

Issue 58 (April 2019)

Is Movement Political? The Body as Witness

Sapir Hubermann
Justus Liebig University Giessen

Contact: sapir.hubermann@gmail.com

Abstract:

Bodies of Evidence (Passagen Verlag, 2018), edited by Gurur Ertem and Sandra Noeth, offers a comprehensive corpus of observations on different localities and experiences, which portray the body as a predominant medium and as a socio-political construct. The book comprises different fields of inquiry that, through a series of essays, case studies, dialogues, artistic sketches, and interviews, suggest multiple perspectives on the body – from the viewpoint of the precarious bodies themselves – “in, as and of evidence” (p. 15).

How to cite:

Hubermann, Sapir: “Is Movement Political? The Body as Witness [Review on: Ertem, Gurur and Sandra Noeth (eds.): *Bodies of Evidence: Ethics, Aesthetics, and Politics of Movement*. Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 2018]”. In: KULT_online 58 (2019).

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22029/ko.2019.268>



Is Movement Political? The Body as Witness

Sapir Hubermann
Justus Liebig University Giessen

Ertem, Gurur and Sandra Noeth (eds.): *Bodies of Evidence: Ethics, Aesthetics, and Politics of Movement*. Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 2018. 280 pages, 30,70 EUR. ISBN: 978-370-920303-3.

Abstract:

Bodies of Evidence (Passagen Verlag, 2018), edited by Gurur Ertem and Sandra Noeth, offers a comprehensive corpus of observations on different localities and experiences, which portray the body as a predominant medium and as a socio-political construct. The book comprises different fields of inquiry that, through a series of essays, case studies, dialogues, artistic sketches, and interviews, suggest multiple perspectives on the body – from the viewpoint of the precarious bodies themselves – “in, as and of evidence” (p. 15).

The current state of migration in Europe places our relationship to borders, passports, and identity as a recurring point for debates. In many fields, such as social anthropology, political theory, critical journalism, and philosophy, the main questions usually concern what governments want or what certain policies lead to. However, rarely ever do discourses of migration consider actual bodies as they are, on the move. Which is to say, all those precarious bodies in transition, bodies that are ultimately most affected by the policies of sovereign power.

The book *Bodies of Evidence*, published by Passagen Verlag in 2018, asks how we can understand bodies as the source, site and target of emotions, pains, and desires, and where vulnerability could help to produce empowerment and resistance. The collection includes different fields of inquiry and travels between the fields of visual and performing arts, social anthropology, political theory, etc. The essays, case studies, dialogues, artistic sketches, and interviews that Gurur Ertem and Sandra Noeth have assembled attempt to provide multiple perspectives on the body “in, as and of evidence” (p. 15).

The book succeeds in being a comprehensive corpus of observations on different localities and experiences, including contributions which are examining new technologies as a means to reconfigure contemporary wars: for instance, the article by Nicola Perugini and Neve Gordon problematizes

the notion of the civilian and shows how militaries have created a mechanism of „liminal spaces“ (p. 172) in which technology helps to create both identification and distinction. Ayesha Hameed’s contribution tackles technology and the state apparatus from a different position. Hameed is an artist and a Research Fellow at Goldsmith University, and her work explores contemporary borders and migration. Here, she focuses on migrants who destroy their fingerprints via various techniques to avoid being detected by Eurodac, the centralized database that documents asylum seekers’ first point of entry in the European Union. She also shows how the violence that one applies to oneself could be conceived at the same time as a way of asserting agency.

Another focal point of discussion in the book is the idea of creating space through experience and not solely through knowledge. Knowledge is something that is not always present at the starting point of a work of art but is rather created in and through the work. For example, the choreographer Manuel Pelmuş shares his personal experience of different border crossings, viewing the border as a physical and mental space. Through this observation, he also insinuates that while the European borders are a physically existing border, there are other forms of borders that are created from within, out of one’s personal experience. In addition, the question of experience is a topic of discussion (p. 123) between Tony Chakar, Katrin Deufert, Thomas Plischke, and the book’s editors, from a perspective that includes observations from Greek mythologies and how they can be used to mediate contemporary experiences. Deufert and Plischke propose Arachne as an example of a mythological figure that weaves stories and risks her life for art’s sake. Deufert further adds that behind the myth of Arachne, it is possible to encounter the composition of art as action and as body, and therefore to ask ourselves at what point the artistic work becomes the physical incorporation of an artist’s political and cultural attitude towards the cultural world (p. 125).

Ferry Biedermann portrays the body in a different light by referring to it in its existence and presence after death. In his contribution, he discusses dead bodies in conflict areas. He argues that the position of journalists in proximity to ‘real’ bodies and human suffering generates an imperative, by which they should not normalize death in their mediation to remote audiences. Here, while the direct relation to the corporeal is the dead bodies of the victims or refugees, Biedermann conceives of journalists as mediating bodies in the production of knowledge and experience for those no longer able to bear testimony.

In sum, the book shows how, in visual studies as well as in performance art, the presence of the body in public space is able to undo the separation between the art world and real-life experience. It examines the body as an object of experience and knowledge and not merely as an agent that transfers the two. Thereby, it creates an affect, both for the performers and the audience. The book does this in

keeping with its un-methodological, nonlinear essayistic juxtapositions, whereby the reader herself is called upon to make the connections and associations between the different contributions. While the book's approach is flexible, experimental and innovative, perhaps its style of presentation could have better reflected the heterogeneity involved in its drifting between the artistic and the scientific, the experiential and the intellectual – or perhaps it could have reflected more on the place of visuals, experimental or performative means of textuality in such an approach.

German Abstract:

Ist Bewegung politisch? Der Körper als Zeuge

Das Buch *Bodies of Evidence* (Passagen Verlag, 2018), herausgegeben von Gurur Ertem und Sandra Noeth, bietet einen umfassenden Korpus von Beobachtungen zu verschiedenen Orten und Erfahrungen, die den Körper als vorherrschendes Medium und als gesellschaftspolitisches Konstrukt darstellen. Es umfasst verschiedene Forschungsbereiche durch Essays, Fallstudien, Dialoge, künstlerische Skizzen und Interviews, die versuchen, mehrere Perspektiven auf den Körper als Zeugnis zu bieten – nicht zuletzt aus dem Blickwinkel der prekären Körper selbst.

Sapir Hubermann
Justus Liebig University Giessen

Contact: sapir.hubermann@gmail.com

How to cite:

Hubermann, Sapir: "Is Movement Political? The Body as Witness [Review on: Ertem, Gurur and Sandra Noeth (eds.): *Bodies of Evidence: Ethics, Aesthetics, and Politics of Movement*. Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 2018]". In: KULT_online 58 (2019).

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22029/ko.2019.268>