

ON THE DOMESTICATED BODIES OF NORTH KOREAN RESIDENTS

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ABSTRACT

North Koreans' social ecological resilience may be recovered by removing their vulnerability and facilitating their adaptability to a changing environment. North Koreans must improve their social relationships with inner or outer environments. Idolatrous social relations have enslaved the bodies of the inhabitants of North Korea. Only changes in the ruling ideology will enable the North Koreans to heal and transform their bodies in a social ecological recovery.

Keywords: philosophy of the body, social ecological resilience, North Koreans.

Particularly in his late works Maurice Merleau-Ponty argued for the ontology of the body. Merleau-Ponty (2004, 191-192) distinguished between, on the one hand, the so-called objective thinking of traditional science and its concomitant in the self-consciousness of Descartes' "cogito," and on the other hand the underlying phenomenal existence. He insisted that the human body was not only a thing, a potential object of study for science, but also a permanent condition of experience, a constituent of the perceptual openness to the world. He therefore argued that the primacy of perception signified a primacy of experience, so to speak, insofar as perception became an active and constitutive dimension, and a corporeity of consciousness existed side by side with an intentionality of the body.

In this regard Merleau-Ponty can be thought of as redefining the human body as an element of system theory. The individual human body is influenced by the relationship between the system components in constant positive interaction with other components in human systemic thinking and acting. Merleau-Ponty does not discount the traditional expectations raised either in the analysis of natural science phenomena or in the transcendent phenomena embodied in human spirituality, but wants us to understand the importance of the human body as the perceiving element at the nexus of the interrelationship of human consciousness and the world.

The ecosystems of the Anthropocene need to be understood in the mutual relationships among bodies, consciousness, and the broader socio-economic ecosystems. The phenomenon is not an unchanging reality in the ecosystem covered in traditional natural science. Our bodies are to be recognized as a phenomenal sensory function at work in a mutual relationship with them. Humans are somehow perceived as phenomenal in relation to human spirituality, even transcendent. This set of

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relationships is crucial, for efforts are needed to develop ecological sustainability in the age of globalization, and in this regard it is particularly important to develop transcendental awareness in order to foster eco-citizenship. The human body already exists in the mutual relationships of the ecosystem. In the Anthropocene era, it is necessary for ecological citizens to recover the optimal level of resilience and sustainable conditions necessary.

Today, mankind needs to equip the body to experience optimal resilience as presented by individual experts in all areas of life, including our lives as perceived in politics, economics, social relations, and interactions with nature. For example, mankind requires resilience through sustainability in food consumption (Seyfang 2006), but sustainability is also a necessary metric for robust resilience in our political, economic, and social lives.

In a society in which citizens tend not to follow the rules of society, Merleau-Ponty's body philosophy offers guidance for fostering citizenship. In other words, efforts to foster citizenship need to reach the body experiences beyond human conception. In particular, ecological citizenship is required in the current situation of global environmental interdependence. In order to preserve the Earth, human ecological citizenship need to be realized on the body beyond perception.

But how might citizen bodies work out in practice? One way to think about it is to consider the situation in my homeland, the Korean peninsula. Perhaps in the unification process, or at least in its aftermath, the North Korean people may remove the aura emanating from the pseudo-religious body of Kim Il Sung to reconstitute themselves as new physical and spiritual bodies. Because of the unit of the body and consciousness in all social relationships, when body and consciousness are in balance, change requires a "death" of the old body. However, the fact that human beings live in this world creates a never-ending process of imbalances with the external environment. Because the social body is formed in a continuous process of reflection on realistic relations, we will try to correct the imbalance. In this case, even though North Korean society in its entirety is maintained through obedience to a rigidly hierarchical superstructure, if you look at the level where after unification you will need to overcome the imbalance with the human ontological necessity, the bodies of North Koreans will already be changing, and will continue to change.

Shifting for the moment from Merleau-Ponty to Karl Mannheim (1954), I wonder about the relation of religious and political utopias as ideologies. We find that the state does not separate religion and politics in North Korea, where Kim Il Sung created a unique power over the squashed. In the process, he led the people of his country into a cult.

But in terms of their bodies, It is necessary to distinguish between the inhabitants and the people of North Korean. As a concept *people* infuses human beings with ideological bias. *Residents*, on the other hand, should be viewed as a pre-conceptual, ideology-free idea. If the civic life is distorted in the North, it is no wonder that the *people* of North Korea reflect on life in a distorted way. But it is not easy for a people enveloped in ideology to reflect by themselves. The inhabitants of North Korea have underdeveloped bodies and weakened perception due to the politico-religious coercion within North Korean society. We can take our own aura — in a physical metaphor perhaps more appropriate to Merleau-Ponty, the "smell" of our religious and similar bodies — to the

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bodies inhabiting North Korea, and expect to see changed perceptions and new bodies there.

Humans internally maintain the imbalances in their bodies. Perfect balance would mean death or another resurrection. Humans are living unbalanced lives despite their constant search for a balanced homeostasis. The bodies of North Koreans was formed through the idolatry of the dictator. North Koreans' social ecological resilience can be recovered by removing their vulnerability and facilitating their adaptability to a changing environment (Young et al. 2006). According to Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of the body, first of all, North Koreans must improve their social relationships with inner or outer environments. Idolatrous social relations have enslaved the bodies of the inhabitants of North Korea. Only changes in the ruling ideology will enable the North Koreans to heal and transform their bodies in a social ecological recovery.

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