

Hanulík, Vladan/Lenderová, Milena/Tinková, Daniela (eds.): Dějiny těla: Prameny, koncepty, historiografie [The History of the Body: Sources, Concepts, Historiography].

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Hanulík, Vladan/Lenderová, Milena/Tinková, Daniela (eds.): Tělo mezi medicínou a disciplínou: proměny lékařského obrazu a ideálu lidského těla a tělesnosti v dlouhém 19. století [The Body Between Medicine and Discipline: Shifts in Medical Ideas and Ideals of Human Body and Corporeality in the Long 19th Century].

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The reviewed volumes represent a major step in the Czech historiography of the body. While in recent years scholars have used the concept of the body mainly to examine the socialist past,¹ many of these texts use the concept implicitly. These two volumes represent the largest collection of texts so far that explicitly places the body at the forefront of historical analysis. Understanding the body as a socially constructed phenomenon, which „is not fixed but available through a system of cultural meanings” (Dějiny těla, p. 31), the authors explore the shifting meanings of the body in the past, focusing mostly on the long 19th century.

The first volume, “Dějiny těla: prameny, koncepty, historiografie”, bringing together contributions from a 2011 conference, seeks to present various types of primary sources to “define the heuristic base” for the study of the history of the body (p. 27). The contributions – ranging from explorations of medieval and early modern medical treatises on the care of the body, to examinations of late 18th century school discipline manuals and the 19th century religious documents prescribing sexual behavior, to a documentation of the institutionalization of the mentally ill – are decidedly Foucauldian, focusing on the “classic” institutions of disciplinatio. The chapters vary widely in their length, depth of exploration of primary sources, and complexity of engagement with the category of the body as well as Foucault’s concept of disciplinary power. All but one contribution in the volume, which zeroes in on early photography, engage in textual analysis.

¹ *Dudová, Radka: Interrupce v České republice: Zápás o ženská těla [Abortions in the Czech Republic. Struggle for Women’s Bodies]. Praha 2012. – Oates-Indruchová, Libora: The Ideology of the Genderless Sporting Body: Reflections on the Czech State-Socialist Concept of Physical Culture. In: Segal, Naomi/Cook, Roger/Stychin, Carl/Taylor, Lib (eds.): Indeterminate Bodies. Houndmills 2001. – Roubal, Petr: Politics of Gymnastics: Mass Gymnastic Displays under Communism in Central and Eastern Europe. In: Body and Society 9 (2003) no. 2, 1-25. – Sokolová, Věra: Cultural Politics of Ethnicity. Discourses on Roma in Communist Czechoslovakia. Stuttgart 2008.*

Karel Černý's immensely detailed examination of the shifts in medical imagination of the body between 1480 and 1730 argues that the shifts were far less revolutionary than previous scholarship has maintained. Late 15th and early 18th century notions of the body were, according to Černý, remarkably similar: the body was understood as a combination of various bodily "humours," associated with elements as well as properties and organs, and the life-giving "spiritus". Daniela Tinková's exploration of dietary documents from 18th and early 19th centuries argues that while the change of corsets in favor of loose, functional clothing at the end of the 18th century seems to us as a liberation of the body, this move was, in fact, a disciplining one. Medical experts of the time redefined a "healthy" body as one that becomes fit through outdoor sports. Tinková argues that medical knowledge is always disciplinary, while Jana Rejchrtová's short text on a sanatorium for mentally ill in Prague-Bubeneč adds that medical knowledge is not simply disciplinary but can also be harmful, removing bodies it defines as abnormal, physically or mentally, out of sight.

One of the best essays in the volume, Vladan Hanulík's "Patientengeschichte", shows that the study of discourse does not take us too far without examining how it is taken up, negotiated, resisted or ignored by individual subjects. In order to do this kind of history "from below," one has to look into a different type of historical source: ego documents. As Hanulík's exploration of the personal letters written by the patients of Vincenz Priessnitz in early 19th century demonstrates, "The level of [their] engagement with biomedical discourse is [...] relatively low" (p. 224). Most of the patients in Hanulík's study understood their bodies – and, accordingly, sought cure – within *both* allopathic and alternative medical discourses, depending on individual preferences, life course stage, and the level of acceptance of alternative curing methods in the society; or they developed their own attitude towards both medicine and healing altogether.

While the first volume introduces primary sources for the study of the body, the second volume, "Tělo mezi medicínou a disciplínou: proměny lékařského obrazu a ideálu lidského těla a tělesnosti v dlouhém 19. století", seeks to explore the "shifts in scientific (predominantly medical) image and discourse about the human body and embodiment in the long 19th century as well as the ways in which these scientific discourses framed individual self understanding of the body." (VII, p. 27) Written solely by the three editors, this volume documents Foucault's argument of increasing medicalization and disciplinary control of the body, and, if much less successfully, the self-disciplining of the body.

The first chapter presents a meticulously researched analysis of the ever more intimate "opening up of the body" to the medical gaze and surgical interventions – particularly interesting are the Czech/Bohemian case studies of medical expertise and practice. Underscoring the argument that the body is a culturally imagined, rather than biologically fixed, entity is the fact that the Czech language did not have any words to describe reproductive organs until the end of the 18th century, as the fourth chapter shows. According to its author, Josef Jungmann himself wrote six textbooks in an unsuccessful search to find the right vocabulary for reproductive organs (p. 149-151). Further demonstrating the gendered nature of 19th century medi-

cal imaginations of reproductive bodies, 19th century birthing textbooks allegedly “did not say anything about male reproductive anatomy” (p. 152).

Milena Lenderová’s chapter exploring prescriptive literature on the aesthetic care of the female body complements Vladan Hanulík’s chapter on the male body, both demonstrating the increasing hygienic control over male and female bodies. Lenderová and Hanulík corroborate Thomas Laquer’s argument that what had once been a singular, if homologous, body, was by the late 18th century differentiated into distinctly male and female bodies with increasingly gendered roles. The authors also show that while the male body was sculpted to “reflect his political attitude by participating in sport organizations, volunteer committees or political arena,” women’s bodies were imagined as essentialized, tied to their supposed biological and physical capacities (p. 126).

Among the most interesting chapters in the volume is Daniela Tinková’s examination of the legislative and social shifts in the approach to the dead body. She argues that an increased emphasis on hygiene and the elimination of potential epidemics connected with decomposing bodies led to the implementation of nighttime burials, storing of the dead in morgues, and moving cemeteries beyond city limits (p. 432). These administrative measures were not without protests by the population, Tinková writes, as demonstrated on the widely unpopular, ultimately abandoned, idea of burying all bodies in whitewash sacks.

While hygienic impulses led to the efforts of medical, non-Catholic and secularizing circles to cremate dead bodies, cremation was banned in Austria-Hungary until the end of the Empire in 1918; not least because of the strong opposition from the Catholic Church. This led to, as Tinková explores in the most fascinating part of the chapter, “cremation tourism” to places where cremation was allowed, such as Paris. The practice effectively pushed the Ministry of Interior to issue a decree in 1874 on the transportation of dead bodies, including a measure on a “corpse passport” (p. 444).

Despite declaring to follow Foucault, the volume’s chapters reproduce some rather un-Foucauldian notions about bodies. That is evident in occasional essentializing claims about the female body (p. 185), but much more crucially in the validation of medical “progress”. The first chapter’s statement that “the [improved] possibility of putting patients into sleep or anesthetizing the place of operation also improved sawing techniques, thus also a better and more aesthetic healing of the scar” betrays the author’s uncritical, and ableist, attitude towards medicine (p. 56). The seventh chapter, which focuses on smallpox vaccination, represents a wholesale triumphalist narrative of modern medical science. Illuminating conflicts and disagreements within the medical community it follows a complicated, non-linear story of medical and institutional struggle to eradicate smallpox throughout the 19th century. What was supposed to be a Foucauldian critique of medical disciplinary power turns into an uncritical celebration of it. Instead of problematizing the modern view of the body as a whole, rationally behaving and scientifically controlled, the chapter thus ends up reproducing the normative (thus desirable) image of the invulnerable, autonomous body.

Among the missed opportunities of both volumes, is the lack of engagement with

the categories of nation, ethnicity, sexuality, and disability, and the ways in which cultural meanings of the body are always negotiated across these categories. What, for example, is the point of the increasing emphasis on sports and diet regulation, as Lenderová and Hanulík mention in their respective chapters, if not to create a healthy national, ethnic and social body? How did the struggle between the Czech and German nationalists over the bodies and souls of the nationally indifferent Bohemian population² – perhaps the main theme in the recent Austro-Hungarian historiography – affect the ways in which bodies were imagined and experienced? How did the 19th century German discourse of superiority over the “subservient Slavs” as well as the Czech nationalist discourse of the deeply democratic and progressive nature of the Czechs framed understandings of the nationally appropriate body?

Analyzing the nationalist framing of much of the studied material would give the readers a better understanding of how exactly bodies became sites for negotiations of symbolic meanings as well as material products of these negotiations. Including the category of disability would allow for a deeper analysis of the normative construction of a modern body in general, and a Czech body in particular.³ In fact, including the broader 19th century context of the construction of “proper” European bodies against its colonial other⁴ would also further inform the way in which modern bodies are always racialized.⁵

Further criticisms of the book concern editorial decisions. First, the editors made the unusual choice of using basically the same introduction for both volumes. While not prohibited, a new introduction to the second volume would better contextualize the chapters within a broader historiographical debate on the 19th century constructions of the body. Second, both books’ titles are problematic. The first volume’s title is unfulfilled and the second volume’s title invites but never answers the question of what, indeed, is the space between medicalization and discipline of the body.

Criticisms notwithstanding, these volumes are pioneering works, opening up space for much further work. New research on the body in Czech history will hopefully take these texts for what they are – the first analyses of the construction of the normative body in the Czech lands in the long 19th century – and will enrich these explorations with a much needed intersectional work.

Chicago

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² *Zabra*, Tara: *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands 1900-1948*. Ithaca 2008.

³ For the Czech context, see the special issue on the category of disability in historical analysis in: *Dějiny, teorie, kritika* (2011) iss. 2.

⁴ In the Czech context this took place through the exhibitions from Emil Holub’s travels, ethnographic shows of the “exotic” other, or widely popular travelogues from the “Orient.” See for example *Bláhová, Kateřina/Petrbok, Václav* (eds.): *Cizí, jiné, exotické v české kultuře 19. století*. [The Foreign, the Other, the Exotic in Czech 19th Century Culture]. Praha 2008.

⁵ *Stoler*, Ann Laura: *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*. Durham 1995.