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Introduction

An object of constant reflection, the body has been considered from antiquity to Descartes, from La Mettrie to Nietzsche, up to the most recent surveys of phenomenology, constructivism and neuroscience, as the centre of sensitive and cognitive reactions; a medium for the expression of inner movements; a representational and communicative entity; a problematic counterpart of the mind.

This volume of "Studi di estetica" aims at investigating the contribution that aesthetics can potentially provide in reconsidering the idea of the body, and at promoting the analysis of the bodily construction of meaning, along with the definition of the differences, or possible connections, between sensory and conceptual knowledge – also in relation to scientific studies and philosophical investigations of authors such as Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, Rorty, Todes. The issue is all the more urgent: the connection maintained by contemporary researchers between mental structures and sensory data (i.e., Mark Johnson's embodiment theory, according to which even the structures of language are determined by perception; Richard Shusterman's somaesthetica, or Gerald Edelman's biology of consciousness) raises the question of whether

and to what extent such a connection is legitimate; and, if so, what new issues and prospects are opening for aesthetics.

In order to answer such questions, the present researches are thematically divided into three ideal sections (each composed of three essays), considering the body from the theoretical, cultural and anthropological point of view.

The first section deals with the question of providing an aesthetics of the body in some of its foundational aspects. Starting from the perspective of pathic aesthetics, Tonino Griffiero provides a phenomenology of the "felt body" that allows highlighting the crucial and pre-reflective role played by the body in all our aesthetic perceptions and life experiences. In the following essay, *The body as an aesthetic paradigm. Form, function, idea*, I try to investigate how the body, in its descriptive assertions and in its connections with artistic practices, becomes an aesthetic paradigm not by virtue of its form – as in the case of the Vitruvian man or Le Corbusier's Modulor – but, rather, of its functionality. Also, the Western stereotype of the body as conceptually opposed to the mind or soul is reconsidered by Marcello Ghilardi, who puts our notion of the body in connection with foreign conceptions of it, especially with Eastern thought.

The second section tackles the question of the body from a historiographical perspective, and it presents the aesthetics of the body in some eminent philosophers of modern and contemporary thought. Through the lens of such authors as Baumgarten, Herder, up to the zoologist Ernst Haeckel, Valeria Maggiore reconsiders the traditional

dichotomy between sensible and conceptual knowledge, showing the relevance of the senses and of the structure of the body for environmental comprehension. As to the limits of the body, the philosopher Günther Anders saw its difficulties in keeping up with innovations in technology or the higher cognitive actions that neurobiology opposes to emotional activities; nonetheless, Francesco Affronti shows how aesthetic experiences can restore the centrality of the body and emotions in the human being as a subject in a Cartesian sense. Another eminent theorist of the body in contemporary philosophy is Maurice Merleau-Ponty, on whom Pasquale Fameli focuses his investigation in order to demonstrate that Merleau-Ponty's reflections about the body have strongly influenced the art of the Sixties and its use of the body as a medium.

The third section focuses on the subject of the body from an anthropological point of view. Vallori Rasini reviews Helmuth Plessner's philosophy of the body and the supposed distinction between the "lived body" and the "objective corpus", showing the validity of his assertions concerning the importance of the senses in all the cognitive experiences. Starting again from Plessner's work, Hans-Peter Krüger focuses on two phenomena that strongly affect our life experience: passion and addiction, showing the importance of Plessner's method, combining phenomenology, hermeneutics and dialectic openness. Finally, Christoph Wulf emphasizes the centrality of the body in the birth and development of all the arts, focusing on how the use of the body in art (dance, music, visual arts) has dealt with the cultural and historical advancement of the arts themselves and of the audience.