

Your Body Fucken Matters

Desire and Bodies as Revolutionary

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Contents

- 1. Separating the Mind and Body** **4**
 - 1.2. Priority of Mind: Repression and Control of the Body 4
- 2. Suppression of Desire and the Body in the Interests of Capitalism** **5**
 - 2.2 Disconnection of Sex at the Expense of Eros 5
 - 2.3 Isolated Individualism 6
- 3. Bodies as Social Constructs** **7**
- 4. Resistance** **8**
 - 4.1 Str8edge Philosophies 8
 - 4.2 The Ascetic Ideal 8
- 5. Indulgence as Revolutionary: Pursuing Passions and Desires** **10**

(This article is dedicated to the memory of my friend, my ally, and one of my original revolutionary inspirations, Tim Yohannan. Although we often disagreed about tactics, we never lost sight of the ultimate goal-the complete and total overthrow of the economics, politics, and ideology of the capitalist system. You will be missed Tim.)

This is a manifesto about the importance of bodies. This is a call to re-affirm the value of desire. This is about the revolution that is and will occur not just in our minds but in and through our bodies. This is about pleasure and fun, feelings and sensations, the rhythms of our own and others' bodies. This is about how life and revolution can never be separate from desire and pleasure. Most importantly, this is about how our minds can never be separate from our bodies.

At Detroit Fest this year, during an otherwise stellar set by Bane, the singer gets on the mike and said something that kinda bothered me. "Don't let your body control you." I had to stop and think for a minute. I know this is common enough rhetoric in str8edge, but I wondered how much we are ultimately damaging ourselves by thinking this way. In a place where everyone is distinctly aware of their bodies, moshing and stage-diving, affirming the rhythms of their bodies by dancing in unison to music, we are told to control our bodies, to repress and stifle ourselves in favor of our minds. What's going on here? Are we advocating a revolution only of our minds? Where does that leave our bodies? (As if we could ever get rid of them) Are we trying to change the minds of a sick society without attending to its varied and different bodies? Why are we separating the mind from the body at all? And finally, what role does str8edge philosophy play in all of this?

1. Separating the Mind and Body

Culture in the West and particularly in the late-capitalist society in which we live, has been all about separating the body from the mind. Beginning with Plato, western philosophy posits a hierarchy with mind over and distinct from the body, while Christianity advocates the spiritual salvation of the soul, the mind, at the expense of repressing and limiting the body. Our history consists of a constant attention to the differences and the boundaries between the mind and the body. Indeed it is in the interests of the system to reinforce these strict boundaries and separations.

We grow up in a society that pays very close attention to the body. Yet it is a body that is seen as clearly separate from the mind, distinct and unconnected, a tool to be molded, manipulated, sold and used. The idealized bodies of men and women parade before us in mass advertising and entertainment. It is not that bodies are invisible, it is that bodies are too visible as bodies, separate from any kind of mind. We also separate the labor of our bodies to sell in the marketplace, to exchange for wages.

We go to therapists to heal our minds, medical doctors to heal our bodies. There is an implicit assumption behind all of this that we are minds reflecting and acting upon our bodies. Our bodies are seen as tools-for us to use, to develop, to suppress, to workout with, to hide, to show off, to obsess over, to destroy, to cleanse or to purify. Fitness and workout crazes, the techno-medical profession, and cultural and religious norms all serve to make us think that our bodies are distinct from our minds.

1.2. Priority of Mind: Repression and Control of the Body

Yet separation also serves to reinforce the idea that our mind does and should control our body. Separation begins the process that seeks to replace the chaos of bodily desire for the orderliness of the analytical mind. The emotional upheavals of pleasure and bodily sensations make us lose control, a control that is essential to the power and legitimation of the system. Thus the mind comes to take control of the errant, evil and erratic body-the cool, detached, and objective mind masters and controls the heated, involved madness of the body. This allows capitalism to get us into the workplace-they control our bodies (in an environment that our bodies naturally rebel against) so that we can sell our labor for the capitalist's profit. As a cultural idea, the repression and control of the body also sustains racist and sexist world views-mind has traditionally been associated with white males, while body (and all the attendant evils and the subsequent restrictions) has been associated with people of color and women.

2. Suppression of Desire and the Body in the Interests of Capitalism

There are two interconnected ways that reinforce the priority of the mind over the body and kill any revolutionary potential we could have from reintegrating the mind and body through pursuing pleasure and desire. Capitalist ideology either forces direct and coercive repression onto the body or perhaps more insidiously, funnels and channels desire and pleasure into acceptable consumerism.

Direct repression and subjugation of the body by the capitalist system comes in two forms: incarceration and wage labor. The staggering amount of people incarcerated, the fact that the prison-system is one of the fastest growing sectors of the economy, and the general cultural and ideological apparatus of discipline as the threat of potential punishment all attest to the prevalence of capitalism's direct repression of bodies. In spite of Foucault's claims that the prison-system tends to discipline one's mind rather than punish one's body, the simple fact is that there are millions of bodies imprisoned-millions of bodies directly and forcefully locked down. Capitalism also stretches its of the body into our daily lives through the institution of wage-labor. As labor is alienated from the person, the body becomes a machine, a cog in the mechanisms of the factory. The rhythms of the body (which previously in our history may have been attuned to sunrises or sunsets) are now set to the watch of the nine-to-five work-day. Bodies are directly transformed into appendages of the capitalist system-even the health of one's body is seen in terms of worker productivity. Global capitalism ever increasingly remakes indigenous cultures in its own image by putting people to work in labor markets making your shoes, your clothes, and your hi-tech stereo systems. Yet instead of any kind of minimum or livable wage, global capitalism subjugates and represses the bodies of so-called Third World peoples for pennies a day. Everywhere in the world, capitalism owns the bodies of her wage-laborers.

For those with the privilege to choose the type and amount of wage-slavery to which they will be subjected, capitalism adds the bonus of channeling the desires and pleasures of the body into consumerism. We are given false pleasures through the media of television, movies, and entertainment that take the very real needs and desires of our bodies and transform them into substantial profits for the culture industry. Our life energies that come from the pleasures, the desires, and the sensations of our bodies are funneled into the only acceptable means of interaction between capitalist victims-shopping during the day, amusing ourselves to death at night. Drugs, alcohol, and entertainment become the palliative for the yearnings of the body. Any real pleasure or desire is quickly channeled into a new product, a new form of entertainment until we can no longer tell the difference between what our body wants and what the capitalist system wants us to buy.

2.2 Disconnection of Sex at the Expense of Eros

Capitalism also channels the very real and broad desires of the holistic erotic body into the controlled and repressed channels of sex. Capitalism does not repress sex, indeed it encourages the proliferation of sex-bodies, sex, and lust are everywhere, on display, on sale, available at the blink of an eye or the touch of a button. Sex becomes disconnected from the body and life energy. Just as the mind is separated from the body, the body is now separated from the whole of its eros, its life energies, and its ability to interact meaningfully with other bodies. Sex becomes a commodity to be bought and sold, an image to accompany any product, the overwhelming display of flesh all in the interests of what

Marcuse calls “repressive desublimation.” Our erotic desires, our desires for passion, emotionality, play, and pleasure are directed into the one-dimensional and sterile commodities that is offered to us through sex in the capitalist system. Instead of interacting directly with other bodies and minds, we are isolated as individuals, viewing sex from afar, repressing our deeply erotic life energies to be redirected into the “acceptable” modes of interaction-work, school, television, and a maybe a little Internet porn on the side.

2.3 Isolated Individualism

The separation of the mind from the body, the subsequent priority of the mind, and the suppression of the body by capitalism all ultimately push us into thinking that we are individuals, isolated and unconnected from each other. Yet our bodies can never be separate from other bodies. The actions and reactions of bodies to- surrounding are what constitute us as human. We are not separate or isolated from one other. Our 1 bodies are a social whole, J working together or against each other, our actions have consequences and effects on others. It is in the interests of the capitalist system to construct us as isolated individuals. In capitalist ideology, we are minds that are separate and distinct and we believe that the actions of our bodies have no consequences upon others. We are individuals that can alienate our labor, exploit each other, or see each other as sexual objects. We think that we can separate our theory and our practice and we think that selfishness should be a priority while accumulation of profit should come before the existence, indeed even at the expense of others. Yet this is the way our society makes and creates our bodies.

3. Bodies as Social Constructs

It should be clear in what I have been arguing that the problems that arise from an ideology that separates and prioritizes the mind over the body are culturally specific. Every society and every culture has a different take on the way the body is constructed. Many of us agree that gender, as a category, is constructed specific to the society in which we live. Ideas about what constitutes “masculinity” or “femininity” are derived from our history and culture. Yet some theorists have even argued that things we normally take for granted as “natural, ” like the specific difference between the sexes, the difference between man and woman, are also socially constructed. Foucault and Butler argue that our bodies are created by the cultures in which we live. Our bodies are maps and landscapes where culture has written its norms and values. The very movements of our bodies, the very pleasures and desires that we think are part of our bodies, are lived experiences of our society. If this indeed is the case, is there any way that we can make our bodies part of a revolutionary experience? How can we resist the values of capitalist society if they are written on and into our very bodies?

4. Resistance

Resistance first takes the form of re-integrating our minds and our bodies. Any action that maintains a separation between the mind and the body, affirming one at the expense of the other is doomed to failure. This is not a call to prioritize the body over the mind. Yet part of re-integrating the mind and the body comes through listening to your body, listening to your desires, your pleasures, and your passions.

4.1 Str8edge Philosophies

At the outset, str8edge was about revolution and change. It was about listening to your body. By not putting drugs or alcohol into your body, it was argued that your mind and body together could be better able to make and create change. The mind and body, free of the poisons with which society tries to mark our bodies, could act together in a revolutionary way. Str8edge was about choice, it was not about coercion-you had the opportunity to choose what you wanted to put into your body, indeed it was that very choice that was part of the pleasure. There was passion in this choice, this was a desire and a pleasure, that by not partaking of drugs or alcohol we could use our minds and bodies to feel the real sensations of our world. Yeah, drugs were a part of our world, but like anything else that gave us pleasure, we could choose what we wanted, we could desire things other than those our society gives us, and we could pursue our passions. We still pursue intoxication, we still pursue pleasure. We just pursue it in ways that do not separate our bodies and our minds.

Str8edge has now become a new religion, a form of coercion and a set of ideologies that separate our minds from our bodies while punishing and repressing our bodies. We have, under the guise of continued vigilance and revolution, completely replicated the capitalist notions of priority of mind and repression of the body. Rather than a positive take on affirming your life, your body and mind free of the poisons of society, working together for positive change, str8edge has become a negative religion. We have replicated all the “thou shalt nots” of our guilty Christian heritage. We have substituted our attempts to find new forms of intoxication and play for the monk’s attitude toward life. We think that through suffering, in punishing our body by not allowing ourselves pleasure, by not “giving in” to our desires, and through denying our bodies, we can make a revolution called str8edge. Rather than finding different ways to be intoxicated, different ways to pursue pleasure, we have given up on pleasure and intoxication all together.

This is fucked. I don’t want to be a monk. I don’t want to live my life always holding myself back from something I find pleasurable, meaningful, or desirous. I want to indulge myself and my desires while celebrating my body and the bodies of others. I do recognize that desires are created by culture-I don’t give in to every desire I have-I pick and choose based upon listening to my body and listening to the bodies of other living beings. Yeah, that includes the bodies of animals and the bodies of my sex partners as well. I don’t want to live my life by a series of things that I don’t do, living by repression, by denial, or by guilt.

4.2 The Ascetic Ideal

Nietzsche called this the “ascetic ideal.” Basically, it means that we think that our minds can and should control our bodies. We think we can achieve, through our suffering and denial of our bodies, some

kind of higher place. He calls the ascetic ideal the fundamental weakness of any culture that cannot handle the chaos of desire, the unknown of the body, and the solidarity of people intoxicated together. Instead of denying our bodies through the ascetic ideal, Nietzsche calls for us to use our will, our will to power. To him, the will is fundamentally and inherently a part of the body, a part of desires, and a part of pleasure. Any culture that thinks the will of mind can be separate from the body (as Stride does when we talk about using our mind to control our body) is a culture that is based upon weakness masquerading as power, oppression masked by the rationality of the mind.

5. Indulgence as Revolutionary: Pursuing Passions and Desires

Why do we echo the long-dead yearnings of medieval monks, praying away our bulging erections? Why do we imitate the corseted culture of Victoria, the repressed and disciplined attempts to hide our bodies beneath fitness, fashionable clothes, makeup, or hygiene products? Why do we fear the primal, bodily pleasure of intoxication, the ecstatic oneness of mountain maenads dancing the rhythmic sociality of bodies and desire? We do we deny our pleasures and repress our desires, to “not let our bodies control us?” Our bodies are the place, the site where everything happens-culture is written on our bodies, why can’t we rewrite ourselves?

I will pursue my passions and desires as revolutionary. I will listen to my body. I will never separate my mind from the workings, the sensations, and the pleasures of my body. I will resist the ideologies of capitalism and the maps it has created on my body. I will resist through purposeful play, through laziness or activity, through pleasure, through my five senses. I will love my body. I will love the bodies of others, human and animal alike. I will respect the choices others make with their bodies, yet I will remind them that they are bodies too, not just minds. I will live and affirm life through my body, my emotions, and my desires. And I will change the world with you, if you choose to change it as well.

Further Reading:

Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter*

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* Vol. 1

Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*

Hebert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*

Fredrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* and *On the Genealogy of Morals*

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The Library of Unconventional Lives

Eric Boehme
Your Body Fucken Matters
Desire and Bodies as Revolutionary
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Inside Front: International Journal of Hardcore Punk and Anarchist Action, Issue #11:
<cdn.crimethinc.com/assets/journals/inside-front-11/inside-front-11_screen_single_page_view.pdf>

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