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The Body in Crisis: New Pathways and Short Circuits in Representation

by Christine Greiner. 2021. Translation by Christopher Larkosh and Grace Holleran. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 140 pp. \$29.95 paper. ISBN: 0472038664, ISBN-10: 978-0472038664. doi: [10.3998/mpub.11883180](https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.11883180). doi:10.1017/S0149767722000389

More than ten years have passed since the Portuguese-language publication of *The Body in Crisis: New Pathways and Short Circuits in Representation*, written by the Brazilian scholar Christine Greiner. Nevertheless, the book is still relevant to contemporary issues, since themes such as sovereign power, cognitive violence, symbolic cooption, and cultural translations remain at stake. *The Body in Crisis* is not a book about dance, but rather a guide that analyses distinct bodily processes in which dance can be understood as a specific way of embodying knowledge. Furthermore, thanks to the new English translation, there is the opportunity to engage readers from all over the world. Christopher Larkosh and Grace Holleran, both of whom coherently present the discussions developed in the chapter on translation (Chapter 1), committed themselves to a translation that went beyond one intended solely to cross linguistic boundaries. Following the transcreation proposal of the poet Haroldo de Campos, the translators' gesture was driven by an "embodied translation" (Larkosh and Holleran 2021, xviii) that resulted in "a political act that calls those very boundaries into crisis" (xx).

The Body in Crisis is not only a book that analyzes or describes an object of study that is separate from the researcher, but is also a work created in several crossings. Greiner not only engages with an immense cartography of bibliographies that discuss the body but also

inspires a performative reading since the book choreographs and unsettles flows of thoughts. For this reason, the book must be read as a sort of guide for those who, in the dance and performance field, want to reconsider their usual understandings of movement. Greiner does not mention dance with any consistency, nor does she use this field alone to explain the body. Rather, she considers political philosophy and cognitive sciences as important interlocutors to rethink dance and movement.

Greiner continues the line of questioning initiated in *O Corpo: pistas para estudos indisciplinados (The Body: Pathways for Undisciplinary Studies)* (2005), which provides an epistemological review of body studies and leads the reader through a vast number of references. *The Body in Crisis* experiments with other concerns but still does so by engaging with authors from different fields, such as political philosophy, communication, arts, and cognitive sciences. In an attempt to give visibility to radical experiences that question the limits of the body, one of the central issues is the following: how are we supposed to pass through abysses that are not yet named, which sometimes are even unremarkable? An ordinary abyss is, for instance, the separation between body and mind, or body and environment. However, there are many other dualistic apparatuses that contaminate our way of thinking and acting. Greiner points out that it is urgent to acknowledge new forms of life, which destabilize dualisms. For this reason, the book focuses on poorly illuminated or voiceless experiences such as queer subjectivities, Black resistances, and precarious artistic processes.

Cristina Rosa's Foreword in the English edition highlights the importance of the book in a moment in which dance, theater, and the performing arts have been intensifying and questioning colonialist and imperialist issues. All these processes are usually invisible, and what Greiner's book contributes the most is calling our attention to unnoticed gestures. In the Preface to the English edition, Greiner reviews the theme of crisis, which is even stronger now due to conservative, moralistic and neoliberal waves across the globe. *A priori* models and identity politics seem to undermine the possibilities of dealing with Otherness.

The Preface, which considers one of the author's most recent research, points out that

fabulation – or a fiction that has its grounds in reality but also rubs against it – might be a potential operator for creating new flows. Following Tavia Nyong’o, Greiner proposes that fabulation brings to light what has been placed in a zone of invisibility. Beyond lying, it can be a political gesture against erasures and silences produced over time. Therefore, fabulation “does not camouflage truth, but looks for ways to expose it through fictional strategies such as poetry, theater, and performance” (Greiner 2021. xxv). Finally, processes of fabulation have been present since *The Body in Crisis* as not only as a topic but also as a performative point of departure. Leaning over her book is a gesture that, through the destabilization provoked by reading itself, enables other states of life.

In Chapter 1 (The Agents of the Crisis), Greiner begins by discussing how processes of translations take place in the body. This line of inquiry may sound unfamiliar to those who work on dance. Nevertheless, Greiner attempts to highlight the invisible utterances presented in dance works and invites the reader to translate not only the symbolic meaning of choreography but also its political micromovements. Many authors, such as Jacques Lacan and Claude Lévi-Strauss, dwell on ways of dealing with a reality that is not visible. According to Michel Foucault, speech translates but also masks reality. For Greiner, then, translation should be considered from a systemic perspective. It is no longer a matter of “unveiling the unconscious as a point of departure but turning it into a point of arrival” (7-8). The “orderly world,” which is an imagined world with everything in its place, and the “ideal models,” that are represented by *a priori* structures, get unsettled, no longer seen under the aegis of the Enlightenment. Therefore, translation is much more complex than turning one meaning into another, because it is a process that deals with disordered worlds and new models of communication.

Considering that dance choreographs both movements and perceptions, Greiner, through Agamben, invites us to read the social and political production of bodies. According to Giorgio Agamben (1998), the paradigm of contemporary biopolitics is in the abyss between qualified life (*bios*), and bare life (*zoë*). Even though dance does not operate directly within

such a distinction, it might usefully guide our perception of what constitutes qualified or unqualified life. Agamben considers that sovereign power is consolidated in the management of death, making the apparatuses of power capture, guide, intercept, model, and control gestures, conducts, opinions, and utterances of living beings. In this constant process of de-subjectification, indifference attacks sensibility and vision, which makes us blind and confines our camp of action. Greiner, in her turn, considers that power is introjected into the body, and for this reason, dance is a potential device to reverse power in new possibilities of life.

In Chapter 2 (Metaphoric Epidemics), Greiner expands her understanding of the creation of meaning in the body. The author recognizes that our conceptual system itself is fundamentally metaphorical, an idea analyzed beyond its linguistic meaning. Metaphors are operators of displacement of thought and action, and they are essential in the translation process. Thus, the representation of the Other does not happen exclusively on the symbolic level. Provisionality and changes of state are also, to some extent, a kind of “message” (35). There are gaps in bodily representations because they also state what was not shown – a gesture that fails to communicate and exposes its own impotence.

Chapter 3 (Principles of Experience: The Profaning Aptitudes of the Organism) opens discussion on perception as a cognitive action. In this Chapter, Greiner highlights that knowledge may not be applied, since it is tested all the time during the experience of perception. The author underlines that perception is understood as the principle of all experience. Therefore, it is not merely the interpretation of sensorial messages, but rather the internal simulation of action as well as the anticipation of consequences, as studied by the scientist Alain Berthoz. Thus, is it possible to open the body to the experience of the Other, even before the formulation of language, or logical discourses of rationalization and judgment? An abundance of research concerning mirror neurons has helped to think about this question by inviting us to consider empathy as a vital action of our organism, which opens us up to other levels of perception. In addition to empathy, feelings—another topic developed in

Chapter 3—are also another important topic that allow us to think about otherness. Once again, Greiner is not explicit in relating these issues to dance; on the contrary, she intentionally offers unusual references. When a dancer or a dance spectator engages with the bibliographies interrogated by Greiner, he/she is invited to expand their notion of movement, feeling, perception and cognition. Every organic level of the body is at stake for creating dance, and consequently for producing a type of knowledge.

In Chapter 4 (Circuits of Activation), the discussion of aesthetics is analyzed from the perspective of cognition and the body. This chapter engages with Japanese researchers to debate the “circuits of the body’s activation” as well as its “interface micromovements” (73). Shigehisa Kuriyama, for instance, considers that presence is a sort of muscle tone pronounced during the moment in which one body is exposed to the gaze of the other, eliciting countless displacements. Therefore, the body’s presence is not merely the presence of the flesh but also the flow of information and the constant mapping of bodily states. Beginning with the description of several diseases which serve as examples to understand the cognitive skills of the immunologic system, in Chapter 5 (Systemic Crises) Greiner explores metaphors of immunization as analyzed in political philosophy. Through Roberto Esposito (2008), she points out that immunity is the ground of modern biopolitics since there are attempts to immunize the individual from what is common.

In the book’s last pages, Greiner recommends that we should not study only what keeps the same, but specially what transforms itself and is constantly moving. In such logic, what characterizes bare life is the impossibility of translating its cognitive acts. In other words, it is not a matter of identifying bare life itself or life as culturally qualified, but rather a matter of overcoming dualisms between nature and culture to detect the impact of the gap, silence, and the impossibility of mediations.

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