

## **Body-Scale: Somaticity, Degrowth, and the Revival of Place**

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As the paper comes after the three other presentations that form the special panel session on Degrowth and Animal Liberation, it takes them as the context in which to situate itself, and as its point of departure. However, instead of building upon their notions of explicit animal liberation, taken to mean the liberation of „other animals” from slaughter, confinement, manipulation—in a word, domestication—and the notions of gender and domination of „nature,” it looks at and digs into their preconditions in the very facticity of the *anthropos* as an animal bound by an alienating form of collective life designated, among other things, by an intolerance of limits, i.e., growth, animated since the onset of modernity around the 17<sup>th</sup> century by the gradual ascent of capitalist relations. It will hold that the *anthropoi*, despite for the most part not being physically confined and disposed of, are captured in a „desomaticizing” regime which cripples their animality and propels the expanding cycle of contemporary crises culminating in the socioecological crisis that puts into question both the existence and the rationale of modern civilization. The *anthropoi* are, then, likewise in need of liberation and the emerging degrowth paradigm offers some insight to its parameters by pointing to the importance of *limits*. These limits, it will be held, regard above all to the fleshly dimensionality of the living body. The paper will also hold that, on account of the diminution of somatic conviviality with other animals, their liberation without concomitant rescaling of the anthropic world to the scale comprehensible to the body is untenable. There can be—a thesis is risked—no liberation of other animals without the concurrent liberation of the *anthropoi* as animals. To the end of establishing its thesis, the paper deals with the following questions, here framed into a series of overlapping episodes:

*—How the "full-bodied" quality of lived meaning diminishes for the anthropos with the growth of institutions and infrastructures beyond its somatic grasp:* Animal liberation is not an affair external to our lives, especially understood in their daily, moment-by-moment unfoldment. It concerns the core of our lived circumstance, how we perceive and experience the environing world. We—the anthropoi, familiarly known to ourselves as „human”—cannot safely take ourselves out of the worldly equation. We are animals through and through: vulnerable, embedded creatures that take on orienting themselves in the world as their primary activity, filling every instant of life with meaning. We are living bodies, valuing most, on the whole, that with which we grow most intimate—what we can touch and feel. With the growth of social institutions and infrastructures beyond our somatic grasp, the relation between that which we value and that which matters for the impersonal systems of rational management is lost—mediated to the point of obscurity. We become objects of administration with no direct access to the logic of how we are governed.

*—How lived experience is impoverished and flattened, and „unlived” experience grows thicker in suppression:* Our lived experience thus orients itself to administrative logic and we relearn how to think, see, and feel, accepting administrative abstractions as our surrogate guides. This is the rational reaction of our animal bodies to changing material circumstances of life, now decided not by individual/communal autonomy and rapport with the environing conditions of Place, but by the tentacles of Empire—the universalizing apparatus of administration that feeds its own growth.

*—How, with growth, what is commonly called imagination, rather than being the celebrated paragon of human nature, constitutes a „permanent emergency” response of the natural body's stretch beyond healthy limits, resulting in relative "desomaticization":* The body's reaction to the changing circumstances of life—to what and where things are decided—is

co-terminous with the ascent of the imagination to dominance in the axiological scheme of the life of the anthropoi. To simplify, we come to prefer to imagine than to experience.

*—How the imagination ascends to dominance when real life—the materially embedded life of sensuous presence—dwindles:* We praise the imagination for opening up our world beyond that which can be directly lived. The imagination figures as a „device” of compensation for loss of meaningful somatic, intercorporeal relations. Imagination is the corporeal equivalent of telecommunications—both make up for the distance created with the uprooting of the body from direct contact with the determinants of its reality. We can call a loved one and praise that as an achievement, but why would we pick up the phone if we could see and feel them? Similarly, we cook up wondrous worlds in our heads just as this one goes out in flames. Virtuality and extropia are the culmination of this process.

*—How what follows with the dwindling of our animal sensorium is a loss of tangible contact with the envioning conditions/determinants of life:* We become objects of impersonal administration and manipulation as the ties linking us to our means of subsistence and meaning-making become snatched out of our somatic grasp. No matter where we are in the ever-intensifying process of division of labor, our fate is always decided elsewhere.

*—How the living body comes to be determined by objective factors beyond its reach except through imagination and abstraction (the symbolic), now dominant in social life, a social life at a decisive remove, and disjointed from, the rest of the natural world, alienated in the true sense:*

Place—where we are—in its qualitative dimensions loses its significance. Coping with the world now requires manipulation of symbols and reliance of abstraction, in which—at the cost of our perceptual life—our faith is invested. This is the process of „desomaticization;” an

impoverishment of our animal nature. Empires are built over our heads and the only way we can relate to them, if critically, is through engaging them on their own terms—to our own detriment. Meanwhile, our senses are starved, reduced to passive recipients of administrative decrees. Embeddedness of the anthropoi and the centrality of locale go hand in hand, and both are ruled out by modern alienation. Modernity takes up the living body and throws it spinning into a whirlpool in which it cannot take a foothold—if one place is just as good, or just as bad as another, with most feeling just the same, then place itself becomes abstract space; abstract all the more in that all past places, now erased, uphold somatic uprootedness, and are reduced to their specific functions in administrative schemes: recreational spaces, working spaces, educational spaces—contributing to ongoing fragmentation.

The paper concludes with an argument, developed throughout the presentation, for the ultimate return to body-scale in economic, social, and political life—now to be reconstituted as animal life—and for the body-scale as indispensable horizon of dismantling empire and restoration of place.