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Symposium
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BODY, SPORT & NUDITY

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BODY, SPORT AND NUDITY

If naked bodies are part of our everyday environment it is mainly because of the decline of modesty and decency, which have long been considered as virtues. The body is presented as a “vehicle for pleasure” (Featherstone *et al.*, 1991), and the more it matches the idealised images of youth, health, shape and beauty (Quéval, 2008), the more it is associated with social success. In this sense, the liberation of bodies is linked to the internalisation of these standards, that is to say that the standards of physical beauty are clearly identified and are becoming more and more constraining (Détrez, 2006). Thus, the dominant image of a young, beautiful and toned body constrains us, alienates us, through a daily effort which is nevertheless supposed to free us. Showcasing and acting out this body involves behaviours which seem natural to us but which are in reality, and at least in part, socially and culturally determined (Elias, 1993). Nowadays, we are responsible of our appearance (Détrez, 2002) and free time thus tends to be transformed into time used to maintain one’s body, for fear of being suspected of being neglecting, sluggish or even lazy. Thence, several different ways of occupying and tending one’s body can be numbered, notably through leisure activities, in order to, finally, make it conform to new and diverse norms. These strategies¹ also aim to fight the body’s decline, to preserve it, to “heal” our appearance (Boltanski, 1974) and are an answer to extended longevity and to the perception of an increasing ageing of the population (Featherstone, 1982).

Individuals also wish to have a body that fully belongs to them. Through customisation, it becomes more singular² than the others. The body is an essential element for the construction of a particular identity. Indeed, the subjectivity of the body has stated for several decades the narcissistic overinvestment of the body on a social aspect. A new conception of self imposes itself, the “*performing self*” (Featherstone, 1982). An accent is placed on appearance and the control of the impressions produced on others. The exterior of the body is perceived as an object that must be constructed as a function of one’s own personality. Individuals thus seek to construct and to control the unfolding of their existence. The body becomes a truly incarnated biography. Individuals incorporate a series of bodily mechanisms which they adapt progressively to the external conditions that may appear, in order to construct a “proper body” which is adapted to any new daily contexts and situations. The individual body is no longer supposed to be part of the social body, submitted to strict norms or even the prisoner of a straightjacket that it did not choose for itself.

The body then becomes a project that must evolve depending on one’s own personality. Body markings such as tanning, piercings, tattoos, scarification, etc., are so many ways to re-appropriate one’s body in the face of a world which is difficult to grasp hold of. They are so many “identity signs” which, according to Le Breton (2002), allow a physical impression of one’s individual mark and provide a sense of control over one’s own existence. The body is thus invested. The body, the skin, in their sole nudity and even in the sporting nudity of Durville (Lorenté, 2019) and Kiene de Mongeot (Wolga, 2018), have no possible existence: the organism is only acceptable when it is covered in signs. The body “only speaks when it is covered in artifice” (Borel, 1992, p. 15) and body modifications only aim to “make one’s body remarkable”, to become singular but also to provoke desire in others (Andrieu, 2008).

Body techniques (Mauss, 1936) are thus resources that can be used to construct a particular

¹ Body maintenance relates here to a mechanistic, biological and anatomical view of the body, influenced by so-called « modern » medicine. Medicine has long time presided over the conception of the body and informs everything relating to health, along with the aesthetics of physical appearance, that is to say well-being in its broadest sense. In developing the rational body (through reason), it tends to conform to characteristics which are either supposed or fantasized: supposed because the body is a reflection in perpetual incarnation of what we are, and fantasized when it relates to a techno-scientific perspective of human identity.

² All our actions are dependent on a sociocultural context and even more so on a socio-historical one. History allows us to become conscious of our body through what we perceive and the way in which we represent it to ourselves. Thence, the body is a resource for constructing a particular self.

self, which incorporates³ into a social context, in such a way that an internalisation and an objectification process links the body to structures and, through them, to the subject. These “re-appropriation of the body” behaviours (clothing habits, game of appearances, types of practices) “constitute a material all the more interesting that, in developed societies, a new modality of the relation between individual and society is at play, made up simultaneously of a submission to both fashion and its codes, as well as of an individualistic affirmation of self. Both the actors and the structures can, from then onwards, be thought along the lines of the modalities of their articulation” (Berthelot, 1991, 120-121)⁴.

The point is to discern the contemporary dimension of an appropriation and production project of the body through rationality, which is also a project for the construction of an identity. In this sense, the relation to the body, the ways of showing it and of revealing it, but also of covering and hiding it, constitutes a remarkable subject for a sociological analysis, as well as from the point of view of anthropology, geography, economics, etc. In this symposium, the aim will be to highlight the behaviours which consist in showing the body or, on the contrary, in hiding it. The two themes proposed below are simply suggestions and examples of subjects than can be broached, but are in no case limitations for the expected propositions.

Theme 1: Experiencing seaside leisure activities: self-affirmation or incarnation of a fantasized health?

Nowadays, 80 %⁵ of holidays⁶ in France take place in summer. These vacations, largely determined by school calendars, are an occasion for changing everyday living habits. French beaches welcome “between July and August, 25 to 30 million people who aggregate on less than 4% of the surface of the national territory, and next to 50 million visitors over the course of the year” (Urbain, 2002, p. 95); which represents one French person out of four⁷.

Despite an unequal holiday density, the seaside and the uses made of it structure themselves so as to produce cohabitation conditions, following logics of territorial attraction. The beach is simultaneously a place to rest, to meet up, to go back to nature and to maintain the body, with the expression of new practices. We can witness tanning sessions (caring for appearances), expressions of the wellbeing procured by bathing in the sea and in the sun (prescribed by doctors⁸ for a long

³ Incorporation is a concept which establishes the inter-dependency of actors and structures, measuring what is at play within these interrelations, and accounting for the relations of domination which are often ignored by consciousness as they speak directly to the body (Faure, 2000). Incorporation would then relate to a diffused socialisation, which would notably produce “body techniques” that are particular and distinctive from one society to the next because they are the product of imitation, of the inculcation of values particular to that social group. One must beware here of the essentialist bias that an application with no nuance of such an analysis grid would present.

⁴ See also Bernard (1995), who speaks also of the concept of « corporéité [*bodiness*] ».

⁵ Meeting with Saskia Cousin in *L'invention des vacances [The invention of holidays]*. *Revue Sciences Humaines*, July 2018, p.47.

⁶ Historically, holidays were promoted by the popularity gained by the medical discourse concerning tiredness, linked to the development of wage-earning, of industrial employment and of mechanisation (Corbin, 1995). According to Viard (2015), it is after the First World War that a clientele of wealthy workers (liberal occupations or senior executives) succeeded to a clientele of idlers, and for whom the beaches and the resorts were set in place. This new wealthy clientele opted for shorter alternating stays. Later on, the evolution of paid vacation also modified the access to holidays with the allocation of a third week (1956) and then a fourth one (1969) of paid leave. It is at that time that the great North-South, East-West migration takes place during the months of July and August, marking the summer activities of the French.

⁷ Beach frequentation has evolved in a significant manner: « 1 French person out of 400 attended in 1900, 1 out of 40 went in 1936; and 1 out of 4 today » (Urbain, 2002, p.96).

⁸ The medical discourse recommended, as early as the second half of the 18th century, the virtues of briny air and the advantages of a softer climate; they prescribed bathing in the sea as a treatment for many afflictions. The sea (in the same way as the mountains and thermal springs) and its therapeutic properties become a place designated by doctors for health resorts and their associated activities.

time), the closed communities within clubs or holiday resorts, surfing or kitesurfing practice (their spots provide the limits of a space) and many other emerging activities (such as *wexball*, a new sport developed on the beaches of Palavas-les-Flots, or the organisation of *iron bootcamp*, a sporting challenge on par with special forces training practice), all the way to activities that involve living naked (not without creating tensions between nudists and “clothed” people). The beach is thus a stage where norms and values organise a particular relation to the body and question the ideal of a return to nature. The body is shown and unveiled, under the conjugated effects of fashion and seaside tourism. To what extent do contemporary seaside experiences organise the ways of showing oneself?

The evolution of the aesthetics of bathing suits is evidence of the place given to the body. For instance, even if the “bikini” instigated by Louis Réaud in 1946 was scandalous (Sohn, 2006), it is nowadays completely allowed on beaches. The body is no longer dissimulated like it was at the beginning of the 19th century; it is exhibited and acted out. We have assisted to a true liberation of bodies since 1960, which tends to conform to the idealised images of youth, health, shape and beauty. Tanning takes part in this idealised image and becomes the “sign of a sporting personality and of a certain dynamism, even if, in itself, taking in the sun is not a particularly active practice” (Andrieu, 2018, p. 41).

Some works exist that evoke this freedom of the body of individuals and that also broach social relations as being able to affect the development of the body. The works of Kaufmann (1995) in a sociology of “naked breasts”, clearly evidence this tendency of the individual free-choice and the impositions of the collective. Mottot sums them up as follows: “To every woman the freedom of exposing herself with naked breasts on the beach, just as long as the criteria for firmness and aesthetics are met. A disapproving look would, if that were not the case, be quick to give the poor woman a change of heart. In substituting the demands of seduction to repression and the internalisation of the norms of restriction, the soft manner to the harsh one, the discourse concerning the body is, finally, a never ending questioning of the relations between individual freedom and the collective one” (2008, p. 39). With the evolution of relational behaviours, individuals must find their partner themselves, and the demands of seduction impose themselves by putting physical attributes to the front and foremost of concerns (Kaufmann, 1995). Within this framework, individuals appropriate series of physical mechanisms. Alongside rational reflection, there exists a corporal intelligence, a practical sense, a silent communication, infra-language, from body to body.

The question is to grasp how the seaside becomes the theatre for behaviours in which a blending of generations takes place, as well as the creation of communities that succeed one another in order to appropriate certain locations (Urbain, 1994), using values which are specific to themselves. Do seaside activities not express this form of liberty/relaxing – “*farniente*” – marked by the expression of health/performance? The behaviours in which bodies are acted out and paraded on the beach show a search for autonomy and self-affirmation in the ways of showing oneself.

Theme 2: Dissimulating or unveiling bodies during sporting activities

Covering or baring bodies is part of a continuous tension within the sporting system. Most practices have created for themselves strict dress codes, supported by aesthetic or security oriented reasons, and sometimes both. The briefest observation of a baseball match would be enough to be convinced: wearing the cap and the jersey for a fielder is as necessary as wearing a helmet and chest protection for a catcher (Bost, 2000). These clothing equipment regulations, just like certain fashions, are however faced with forces of increasing contestation on the international sports scene. These objections are often linked to the possibility of an individual to dispose of their body, and of showing it or not, following their own criteria of decency and comfort, aspects which are not necessarily disconnected with the search for performance.

Gender questions occupy here an important place, notably in their relation with sports garments as a product which must conjugate technical demands and socio-cultural norms (Jamain,

2005; Terret, 2006). In certain contexts, participating in sports competitions can create tensions between, on the one hand, sporting norms, and on the other hand, social and/or religious norms. The possibility of competing, notably within international events, without having to transgress prohibitions, religious or other, has become the source of more and more pressing demands. Practicing certain sports for Muslim women, especially those that could be associated to the male gender, broaches the question of wearing headscarves, whether it is voluntary, to make a point, or imposed (Lachheb, 2012; Ndongo, 2017). These new demands have led certain federations to apply a reform to their rules and regulations in order to allow access to a wider public. In this way, in 2012 and just before the Olympic Games of London, the International Federation of Beach Volley – an Olympic sport since 1996 – relaxed the rules enough to authorise long leggings, long shorts and long or short-sleeved t-shirts, and no longer solely one or two-pieces bathing suits.

At the same time as this re-clothing process of sporting bodies, a denuding process also manifests itself, sometimes in opposition to the principles of decency. These tensions are expressed differently depending on the socio-cultural groups concerned and the meaning associated to nudity transforms over time, as can be attested by the rejection and then the increasing acceptance of nudity within the gymnasiums of Ancient Rome, until becoming the norm not as a pedagogy of virtue as in its Greek model, but as a place for erotic consumption (Cordier, 2005). This total or partial nudity is often justified, within sports, using practical reasons. But it can also be the product of a re-appropriation, or sometimes of a contradiction, of the model. Practicing certain sports that lead to unveiling the body can also be a sort of claim aiming to contest the established norms and to overhaul hierarchy and statutes by retaking publicly possession of one's body (Tlili, 2012).

Around these questions, debates are engaged in which are opposed the supposed universal nature of sports and a form of cultural relativism respecting values which are often antagonistic, and sometimes incompatible, in the field. In other words, sports in which nudity and decency are simultaneously deployed, such as naked surf (Andriau, Nobrega, 2018), are a privileged space for the expression of tensions and negotiations between values and actors belonging to a same group. Equally, the meanings behind nudity and decency, variable from one group to another, from one individual to another, question the claimed universal nature of sports and the capacity of its actors (individuals and institutions) to accommodate or not the constraints that overlap from the sole regulatory framework linked to the practice to which they relate.

Theme 3: Bodies under control for what kind of staging of oneself ?

Nowadays, medico-technical and biotechnical advances provide so many means to modify and to control the body, which allow for so many new ways of staging it. They allow bodies to be manipulated, and to open a field of possibilities by multiplying them in a rational manner, under scientific control and in a concerted manner with the medical field. The aim is to turn the living body into what we desire, through mastering it and by using calculations which can now be applied by using new methods. This is how a phantasm emerges of a body under the control of reason. Man believes that He possesses the necessary instruments to fulfil the dream of transforming one's being. This dream can be reached through the use of medicines, diets, physical training, the surgeon's knife... As a reflection of the self, the body is thus transformed, but also invested in through training programmes and dieting advice which become contemporary help (as well as a true market) and which are evidence of this attention given to the body.

Implants, plastic/bariatric surgery, interventions in the field of reproduction, increasing performances through the use of drugs, the prospect of genetic modifications, cloning and other interventions, all question the limits/possibilities of the construction of a silhouette under control used as an expression of oneself (Vigarello, 2012) and a means of exposing oneself to others.

Thence, the modifications to the body which take place – and that influenced by the dominating image of a young, beautiful and toned body (Queval, 2008) – question the relation between freedom and servitude. Could creating a body by using techniques which call for a daily effort in order “to make one's body remarkable” (Andrieu, 2008) be seen as a alienating source of

self-constraint ? In what measure does the social pressure for sculpting oneself (medical power, being responsible of oneself, interrogations about the future, markets) influence the ways of showing the body and/or create strategies of separation? How to interpret those people who singularise themselves far from the normative injunctions, risking stigmatisation? Thus, the various forms of voluntary construction of the body (clothing attitudes, eating habits, game of appearances), active or passive, and the lifestyles which derive from them, should be given all our attention.

GUIDELINES FOR PRESENTATIONS

Oral communications (20 minutes and 10 minutes for discussion) will be either in French or in English, the official languages of the symposium.

The submitted abstract must take the following form:

Title of the proposition, (Times, 12, left-justified)

Name(s) of the author(s), address (Times, 12, left-justified)

Abstract of 300 words maximum (Times, 12, justified)

Keywords: 5 keywords clearly specifying the scientific fields.

The propositions for communications must be submitted before **15th April 2019** to the following email addresses: eric.perera@umontpellier.fr & jeromesoldani@hotmail.fr

Information: <http://www.santesih.com/index.php/seminaire-corps-sport-et-nudite/appel-a-communications>

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The « Body, Sport and Nudity » congress will take place on **17th and 18th July 2019** at **Saint-Charles 2 de l'Université Paul Valéry Montpellier 3**. It is organised by SantESiH (Santé Education Situations de Handicap [Health, Education, Disability situations], EA 2516, University of Montpellier), the LIRDEF (Laboratoire interdisciplinaire de recherche, de didactique, enseignement et la formation [Interdisciplinary Laboratory for research, didactics, teaching and training], EA 3749) and the LERSEM-CERCE (Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Comparatives en Ethnologie [Study and Comparative Research Centre for Ethnology], EA 3532, University Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3).

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