

# *The Phenomenology of the German People's Body (Volkskörper) and the Extermination of the Jewish Body*

Boaz Neumann

This essay is about the body of the German people (*Volkskörper*) as it manifested itself in the Nazi worldview (*Weltanschauung*). The body has been an obvious focus of politics in the modern age. The innumerable range of practices associated with it—from physical education to a proper diet to sterilization, for example—has been constitutive of the modern state, of society, and of the population.<sup>1</sup> This essay examines Nazi body politics by focusing on that body which the Nazis themselves positioned at the center of their *Weltanschauung*, the German *Volkskörper*. Although a great deal of scholarly attention has been devoted to the subject of Nazi body politics,<sup>2</sup> the historiography

I wish to thank Shula Volkov for her insightful and critical responses to an earlier draft of this article, which is based on a chapter from my latest book, *Nazi Weltanschauung: Raum, Körper, Sprache* (forthcoming).

1. The most important and influential book on this subject is, of course, Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley, vol. 1 (New York: Random House, 1976). I am not able to review here the enormous amount of research that addresses the topic either directly or indirectly.

2. See, e.g., the classic studies by George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: Fertig, 1985), 133–80; and Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies: Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, trans. Chris Turner and Stephen Conway, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Polity, 1977). It is not possible to review the huge amount of scholarship devoted, either directly or indirectly, to this subject. See, e.g., Paula Diehl, ed., *Körper im Nationalsozialismus: Bilder und Praxen* (Munich: Fink, Schöningh, 2006).

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has almost entirely ignored this particular body. However, it was the *Volkskörper*, and not individual bodies, which formed the corporeal ontology in the Nazi *Weltanschauung*, that by which both “worthy” and “unworthy” individual bodies were defined and by which policies of cultivation and enhancement, on the one hand, or neglect, removal, and extermination, on the other, were determined.

The first part of this essay reviews the limited historiographical literature on the phenomenon of the German *Volkskörper* in the Nazi *Weltanschauung*. These studies have, in fact, overlooked the *Volkskörper*, viewing it as an expression of “something else.” Thus, for instance, the *Volkskörper* has been interpreted to be a bodily metaphor or an expression of the organic creed characteristic of fascist ideology. No one has suggested that the *Volkskörper* was an actual, concrete body. Yet this was how the Nazis themselves perceived, understood, and experienced it. The second part presents the history of the *Volkskörper* in phenomenological terms, that is, a history of the *Volkskörper* as it manifested itself in the Nazi *Weltanschauung*. I describe the moment of its birth, the traumas and catastrophes this body experienced, its recuperation and return to health, as well as its general practices and achievements. However, I do not, as much as this is at all possible, offer an interpretation of this body. Instead of analysis or diagnosis, I seek to keep my account as close as possible to the way this body manifested itself in the Nazi *Weltanschauung*. The third part explores what the *Volkskörper* meant for the Jewish body, how, that is, it turned the Jew into a foreign body (*Fremdkörper*). The very manifestation of the *Volkskörper* in the Nazi *Weltanschauung* was what actually exposed the Jew as a body, and as a *Fremdkörper*, one that either lived in a parasitic relationship among the *Volkskörper* or actually penetrated into it. Thus the true Jewish problem, as the Nazis understood it, was not born of the Jewish status as a *Fremdkörper*, that is, as an other. The Jewish problem, rather, issued from the very loss of otherness. By subterfuge, camouflage, and disguise the Jewish body masked itself and consequently infiltrated the *Volkskörper*, where it thrived. The essay’s conclusion discusses the ramifications of using a phenomenological approach to the historical study of the Nazi phenomenon.

### ***Historiography of the German Volkskörper in the Nazi Weltanschauung***

The scholarly indifference to the *Volkskörper* is manifest, first and foremost, in how the term itself has been translated. Effectively obscuring its corporeal aspect and, by implication, denying that the concept even refers to a body, such

translations include “ethnic community,”<sup>3</sup> “nation,”<sup>4</sup> “people,”<sup>5</sup> and “society.”<sup>6</sup> Even those translations that do not entirely erase the corporeal element in *Volkskörper* have nevertheless ignored the fact that this is the body of the “*Volk*,” that is, the body of the “people.” These translations include “body,”<sup>7</sup> “body politic,”<sup>8</sup> “eugenically desirable body,”<sup>9</sup> “racial body,”<sup>10</sup> “social body,”<sup>11</sup> and even “social, national, or racial collective body.”<sup>12</sup> Alongside these translations we find inexact translations that promote misleading interpretations of the subject. Thus *Volkskörper* has been interpreted to mean the “biological body of the German people,”<sup>13</sup> or the “body of the nation,”<sup>14</sup> or the “collective ‘body’ of national population,”<sup>15</sup> or “ethnic body politic,”<sup>16</sup> or “national body,”<sup>17</sup>

3. Gisela Bock, “Sterilization and ‘Medical’ Massacres in National Socialist Germany: Ethics, Politics, and the Law,” in *Medicine and Modernity: Public Health and Medical Care in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Germany*, ed. Berg Manfred and Geoffrey Cocks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 155.

4. Adolf Hitler, *Hitler’s Secret Book*, trans. Salvator Attanasio (New York: Grove, 1961), 6, 8, 34; Daniel Wildmann, *Begehrte Körper: Konstruktion und Inszenierung des “arischen” Männerkörpers im “Dritten Reich”* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1998), 18.

5. Hitler, *Hitler’s Secret Book*, 12.

6. Adolf Hitler, *Hitler’s Table Talk, 1941–44: His Private Conversations*, trans. Norman Cameron and R. H. Stevens (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), 151 (December 23–24, 1941).

7. Richard Overy, *The Dictators: Hitler’s Germany and Stalin’s Russia* (New York: Norton, 2004), 250.

8. Norbert Frei, *National Socialist Rule in Germany: The Führer State, 1933–1945*, trans. Simon B. Steyne (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 103.

9. Caitríona Ní Dhúill, “‘Ein neues, mächtiges Volkstum’: Eugenic Discourse and Its Impact on the Work of Gerhart Hauptmann,” *German Life and Letters* 59 (2006): 418.

10. Gisela Bock, “Racism and Sexism in Nazi Germany: Motherhood, Compulsory Sterilization, and the State,” in *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany*, ed. Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossmann, and Marion Kaplan (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984), 274, 275, 288.

11. *Ibid.*, 274.

12. Dhúill, “Ein neues, mächtiges Volkstum,” 407.

13. E. Ernst, “Commentary: The Third Reich—German Physicians between Resistance and Participation,” *International Journal of Epidemiology* 30 (2001): 38.

14. Thomas Mueller and Thomas Beddies, “‘The Destruction of Life Unworthy of Living’ in National Socialist Germany,” *International Journal of Mental Health* 35, no. 3 (2006): 97.

15. Edward Ross Dickinson, “Biopolitics, Fascism, Democracy: Some Reflections on Our Discourse about ‘Modernity,’” *Central European History* 37 (2004): 3.

16. Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 10, 103, 243.

17. Dickinson, “Biopolitics, Fascism, Democracy,” 4, 29; Henri Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 50; Hitler, *Hitler’s Secret Book*, 31; Claudia Koonz, “Ethical Dilemmas and Nazi Eugenics: Single-Issue Dissent in Religious Contexts,” *Journal of Modern History* 64, no. 12 (1992): 17; Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 30; Mueller and Beddies, “Life Unworthy of Living,” 95.

or “national ethnic body.”<sup>18</sup> In all of these instances, the *Volkskörper* is presented as an expression of “something else,” of biological, national, democratic, ethnic, or various other characteristics. In fact, some studies have adopted more than one term for *Volkskörper*.

In addition to the carelessness and confusion that has plagued the phenomenon as a whole, the scholarly literature also tends to identify the *Volkskörper* as nothing more than a symbol or metaphor for the “nation,” the “people,” “society,” or the “state.” Historians making such claims locate the *Volkskörper* as a symbol or metaphor along a historical axis of classical analogies between the body and the state or between the body and society. They trace the origins of these analogies to Plato’s and Livy’s political philosophy, and in the German case to Johann Gottfried von Herder as well.<sup>19</sup> In other versions, the *Volkskörper* is seen to be a “biological metaphor” that the Nazis applied to German society,<sup>20</sup> or a “medical metaphor” that the Nazis applied to the German population.<sup>21</sup> There are also those who argue that the *Volkskörper* is nothing other than an “imagined body.” In this case, the German *Volkskörper* as the Nazis perceived it becomes essentially an “abstract *Volkskörper*.”<sup>22</sup>

Psychohistorians who subscribe to the oedipal model and, in particular, to the Freudian version of the same, identify in the *Volkskörper* in the Nazi *Weltanschauung* an obsession with the mythic or atavistic body of the “Mother” (“Mother Earth,” “nature,” “soil,” “homeland,” “*Lebensraum*” [living space], etc.). According to this perspective, Nazi politics was nothing but an attempt, concrete or imagined, to merge with the “Great Mother,” a synthesis that consti-

18. Koonz, *Nazi Conscience*, 25.

19. Inge Baxmann, “Der Körper der Nation,” in *Nation and Emotion: Deutschland und Frankreich im Vergleich, 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Etienne François, Hannes Siegrist, and Jakob Vogel (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1995), 353–65; Moritz Föllmer, “Der ‘kranke Volkskörper’: Industrielle, hohe Beamte und der Diskurs der nationalen Regeneration in der Weimarer Republik,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 27 (2001): 41; Eberhard Jäckel, *Hitler's World View: A Blueprint for Power*, trans. Eberhard Jäckel and Herbert Arnold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 58–59; Wolfgang Kaschuba, “Die Nation als Körper: Zur symbolischen Konstruktion ‘nationaler’ Alltagswelt,” in François, Siegrist, and Vogel, *Nation and Emotion*, 291–99; Ute Planert, “Der dreifache Körper des Volkes: Sexualität, Biopolitik und die Wissenschaften vom Leben,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 26 (2000): 543; Roswitha Schieb, *Das teilbare Individuum: Körperbilder bei Ernst Jünger, Hans Henny Jahn und Peter Weiss* (Stuttgart: Verlag für Wissenschaft und Forschung, 1997), 20–30; Cornelia Schmitz-Berning, *Vokabular des Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998), 667.

20. Winfried Süß, *Der “Volkskörper” im Krieg: Gesundheitspolitik, Gesundheitsverhältnisse und Krankenmord im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland, 1939–1945* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2003), 12n3. Cf. Schmitz-Berning, *Vokabular des Nationalsozialismus*, 668, 670.

21. Föllmer, “Der ‘kranke Volkskörper,’” 42; Overy, *Dictators*, 250.

22. Süß, *Der “Volkskörper” im Krieg*, 32. Cf. Baxmann, “Der Körper der Nation,” 353–55.

tuted the German-Nazi response (whose uniqueness is the subject of scholarly debate) to the alienated nature of modern life, to the assault on racial purity, to the German defeat in World War I, to the deep wound of the Treaty of Versailles, and to the economic crises of the Weimar years, among other events.<sup>23</sup>

Besides symbolic and metaphorical, and psychological and psychoanalytic, interpretations, the most common view of the subject finds that the Nazi view of the *Volkskörper* was an expression of right-wing, conservative, fascist, and, of course, Nazi politics. The Nazi obsession with the *Volkskörper* is evidence, thus, of an organicist view of the state, society, and the population. The *Volkskörper*, these historians argue, was not actually a body. Rather, it was an expression of an organic society (in contrast, for example, to liberal concepts of society), of organic nationalism (in contrast to civic patriotism), of ethnicity, and of much more.<sup>24</sup> This is what has led Gisela Bock to claim that the *Volkskörper* was nothing other than an “ethnic community conceived as an organism.” According to Bock, the Nazi medical outlook saw “the individual human as a subject of suffering and object of healing” that was “supplanted by a collectivity to be redeemed, the *Volkskörper*.”<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Claudia Koonz writes that in light of the Nazi shift of the center of moral gravity from the individual body to the biologized body politic, the new term, “national body” (*Volkskörper*), displaced the traditional term, “national community” (*Volksgemeinschaft*).<sup>26</sup> Such perspectives of the *Volkskörper* in the Nazi *Weltanschauung* present it as one more of a myriad of expressions of the scientific-technological-medical discourse,<sup>27</sup> and even the biopolitical

23. Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, “Reflections of a Psychoanalyst upon the Nazi Biocracy and Genocide,” *International Review of Psycho-Analysis* 17 (1990): 167–76; Chasseguet-Smirgel, “A Psychoanalyst’s Thoughts concerning the Genocide,” *Journal of Social Work and Policy in Israel*, nos. 5–6 (1992): 17–32. Cf. James M. Glass, “Skin Ego and Purification Ritual: Psychodynamics behind the Nazi Final Solution,” *Journal for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society* 2 (1997): 47–54.

24. Alexander Bein, “‘Der jüdische Parasit’: Bemerkungen zur Semantik der Judenfrage,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 13, no. 2 (1965): 124; Gisela Bock, *Zwangsterilisation im Nationalsozialismus: Studien zur Rassenpolitik und Frauenpolitik* (Opladen: Westdeutscher, 1986), 107–9; Föllmer, “Der ‘kranke Volkskörper,’” 66–67; Ulrich Herbert, Karin Orth, and Christoph Dieckmann, “Die nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager: Geschichte, Erinnerung, Forschung,” in *Die nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager: Entwicklung und Struktur*, ed. Ulrich Herbert, Karin Orth, and Christoph Dieckmann, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1998), 27; Koonz, *Nazi Conscience*, 10, 25, 103, 243; Detlev J. K. Peukert, *Max Webers Diagnose der Moderne* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1989), 111–12; Wildmann, *Begehrte Körper*, 18–19.

25. Bock, “Sterilization and ‘Medical’ Massacres,” 155–56.

26. Koonz, “Ethical Dilemmas and Nazi Eugenics,” 17.

27. Ernst, “Commentary,” 38; Friedlander, *Origins of Nazi Genocide*, 50; Peter Fritzsche, “Nazi Modern,” *Modernism/Modernity* 3 (1996): 9–10; Lifton, *Nazi Doctors*, 46; Mueller and Beddies, “Life Unworthy of Living,” 95, 97; Planert, “Der dreifache Körper des Volkes,” 539–76.

discourse.<sup>28</sup> This discourse promoted a “diagnosis,” on the one hand, and a “therapy,” on the other, to an ailing society and population desperately in need of a cure.

In opposition to those interpretive traditions I have surveyed here that identify the Nazi version of the *Volkskörper* as an expression of “something else” (a symbolic/metaphorical expression of the body; a mythic/atavistic expression of the body; or an organic expression of state, society, and population), I believe that the *Volkskörper* in the Nazi *Weltanschauung* should be viewed as the manifestation of an actual, concrete body. In fact, the Nazis themselves understood and experienced this body in such a way, in philosophy, politics, literature, the plastic arts, and stadium displays. Adolf Hitler and members of the party elite, Nazi philosophers, anthropologists, and experts in numerous other fields of inquiry, as well as the “man in the street”—all reported on their concrete experience of this body.

This concrete reality is also manifest in the equally concrete effect this body had on adjoining bodies, not only those deemed “worthy” but also those “unworthy” organs of the *Volkskörper*. More than any other body, the Jewish body, as I discuss below, was perceived, interpreted, and experienced as a *Fremdkörper* residing among or within the *Volkskörper*. The horrible fate that awaited the Jewish body was a function of its parasitical relationship to, or its violation of, the *Volkskörper*. And since the fate of this Jewish body was a real one, it follows that the *Volkskörper* was no less real. If the Jewish *Fremdkörper* was not a metaphor—and, indeed, the Nazis treated this body in distinctly nonmetaphorical fashion—then why do we assume that the *Volkskörper* was essentially symbolic?

Even if we insist on the symbolic or metaphorical, the mythic or atavistic, or the organic expression of the *Volkskörper* in the Nazi *Weltanschauung*, this has no effect on the phenomenological argument I am making. More important than determining if the *Volkskörper* was a metaphorical or a concrete body is the effect this body had. One can continue to argue that the *Volkskörper* is “nothing but” a symbol or a metaphor. But a metaphor often finds practical expression in the real world. In the present context, this was a most deadly expression. Even if the *Volkskörper* is “nothing but” a word or a concept, then it would appear that life and death were truly matters of language in

28. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 147; Dickinson, “Biopolitics, Fascism, Democracy,” 3, 4, 29; Michael Gamper, “Nacktes Leben—lebendige Nacktheit: Formung der Masse durch Körper- und Volkskörperpolitik,” in Diehl, *Körper im Nationalsozialismus*, 149–70; Planert, “Der dreifache Körper des Volkes,” 539–76.

the Nazi world. In a phenomenological approach that examines the *Volkskörper* as it manifested itself in that world, that is, as it presented itself in the Nazi *Weltanschauung*, it makes little difference if we are talking about a word or about the thing itself. It certainly made no difference in relation to the other bodies manifested in relation to the *Volkskörper*.

### ***The Phenomenology of the German Volkskörper in the Nazi Weltanschauung***

In contrast to the historiography surveyed above, I propose a phenomenological approach to address the phenomenon of the German *Volkskörper* in the Nazi *Weltanschauung*. A phenomenon, in its simple and straightforward meaning, is “what shows itself, the self-showing, the manifest” (das, was sich zeigt, das Sichzeigende, das Offenbare). Phenomenology thus allows us to examine things as they present themselves. This definition is drawn from Nolte’s work, and Nolte adopted the concept from Heidegger. Nolte claims that phenomenology is a practical method of historical research as long as the subject under study uses a language that generates self-understanding and identity. This is a language, in other words, that allows for self-manifestation.<sup>29</sup> I attempt to show that the phenomenon called the German *Volkskörper* as conceived by Nazism had such a language.

Phenomenology in general, and Heideggerian phenomenology specifically, is a complex notion. I adopt the concept of the phenomenon in its simple, direct meaning, as explained above, despite the injustice I do to phenomenology. I am also aware of the possibly problematic nature—both methodological and ethical—of basing a study of Nazism on Heidegger’s work, given his relationship with the Nazi movement and given Nolte’s revisionist positions. I cannot address these issues here in any systematic fashion, although a short discussion appears in the conclusion.

Phenomenology makes it possible to transcend the dominant historiography described above, which identifies the *Volkskörper* in the Nazi *Weltanschauung* as expressing “something else.” It exposes the history of this *Volkskörper* without any extraneous interpretive and analytic baggage and without having to impose meanings foreign to it. Phenomenology assumes that the

29. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993), 28; *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 25; Ernst Nolte, *Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche: Die Action française, der italienische Faschismus, der Nationalsozialismus* (Munich: Piper, 1963), 53–54. For a study that takes the phenomenological discussion beyond the body to include Nazi space and language, see Boaz Neumann, *Nazi Weltanschauung: Raum, Körper, Sprache* (Göttingen: Wallstein, forthcoming).

*Volkkörper* in the Nazi *Weltanschauung* is exactly what it was, no more, no less: the body of a *Volk* with a life of its own that had suffered mortal injuries as a result of World War I, the rise of the Weimar Republic, and modern degeneracy in general. This *Volkkörper* then recovered and was even born again through the Nazi revolution.

The Nazi corporeal ontology did not rest on the individual's body, since such a body was vulnerable to biological "whim." The individual body was one that invariably decayed. The Nazi corporeal ontology was based, instead, on a body that did not degenerate. This was the *Volkkörper*, whose existence was autonomous of this or that specific body. The *Volkkörper* was manifested in the Nazi *Weltanschauung* as a result of corporeal catastrophe and trauma.

The Weimar Republic—its founding, its history, its essence—was the focus of the Nazi experience of catastrophe and of corporeal trauma. Weimar had allowed foreign bodies to penetrate the bloodstream of the *Volkkörper*. During the fourteen years of its existence, starting from the end of World War I, one often claimed to be "shocked to behold the extent to which alien blood has already penetrated into our *Volkkörper*."<sup>30</sup> According to the Nazis, "the preservation and strengthening of high-quality blood of the same racial composition is one of the most important prerequisites for the healthy growth of the *Volkkörper*."<sup>31</sup>

The bloodstream of the *Volkkörper* became contaminated, first of all, by the republic's liberal immigration policies, which let foreign bodies through. For the most part, the *Volkkörper* withstood this threat. But its natural immunity grew weak over time. "The paralysis as a result of the foreign poison has now spread to nearly all the limbs of its living body [*Leib*]."<sup>32</sup> (The German language distinguishes between the body as a material body—a *Körper*—and a living body—a *Leib*. While the *Leib* is the body of a human being, the *Körper* can also be a corpse and a nonliving body. I expand on this point below.)

The diseased condition of the *Volkkörper* was no less the result of the impotence that characterized republican government. For instance, though

30. Walter Groß, "Politik und Rassenfrage," in *Reichstagung in Nürnberg*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Weller, 1933), 157. Cf. Hermann Otto and Werner Stachowitz, *Abriß der Vererbungslehre und Rassenkunde einschließlich der Familienkunde, Rassenhygiene und Bevölkerungspolitik* (Frankfurt am Main: Diesterweg, 1935), 68; and Wilhelm Schumann, Heinrich Heun, and Wilhelm Heun, *Reichskunde für junge Deutsche* (Darmstadt: Winkler, 1943), 12.

31. Otto Koellreutter, *Deutsches Verfassungsgericht: Ein Grundriss* (Berlin: Junker und Dünhaupt, 1938), 72.

32. Harry Griessdorf, *Unsere Weltanschauung: Gedanken über Alfred Rosenberg, der Mythos des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Nordland, 1941), 88–89.



aware of the pervasive threats to the *Volkskörper*, the Weimar government undertook no steps to meet them. While it treated the symptoms, it failed to address the underlying causes. The government, it was maintained, “gives the *Volkskörper*, shaking and shuddering, medicine to combat its burning fever. But at the same time, it leaves the windows wide open, allowing the pestilential winds of destruction, corruption, deceit and the officially tolerated exploitation of our *Volk* strength to whistle in upon this sick and frail organism, blowing incessantly.”<sup>33</sup>

Disease was also brought on by the very nature of republican rule. Weimar was identified with liberal individualism, which threatened to destroy the state because of the “softness of [its] bones.”<sup>34</sup> Communism had the same lethal effect. Class war prior to the Nazis’ assumption of power tore the *Volkskörper* into “two halves.”<sup>35</sup> Marxism was generally considered one of the greatest threats to the health and well-being of the *Volkskörper*. It was a “racial tuberculosis.”<sup>36</sup> The republic’s history was, in fact, the history of a struggle between Marxism and the *Volk*: “The German *Volk* is splitting more and more into two opposed camps of mortal enemies. These are increasingly closing themselves off one from the other, changing into self-contained, self-sufficient *Körper*. Of these two, one, the Marxist, as a foreign body within one’s own *Volk*, repudiates all ties to the nation.”<sup>37</sup>

Weimar democracy likewise injured the *Volkskörper*. While older European democracies were considered already immune to the poisons of democratic life, the *Volkskörper* was younger and consequently belonged to a higher-risk group. Democracy is “a poison which disintegrates the *Volkskörper*.” In the specific instance of the young German democracy, the danger was even greater. In a “young, unspoiled nation, the poison is instantly fatal.”<sup>38</sup>

33. Joseph Goebbels, “Sturmzeichen” (February 13, 1928), in *Der Angriff: Aufsätze aus der Kampfzeit* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1937), 104.

34. Alfred Kotz, *Führen und Folgen: Ein Katechismus für Hitlersoldaten* (Potsdam: Voggenreiter, 1934), 99.

35. Joseph Goebbels, “NSDAP-Kundgebung vor der Reichstagswahl am 31. Juli 1932” (July 9, 1932), in *Goebbels Reden, 1932–1939*, vol. 1 (Munich: Heyne, 1971), 44. Cf. Adolf Hitler, “Aufruf der Reichsregierung an das deutsche Volk” (February 1, 1933), in *Speeches and Proclamations: 1932–1945*, trans. Mary Fran Gilbert, vol. 1 (London: Tauris, 1990), 234.

36. Adolf Hitler, in Georg Schott, *Das Volksbuch vom Hitler* (Munich: Wiechmann, 1924), 167.

37. Adolf Hitler, “Hitlers geheime Broschüre für Industrielle” (August 1927), in *Die ungeliebte Republik: Dokumentation zur Innen- und Außenpolitik Weimars, 1918–1933*, ed. Wolfgang Michalka and Gottfried Niedhart (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984), 238. Cf. Wulf Bley, *Deutsche Nationalerziehung und Rundfunk-Neubau!* (Berlin: Fehrentheil, 1932), 102.

38. Hermann Rauschning, *Hitler Speaks: A Series of Political Conversations with Adolf Hitler on His Real Aims* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1940), 112, 113.

The Nazis rewrote the history of Weimar as a narrative of the weakness, debilitation, fragmentation, and death of the *Volkskörper*. The Treaty of Versailles was “an open, bleeding, life-threatening wound on the *Körper* of the German *Volk*.”<sup>39</sup> In more concrete terms, it was claimed that “on the basis of the Versailles diktat, German land was . . . brutally torn from the German *Volkskörper*.”<sup>40</sup> The reparations forced on Germany cut off the limbs of the *Volkskörper*: “We resemble the beggar who, while still alive, sold his living body [*Leib*] to the anatomy department.”<sup>41</sup> The Dawes interim reparations plan of August 1924 also posed a catastrophic threat to the German organism. The plan only seemed to improve the health of the *Volkskörper*. In fact, it was “a seductive red bloom of counterfeit health.” “The poison continues without surcease to eat away at vital organs, until the entire organism, hollowed out and full of pestilence, one day collapses, exhausted and sick unto death, never again to rise up.”<sup>42</sup> The *Volkskörper* was also threatened by the Young Plan of June 1929, which had rescheduled the country’s debts. The plan was none other than “a wound which, externally scarred over, like a creeping sickness eats away inwardly, destroying our *Volk* life.”<sup>43</sup> The worldwide economic crisis of October 1929 dealt a mortal blow to the *Volkskörper*: “The economy is, so to speak, only the gateway through which the bacterium seeks and finds the path into the *Volkskörper*.”<sup>44</sup> In 1932, in the depths of recession, Hitler declared to the industrial club of Düsseldorf that “all of the functions of this *Volkskörper* should ultimately fulfill only one purpose: securing the preservation of this *Volkskörper* in the future. . . . [The economy is] one of the functions the *Volkskörper* requires for its existence.”<sup>45</sup>

The *Volkskörper* was victimized not just by the Weimar Republic. It had been profoundly damaged in the war and its immediate aftermath as well. The physical injury done to the German body was unprecedented.<sup>46</sup> The number of military casualties was placed between 4.2 and 4.5 million. During and after the war, physicians treated about nineteen million wounds and injuries,

39. Joseph Goebbels, “Gegen die Young-Sklaverei” (September 23, 1929), in *Der Angriff*, 120.

40. Schumann, Heun, and Heun, *Reichskunde für junge Deutsche*, 144. Cf. Walther Jantzen, *Die Geographie im Dienste der nationalpolitischen Erziehung: Ein Ergänzungsheft zu den Lehrbüchern der Erdkunde* (Breslau: Hirt, 1936), 29–30.

41. Schott, *Das Volksbuch vom Hitler*, 239.

42. Joseph Goebbels, “Gegen den Volksfeind” (January 24, 1928), in *Der Angriff*, 109, 110.

43. *Ibid.*, 120.

44. *Ibid.*, 110.

45. Adolf Hitler, “Vortrag Adolf Hitlers vor westdeutschen Wirtschaftlern im Industrie-Klub zu Düsseldorf” (January 27, 1932), in *Speeches and Proclamations*, 90.

46. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality*, 114–32; Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 229–435.

a high percentage of them disfiguring: 24.7 percent were combat wounds, while 13.4 percent derived from dermatological disease and 6.8 percent from orthopedic disorders.<sup>47</sup> Eighty thousand German soldiers lost limbs during the war. Twenty-five thousand lost one or both arms; fifty-five thousand, one or both legs.<sup>48</sup> These figures should then be augmented by the unprecedented number of soldiers who died, 1.8 million. This disastrous physical trauma to the German body was expressed not just in the quantity and quality of the injuries but in other physical experiences as well. Thus, for instance, the discharged corporal Hitler testified: “I learnt to hate rats when I was at the front. A wounded man forsaken between the lines knew he’d be eaten alive by these disgusting beasts.”<sup>49</sup>

But it was not only the republic and the war that had so damaged the *Volkskörper*. The Nazis were anxious about longer-term “degeneration” (*Entartung*) as well, manifest, for example, in the growing percentage of the country’s population categorized as “infirm persons” (*Gebrechlichen*). In 1925 the number of blind Germans was estimated at 33,192; the number of deaf, at 43,376; and the number of physically frail (*körperlich Gebrechliche*), at 429,654.<sup>50</sup> The Nazis complained that a policy of “counterselection” (*Gegenauslese*) ran against “the law of natural selection.” According to them, such a policy preserved, if it did not actually increase, the number of Germans wearing eyeglasses or the number receiving artificial limbs.<sup>51</sup>

The Nazis pointed to other long-term developments threatening the *Volkskörper*. These included the degeneration manifest in the modern body, the “concrete dangers of physical decay and decline.”<sup>52</sup> The steep decline in the birthrate was seen as imperiling any chance of “maintaining the *Volkskörper*.”<sup>53</sup> The declining birthrate among the “gifted strata” would eventually lead them

47. Robert Weldon Whalen, “Bitter Wounds: German Victims of the Great War, 1914–1939” (PhD diss., Cornell University, 1982), 40, 66–67, 72–73.

48. Mia Fineman, “Ecce Homo Prostheticus,” *New German Critique*, no. 76 (1999): 88.

49. Hitler, *Hitler’s Table Talk, 1941–44*, 99 (October 30, 1941).

50. Heinrich Limbeck, *Völkisches Weltbild in Zahlen: Das deutsche Volk und sein Schicksal* (Karlsruhe: Braun, 1936), 8. Cf. Otto and Stachowitz, *Abriß der Vererbungslehre und Rassenkunde*, 73.

51. Paul Brohmer, *Mensch, Natur, Staat: Grundlinien einer nationalsozialistischen Biologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Diesterweg, 1935), 99.

52. Walter Groß, “Der Rassengedanke in der weltanschaulichen Auseinandersetzung unserer Tage” (November 26, 1935), in *Rasse, Weltanschauung, Wissenschaft: Zwei Universitätsreden* (Berlin: Junker und Dünhaupt, 1936), 24.

53. Friedrich Burgdörfer, *Krieg und Bevölkerungsentwicklung* (Munich: Lehmann, 1940), 54; Ritter von Goss, *Gedanken über die wehrgeistige Erziehung in der deutschen Schule* (Prague: Volk und Reich Verlag, 1941), 52.

to “disappear from the *Volkskörper*.”<sup>54</sup> The *Volkskörper* was aging, since the birthrate did not make up for, let alone exceed, the expected number of deaths.<sup>55</sup> According to Hitler, a primary cause of this “draining of blood from a *Volkskörper*,” which found expression in emigration and in the decline of new births, was pacifist politics.<sup>56</sup> Another central danger was, obviously, the mixing of the races.<sup>57</sup>

Before I follow the Nazi diagnosis of the *Volkskörper* with the Nazi therapeutic response, I will describe those theoretical assumptions that informed the Nazi distinction between the *Körper*, “body,” and the *Leib*, “living body”; between the *Volkskörper* and the *Volksleib*, the “living people’s body.” These distinctions are important for understanding the Nazi *Weltanschauung* as it related to the body. The *Meyers Lexikon* from 1939 proposed the following definition of *Leib*: “The material vehicle of vital organic life in individual form, life which for its part is the vehicle of individual psychological and mental life.” The entry continues by emphasizing that “only the German language, and thus the German *Weltanschauung*, distinguish[es] between *Leib* as a vehicle and expression of life and *Körper* as the material basis of life.”<sup>58</sup>

The Nazi philosopher Alfred Baeumler supplied the philosophical foundation for distinguishing between the two types of bodies and for ranking *Leib* over *Körper*. Baeumler attacked the Cartesian dichotomy that separated *Geist*, or mind, from *Körper*. According to Baeumler, Descartes had defined the mental aspects of human life as the living element and the physical aspects as insensate material. An individual’s motor abilities, as Descartes perceived them, depended on the interaction between the two. But even during such physical movement the mind remained the human living element, while the *Körper* was nothing but matter under the mind’s control, much like a marionette. Baeumler claimed that this radical dualism blinded Descartes to the significance of the *Leib*. Once he had categorically separated the two, Descartes left himself only two options. The material option would conceive of an individual as an anatomical and physiological entity. The spiritual option was characterized by a psychological and moral perspective. Baeumler considered such dichotomies flawed. He offered instead a model based on soul and *Leib*:

54. Hermann Römpf, *Vererbungslehre und Rassenkunde für Jedermann: Darlegungen zur Lebenskunde* (Stuttgart: Franckh’sche Verlagshandlung, 1933), 26.

55. Ludwig (?) Wiehle-Harm, *Lebenskunde für Mittelschulen*, pt. 6 (Halle an der Saale: Schroedel; Breslau: Hirt, 1942), 104.

56. Hitler, *Hitler’s Secret Book*, 51.

57. Wiehle-Harm, *Lebenskunde für Mittelschulen*, 84, 86, 91.

58. *Meyers Lexikon*, 12 vols. (Leipzig: Bibliographisches Institut, 1936–42), 7:398.

“The *Körper* is without mind; the mind is without a *Körper*. But the *Leib* never lacks a soul. If it does, it becomes a *Körper*. At death, then, the *Leib* is transformed into a *Körper*. But the soul is never without a *Leib*.”<sup>59</sup>

Baeumler identified Cartesian dualism with the “culture of the mind” (*Kultur des Geistes*) embraced by the Enlightenment bourgeoisie, which had mistakenly assumed that it was possible to separate out mind, soul, and *Leib*.<sup>60</sup> Baeumler further suggested that the distinction between *Körper* and *Leib* could be made in social and political terms. The *Körper* is the body of an individual with no existence outside its own skin. Nothing, that is, exists outside it. The *Leib*, in contrast, is a part of the *Volksleib*, since “the *Leib* is something political.” Hence

the citizen [*Staatsbürger*] has a *Körper* at his disposal, with which he can do what he so desires. Since the citizen is defined overall by the institution of private property, treating everything according to its pattern and scheme, he also accepts his *Körper* as private property. By contrast, the member of the *Volk* [*Volksbürger*] knows that through his *Leib* he is bound up with the total *Leib* [corpus] of his *Volk*.<sup>61</sup>

The *Leib* allowed Baeumler, and the Nazis, to transcend the individual *Körper* in favor of the *Volksleib*. It was now possible for them to draw an analogy between the individual *Leib* and the general *Volksleib*. Just as every organ and limb belong to an individual’s *Leib*, every body was a constituent part of the *Volksleib*:

When the hand is separated from the *Leib*, then it is no longer a limb, but a dead *Körper*. And when the *Leib* separates off from the *Leib* of the totality, then it is no longer a *Leib* but merely an isolated *Körper*. Thus the individual is only a dead *Körper*, separating itself off from the living *Leib* of his *Volk*. The “culture of the *Körper*” is devoid of any principle of community and is thus bereft of vitality: because when fifty people tend to their *Körper*, each to his own, this does not constitute a life in community—it is individualism in the form of the herd.<sup>62</sup>

59. Alfred Baeumler, “Sinn und Aufbau der deutschen Leibesübungen” (May 30, 1930), in *Männerbund und Wissenschaft* (Berlin: Junker und Dünnhaupt, 1934), 52.

60. Alfred Baeumler, “Kultur und Volk: Der Begründung der deutschen Leibesübungen” (1934), in *Politik und Erziehung: Reden und Aufsätze* (Berlin: Junker und Dünnhaupt, 1937), 127–28.

61. Alfred Baeumler, *Studien zur deutschen Geistesgeschichte* (Berlin: Junker und Dünnhaupt, 1937), 139.

62. Baeumler, “Sinn und Aufbau der deutschen Leibesübungen,” 55–56.

The race scientist Ludwig Ferdinand Clauß applied similar arguments, although anthropological rather than philosophical ones, contending that race could be identified not in the material, dead *Körper* but exclusively in the organic, vital *Leib*. According to Clauß, attempts to determine a person's race through certain traits are just as "effective" as referring to the fact that he or she has a nose, a mouth, and two arms and two legs. Racial identity was manifested in the form of his or her limbs, in their relation to each other, and in the way they moved.<sup>63</sup> Clauß made a categorical distinction between the *Körper* as an object of conventional racial theory and the *Leib* as an object of the new racial anthropology. The first is analytic, mechanical, static, and dead. The latter is synthetic, organic, dynamic, and vital:

In anatomical terms, *Körper* precisely like these can be measured exactly like other bodies: the word *Körper* does not signify something living that moves and expresses an experience [*Erleben*] in its movement. Rather, it is what is left over from corporeal appearance if you exclude its living and vital sense. Of course, *what is lifeless* does not wrest itself away, does not move: it remains still and motionless. It can be measured. Why not? It can even be cut up into parts and pieces . . . but in the most minute measurement and [in] its being cut and dissected into the tiniest constituent parts, you will not find what is most important for us here: *the meaning* of the corporeal [*leiblichen*] form, which in its movements expresses the dynamics of the soul.<sup>64</sup> (emphasis in original)

The *Meyers Lexikon* of 1939 concludes its entry for *Leib* by declaring, "A 'renaissance of the *Leib*' (not of *Körper*) is under way today. . . . It is based on the conviction of a holistic-indissoluble bond between *Leib*, soul and spirit in the human being. It knows that the healthy, fully developed *Leib* is the vehicle of the race . . . not only for the individual, but for the entire *Volk* and its historical existence."<sup>65</sup>

I now return to examining the Nazi therapeutics developed for treating the ailments of the German *Volkskörper*.

If the *Volkskörper* was a wounded body, then the *Volk's* leaders were physicians, or were at least worthy of that role. It was critically important that they understand the "inner processes" of this body. "Like the physician, the statesman must observe and influence the rising of the humors and the circula-

63. Ludwig Ferdinand Clauß, *Rasse und Seele: Eine Einführung in den Sinn der leiblichen Gestalt* (Munich: Lehmann, 1941), 17–18.

64. *Ibid.*, 134.

65. *Meyers Lexikon*, 7:398.

tion of the limbs in the organism that he wishes to treat.”<sup>66</sup> This would not just include political leaders. Experts from other disciplines, such as statistics and geography, were needed as well.<sup>67</sup> Hitler thought that the *Volkskörper* had to be positioned at the center of political activity, whether in domestic or in foreign policy. The aim of the former was “the steeling and strengthening of a *Volkskörper* . . . by nurturing and promoting its inner values according to a conscious plan.” That was in contrast to foreign policy, which needed “to protect and assist this interior work of educating a *Volkskörper* toward the outside, to create and secure the general prerequisites for existence.”<sup>68</sup>

Given the threat of invasion by foreign bodies, it was little wonder that one of the Nazis’ first steps after assuming power was to thwart this invasion. In early 1933 they initiated legislation for “the first and most coarse cleansing of our *Volkskörper*, sealing it off from the outside to protect it from the influx of those with inferior genetic material [*Erbminderwertiger*].”<sup>69</sup> Foreign bodies, as already noted, did not just emanate from outside the *Volkskörper*. Some of them were already present within it. This required a set of complementary steps: “The second and decisive measure for inducing the racial improvement of a *Volkskörper*—even if it is still totally negative in nature—is to *render those with inferior genetic material infertile by means of a prohibition on marriage, or sterilization*. The consequence of this move will be the gradual dying out of the weaker genetic material in a nation” (emphasis in original).<sup>70</sup> If, according to one estimate, “hereditarily healthy” families had on average 2.2 children, while “morons” had 3.5 and “criminals” 4.9, then the Law to Prevent Progeny of Diseased Hereditary Stock would constitute an effective means of “intervention in a bid to heal the sickness of the *Volkskörper*.”<sup>71</sup>

The Nazis did not repeal the Weimar constitution. But as they saw it, the real constitution was not recorded on paper. The constitution’s role in a *Führer* state was “the political and legal shaping of the *Volkskörper*, by means of a leadership closely bound up with the *Volk*.”<sup>72</sup> But the law was not the only institution that needed to treat the German *Volkskörper*. The Gestapo was another “institution which carefully supervises the political health of the

66. Jantzen, *Die Geographie im Dienste der nationalpolitischen Erziehung*, 29.

67. *Ibid.*

68. Hitler, *Hitler’s Secret Book*, 70.

69. Ernst Bergmann, *Deutschland, das Bildungsland der neuen Menschheit: Eine nationalsozialistische Kulturphilosophie* (Breslau: Hirt, 1933), 23.

70. *Ibid.*, 24.

71. Jantzen, *Die Geographie im Dienste der nationalpolitischen Erziehung*, 33. Cf. Otto and Stachowitz, *Abriß der Vererbungslehre und Rassenkunde*, 75.

72. Koellreutter, *Deutsches Verfassungsgericht*, 20.

German *Volkskörper*, which is quick to recognize all symptoms of disease and germs of destruction—be they the result of disintegration from within or purposeful poisoning from without—and to remove them by every suitable means.”<sup>73</sup>

The Nazis also turned mass sporting events into collective demonstrations for producing and reproducing the *Volks-gemeinschaft* through its public manifestation.<sup>74</sup> The stadium became the site of the Nazi sociopolitical act that organized and integrated the assembly of individual bodies into a single organic body. Hitler thus considered the stadium a place where the *Volkskörper* was “toughened and steeled” (fig. 1).<sup>75</sup>

*A festival without athletics is like a house without a foundation. All the power of a Volk, mentally, intellectually, politically and culturally, rests, like the roots of a tree, in the bodies [Leiber] of its members. The völkisch state places the Volksleib at the very heart and center of its Volk festivals and calls for “culture of the Leib,” not for “culture of the Körper,” as was done in times past. The festivals are milestones in the life of the Volk; in them, historical memories wed with current political action. (emphasis in original)<sup>76</sup>*

The birth of the *Volkskörper* in the stadium was not the kind of birth in which one first sees the light of day. It was to be compared, rather, with that moment when one first achieves self-consciousness through one’s self-manifestation:

Thus the *Volk* grows on; it grows and will not stop. Only now is it becoming truly conscious of its organs; it feels its limbs, though these are still stiff, inflexible. The German *Volkskörper* is beginning to stretch; the *Volk* is setting out onto the march. Perhaps these steps today are still a bit uncertain and unclear, since the *Volk* has only recently been reborn. We live at a stage of childhood, but this is the most felicitous of times. In its demonstrations, the *Volk* is jubilant as it cheers its *Führer*. It senses . . . that its eyes have been opened. And that life has become conscious, wakeful, and alert.<sup>77</sup>

73. Werner Best (1936), quoted in Frei, *National Socialist Rule in Germany*, 103.

74. Hartmut E. Lissinna, *Nationale Sportfeste im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland* (Mannheim: Palatium, 1997); Werner Rittich, *New German Architecture* (Berlin: Terramare Office, 1941), 37–38.

75. Adolf Hitler, “Ein Reich der Ehre, Treue und Anständigkeit!” in *Reichstagung in Nürnberg*, 64.

76. Johannes Dannheuser and Arno Kreher, *Zur Methodik einer politischen Leibeserziehung* (Berlin: Limpert, 1937), 106. Cf. Werner Hager, “Bauwerke im Dritten Reich” (1937), in *Die bildenden Künste im Dritten Reich: Eine Dokumentation*, ed. Joseph Wulf (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1963), 216.

77. Hans Schemm, *Hans Schemm spricht: Seine Reden und sein Werk* (Bayreuth: Gauleitung der Bayerischen Ostmark, 1936), 36, 37.



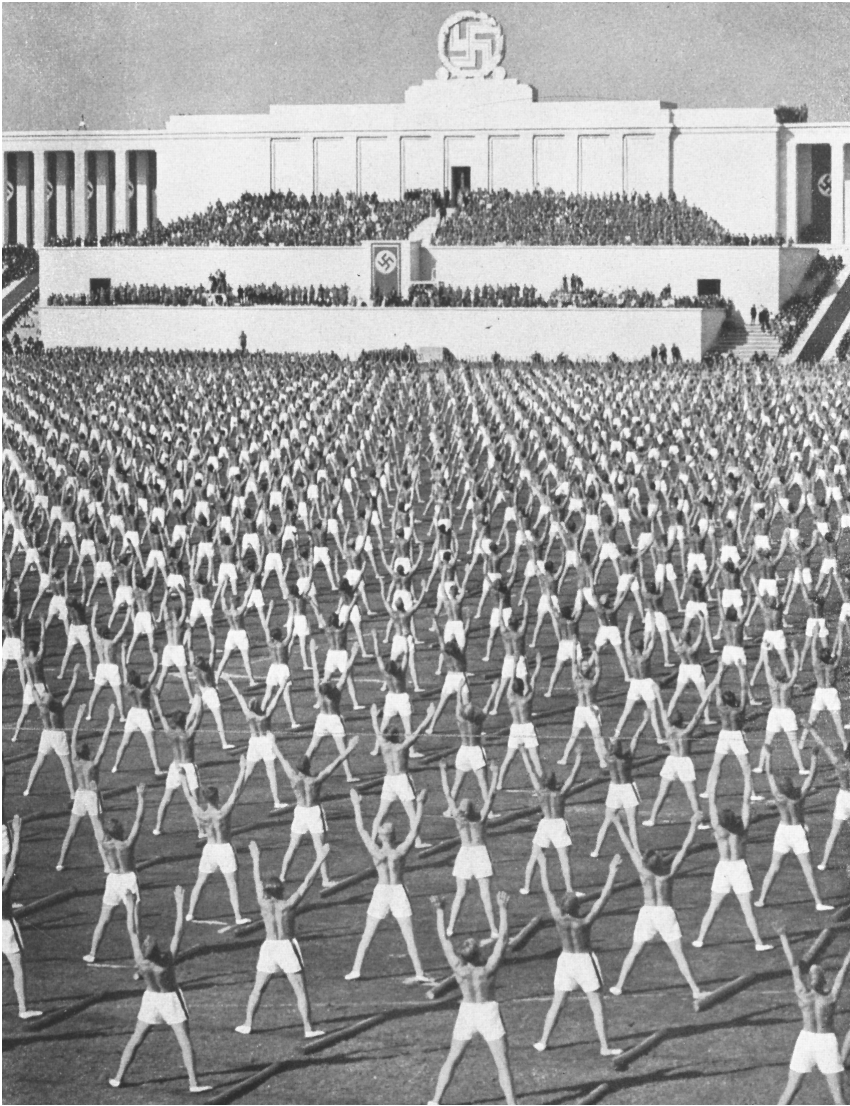


Figure 1. The German *Volkskörper*. National party convention, Nuremberg, September 1938. *Reichstagung in Nürnberg*, 1938, vol. 6, 141

The *Volkskörper* did not suffer only from the penetration of foreign bodies or from their presence in its midst. It had also been critically injured by the breakdown of its limbs and organs. The physical therapy must, then, reintegrate them. The treatment of the *Volkskörper* occurred not just in the stadium but in other spaces as well. One goal of the Austrian *Anschluss* (annexation) was exactly that: “The inhabitants of Austria and the Reich are not fraternal peoples but limbs of a single *Volk*, which belong together like left hand and right, parts of the same *Körper*.”<sup>78</sup> The autobahn system as well, which would reunite the regions of the new Reich—those already existent and those to be annexed—was none other than a creation of the “life veins of the German *Volkskörper*” that were to cure the “wounds” suffered by the land.<sup>79</sup> The autobahns, as a constituent part of the German *Lebensraum*,<sup>80</sup> were not “a lifeless design on the drawing board of the calculating art of the engineer.” Rather, they were “pulsating streets, veins of German *Volk* life in every respect.”<sup>81</sup> A 1935 exhibition titled “Miracle of Life” presented a poster that similarly portrayed the German *Volkskörper*. An analogy was made between the autobahns crisscrossing Germany and the body’s nervous system. That is, the former were the nerves of the German *Lebensraum*.<sup>82</sup>

The Nazis thus perceived their *Lebensraum* as an “organism,” as having “arteries,” “blood pressure,” and “blood circulation.”<sup>83</sup> It was this view of space as an organic body that then made it possible for them to identify the new German city as a human body with “one head, two arms, two legs, a torso . . . skeletal frame, muscles, respiratory organs, and blood circulation.” This was a body that could be mapped in an “Atlas of Anatomy.” Just like the human body, the city could also suffer from diseases and complications—such as “hypertrophy or malnourishment, growth of a giant or a dwarf”—if it was not constructed and did not behave in organic, healthy fashion.<sup>84</sup>

78. Friedrich Lange, *Grenzen zwischen Deutschen und Deutschen* (Munich: Eher, 1933), 12.

79. *Das Bauen im neuen Reich*, vol. 1 (Bayreuth: Gauverlag Bayerische Ostmark, 1941), 98.

80. *Deutschlands Autobahnen: Adolf Hitlers Straßen* (Bayreuth: Gauverlag Bayerische Ostmark, 1937), 25.

81. *Die Straßen Adolf Hitlers: Sechzig farbige Bilder auf Veranlassung des Generalinspectors für das Deutsche Straßenwesen geschaffen von Ernst Vollbehrl* (Leipzig: Koehler und Amelang, 1935), 7.

82. Herbert Bayer, *Das künstlerische Werk, 1918–1938* (Berlin: Bauhaus-Archiv and Mann Verlag, 1982), 102–3. Cf. Jantzen, *Die Geographie im Dienste der nationalpolitischen Erziehung*, 3–4.

83. Hanns Johst, *Ruf des Reiches—Echo des Volkes! Eine Ostfahrt* (Munich: Eher, 1940), 65, 74–75; Bernhard Kumsteller, *Werden und Wachsen: Ein Geschichtsatlas auf völkischer Grundlage* (Braunschweig: Westermann, 1938), 1.

84. Gottfried Feder, *Die neue Stadt: Versuch der Begründung einer neuen Stadtplanungskunst aus der sozialen Struktur der Bevölkerung* (Berlin: Springer, 1939), 2, 3, 13. Cf. Andreas Walther, *Neue Wege zur Großstadtsanierung* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1936), 4.

Once space was conceived as a real organic body the Polish Corridor, established by the Treaty of Versailles to separate East Prussia from the rest of Germany, could be considered a “bleeding wound,”<sup>85</sup> and the “Versailles Diktat” a cause of “bleeding borders.”<sup>86</sup> Another therapeutic approach to the ailing *Volkskörper* was to position it in natural surroundings, in its *Lebensraum*, which was the only place where it could develop: “The healthy development of our intact *Volkskörper* is only possible in the *Lebensraum* of Central Europe given to us by Nature and our history.”<sup>87</sup> By 1940 the Nazi author Hans Johst was describing *Lebensraum* as a healthy and vital *Volkskörper*. Thus he wrote after a tour of Poland led by Heinrich Himmler:

Time has been fulfilled, and the Great Germanic Empire is nearing completion! The streams of blood, the protuberances of squandered *Volk* powers are coming together in a new and greater *Volkskörper*. There is no longer something external, internal. All German consciousness and Germanic *Dasein* in this world is a unified organism, animated by a single heart, vitalized by a single soul, mastered by a single force, led by a single will—molded and guided by its designer, Adolf Hitler!<sup>88</sup>

The Nazi revolution was experienced as “the miracle of rebirth” of the “rejuvenated *Volkskörper*.”<sup>89</sup> Weimar socialism had been replaced by a “*Leib* and *Leib* community.” The corporatism of the Third Reich was based on the “*Weltanschauung* of the *Leib* community.”<sup>90</sup> If the unification of Germany during the last third of the nineteenth century was marked by the “transformation of the nation’s spirit into *Leib*” (*Verleiblichung des Geistes der Nation*), then the Third Reich now completed this process by “breathing a spirit into what constitutes the *Leib*” (*Begeisterung des Leiblichen*) after it had been so badly wounded in the war.<sup>91</sup> One way to realize this goal was physical education,

85. Goebbels, “NSDAP-Kundgebung,” 44.

86. Brohmer, *Mensch, Natur, Staat*, 85.

87. Fritz Donath and Karl Zimmermann, *Biologie, Nationalsozialismus und neue Erziehung* (Leipzig: Quelle und Meyer, 1933), 20.

88. Johst, *Ruf des Reiches—Echo des Volkes!* 29.

89. Ina Seidel, “Zum Geburtstag des Führers” (April 1942), in *Literatur und Dichtung im Dritten Reich: Eine Dokumentation*, ed. Joseph Wulf (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1963), 353.

90. Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, *Das dritte Reich* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1931), 122; Moeller van den Bruck, “Die Jungen in der Politik” (July 26, 1919), in *Der politische Mensch* (Breslau: Verlag Wilh. Gottl. Korn., 1933), 121.

91. Richard Benz, *Geist und Reich: Um die Bestimmung des Deutschen* (Jena: Diederich, 1933), 175–76.

whose influence had a triple effect through care, strength, and discipline of the “*Volksleib* as a whole.”<sup>92</sup>

Nazi Germany was founded on an organic politics fated to replace the “system” of Weimar: “Perhaps more than in any previous revolution, it seeks to draw on the biological-natural reservoir of strength of the *Volk*, mobilizing the organic substance in order to reconfigure the *Körper*, atomized over the past hundred years, into a unitary whole.”<sup>93</sup> The *Volkskörper* would serve as the basis of the Nazi state and would protect it. The meaning and purpose of the Nazi state would be derived from the “living *Volkskörper* which it is called on to protect. Seen from within, it can be called the skeleton of the living *Volk*; from without, it can be viewed as its defensive shield” (fig. 2).<sup>94</sup>

An essential therapeutic role in treating the *Volkskörper* was, of course, reserved for the *Führer*. Hitler succeeded in rejuvenating this body after it was injured in the war:

The unknown soldier, like a magnet, brought together the shattered fragments of the *Volk*, the classes, parties and interest groups, melding them into an expressive *Körper* of magnificent rhythmicity. . . . This whirling, teeming godless mass of human beings, seized by the frenzy of the sense of utility, pushed and pinned by avarice and egoism, was, at a historic hour, struck by a lightning bolt. That bolt welded their atoms in the glowing white heat of a new and sublime message—the message of the community of the German *Volk*. That was the hour of birth of the Third Reich!<sup>95</sup>

The *Volkskörper* did not just have a spatial manifestation. It had a temporal expression as well. This is what made its purification from any foreign influence so important, allowing this body to maintain its purity during its historical development. “The human being is more than a machine that exhausts its meaning in the present moment, without a before or after.” The Nazis claim that their ancestors “are not actually dead but live on within us men-

92. *Situationsbericht über die Neugestaltung der Leibesübungen in den Jahren, 1933–1935* (1935), in Hajo Bernett, “Die innenpolitische Taktik des nationalsozialistischen Reichssportführers: Analyse eines Schlüsseldokuments,” *Arena: Zeitschrift für Geschichte des Sports und der Körperkultur* 1, no. 1 (1975): 157.

93. Jörg Lampe, “Geistig und Intellektuell” (1938–39), in Wulf, *Literatur und Dichtung im Dritten Reich*, 288.

94. Leonardo Conti, “Körperliche Erziehung als biologische Aufgabe des Staates,” *Staatsmedizinische Abhandlungen* 6 (1940): 15.

95. Friedrich Freiherr von der Goltz and Theodor Stiefenhofer, *Unsterbliches Deutschland: Völkischer Durchbruch in der Geschichte* (Braunschweig: Westermann, 1936), 9–10.

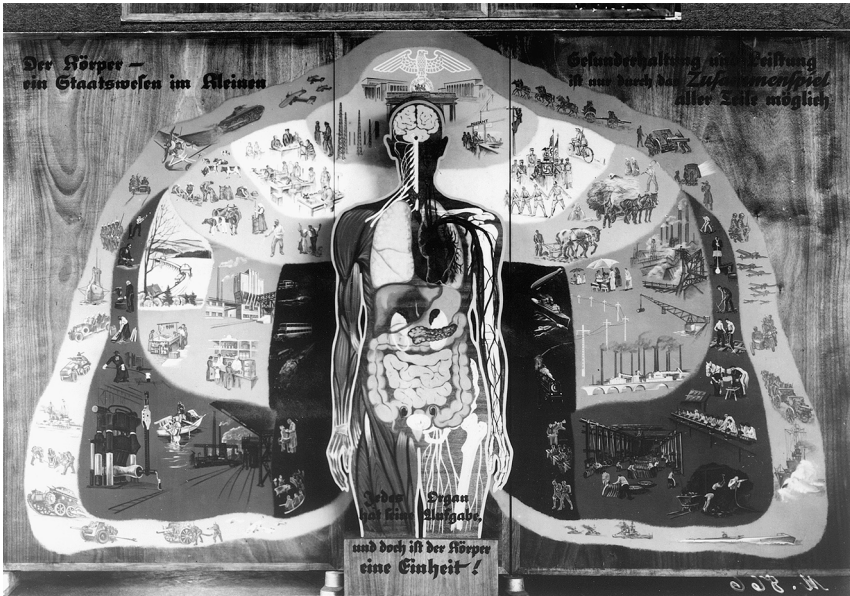


Figure 2. “The *Körper*—a state in miniature. Its health and capacity are possible only if all parts work in unison. Each organ has its special task, yet the *Körper* is a single unit!” Eternal Volk: Photographic Documentation in the Mobile Exhibition, 1937–39. Stiftung Deutsches Hygiene-Museum

tally and physically.” In their experience, they themselves “do not end with our *Körper* but must feel responsible, accountable for those who come after us, just as our fathers wished to eternalize their will to life in us.”<sup>96</sup>

### ***From Body to Fremdkörper; or, The Phenomenology of the Jewish Body in the Nazi Weltanschauung***

I now wish to describe the manifestation of the Jew as a *Fremdkörper* in relation to the German *Volkskörper*. Obviously, the full story should include all of those bodies that now manifested themselves as “foreign” elements living within the *Volkskörper*, bodies that were disavowed and destroyed, alongside “worthy” bodies that were promoted and improved. However, I focus here on the Jewish body. This is not an arbitrary choice. Nor is it a parochial one. The Jewish body was the ultimate, paradigmatic *Fremdkörper*. It encompassed the

96. E. Hefter, “Was der Sportlehrer von der Rassenpflege wissen muß,” *Leibesübungen und körperliche Erziehung* (1933): 22, 501.

full repertoire of otherness in and of itself. It was an ugly, manipulative, perverted, parasitic, cancerous body. The Jewish body, in other words, was a radical sign by which the field of action vis-à-vis all other foreign bodies in Nazi Germany was delineated. In this respect, the Jewish body was an essential element in Nazi body politics, as well as being essential for a politics of the body in relation to the other. The *Volkskörper* could not (co)exist with the Jewish body. At the same time, it could not live without it. This is how I make sense of Victor Klemperer's observation that "the Jew is the most important person in Hitler's state."<sup>97</sup> (Innumerable explanations have been offered for why the Jew was considered the ultimate *Fremdkörper* in the Nazi *Weltanschauung*. Such discussions are irrelevant to a phenomenological investigation that focuses on the form of this body's manifestation rather than its roots, sources, or causes.)

The existing scholarly literature has also interpreted this body as an expression of "something else." Like the prevalent view of the *Volkskörper*, the Jewish body, as a *Fremdkörper*, is commonly identified as a metaphor, that is, as nothing more than a semantic question. For some, this identification of the Jew with a *Fremdkörper* is nothing but a metaphor or an image by which the Nazis saw the Jew. In this respect, it makes no difference if the Jew is identified as a *Fremdkörper* or, alternately, as "parasitic," "cancerous," "vermin" (*Ungeziefer*), "bacteria" (*Bazillen*), or "bacillus." The identification of the Jew as a *Fremdkörper* is also nothing more than a modern version of earlier views of the "Antichrist" or of "Satan," among other variations of the same. According to other historians, the identification of the Jew as a *Fremdkörper* belongs to a modern scientific-medical-biological discourse that defined the other—and the Jew more than anyone else—in organic terms.<sup>98</sup> I wish to argue against these historiographical clichés and reach, instead, an understanding of the Jewish body as a *Fremdkörper* in phenomenological terms, that is, as it manifested itself to the Nazis and, more specifically, as it manifested itself among or within the *Volkskörper*.

The Jewish body's manifestation in the Nazi *Weltanschauung* was shaped by the threat it posed to the *Volkskörper*. Jewish propaganda, it was claimed, "consciously aimed at hollowing out and splitting apart the *Volkskörper*."<sup>99</sup> These counteraccusations were aimed at a supposed attempt by Jews to deal a

97. Victor Klemperer, *The Language of the Third Reich: LTI—Lingua Tertii Imperii; A Philologist's Notebook*, trans. Martin Brady (London: Athlone, 2000), 176.

98. Bein, "Der jüdische Parasit," 121–49; Planert, "Der dreifache Körper des Volkes," 561–64.

99. SS-Hauptamt, "Lehrplan für die weltanschauliche Erziehung in der SS und Polizei" (n.d.), in *Der Nationalsozialismus: Dokumente, 1933–1945*, ed. Walther Hofer (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1957), 281.

mortal blow to the *Volkskörper*. They appeared in sundry contexts, including court verdicts. In one such judicial case, the German solicitors' Court of Honor (Court and Appeal Court) deliberated over disbarring the Jewish attorney and Justice Ministry official Martin Drucker, who had been accused of offering advice to a colleague who had requested extradition to France for a kidnapped French spy. In the verdict, delivered in Leipzig in January 1935, Drucker was found guilty. The conviction noted that "his behavior can be understood absolutely only as hostility toward the German *Volk*, as part of the work of helping in the decomposition of the German *Volkskörper* by his race."<sup>100</sup>

The Jewish body was also seen to have a parasitic relationship to the *Volkskörper*. According to Hitler, the Jew is "always a *parasite* in the body of other peoples" (emphasis in original).<sup>101</sup> "They have lodged themselves in each and every people, live at the expense of the *Volkskörper*, weakening this body, just as every parasite-caused sickness debilitates the body of the host, causing a constant feeling of discomfort and discontent."<sup>102</sup> Shortly before his transportation to Buchenwald, Heinz Lewin was told by the Gestapo that "you Jews are all asocial elements who are sucking dry the German *Volkskörper*. That is why we will deal with you as you deserve."<sup>103</sup>

The *Meyers Lexikon* of 1940 held that the term *parasitism* embraced "elements . . . which have penetrated into the organism of the *Volk* or state and are living at its expense, themselves not sedentary, not rooted to the soil and not acting to form the state." In providing an example of parasitism "in the history of settlement and race," the author pointed to the Jews (fig. 3).<sup>104</sup>

On July 6, 1933, a *Hakenkruzbanner* article, "A Jew Lout Learns How to Work," told of one "Furniture-Jew Finkel," who had employed a German for five hours of work and then paid him a single mark. "That is how they become rich, these bloodsuckers feeding on the German *Volkskörper*," the author declared. This would not last for long. A group of SA members forced Finkel to sweep the courtyard of his store. That he did it poorly did not disturb the

100. "Ausfertigung. Im Namen des deutschen Volkes! Urteil. In dem ehrengerichtlichen Verfahren gegen den Rechtsanwalt Justizrat Dr. Martin Drucker, Leipzig" (January 26, 1935), 10, Wiener Library, London, P.II.b./38.

101. Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), 304.

102. Curt Rosten, *Das ABC des Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: Schmidt, 1933), 235. Cf. Brohmer, *Mensch, Natur, Staat*, 92–93; and Schumann, Heun, and Heun, *Reichskunde für junge Deutsche*, 99.

103. "The Adventures and Travels of Henry Lee Formerly Heinz Lewin, a Berlin Jew, to Italy—Abbyssinnia [*sic*]—Austria—Buchenwald—Tschechoslovakia [*sic*]—Poland—England" (1955), 3, Wiener Library, London, P.III.d./388.

104. *Meyers Lexikon*, 8:887.



Figure 3. “The Jew as parasite.” *The Eternal Jew*, poster for a Nazi film, 1940. Yad Vashem

Nazis or the large group of onlookers. Shortly afterward the SA seized Finkel again, this time hanging two signs on his body, one in front and one in back. The first read, “I am an exploiter.” The second declared, “Jewish exploiter, [who] paid a mark for five hours labor. Good wages for a Christian.” Finkel was then marched through the streets to make sure that his “colleagues” witnessed his humiliation.<sup>105</sup>

The Jewish body was not just parasitic. An even greater danger was manifest in the fact that this body had actually penetrated the *Volkskörper*. In their commentaries on the Reich Citizenship Law from September 15, 1935, Wilhelm Stuckart and Hans Globke argued, “Every people is damaged in its vital capacities by absorption of alien blood into the *Volkskörper*. But one of its principal concerns should be to keep its blood pure.”<sup>106</sup> Stuckart and Globke

105. “Ein Judenlummel lernt arbeiten” (July 6, 1933), in *Die Judenverfolgung in Mannheim, 1933–1945: Dokumente*, ed. Hans-Joachim Fliegener (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1971), 338–39.

106. Wilhelm Stuckart and Hans Globke, *Reichsbürgergesetz vom 15. September 1935* (Munich: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1936), 132.



had earlier written that “racial otherness is especially characteristic of Jewry, which forms a *Fremdkörper* within all European peoples.” That is why “citizenship in the Reich must be denied them.”<sup>107</sup> In February 1940 the *Lodzer Zeitung* reported on the need to separate the German and Polish populations from the Jewish one. Police ordinances were issued for that purpose, which referred to the Jews’ residency rights: “The Jew, who crawled forth from the dark quarters of the ghetto into the surrounding neighborhoods of the Germans, who ate his way into the other *Volkskörper* like the maggot into liver, has been subdued and controlled.”<sup>108</sup> The Germans, Hitler claimed, could intuitively identify the Jew as “the *Fremdkörper* in one’s own living body [*Leib*].”<sup>109</sup> During the first half of the 1920s Hitler spoke of threats to the *Volkskörper* almost exclusively in terms of the Jewish danger.<sup>110</sup> The Nazis were concerned that the hundreds of thousands of Jews living in Germany were increasing “through blood mixture in the German *Volkskörper*.”<sup>111</sup> “Three hundred thousand bastards with mixed Jewish-German blood in our *Volkskörper*—a sorry sum! That is defiling of the race.”<sup>112</sup> According to Himmler, the Third Reich would not have survived the difficult years of World War II, and particularly the bombing war, “if we still had this decomposing plague [of Jews] within our *Volkskörper*.” He thus concluded that “the Jews must be exterminated [*ausgerottet*].”<sup>113</sup> The Jewish body was perceived as an internal threat in other ways as well: “The effect of the Jews on the German *Volkskörper* was like a decomposing poison.”<sup>114</sup> The penetration by the Jewish body was also experienced as a cancerous invasion.<sup>115</sup>

The perception of the Jew as a corporeal other was based on traditional Jew hatred. It was the basis of ongoing efforts to harm the Jew’s body, from harassment in the street to imprisonment, exile, and murder. But these were

107. *Ibid.*, 28–29.

108. “Der Jude wird gebaendigt” (February 11–12, 1940), 1, Wiener Library, London, P.III.i./678.

109. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 312.

110. Adolf Hitler, *Sämtliche Aufzeichnungen, 1905–1924* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1980), 299, 644, 675, 682, 764, 799, 919, 966, 1049.

111. Paul Schultze-Naumburg, *Kunst und Rasse* (Munich: Lehmann, 1928), 9n1.

112. Ernst Dobers, *Die Judenfrage: Stoff und Behandlung in der Schule* (Leipzig: Klinkhardt, 1938), 35.

113. Heinrich Himmler, “Rede vor den Reichs- und Gauleitern in Posen” (October 6, 1943), in *Geheimreden 1933 bis 1945 und andere Ansprachen* (Frankfurt am Main: Propyläen, 1974), 169.

114. B. Kumsteller, U. Haacke, and B. Schneider, *Geschichtsbuch für die deutsche Jugend* (Leipzig: Quelle und Meyer, 1942), 242.

115. Robert N. Proctor, *The Nazi War on Cancer* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 8, 46, 61–63.

all still familiar practices. They cannot explain the unprecedented Nazi project of eradicating the Jewish ontology. That mission was born of the fervent conviction that the Jews were actually losing their otherness, that they were capable of penetrating the *Volkskörper*, which, in fact, they were doing. As long as the Jews were seen as other, they remained the object of traditional attacks. Once they began to lose their alienness, they emerged as an existential threat to the *Volkskörper*. The Nazis certainly perceived the Jews as losing their physical otherness because of assimilation, social integration, and even conscious efforts on their part to disguise themselves. Goebbels formulated the Jewish problem in these terms when he pronounced that “Judaism’s power resided in its anonymity.”<sup>116</sup> Here, according to the Nazis, is where the real Jewish problem lay. The Jews’ corporeal otherness was not the “problem.” As long as they maintained their identifiable otherness, it was easy to protect oneself and society from them. As other, the Jews could not penetrate the *Volkskörper*. The “problem,” rather, arose the moment they lost that otherness and threatened to enter the German bloodstream. In losing their otherness, the Jews constituted a clear and present danger to the Nazi *Weltanschauung*, undermining its ability to observe and identify bodies.

It followed, then, that the Jews who were losing their bodily otherness faced intense efforts at exposure. Techniques of observation were central to racial practice. They sought to mobilize the eyes of all Germans as well as the politics of *Anschaulichkeit* (concreteness).<sup>117</sup> Thus, for example, a school lesson in comparative observation instructed pupils to “put on the board photographs of Jews. . . . Now right next to them, put up and juxtapose the picture of a German. . . . It won’t take long for there to be a flood of answers: ‘The Jews have different *noses*, different *ears*, different *lips*, a different *chin*, a totally different *face* than what Germans have’” (emphasis in original).<sup>118</sup>

At the same time, the Nazis were not satisfied with simply training the German-Nazi gaze. Expression of Nazi angst over the Jews’ loss of their corporeal otherness is found also in the growing obsession to mark them by various means, including yellow stars. In exposing Jewish bodies to the German gaze, the yellow star also exposed the Jews’ bodies to themselves.

116. Joseph Goebbels, “Rassenfrage und Weltpropaganda,” in *Reichstagung in Nürnberg*, 140.

117. Ernst Lehmann, “Erbbiologische Grundlagen der Rassenkunde” (July 23, 1936), in *Wege und Ziele einer deutschen Biologie: Drei Vorträge* (Munich: Lehmann, 1936), 9–10; Lehmann, “Wege und Ziele einer deutschen Biologie” (July 11, 1936), in *Wege und Ziele*, 39; Friedrich Wolter, *Erbgut und Rasse: Arbeits- und Tatsachenheft über Vermehrung, Vererbung, Umwelt und Rasse im Biologieunterricht* (Leipzig: Klinkhardt, 1939), 19–23.

118. Fritz Fink, *Die Judenfrage im Unterricht* (Nuremberg: Der Stürmer, Abteilung Buchverlag, 1937), 15, 16.

Indeed, this was the discordant finale of Jewish efforts to become Germans. Jews forced to wear the yellow star avoided going out in public as much as possible.<sup>119</sup> This was because the yellow star was much more than a yellow star. When Yitskhok Rudashevski espied from his window a group of Jews donning their patches, he was pained to see how they were stared at. He experienced the yellow star as something “burning” him, branding him. He could not, in fact, wear it. “I felt a hump, as though I had two frogs on me.”<sup>120</sup> After being forced to wear the yellow star, Klaus Scheurenberg wrote, “I felt terribly ashamed. . . . It seemed to weigh many stone. . . . I had the feeling that everyone was staring at me. But they weren’t; I was feverish, as if naked!”<sup>121</sup> The yellow star imprisoned the Jewish body within itself. Klemperer wrote that “every star-bearing Jew carried his own Ghetto with him like a snail with its shell.”<sup>122</sup> The Jew was once again a *Fremdkörper* in the eyes of the Nazis, as well as in his own eyes. All that was left to do was to get rid of him.

The Jewish body, the ultimate *Fremdkörper* among and within the German *Volkskörper*, was removed to the camps. There the Jewish ontology was annihilated along with that body. The camps were not just the site of individual corporeal destruction. They were, in the phenomenological terms of this discussion of the Jewish *Volkskörper*, where piles of corpses were destroyed that no longer had individual identities. “We now saw piles of naked bodies that had been haphazardly collected,” as Kalman Gochman, a prisoner in Auschwitz, described this Jewish *Volkskörper*, “like piles of garbage with arms, legs, and heads all mixed up together” (figs. 4–5).<sup>123</sup>

Dismemberment was the fate reserved for the Jewish *Fremdkörper*. The Jewish *Körper* and *Volkskörper* in the camps were “bodies without organs.”<sup>124</sup> In this respect, a cubist portrait of the Jewish *Volkskörper* was no mere conceptualization or abstraction: it was the most realistic representation imaginable (fig. 6).

119. Mary Berg, *Warsaw Ghetto: A Diary* (New York: Fischer, 1945), 25 (January 10, 1940).

120. Yitskhok Rudashevski, *The Diary of the Vilna Ghetto: June 1941–April 1943*, trans. Percy Matenko (Tel Aviv: Ghetto Fighters’ House and Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 1973), 29–30 (July 8, 1941).

121. Klaus Scheurenberg, *Ich will leben: Ein autobiographischer Bericht* (Berlin: Oberbaumverlag, 1982), 79–80. Cf. Valentin Senger, *Kaiserhofstraße 12* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999), 79–80.

122. Klemperer, *Language of the Third Reich*, 168.

123. Kalman Gochman, *Class Reunion* [in Hebrew] (n.p.: Maor, 1989), 134.

124. I adopt the concept “body without organs” in its immediate and literal meaning from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).



Figure 4. "The sculpture of Germany." Garvens, 1933. *Jugend*, 1933



Figure 5. The Jewish *Volkskörper*. Buchenwald, 1945. Yad Vashem



Figure 6. *Mass Grave*, by Pablo Picasso, 1944–45. Succession Picasso 2008

In light of the “special treatment” the Jewish body was accorded as a *Fremdkörper* that needed to be purged from the German *Volkskörper*, the description of Auschwitz as the “anal orifice of the world” (*anus mundi*) should not just be read as a metaphor.<sup>125</sup> Auschwitz, where the Jewish ontology was erased, including its corporeal ontology, was where the Jewish body, the ultimate *Fremdkörper*, was flushed out of the *Volkskörper*. David Rousset wrote that in the camp they were “excrements.”<sup>126</sup> Robert Antelme confessed: “I’m just a piece of shit.”<sup>127</sup>

### **Conclusion**

I have sought to explore Nazi body politics by specifically examining the German *Volkskörper*. The *Volkskörper*, and not the private body, is the basis of the Nazi corporeal ontology on which judgment concerning individual bodies—either those bodies to be reproduced or to be exterminated—rested. In methodological terms, I have assumed, while anchoring my assumption in the sources, that the *Volkskörper* was perceived, understood, and experienced in the Nazi world as a real, concrete body. The *Volkskörper* should not, in other words, be looked on as “something else,” as a symbol or metaphor of the body, a corporeal expression of the mythic or atavistic, or an expression of organicist visions of the state, society, and population. I have traced the development of the *Volkskörper* in the Nazi *Weltanschauung* in phenomenological terms, that is, as it was manifested to contemporaries. At the same time, I have sought to keep interpretive, analytic, and diagnostic interventions to a minimum.

A phenomenological study that focuses on the manifestation of bodies has no interest in the causes and origins of the Jewish “problem” or in its “solution.” Such a discussion would miss the point of a phenomenological investigation, because it would lead us away from the phenomena themselves as they were manifested in the Nazi *Weltanschauung* and point us, instead, toward such phenomena as anti-Semitism, German nationalism, the crises of the Weimar years, and the question of modern. A search for origins rests on a historiographical assumption of cause and effect. Thus, for example, we read that “first” came anti-Semitism, “then” the Nazis, who solved the Jewish “prob-

125. Wieslaw Kielar, *Anus Mundi: 1,500 Days in Auschwitz/Birkenau*, trans. Susanne Flatauer (New York: Times Books, 1980); Johann Paul Kremer (September 5, 1942), in *Auschwitz in den Augen der SS: Rudolf Höß, Pery Broad, Johann Paul Kremer* (Auschwitz: Staatliches Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau, 1997), 154.

126. David Rousset, *The Other Kingdom*, trans. Ramon Guthrie (New York: Fertig, 1982), 138.

127. Robert Antelme, *The Human Race*, trans. Jeffrey Haight and Annie Mahler (Marlboro, VT: Marlboro, 1992), 114.

lem” in the most efficient, and horrible, way of all. In this respect, the Nazis were “just” one factor among many that sought to solve the Jewish “problem.”

A phenomenological study is exactly that, a study of phenomena. In the present article, this entails a focus on the phenomenon of the body as it manifested itself. In the more specific instance of Nazi *Weltanschauung*, we see that the *Volkskörper* was manifested as an injured body, a survivor of catastrophe and trauma. That very manifestation gave shape to its history, the history of a body that sought to rehabilitate itself along with other “worthy” bodies while removing “unworthy” bodies, as defined by the *Volkskörper*. This included, first and foremost, the Jewish body. Phenomenology thus offers us an alternative to common diachronic descriptions of Nazi body politics, descriptions that force us time after time into discussions of other subjects entirely. In contrast, the phenomenological approach offers a synchronic perspective that allows us to stay within the world of the Nazis, within their *Weltanschauung*. The actual manifestation of the *Volkskörper* as a wounded survivor of catastrophe shaped an entire body politics that rested, on the one hand, on practices of cultivation and enhancement and, on the other, on removal and extermination. In this respect, the phenomenology of the *Volkskörper* already contains the phenomenology of the Jewish body in general and of its nature as a *Fremdkörper* specifically. Phenomenology thus saves us from the need to discuss other phenomena when attempting to understand the phenomenon of the body in the Nazi world.

Moreover, phenomenology allows us to reconceive the relationship between Nazi and Jew, and between their respective bodies. At first glance, it would seem to have been a straightforward relationship of “removal” and “distancing” (*Entfernung*). The Nazis moved the Jewish body away and in so doing drew the boundaries of their own bodies. At the same time, a phenomenological study reveals a more complex relationship between the two. The Nazi body was not a simple function of *Entfernung*. Rather, it was a result of inclusion-exclusion. If the *Entfernung* of the Jewish body was, in fact, a necessary condition for creating a Nazi body, then the Jewish body also had to be present in that body. The Jewish body had to be present so that it could be pushed aside, allowing the Nazi body to manifest itself as such.

The place of the Jewish body in the Nazi *Weltanschauung* is best captured, I think, in the dual meaning of *Entfernung*, a concept that expresses both the act of distancing (*Entfernung*) and its annulment (*Ent-fernung*). The word *Entfernung* consists of two parts: *Fern*, or “distant,” “faraway,” or “far off,” and *Ent*, a prefix used to annul or inverse the meaning of the word it is affixed to. *Entfernung* thus means distance and removal. At the same time, it

means their repeal.<sup>128</sup> The Jew at once inhabited the Nazi world and was situated outside it. The Nazis “needed” Jews in their body so that they could distance Jews and, by so doing, define their own body as “worthy” and “purged.”

I wish to conclude by referring to what I made note of in the introduction, that is, the possibly problematic nature of a phenomenological study of Nazism based on Heidegger and Nolte. In an entirely different context, Georg Simmel wrote, “It is not our task either to accuse or pardon, but only to understand.” This is the final sentence of his *Metropolis and Mental Life*, which appeared in 1903. There is no doubt that phenomenology neither accuses nor pardons but simply understands. I have built the present phenomenological investigation on a generally uncritical use of Nazi sources and language. Indeed, I have allowed the Nazis to speak in their own voice. At no point have I stopped them or silenced them. At no point have I criticized them. I have never considered their language, or the more specific phenomenon of the *Volkskörper* in their *Weltanschauung*, an expression of “something else.” Without a doubt, the Heideggerian project, and certainly Nolte’s as well, rests on understanding. Is it possible, and desirable, to build a scholarly investigation of the Nazi phenomenon that is devoid of judgment? I believe that it is.

Nazi historiography can generally be divided into the two approaches that Simmel tells us that we should equally avoid, that which “accuses” and that which “pardons.” The accusers condemn Nazism and the Nazis for what they were and for the terrible wrongs they committed. This approach is embraced both by liberal and by conservative historians who identify Nazism as a threat, if not, in fact, the gravest danger in the annals of history, to an “open society,” however such a society is defined. In contrast, historians who prefer to pardon, or apologize, for Nazism insist on viewing it as the effect of exogenous causes. These included the political, economic, and social crises that plagued the Weimar Republic, together with the catastrophe that was World War I, the German *Sonderweg*, the structural pathologies inherent to the nation-state, the failures of capitalism, and the calamities of modernity.

These two interpretive schools of Nazism have the same foundation, in my opinion. Both are driven by “the end of the story,” that is, by World War II, Nazi crimes, and Auschwitz. When examining such Nazi “insanity,” historians have little choice but to act as judges, that is, either to condemn the Nazis and Nazism or, alternately, to acquit them out of extenuating circumstances. Arguably more than any other subject of historical inquiry, Nazism places enormous obstacles in the path of scholars who simply wish to understand it—

128. Cf. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 104–10; Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 97–102.



not to accuse or pardon but to understand. (As an Israeli and Jewish historian, I find this an even more difficult task.)

This phenomenological study does not seek to accuse and certainly does not intend to forgive. Instead, it strives to understand Nazism and the Nazi *Weltanschauung*, to enter deeply into this world, to learn its vocabulary and its syntax. As a historian desirous of understanding the Nazi *Weltanschauung*, I do not consider it my role to be their accuser, that is, to condemn them for what they were and for what they did, for their manipulations and their lies. At the same time, it is not my role to forgive them (because they were the inevitable outcome of . . . or a reaction to . . . or because they served as instruments in the hands of . . .). As one who seeks to fathom the Nazi world, I am certainly not allowed to reduce that world to the sum of its sources and origins. Such a reduction would distance me from the Nazi world and push me toward other worlds, namely, those that preceded it. As someone seeking to understand the Nazi world, I am also uninterested in offering diagnoses: neither political diagnoses (that would describe Nazism as an “authoritarian” or “totalitarian” or “fascistic” regime), social diagnoses (that would describe Nazi society as “modern” or “reactionary,” “progressive” or “regressive”), or psychological diagnoses (that speak of the Nazis as “normal” or “neurotic” or “psychotic”). These kinds of judgments would reveal me as a historian unable or unwilling to truly comprehend his subject, to see it, to listen to it. As a historian who strives to understand the Nazi world, I also do not view it as my place to offer comparisons, with Stalinist Russia, fascist Italy, or Maoist China. That kind of comparative study would show only that I was less interested in Nazism itself than in its relationship to other regimes and other societies.<sup>129</sup>

I believe that the phenomenological approach can be, and should be, put into practice, not only in regard to the specific case of the German *Volkskörper* but in regard to the entire Nazi world and *Weltanschauung*. Such a history of the Nazi phenomenon has yet to be written.

129. I am unable to review here in general fashion the historiography of Nazism. That is also not the aim of this study. For what I consider the best such review, see Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (London: Arnold, 2000).