

The Body as a Place of Resistance to the Pandemic Politics of Global Corporations: Recovering the Sensibility of the Body

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Abstract

Capillary practices of power are spreading in the contemporary form of the society of control, which was described by Gilles Deleuze in “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” where he developed the Foucauldian analysis of power relations in the disciplinary society and adjusted it to the present conjuncture. Practices of power reach individual bodies, whose movements and actions in the world are controlled by digital technologies—tracked, monitored, and formed according to the images promoted. The contemporary form of power digitally embraces each and every one of us in an entirely unprecedented way, extending over intimate and private spheres. Again, as feminists claimed in the 1970, “the private is political”; more than that: the private sphere has become public. The contemporary forms of power are exercised directly on the body and through the body as disciplinary power and biopower, to use Michel Foucault’s terms. However, the body is at the same time the ultimate site of resistance to these practices of power. This is recognized by Leszek Koczanowicz and conceptualized as somapower, drawing on Foucault’s biopower and on Richard Shusterman’s somaesthetics.

The case study I examine in this chapter concerns power exercised on bodies by global corporations and somapower capable of emancipating one from the corporations’ practices of power. Then, I address the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which allowed global corporations to reach potentially all the bodies in the world through pharmaceutical corporations in cooperation with the World Health Organization, imposing mandatory vaccinations on countries. The critical response to such developments that can be understood in terms of somapower has included the revival of interest in traditional healing, the knowledge of herbs, and traditional practices (for example, using *Plantago lanceolata*-based infusions and syrups as anti-virus protection). These practices are firmly embedded in bodies, which are an active and integral part of persons, and represent a form of resistance to contemporary biopower by developing bodily sensibility, which is a practical aim of Shusterman’s somaesthetics. Arnold Berleant also stresses this factor in his call for recovering sensibility from

capitalist abuse. In his view, sensibility should be reclaimed from the corporate takeover of images, smells, tastes, and sounds, where profit is made from the abuse of the senses. From such a perspective, the decision to listen to the body, to strengthen it through natural methods, which also calm the mind, and to develop its abilities and sensibility, preventing the corporations' absolute control of the body, is a political decision.

Keywords

practices of power – biopower – biopolitics – somaesthetics – sensible engagement – resistance

1 From the Disciplinary Society to the Society of Control: Digital Modulations of Lives and Identities

Contemporary forms of power have already gone through some important transformations since the analysis conducted by Michel Foucault; however, his take on forms of power invites development and continuation. Foucault started his historical analysis of the transformation of power from its feudal model, where everybody was subjected to the general and sometimes capricious will of the sovereign, and proceeded to a more contemporary form of republican power. In a republic, there is no external will of the sovereign; rather, power is disseminated across society. It permeates the social body in and through a complex network of practices; in this way a capillary diffusion of power takes place in contrast to its previous embodiment in the person of the sovereign. In such a situation, everybody must watch themselves under the social contract based on the liberal concept of freedom. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1977) describes a disciplinary society that emerges under such circumstances. The implementation of discipline is indispensable for people to order social life devoid of the figure of power, the way it happens in adolescence, when youngsters internalize the symbolic voices of their parents and discipline themselves by these already internal means (Freud 1930). The citizens, too, internalize power and exercise it on themselves by themselves in their activities and forms of behavior. A trespass against adequate behavior triggers an external response, if noticed by officials. This arrangement was well described by Louis Althusser (1971) through the concepts of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) and Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA), where ISA are ways of forming citizens, a certain *Bildung* of individuals to become full-fledged

citizens, which Althusser attributed to Family, School, and Church in his time, while RSA guard the limits of accepted behavior and threaten to punish those who misbehave.

Ideological State Apparatuses work to produce subjects adequate for the system (Althusser 1971). This, in general terms, holds today as well, though the form of these apparatuses may change, and even one apparatus may be replaced with another. For example, Althusser named Family, School, and Church as the main Ideological State Apparatuses of the 19th and the first part of the 20th centuries, while we may now reasonably argue that Church has lost much of its influences to the benefit of Media. Ideological State Apparatuses do not act on the level of consciousness, and ideology is understood by Althusser not as a state of false consciousness or any other form of consciousness, but rather as a set of customary practices that individuals undertake, willingly participating in common activities in a standardized way in the interest of some form of power. In its early form, the capitalist governance was closely bound to the technology of its time, which was used to discipline people by means of the camera, that is, analog photography. This process is superbly depicted by John Tagg regarding photographic practices which were taken up by individuals, but molded subjects expected by the system and, in this way, operated as part of the Ideological State Apparatus (1993). Their essential characteristic is that they do not work through direct duress, but through eliciting individual voluntary actions. The point is that individuals willingly start to use on themselves the practices of subjectification to the dominant system of power, without being forced, but acting spontaneously. Subjectification to power in front of the camera that operates on the basis of a standardized mechanism commodifies individuals, flattening them to that which is visible, measurable, and accountable. This subjectification is carried out with an illusion of a free action in order to be efficacious.

Analog photographic practices were paradigmatic of the industrial era, as convincingly argued by André Rouillé in his book *La photographie. Entre document et art contemporain* (2005), where he demonstrates that the machinic repeatability, immediacy, transparency, rationality, and objectivity characteristic of the technical form of imaging were essential to the industrial form of capitalism. Today, interest in analog photography only appears in artistic circles discovering older crafts, while the most popular way of imaging is the modulated digital image, which cannot easily be called photography because of a different ontology of the image (electronic, rather than physical matter) and the lack of the negative. A digital image is a presentation and a not representation, which means that it presents an image of something without the evidence of the negative, influencing back the thing that is pictured so that it fits its image, rather than, inversely, seeking to have an image that looks like

this thing (Łukaszewicz Alcaraz 2015). This image is modulated and adjustable in many tiny ways to customize it so that it gives an impression of originality, individuality, and spontaneity (this causes some theorists, such as François Soulages [1998], to argue that digital images are closer to paintings than to analog photography, though they are trusted, as their superficial similarity to photography ensures their effectiveness in the public and social sphere). Digital images are thus part of the Media Apparatus understood within the framework of ISA. Notably, Tagg's (1993) line of argumentation on the subjectification of individuals in accordance with the needs of the system by means of analog photography has lost none of its validity with the transition from industrial to postindustrial capitalism and from analog to digital photography, which is as paradigmatic of the current version of the system as analog photography was of industrial capitalism (Łukaszewicz Alcaraz 2015).

People are viewed and observed by the system of power, and they actively participate in the exercise of power by subjugating themselves to the eye of the camera, which structures their behavior and look. Articulated by Tagg in relation to analog photography, this insight is even more relevant today, with digital cameras in smartphones. This brings the situation closer to the social ideal of disciplinary society as metaphorically depicted in the Panopticon, which Foucault derived from Jeremy Bentham's writings (Bentham 1995), though deconstructing or rather diffusing the material side of it. For Bentham, the Panopticon was a round building with individual cells on various floors, each having a window facing the central tower with Venetian windows all around, so that prisoners did not know if a guard was looking at them at a given moment, but were aware that he/she could do so at any moment, which impacted their behavior. When referring to the Panopticon as a metaphor, Foucault had in mind surveillances in a society as a whole, and not just the prison as such (Elden 242). Bentham's Panopticon is primarily a prison, because it "has many different functions to fulfil—safe custody, confinement, solitude, forced labour and instruction" (Bentham 1995, 34). For Foucault, the prison as the Panopticon is just one piece of general panopticism—a new form of government. The digital Panopticon, an ideal type of such government, was not fully possible before the technological inventions that only arrived after Foucault's death. With mobile technologies, which we use today to take photos of ourselves and our surroundings, leaving digital traces of most of our activities, we are becoming enmeshed in the Panopticon's net.

Foucault's thought was carried in this direction in an essay that Gilles Deleuze wrote in 1990, six years after Foucault's death. "Postscript on the Societies of Control" is a short text, but its farsighted view is astonishing. According to Deleuze, societies of control are an extension of disciplinary societies in which technologies have taken over the burden of the guard's tiresome work

and record nearly every step one takes. This became a necessity after World War Two and marked the beginning of a crisis of numerous “environments of enclosure—prison, hospital, factory, school, family” (Deleuze 1992, 3–4), that is, institutions which have been undergoing constant reforms for decades. Today, individuals do not simply pass from one enclosed environment to another, where they must submit themselves to external power and be checked in an array of examinations. Examination has been replaced by continuous control in all these spheres, especially now, as increasingly more convicts walk “freely” (at ease) wearing electronic surveillance wristbands, community psychiatry opposes closed psychiatric hospitals and argues for restoring patients to and monitoring them in their communities, lifelong learning (perpetual training) is promoted in education, and factories are replaced by corporations. With these changes at hand, the individuals cannot be watched and disciplined within any closed setting, but must constantly be controlled, monitored, and motivated wherever they are. Deleuze writes about “modulation” that replaces the molds of enclosures: “Enclosures are *molds*, distinct castings, but controls are a *modulation*, like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other, or like a sieve whose mesh will transmute from point to point” (1992, 4; italics original).

This modulation is made possible by the use of advanced technology and the ongoing processing of big data. In the early 1990s, Deleuze discussed computers as machines characteristic of the contemporary form of late capitalism (which Deleuze calls “a capitalism of higher-order production” [1992, 6], where not goods, but services are produced). However, computers alone are not enough; they cannot collect the data all by themselves; they can just process them based on the rules installed in them. The vision of modulated control described by Deleuze is actualized through remote control and online tracking of almost all human activities. While it was only a vision in 1990, today it has become palpably true. Individuals are now controlled in their movements and actions in the world by digital technologies: where they go, what they do, what they watch and read, who they meet, what they talk about, etc. This is possible not just because of the invention of computers, but because of their miniaturization in the form of smartphones, which no longer serve only to make phone calls, but are used for a range of purposes: to choose a meal, to take a bus, a train, or a plane, to meet people, to work or to do homework, to read, watch, and listen, to buy products and services, to pay bills, to exercise, to monitor one’s health, etc. Smartphones can do all this thanks to multiple ingenious applications and because they are not *at* hand anymore, but usually, and especially regarding the younger generations, *in* hand. This is characteristic of the era of Web 3.0.

The differences between Web 1.0, Web 2.0, and Web 3.0 foremostly refer to the interactivity of the Internet. While the Web 1.0 environment was thought mostly to retrieve information, in Web 2.0 users are already regarded as participants, and Web 3.0 is based on continuous, sometimes even unconscious, interactivity (Cover 2016, 74–78), which “is a key element of contemporary digital media and communication and an important communicative formation to investigate [...] the relationship between identity and digital media” (Cover 2016, 78). As their kind and form of activity, users of digital technologies are principally prompted to provide feedback on the delivered results of Internet searches, which contributes to further perfecting their capacity to preempt our needs and wishes. This causes direct pleasure, which prevents us from realizing what is really being done, from perceiving that our needs and wishes are being shaped and manipulated, and that our subjectivities and identities are being formed. Individual identity is constructed in relation to the online world in a loop of feedback. The needs addressed by technology are of much higher import and much more material, too. They concern our movement, work, well-being, including physical fitness, our family and friends. In this way, smartphones accompanied by other wearable technologies morph into a ubiquitous surveillance system guiding people in the streets, measuring the food they eat and physical activity they undertake, and monitoring their levels of sugar or blood pressure, to name but a few controlling functions they fulfil.¹ This is a very interesting version of the internalization of the disciplinary system, which is now individually customized, that is, modulated, to use Deleuze’s phrase, rather than being indiscriminately applied in one mode to the entire population or larger groups, which was the case in the older version of the disciplinary society. This modulation or customization gives an impression that the order applied is very individual and personal, whereby the general order with its possibilities of slight modulations remains undisclosed, which produces an illusory sense of liberty. Thus, as Rob Cover puts it:

Digital media communication tools as a complex taken together are the biopolitical tools par excellence in that they permit and encourage engagement with ranges and scales of normativity, and provide the tools

1 An interesting critical art project on the monitoring of populations was undertaken by Steve Mann, “a father of wearable technology” and the inventor of, among others, Google Glasses. Riding a bike and walking with a head-camera turned to his back as part of his art research project *Shooting Back* (1994–1997), Mann intervened in the public and private spaces that he entered. It turned out that his camera was more often than not prohibited where the places were already monitored.

(at-hand, in-hand, and readily worn) for the persistent measurement of the body's progress. Together, this is body work that is not just a project, but which produces and materializes a body within a digital-era projection of normativity.

2016, 138

The normativity applied produces obedient bodies of consumers that fall victim to global corporations, instead of the governments of old. The flexible ways of “engaging with space, work, information, communication, familial life, kinship, friendship, and care” (Cover 2016, 184) leave digital traces that add up to archives in cloud storage, inaccessible to those that feed the data in, but manipulable by their owners—corporations—that can trade them as they please. Consequently, what was once considered private appears to be fundamentally public—the provision of tools that people operate, the mechanisms of their operation, and the effects of their uses (probes, comparisons, and traces) belong not to individuals that supply them, but to global companies. The big data obtained by such means cannot be processed by humans and are handled by computers and Artificial Intelligence. As a result, even when the Panopticon's guard is not looking at us while we are walking down the street, our digital shadows are today collected, processed, and responded to in ways that suit the system, for example, giving us hints about where we should go now, what we should buy, or what medicine we should take.

All this raises privacy issues and questions about the security of data, because we renounce privacy in exchange for benefits that mostly come down to some kind of pleasure (feeling fit, smoothly moving around, easily contacting our loved ones, choosing goods and services, etc.); if we choose to download the application that will help us achieve this, we must accept the conditions that limit our privacy, and there is no way to opt out **from having an app**. Digital technologies owned by global corporations ramify into capillaries that criss-cross societies and are employed by individuals on themselves. One can give up on them, but this hampers one's social functioning in various spheres. As a result, individuals willingly coerce themselves with the system's power by supplying loads of data files on themselves that are meticulously and precisely archived on servers and in cloud storages. Taking selfies and uploading them on social media is perhaps the most striking example of such practices. As Cover notes, “archives are an important element of our digital activities and such surveillance is implicated in the establishment of digital media as a kind of archive of the entire world. Here [...] selfies are illustrative of the way in which subjectivity is produced in the context of that which we record, distribute, and which remains at risk of online permanency” (2016, xx11).

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"The personal is political," a feminist slogan from half a century ago, is still relevant. It was popularized, among others, by Carol Hanisch (1970), who argued that personal experiences were located in a certain system of power that shaped them in line with its premises. Although like Betty Friedan (1963) before her, and bell hooks (1984) and Patricia Hill Collins (1990) later, Hanisch predominantly focused on women's (including black women's) experience, the observation that individual experiences and activities are connected to a larger social and historical context in functional structural analysis is also valid outside feminism. Still, one has to ask first who benefits from people's entanglement in digital technology, from an omnipresent surveillance of our activities and the state of our bodies and minds. An overriding answer is—global corporations.

Of course, attempts are undertaken by individuals and groups to throw off the yoke of digital surveillance. A refusal to use technologies altogether is one of such critical responses. Another involves sharing techniques to evade surveillance, which occurs, for example, during online and live events of the so-called CryptoParty, which is described by its co-founder Julian Oliver as "a decentralized movement with events happening all over the world. The goal is to pass on knowledge about protecting yourself in the digital space. This can include encrypted communication, preventing being tracked while browsing the web, and general security advice regarding computers and smartphones" (<https://www.cryptoparty.in>). Oliver has also co-authored "The Critical Engineering Manifesto," which is a guide to such strategies (Oliver, Savicic, and Vasiliev 2011). However, individual techniques tend to be ineffective in opposing structural oppression, which was recognized by worker, black, and women's movements (Hanisch 1970), and group techniques may fail as well, because the system can have more overriding power, especially when it is not a system of governmental power but of global corporations. This dynamic is well presented by the Polish sociologist Zbyszko Melosik (1995), who has identified three forms of opposition to the capitalist system and the risks that accompany them. One of the forms is direct forceful opposition, which comes with its risk that direct, spontaneous action will supersede consciousness. As a result, even if this revolutionary movement wins, it is very likely that it will reproduce the old power relations, though with a different personnel and in different historical scenery. Another form of opposition is an intentional involvement with the mainstream system in order to reform it from within, which is, for example, the explicit strategy of the European Green Party. This strategy of mainstreaming poses a threat of absorption and loss of the critical edge. The third form entails the establishment of niches, intentionally different from and autonomous of the mainstream. However, these niches tend to be commodified and have no

transformative power. The capitalist system, about which Melosik writes and in which we live, is referred to by a range of monikers, such as neoliberal capitalist, postcapitalist, and “capitalism of higher order” (Deleuze 1992, 6), since it is not state (national) capitalism, but the capitalism of global corporations.

2 **The Governance of Global Corporations and the Pandemic Engineering of the Population**

Global capitalism based on the governance of corporations can only partly be understood within the traditional framework of corporatism, which according to Philippe C. Schmitter,

can be defined as a system of interest representation in which the constituent units are organized into a limited number of singular, compulsory, noncompetitive, hierarchically ordered and functionally differentiated categories, recognized or licensed (if not created) by the state and granted a deliberate representational monopoly within their respective categories in exchange for observing certain controls on their selection of leaders and articulation of demands and supports.

1979, 13

The global governance of corporations tilts the scales of power between the state and the companies that are international or supranational, which has invited a lot of criticism, especially in the U.S. (Pappin 2020), reviewing the influence of lobbies and the corruption of politics. The media, arms, pharmaceutical, and public health corporations impose decisions and regulations on nation states. These “large interest organizations cooperate with each other and with public authorities not only in the articulation (or even ‘intermediation’) of interests, but also [...] in the ‘authoritative allocation of values’ and in the implementation of such policies” (Lehmbruch 1979, 150). This is, for example, the case of an agreement between the World Health Organization (WHO) and YouTube to block critical information on anti-COVID-19 vaccines—to censor it, though many countries declare the lack of censorship (Segal 2021). Another example is provided by the WHO pressure on national governments to buy certain vaccines (AstraZeneca/Oxford vaccine, Johnson and Johnson, Moderna, Pfizer/BionTech, Sinopharm, Sinovac, COVAXIN, Covovax, Nuvaxovid, and CanSino [WHO 2022]) and to make vaccination mandatory for travel and sometimes even movement within one’s own country; this was effected by the introduction of so-called COVID passports in the European Union (European

countries

Union 2021) and reached the peak in **counties** such as Germany, where people were divided into those vaccinated with one jab, with two jabs, with three jabs, and convalescents, without any category for the non-vaccinated. The implementation of anti-COVID restrictions categorizing people and limiting the citizens' freedom continues to cause anti-vaccination demonstrations (in Germany, they have not ceased since 2021, and I am writing this in late 2022). The anti-COVID regulations form a system of control that differs from the previous ones and from the generally understood system of control, in that it does not simply mold people's beliefs and customary practices, but literally enters people's bodies. This intrusion causes a fierce response in some social groups, though the majority of the population willingly accepts it as the solution to the mortal risk faced by individuals and their loved ones. People's voluntary submission to anti-COVID regulations through vaccination exemplifies the internalization of power that is diffused in the population, across the borders, and exercised through the decisions of global corporations and organizations, but goes further than ever before as it violates the national constitutions, which guarantee the freedom of movement.

The limitation of citizens' freedom is not an easy thing to do in democratic countries, even if the impact of corporations on governments is noticeable. The means of implementing changes to which a significant part of society is averse, feeling that they abuse freedom, are well recognized within the ten strategies of manipulation attributed to Noam Chomsky (on the controversies regarding the attribution see, e.g., Fedorov et al. 2022). If far-reaching control of individuals is to be implemented, the public must be distracted and convinced that what the media present is the central issue at the moment. This distraction is especially effective when the system creates problems in order to offer solutions to them, and these **problem** ^{problems} seemingly do not concern the system of power, but affect the social and public good. This mechanism was commonly used in the implementation of neoliberalism, as extensively shown by Naomi Klein in her book *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (2007). "The shock doctrine" states that a natural crisis should be used or, if none is around, a crisis should be created to make people willingly welcome a limitation of their liberties and/or rights; for example, an economic crisis helps elicit acceptance for a withdrawal of social rights and a dismantling of public services.

Such a mode of action can be traced in the COVID-19 pandemic, though efforts to explain its outbreak in such terms provoke accusations of conspiracy theories. Nevertheless, the other eight strategies of manipulation attributed to Chomsky also apply in this case, including the fact that the constraints were introduced gradually, all the time being presented as "painful and necessary"

for the public health and the social and economic order, in the hopes of being lifted in a misty future. The public was addressed in emotional terms, appealing to the fundamental human needs and wishes of health and life for oneself and one's family. By inducing fears for health and life, pharmaceutical corporations and global health organizations not only became capable of giving a solution but also made the public opinion pressure them to do so. Subsequently, the pre-designed response for the induced fear came from them in the form of a vaccine and the necessity of vaccination, so that countries and individuals chose it of their own accord.

I do not claim here that the COVID-19 virus was created intentionally in laboratories, though there are studies that support such a belief.² Such information has also already made its way to the mainstream media, despite the protective measures launched in the name not of God, but of Science—ideologically approached in a quasi-religious manner³—that triggered censorship and banned what was considered “fake” information on coronavirus and vaccines. Nevertheless, no matter whether the virus came from a laboratory, from a dirty market, or from wherever else, the pandemic can be claimed to have been in the making long before it happened. Around 2009, when a swine flu epidemic broke out in Mexico, the WHO changed its definition of the pandemic to make it possible to declare a global pandemic if a sickness globally spread, irrespective of the mortality rate. This was indicated to me by a friend from the WHO when I worried myself sick while waiting for my Mexican fiancé to arrive in Europe; the issue was also addressed by Deborah Cohen and Philip Carter (2010), who pointed out that the WHO had changed the definition of an influenza pandemic by excluding the words “with enormous numbers of deaths and illness.” The search of online archives revealed that the WHO website had erased the definition dating back to at least January 2003 through to July 2008. Earlier, in 2002, the WHO published a short manual on how to

2 “Despite a high similarity with the genome sequence of SARS-CoV and SARS-like CoVs, we identified a peculiar furin-like cleavage site in the spike protein of the 2019-nCoV, lacking in the other SARS-like CoVs” and “[t]his furin-like cleavage site, is supposed to be cleaved during virus egress (Mille and Whittaker, 2014) for S-protein ‘priming’ and may provide a gain-of-function to the 2019-nCoV for efficient spreading in the human population compared to other lineage b beta coronaviruses. This possibly illustrates a convergent evolution pathway between unrelated CoVs. Interestingly, if this site is not processed, the S-protein is expected to be cleaved at site 2 during virus endocytosis, as observed for the SARS-CoV” (Coutard et al. 2020, 1, 4).

3 People tend to pedestalize major ideas, such as God, Nature, History, and Science, which organize the world, meaning that they help individuals make sense of their existence within their discourses. Outside of any discourse, there is no meaning at all, just the “integral monstrosity” of Donatien Alphonse François de Sade, as explicitly shown by Jerzy Kochan (2004).

treat an epidemic/pandemic caused by the spread of a human-made biological agent, titled “Preparedness for the Deliberate Use of Biological Agents: A Rational Approach to the Unthinkable” (2002). The manual primarily stressed the need to introduce far-reaching control and health management on the national and international levels, stating that whether the agents came from human or natural causes, their propagation was similar and, as such, called for similar remedies. The propagation of a virus was even practiced to some extent by means of a popular real-time strategy simulation video game called *Plague Inc.*, which was developed by Ndemic Creations and released in 2012.

When the pandemic is announced to the frightened public, the remedy is of course a vaccine, or rather *the* vaccine—that is, one of the vaccine variants approved by the global bodies, meaning produced by one of the accepted corporations. When traveling internationally one can palpably experience that the label is more important than the formula itself, as vividly illustrated by AstraZeneca (Covishield), which has been approved in several African countries, including Kenya, but has not been recognized in the European Union as a result of being produced in and imported from an India-based corporation that has not signed the vaccine supply agreement with the European Medicines Agency (EMA) (Lidigu 2021). Such circumstances make one convinced that it is not about the formula, but about corporate agreements. This conviction is strengthened when one notes that most of the restrictions, even in the harsh times of lockdowns, do not apply to so-called essential workers, that is, employees traveling between the cooperating international companies and institutions or between branches of one corporation or consortium. The freedom of movement is granted not by the national passport and/or visa, combined with the clean international criminal record, but by COVID-19 passports made possible and implemented by global organizations, sometimes supported by additional certificates stating that the person is moving within a corporation, a consortium, or a similar association.

To be clear, I do not claim that vaccines contain nanorobots making it possible to remotely control individual bodies of the global population, which is a claim that tends to be attributed to vaccine skeptics, often called “flat earthers,” to discredit them. This is not exactly what their accusations in fact are about. Called “Querdenkers” (literally: “lateral thinkers”) in Germany, the skeptics are against the norms in place, dominant beliefs, and most of the politicians, scientists, and the media that impose certain beliefs and behaviors through a threat of restricting mobility possibilities; they also generally express a skepticism about the quick, untested, enforced vaccination of the population.

One cannot know now the long-term effects of vaccines or their durable influence on people's lives and health, which may also be intentional, since

deferral is an important element of the strategies of manipulation. Nevertheless, anti-COVID-19 vaccination is an element of the practices of power exercised by global corporations, whether we take this practice to be public-good-oriented or nefarious. In any case, it is an element of the apparatus of power, which is the arrangement of software and hardware, agreements and beliefs, and media and medical practices exercised on the population with a view to controlling and surveilling it. The introduction of vaccines into the population's body is not metaphorical or conceptual, but strictly material, and it physically interferes with individual bodies. These practices of power do not only simply catch people in a net. For the first time in human history, they methodically enter people's bodies and mark them. These marks—types of vaccines, the number of shots taken, etc.—are used to categorize people. Depending on what category one is, one has a certain scope of possibility, some rights to move around, to meet with others, and to travel.

Our situation increasingly resembles the position of feudal serfs, only scaled up to a global proportion. We also turn into serfs as a result of the economic crisis, a highly predictable fallout from the announcement of the pandemic, making those who had little unable to collect any funds to buy anything and dependent on others to pay the rent—being on a corporate debt statement, as small private businesses go bankrupt, and only the richest make profit. The richest not only make profit, but also buttress the new governance of the world's masters across national borders, as epitomized by Elon Musk, whose positive attitude to Russia has gained a wide resonance in the world, especially because it can carry serious global consequences both on the military and on the media levels (Metz, Vinograd, and Cooper 2022).

Since modern forms of power cross national boundaries, they need practices that reach individuals irrespective of state borders. Affecting individuals on the level of consciousness, by shaping them through the media and putting pressure on governments, is a powerful strategy; however, it is also an imperfect one, because individuals' bodies can eventually slip away by managing their own consciousness. From the point of view of the interests of power, it is therefore necessary to access individual bodies. These individual bodies must willingly submit to the practices of power, which does not want to—nor can—be brutal or non-humanitarian. Practices of enslavement are much more effective when they are humanitarian, so that people are persuaded to put their necks into the harness of their own accord. Ideally, people should believe to be free, because the ideal of freedom is very compelling, and its seduction issues in a certain political, social, and individual arrangement. Such arrangements

can vary, because, as Jerzy Kochan has shown drawing on Althusser's reflections, the concept of freedom is empty in itself and, on every occasion, it is filled with a different content calling for identification (being interpellated) within a given system that promises freedom (2003) either in heavens or on Earth, either through rationality or by means of temporal transgression (Koś 2004). While the will to be free is differently described in various philosophical, religious, and political frameworks, the basic will to be free in the sense of not being directly constrained can be reduced to the need of security, that is, to the instinct of protection. Thus, to make people allow the practices of power to enter inside their bodies, it is necessary to evoke a global risk to the body—its health and life. What a direct, physical, mortal risk to the body first triggers is not reflection, but the instinct of survival and protection. The instinct then responds by arousing emotion—fear. Through exposing a global and mortal risk to the body, one can instill fear in the global population and guide it toward one's interest, by offering a solution to the fear that lowers it to the livable level, without making it disappear completely. It is through this natural fear that the masses can be easily directed.

Emotions alone do not suffice to sustain the instinctual reaction for long, and the support of consciousness is indispensable to perpetuate it. To elicit such a support, scientifically grounded reasoning is needed, especially in our times, largely defined, as they are, by scientific operational knowledge. This knowledge is operational or functional, rather than essential, not just because, as observed by Kant (1998), it has no access to the noumenal world, but first and foremost because it easily deals with critique though modulating the form of operation or functioning, without necessitating any deeper reflection or reform (Marcuse 2002). An appeal to Science and Scientists as experts on health, without examining the evidence, is an appeal to *believe* (in) *Science*, but not really to *follow scientific inquiry*, which are two very different things. It appears that Science has just replaced God or Nature as an ideological figure for explaining and grounding everything, which does not actually have much in common with scientific research, which requires questioning, experimenting, testing, and reformulating hypotheses. Nevertheless, on the level of common consciousness, in order to feel reasonable and rationally grounded, it is enough to relegate the activities of questioning, experimenting, testing, and reformulating hypotheses to experts, and to accept the popularized versions of the outcomes of these activities as disseminated by the media. As a consequence, providing a specific media content full of appeals to Science gives an acceptable justification to the fear triggered by a risk to life and health, strengthening

and perpetuating the effect of instinctual fear. One acts then with the belief that one is free and aware, though one is in fact thoroughly manipulated on various levels of one's existence: physicality, emotionality, and consciousness.

3 Recovering Sensibility as a Political and Economic Stake

The practices of biopower, that is, a power bound up with biopolitics, "a power that exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations" (Foucault 1976, 137), are overwhelming and intrusive. They are "focused on the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary" (Foucault 1976, 139), and they cooperate with disciplinary power, complementing each other. Therefore, one that aims to free oneself from biopower, or at least to loosen its grasp on one, must begin to listen to one's intuition and body, suspending one's belief in the truths disseminated by the media. If one reclaims one's body, one can be free and not entirely biopolitically manageable. One will then be a freed, or freer, slave, finding sensibility and activity in one's conscious body, that is, the soma. This sensibility and activity give power to the body, which is not treated as an object. Following Koczanowicz (2022), this can be called somapower (2022). Used by Koczanowicz and inspired by Shusterman, the notion of the soma "denotes not mere physical body but the lived, sentient, intentional, body that involves mental, social, and cultural dimensions. The soma is not merely an object of consciousness but a conscious subjectivity that displays different levels of consciousness (and unconsciousness)" (Shusterman 2011, 315). It is a "mindful soma" (Shusterman 2011, 315). This conceptualization of the body differs from the Foucauldian notion of the body in that the body is now perceived not only as an object, but primarily as "the operative body engaged in action and capable of resisting external pressures" (Koczanowicz 2022, 71).

Shusterman endorses Foucault's vision of "the body as a docile, malleable site for inscribing social power" (Shusterman 1999, 303), but argues that it is just one side of things, and that pragmatism and its methodologies propose "alternative body practices to overcome the repressive ideologies entrenched in our docile bodies" (Shusterman 1999, 309). This ensemble of methodologies includes somaesthetics, which has emerged from pragmatism and "can be provisionally defined as the critical, meliorative study of the experience and the use of one's body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation (*aisthesis*)

and creative self-fashioning. It is therefore also devoted to the knowledge, discourses, practices, and bodily disciplines that structure such somatic care or can improve it" (Shusterman 1999, 302). Shusterman stresses that "somaesthetics [...] involves social critique and historical inquiry with respect to body norms and practices and to the sociopolitical power relations that those norms and practices both reflect and reinforce through our habits. Our somas are essentially shaped by culture as well as by nature" (2011, 316). Koczanowicz draws on these ideas in developing his approach to social power relations and stressing that the concept of somapower "vitaly affirms that while the body is shaped by social relations of power, it can also shape those relations. In this sense, somapower is intimately intertwined with the concept of the micro-physics of emancipation" (2022, 71–72).

The use of the aesthetics of the soma as a social critique starting from the sensible and conscious body, from conscious sensibility, is now thoughtfully practiced by Berleant too, as presented in his recent conference papers and articles (2017), culminating in *The Social Aesthetics of Human Environments: Critical Themes* (2023). Stressing the concept of sensible engagement, which is always relational, that is, social, Berleant calls for resisting the contemporary form of biopower by developing bodily sensibility, which is also a practical demand of Shusterman's somaesthetics. These theoretical concepts can be compellingly combined and brought into play in order to realize, for example, that one response to the pandemic situation has been a robust revival of interest in traditional healing, the knowledge of herbs, and traditional bodily practices. For example, *Plantago lanceolata*-based infusions and syrups have been used as anti-virus protection, becoming highly popular among hipsters in Warsaw in 2021. Also, taking vitamins D and C and maintaining a bacterial flora balance and the adequate level of acidity and alkalinity are practices that sit firmly in people's bodies and go athwart other pandemic recommendations and advice. Taking them up aims to prevent infections, but it shows, too, that the body is not treated just as means to something, but as an active and integral part of the person.

If we build and maintain our bodies listening to them, in emotional stability and not under the pressure of the pandemic hysteria, we will be less likely to become ill, and if we do, we will have more internal immunity to fight the disease. The decision whether or not to become vaccinated should not be pragmatically driven by the wish to move around more or less freely, to travel internationally easily, because to do so is people's right in free and democratic countries; instead, such a decision should be based on the recognition of one's own body and its needs. Sensibility is thus a political stake, as stressed by Berleant, who advocates for democracy as perceived through the

kind and value of experiences. Berleant (2015) claims that sensibility should be recovered from the corporate takeover of images, smells, tastes, and sounds, where profit is made from the abuse of the senses. Therefore, the decision to listen to one's body, to strengthen it through natural methods, which also calm the mind, and to develop its capacities and sensibility, preventing corporations from taking absolute control of it, is a political decision that limits one's dependence on companies producing food, cosmetics, and medicines, all of which are tightly interwoven, depending on developments in chemistry.

This chapter is not aligned with pure theory, but with theory-practice, as it explores and participates in practices of resistance, which should not be misrecognized as fight. By focusing on the strength, health, and general well-being of one's body and listening to one's body, that is, being receptive to one's sensibility, one can develop distance to the practices of corporations that affect the individual bodies of the global population. Using herbs instead of legally registered drugs (if not in a radical and life-threatening situation) and cooking one's own food from produce grown in the garden and obtained from friends (some of whom may have their own small smokehouse or breed hens) forestalls one becoming a constant client of pharmaceutical companies and removes the unpleasant effects of unhealthy food. The aim of pharmaceutical companies is not to heal people, but to semi-heal them so that they go on being clients with one or another complaint. Of course, I am aware that that global economic situation does not support individual food production and that, in some urban environments, it is sometimes challenging to procure good food. However, observable in recent years, the vigorous trends of urban farming and even urban bee-keeping—in houses, on terraces, and on rooftops—speak to people's commitment to find their own way amidst the globally distributed, mass-produced food, beyond the obvious mindful selection of foodstuffs at stores, based on the careful reading of their labels.

The regaining of one's sensitivity and refusal to give it up in exchange for the beauty promised by cosmetic corporations is vividly illustrated by the choice to practice face yoga, instead of undergoing beauty treatments, especially invasive ones, such as Botox injections. Botox (a protein made from *Botulinum* toxin produced by a bacterium called *Clostridium botulinum*) injections work by paralyzing face muscles, so that the visual effect is a reduction of wrinkles. The point is that as the face ages and its muscles become weaker causing wrinkles to appear, people do not seek to boost the tone and strength of the facial muscles so as to prevent the deepening of wrinkles, but choose to have them paralyzed in order to have a quick result. However, in a longer run, the procedure must be repeated, because the toxin is absorbed, and the muscles are weaker than before. As opposed to this, face yoga develops our sensibility

and expression, does not paralyze us, and is not financially draining. Silicone breast implants are a similar case as frequent complications involve “loss of nipple sensation [...] and skin hypersensitivity/paresthesia or loss of skin sensation” (Lund, Turkle, Jewell, and Murphy 2016, 673); one can cherish a visually perfect breast that meets the current beauty standards, but one only has it, without feeling it anymore. This also exemplifies the loss of sensitivity, surrendering it to the corporation for the promise of visual perfection, quite a costly one, too.

Pharmaceutical and beauty companies undoubtedly access our bodies, forming them in the image and likeness of the consumerist, standardized, and controlled ideal of the person demanded by consumerist, standardized, and controlling societies, whereby even how deep one’s wrinkles are and how low one’s breast hangs is monitored to pull individuals into the consumer capitalist system as surveilled clients. In such cases, individuals still have a choice, although the wishes, drives, and desires of the population are created and manipulated through the media and the ideology of perfection. From the point of view of the system that strives for the complete control of the population, it is serviceable to induce people’s need to be surveilled clients of pharmaceutical companies. A global need of this kind that overrides the liberties of democratic societies may only be sparked by a threat to the health and life of individuals and their loved ones. Under such circumstances, many people will seemingly freely and of their own accord choose to be vaccinated despite not knowing anything about long-term effects of the products picked by global corporations in collaboration with the WHO, as in doing so they will be guided by their survival instinct, reinforced by the reasonable recommendations of experts or rather by their appeals to Science.

The body is therefore the main object of politics—of the biopolitics of global corporations— and, as such, it is also the last line of defense, a site of resistance to the politics of global corporations. This is particularly true today, in the times of the pandemic. The sensibility of the body and our free will in managing it beyond simply following the prescribed paths are what is at stake today. We must awaken our somapower.

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