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The body and corporality in the service of socialist realism

Abstract

The thesis analyses images of the body and embodiment during socialist realism in poetry, prose and periodicals between 1945 and 1956 as well as during the so-called 'normalization' period in Czechoslovakia. Individual forms of embodiment are presented via a system of binary oppositions (individual - collective body, public - private, functional - dysfunctional, male - female, beautiful - ugly etc.), on the basis of which it attempts to demonstrate how the 'natural' symbolism of the body became a tool for representing a specific value system. The thesis describes the coming to terms of socialist realism with the individualised and fragmented body as a legacy of naturalism, the avant-garde and surrealism through the adaptation of the individual body to typified resemblances (images of the enemy, man, woman, leader). These emblematic reductions were, in many cases, taken from popular literature which, despite being rejected by socialism, guaranteed popularity amongst readers and was intelligible to the largest part of the population. The highest level of embodiment was the staging of the collective body, the 'spartakiada' performances, which were co-responsible for creating the myth of national unity, discipline and the will to build *a new world*.