

# Shift Biological human body to fragmented social bodies: From post-structuralism point of view

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**Abstract:** The human body has in current times become a 'hot' topic in social sciences especially in sociology, not just in empirical research but also in sociological theorizing. In the latter context, the body has been variously a resource for broadening the parameters of traditional sociological thought deriving from the nineteenth century, and for overturning that paradigm and fundamentally reorienting the assumptions and concepts of sociological thinking from post structuralism lens. Attempts to abandon the old paradigm and foster a new one through the means of thinking about bodies are many and manifold, and in this paper we trace out the intricate history of biological body moves towards a fragmented social bodies or 'corporeal sociology'. We identify the dilemmas that have attended these developments, especially as concerns the ways in which new modes of thinking sociologically have tended to founder over the classical sociological dichotomy between social structure and social action. Through tracing out the various moves and counter-moves within this field, we identify a central contradiction that affects all contemporary sociological practice, not just that dealing with the body: an oscillation between judging the utility of conceptual tools in terms of criteria derived from the discipline of Cultural Studies, and evaluating the arguments created by those tools on the basis of the incompatible criteria of classical sociology.

**Keywords:** Biological body, Power relation, social bodies, post-structuralism

## Introduction:

By the close of the twentieth century the body had become a key site of political, social, cultural and economic intervention in relation, for example, to medicine, disability, work, consumption, old age and ethics. In short, the body has come to be recognized as a contested terrain on which struggles over control and resistance are fought out in contemporary societies. That the body has emerged in recent years as a key problematic in the social sciences is indicated, for instance, by the proliferation of books and journals, conferences and other media dedicated to a sociological analysis of the body. Similarly, courses on the body and related issues feature increasingly in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. In contemporary societies body issues are everywhere. For example, new social movements struggle for citizenship and emancipation in the name of excluded bodies (Nicholson and Seidman 1995). There has been a radical shift in the understanding of disability and old age from a medical and welfare perspective to a focus on embodiment as a human rights issue. Ethics are fought out at the level of aesthetics and relations between bodies. Projects of self enhancement and bodily transformation are the focus of embodiment as a consumer lifestyle. Medicine is shifting its focus from diseased to healthy bodies. Transnational capitalism demands flexible bodies for flexible accumulation and the organization of the body on an unprecedented scale. These particular developments, which spell out the presence of the body in social, moral and political life, have had a profound impact on sociology and social theory. The assumption of classical positivist sociology, that bodies belong primarily to biology, has collapsed and the meaning of the body. Introduction body has become a problem for linguistic, cultural and social analysis. This inclusion of the body in sociological inquiry can be regarded as a critical and reflective response to the social changes which have brought the body to the forefront of contemporary struggle and debate. Its intellectual roots are diverse, although post structuralism and feminism can claim to be at its core; and Nietzsche and the critique of Cartesian dualism, important in phenomenological thought, are its most notable theoretical ancestors. Like the world it seeks to describe and explain, the sociology of the body is a place of twists and turns, uncertainties and ambiguities, a place where the long, unchallenged reign of reason is in dispute. In epistemology, sociological inquiry into the body tends to opt for pragmatism; in methodology it embraces pluralism; in ontology it tends to try to escape the traps of essentialism and foundationalism. Debates in feminism and the 'philosophy of difference' have been key players in shaping the intellectual hue of the sociology of the body. Yet the arrival of this new sub discipline in sociology is not simply a response to the theoretical pluralism and the cross-fertilization of disciplines that have collapsed the boundaries between the human sciences in the contemporary world. We feel that it is necessary to say a little about the social and cultural events that have provoked the claim that we live in a 'somatic society' (Turner 1996: 1) – that is, a society 'within which major political and personal problems are both problematized within the body and expressed through it'.

The Dialectic of Enlightenment and exposing the key value of modernity, Horkheimer and Adorno wrote: 'What men want to learn from nature is how to use it in order to wholly dominate it and other men. That is the only aim' (1973: 28). Although one might contest this singular and absolute account of modern times, it does suggest a re-ordering of the relationship between culture and nature in which the former acquires a privileged status. Nature, including the body, has become something to be commanded and disciplined. Over the past 300 years the planetary body has been subjected to human exploitation on a massive scale, and

human embodiment, emotions and desires have been 'civilized' by the coincidental rise of the modern state and the proliferation of formal modes of conduct (Elias 1978). For Foucault (1971: 153) the body is moulded by 'a great many distinct regimes'. It is an outcome of the play of power, and power 'reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives' (Foucault 1978: 39). The heady combination of feminism and post-structuralism has produced the claim that not only gender but sex is a social construction (see, for example, Butler 1993), and Haraway (1990) has argued that the ubiquitous couplings of flesh and machine that we witness in contemporary times are evidence of the rise of cyborg culture. Underpinning this widespread cultural agenda of the body at the end of the twentieth century is a powerful emphasis on its malleability. 'We have become responsible for the design of our own bodies' (Giddens 1991: 102). No longer is the body conceived as a fixed essence. The changes that it undergoes are no longer regarded as wholly dependent on natural physiological processes. As the celebrity Cher once put it: 'Nature isn't always the best. I have the money to improve on nature and I don't see why I shouldn't' (Glasgow Evening Times, 24 April 1992). The boundaries between culture and nature have collapsed and the body has become flexible: 'Flexibility is an object of desire for nearly everyone's personality, body and organisation' (Martin 1994: xvii). The body has become plastic, a lifestyle accessory, a thing to be sculpted, shaped and 'stylized' (Featherstone 1991a). It has been transformed from a biological fact into a 'project' (Giddens 1991) and a 'performance' (Goffman 1971b). Contemporary culture is marked by a quest for physiognomical and physical regimes of embodiment that are based on the assumption that the surface and the interior of the body are amenable to reconstruction or re-incorporation. As Anthony Giddens (1991: 7-8) has argued: 'The reflexivity of self in conjunction with abstract systems pervasively affects the body [ . . . ] The body is less and less an extrinsic given functioning outside the internally referential systems of modernity, but becomes itself reflexively mobilised.' These claims, which transform our ideas about the body from obdurate matter to flexible performance, have powerful empirical points of reference in popular culture and new technologies. The organ transplant trade raises questions not only about the ownership of the body but also about its boundaries (Elshtian and Cloyd 1995). The notion that nature constitutes an absolute limitation is an idea in decline. The body conceived as a project opens up possibilities for its re-formation and modification. 'Body work' is no longer simply a question of mechanical maintenance but one of lifestyle choice and identity. Shaping the body through diet, exercise and cosmetic surgery is a fleshy testimonial to the aestheticization of everyday life (Featherstone 1992; Welsch 1996), a fascination with appearance and, some argue, the narcissism of contemporary culture (Lasch 1980). The fitness, health and dieting booms of the 1970s and 1980s supported the marketing of all sorts of commodities and techniques for bodily enhancement. For a significant number of women dieting can take on vocational proportions and one study claims that only 10 per cent of women have never dieted (Ogden 1992). Health farms and fat farms sell dreams of the body beautiful and offer a range of techniques and therapies for shaping body and soul. In the USA Weight Watchers claims a membership of eight million whereas those who want to go it alone can choose from hundreds of best-selling slimming books, exercise videos, machines or classes or can pick up any popular magazine and read about the thousands of food items, concoctions, exercise regimes, body-building programmes and pharmaceuticals that claim to help in the battle against the unfashionable body. For those who can afford it, there is the option of the surgeon's knife, used widely in the West to combat the ageing process, to eliminate unwanted physical features (K. Davis 1995) or even as a means of mobilizing the body as an artistic canvas (K. Davis 1997b). The possibilities for self-transformation have extended to sexual identity. Once regarded as fixed and impervious to modification, sexual identity has been relocated from the kingdom of necessity to the land of choice. Today, 'normal sexuality is simply one type of lifestyle choice among others' (Giddens 1992: 179). In light of the growth and recognition of 'diverse sexual proclivities' the discourse of perversion has collapsed (Giddens 1992: 179). With improvements in reproductive and 'sex change' technology and the arrival of artificially produced conception, 'sexuality is at last fully autonomous' (Giddens 1992: 27) and sexuality has become 'plastic'. The proliferation of projects of self identity that involve new ways of being in the body and expressing its sexuality, mean that in the age of 'plastic sexuality' gender identity is no longer embedded in a fixed biological foundation. Anything goes: sex too is a reflexive project.

### **Sociological bodies:**

Now that the body itself is mobilized in the name of a host of practices and projects of self-transformation, there has been a simultaneous proliferation of sociological bodies. These bodies have been predominantly a) theoretical, b) historical or c) analytical – or, more accurately, theory, history or heuristic devices, including matrixes and taxonomies, have been used as the basis for distinguishing between types of body and embodiment. (a) The highly contested domain of sociological theory provides an interesting playground in which perspectives tussle with one another over which is the more efficacious in relation to interpreting and understanding embodiment. Chris Shilling (1993) provides an excellent guide to social and sociological theories of the body and Bryan S. Turner (1996) weaves insightful essays on bodies by pragmatically threading together a variety of theories, most notably post-structuralism (especially the work of Michel Foucault), phenomenology and feminism. (b) Feher, Naddaff and Tazi (1989) have argued that across time, the cultural nuances of embodiment can be traced in terms of a continuum between the deified, godlike body on the one hand, and the body conceived as machine or animal on the other. In their engaging study of the relationship between community and embodiment, in which the ambiguity of the corporeal is a consequence of its struggle between sensuality and rationality, Mellor and Shilling (1997) refer to medieval, protestant modern and baroque bodies. (c) Of the various attempts to develop an analytical framework for the sociology of the body, the two most celebrated and coherent are associated with the work of Turner (1996) and Frank (1991). Turner focuses on the tasks that society sets itself in relation to the 'government of the body'. These tasks are reproduction, restraint, regulation and representation. Individual bodies (internally and externally) and populations (across space and time) are regulated in terms of these basic tasks, which every society must confront. The form of government of the body can vary depending on the institutional means used to implement the tasks. Asceticism, patriarchy, panopticism and commodification constitute the range of possible means. Frank's typology of sociological bodies is derived partly from a critical reflection on Turner's work. He displaces the functionalist flavour of Turner's typology

with a framework that is indebted to the North American tradition of 'symbolic interactionism', where the emphasis is on agency and active bodies rather than bodies which are heavily informed by institutional and structural constraints. Frank offers a 'typology of body use in action' in which disciplined, dominating, mirroring and communicative bodies are the key terms in the analytical framework (Frank 1991: 54). These two analytical approaches produce body types that are theoretically grounded and synthetic. This text is not so bold. Our ambition is accessibility and to this end we aim to provide a prequel to the complexities of theoretical and analytical synthesis and a salient review of some of the literature that opens up and smooths over the gap between the sociology of the body and (some) other sociological sub-disciplines. Our typology is, therefore, nearer to the one offered by Frank in a review essay of 1990, in which he divided his material into medicalized, sexual, disciplined and talking bodies. We too have adopted substantive categories which are not dependent on or constrained by fidelity to a single theoretical framework. In so doing we have followed our own interests and specialisms in old age, ethics, organization, disability, medicine and consumption. All of these fields of investigation can be regarded (arguably) as sociological sub-disciplines and we have attempted to trace the impact of the sociology of the body in these specific domains. Our terrain, therefore, is an intellectually fertile one in which new ideas and perspectives have helped to revivify more established bodies of knowledge. We do not claim to have left no stone unturned. There are other bodies – religious, sporting, sexual, emotional, knowing, for example – that are equally amenable to this treatment, but these are beyond the scope of this book. The bodies that we have selected for discussion arise in the domain of contested modernity in which the case for pleasure, desire, sensuality and emotion challenges the rather jaded Enlightenment values of reason, truth and progress. It is this broad context which forces embodiment on to the sociological agenda. Whatever prefix we use to describe modernity, it is not what it used to be, and debates about old age, ethics, organization, disability, medicine and consumption are all embedded in and reflect the precariousness of the times in which we live. We live in an 'age of anxiety' in which existential and ontological insecurity is rife (Giddens 1991), and where our faith in the grand thoughts and designs of the past has weakened (Lyotard 1984). Our time is one of irony and nihilism, fundamentalism and anti-foundationalism, globalization and localization, geopolitical realignment and ecological crisis, post-colonialism and the decline of the nation-state, new nationalisms and the unimpeded expansion of transnational corporations. We live – we hear – in interesting times, perhaps even apocalyptic ones, in which the values of the past seem both remote and ripe for review. The body and embodiment have figured strongly in this ongoing re-evaluation of values, largely because reason has come to be regarded as a false god. Modernity in its aged and uncertain state has become nostalgic for the mythical, baroque, fleshy energy of its youth. Modern bodies The dominant representation of the body in modernity has been provided by the biomedical discourse which became, in the nineteenth century, a science of universal bodily processes. However, in Chapter 1 – 'Medicalized bodies' – Bill Hughes argues that biomedicine now seems to be in a crisis of legitimization, and alternative, more holistic concepts of medicine and embodiment are challenging its hegemony. Biomedicine has come under fire from epidemiologists, social scientists, feminists, gay and disabled people, theologians and – most tellingly – lay persons. In an attempt to incorporate these critiques and to respond to changes in the nature of disease as well as the economic imperatives of neo-liberalism, medicine is repositioning itself as a bio-psychosocial practice (Armstrong 1987) in which health maintenance – rather than disease (and its) elimination – is becoming the locus for healthcare organization and intervention. The chapter focuses on the ways in which medicine is transforming its conception of the body from a passive receptacle of disease to a responsible and active agent of self-care. Contemporary medicine prescribes and dispenses not only pharmaceuticals, but also information and advice about how to live, and its notion of what constitutes health work has expanded beyond clinical action to include lay vigilance in relation to behaviour, lifestyle, patterns of consumption and the organization of social space. The medicalization of disability in the nineteenth century marked the 'scientific' exclusion of disabled people from the mainst social life. It is only since the emergence of the Disability Movement – sometimes described as 'the last civil rights movement' – that the experience of disability has been evaluated from a non-medical perspective. Ironically, to date, disability studies and the sociology of the body have not provided a great deal of intellectual nourishment for one another. However, disabled activists have challenged the medical model in which disability is viewed as a bodily limitation, and replaced it with a social model in which disability is defined as a situation produced by a socio-spatial environment that fails to acknowledge the needs and rights of people with impairments. This model is rooted predominantly in a structural analysis (Finkelstein 1980; Abberley 1987; Oliver 1990). It made good political sense, initially, for disability activists (like feminists) to marginalize embodied experience because biological arguments had been used historically to legitimate social exclusion. **'Disabled bodies'** – Kevin Paterson and Bill Hughes argue that a disembodied view of disability is no longer tenable. They reflect on changes in disability studies which seek an embodied view of disability and develop what has been called a social model or sociology of impairment. The chapter traces the ways in which 'the body' and 'the social' compete in the constitution of the meaning of disability.

**'Consumer bodies'** – Liz Jagger outlines the view that some of the major social transformations of modernity – including changes in work organization and techniques, the decline of heavy industry, the increasing importance of the service and leisure industries and the rise of the media and advertising – established the foundations of a consumer culture (Featherstone 1991a) and brought questions of 'self' to the front of the political, social and economic stage. Self-identity is now derived not from work and production, but from consumption (Tomlinson 1990). Moreover, with the decline of religious authority and a loss of faith in grand political narratives – two of the key markers of postmodernity – the physical body seems to provide a locus and a focus for the affirmation of identity. It provides the medium through which messages about self-identity are transmitted and is a key site for the marking of difference (Shilling 1993, 1997). The chapter explores the connections between consumption, identity and the body, drawing on the work of writers who, in diverse ways, have addressed these links. For Bourdieu (1984) consumer choices are inscribed on the body and therefore make it a site of social and especially class differences. Thus, we consume according to who we are. By contrast, for some so-called postmodern theorists we become what we consume. The body is saturated with cultural signs with no fixed referents and, as a consequence, produces multiple, shifting identities (Jameson 1985; Baudrillard 1988b).

However, given that access to cultural resources for identity construction is not equally available to men and women in consumer society, reflexive self-fashioning (Giddens 1991) is more problematic for women (Lury 1997). To exemplify the contingent and uncertain nature of feminine subjectivity. The body – built firm and strong – has become, in modernity, a sign of moral worth, and the worship of youth and beauty has made ‘strangers’ of older people. The moral alterity of older people is compounded by economic arguments which classify the growing elderly population as fiscal muggers who can neither produce nor reproduce. Ageism is rife and older people are regarded as the embodiment of deterioration and decay. ‘Old bodies’ – Emmanuelle Tulle-Winton discusses the body as a contested site for the constitution of old age and old people. The emergence of old age as the object of professional study and practice in the late eighteenth century gave rise to a range of possible narratives about the experience of being old. The variable emphasis on and explanatory power given to the bodily manifestations of becoming and being old, and their potential for liberation, define these narratives. These narratives, starting with the problematization of old age as a primarily medical event where the body takes centre stage. This gives rise to the modernist discourse of old age – as biological decline, physiological and mental decrepitude and loss. The constitution of old age as a biological event over determining the actual experience of later life was reinforced by the emergence of gerontology, the study of old age, which reflected, justified and constructed the cultural, economic and symbolic obsolescence of old people (Lynott and Lynott 1996). Its aim was to construct strategies of adaptation to loss. There have been two principal challenges to the medicalization of old age. The first focused on the structural determinants of old age and embodied the argument that economic exclusion and discriminatory welfare practices were constitutive of the othering of old people and marked an obsession with the corporeality of the ageing body. The second was based on the cultural problematization of old bodies as posing a threat to the norm of identity which was calibrated against the valorization of youthfulness. This perspective proposed ways to manage (away) the old body and, thus, enable old people to maintain intact the integrity of their personal identity. There was, however, a cost attached to this. On the one hand, it led to the rehabilitation of successful agers, through the extension of middle age and the encouragement to keep a close check on bodily deterioration through a range of techniques of the self. On the other hand, it exacerbated the marginalization of those who could not escape old age; especially very old people or ill old people. The chapter concludes that, despite efforts to do so, old bodies cannot be abrogated and that there may be a case for attempting to recover the fleshiness of the old body without losing sight of the social and cultural processes that contribute to the marginalization of old people. Although the bodies of post-productive people have been made anthropologically strange by the narrow moralities and economic necessities of modernity, working bodies face the disciplinarity and demands of flexibility which pervade organizations in late capitalist society. Contemporary sociological accounts of the relationship between work, its organization and the human body have been shaped by a number of recent developments both in sociology and in the world of work itself. These include, for example, shifting philosophical perspectives on the body, changes in working patterns and an increased academic and managerial concern with organizational culture. The impact of such developments has been further exacerbated by the rise of post-Fordist modes of production and exchange and the demands of an expanding tertiary sector, which has resulted in even greater attention being paid to issues of image and appearance by organizations concerned with maintaining global competitiveness. Integral to this has been the substantial increase in the proportion of jobs in which people are employed, specifically in front-line ‘customer facing’ service providers. It is their bodies that become the carriers of the aesthetic concerns of contemporary organization(s).

**‘Working bodies’** – Philip Hancock and Melissa Tyler open with a brief discussion of these developments and their implications for the management of the body at work. They adopt a broadly historical perspective on the management and rationalization of the working body, with particular reference to the development of wage labour in western capitalist societies. Commencing with a review of these managerial systems, developed largely in the early twentieth century, which were concerned with the efficient use of the body’s capacity to labour, the authors chart the refinement of various technologies of rationalization and their eventual impact on the body in contemporary work organizations. This prefigures a consideration of the significant contribution that feminist sociology has made to the understanding of the role played by the body in the management of gender differences in the workplace. The chapter ends by shifting attention away from the formal domain of paid work to focus on what Shilling (1993) has called ‘body work’. This refers to the time, effort and resources dedicated to maintaining a particular state of embodiment in everyday life. The conclusion suggests that this concept offers a potentially useful way of understanding the relationship between work and the human body, one that rejects an artificial distinction between work and consumption. If reflection on contemporary organization suggests a problem with the distinction between work and consumption, contemporary work on ethics suggests that the distinction between ethics and aesthetics is also difficult to sustain. The body is a key player in the deconstruction of this distinction. The rationale for an embodied ethics arises out of the convergence of two dominant sociological trends: the re-emergence of the moral and the new prominence of the body as the ethical subject in sociology. In Chapter 6 – ‘Ethical bodies’ – Rachel Russell discusses general processes of contemporary moralization and examines the conceptualization of the body as a site for the embodiment of ethics in two ways. First, she explores ‘aesthetic ethics’ and considers 10 Introduction the historical origins of the notion that ‘you are what you look like’ (Synnott 1993). Second, by way of a critical consideration of the emergence of ethical subjects in the realm of consumption and new social movements, she examines the ideas of Foucault (1997) and Maffesoli (1996). The emphasis on the rational and visual in these approaches (Jay 1994) is contrasted with those that privilege the emotional and sensual dimensions of embodied ethics (Levinas 1981; Bauman 1993; Irigaray 1993; Maffesoli 1996; Smart 1996). The distinction between the rational and the emotional, and the visual and the sensual is illustrated by a consideration of the way in which ethical bodies are understood in contemporary society and social theory. A comparison of these two approaches to embodied ethics suggests that alternative sociological approaches to ethical bodies can be identified. Perspectives that transcend ontological duality and allow for an understanding of the ethical subject as emerging from embodied interaction are beginning to provide the focus for scholarship and action in this area.

Bodies are important; they matter to the persons who inhabit them, and religions speak to many of these body-oriented human concerns. Part of the reason our bodies matter to us is that we strongly identify our very selves with our bodies. We experience things done to our bodies as done to our selves. Our agency as active personae in society is accomplished through our bodies. MerleauPonty (1962:37) has reminded us, "Consciousness is in the first place not a matter of 'I think that' but of 'I can'." Thus, loss of that agency (for example, through disability, enslavement, or repression) is experienced as a fundamental assault upon ourselves. Because of this intimate linkage, attention to how people's bodies matter to them can give social scientists valuable clues to the nature of the connection between individual and society. Second, bodies are matter. The material reality of our bodies is part of the grounding of human experience in reality: The "lived" body is our vehicle for perceiving and interpreting our dualism: The "mind I spirit" part goes to the social scientists and religious studies scholars, while the "body" part (translated by some as "really real") goes to the biologists and medical scientists. It is counterproductive for us, individually and professionally, to continue to accept uncritically the assumptions of this mind I body dualism. Rather, let us assume that the human body is both a biological and a cultural product, simultaneously physical and symbolic, existing always in a specific social and environmental context in which the body is both active agent and yet shaped by each social moment and its history. To remind us of this unitary quality, Schepper-Hughes and Lock (1987) have referred to it as the "mind-ful body." We must reconceptualize mind, body and society, not as merely connected, but indeed as deeply interpenetrating, meshed as a nearunitary phenomenon. This essay is but a brief sketch of some suggested directions for how the social sciences of religion might come to a better appreciation of this mind-ful body. These suggestions are here organized along three broad themes: 1) the body's importance in self experience and self's experience of others; 2) the body's role in the production and reflection of social meanings; 3) the body's significance as the subject and object of power relations. These three themes draw from various theoretical approaches, with diverse epistemological assumptions, but collectively they suggest both the importance of considering the mindful body and some possible directions for future inquiry. This preliminary agenda indicates aspects of special importance for the scientific study of religion, for we are already keenly interested in religion's relationship to individual selves, to socio-cultural meanings, and to the theme of power. The living body is our fundamental phenomenological basis for apprehending self and society. Each person's body as it is concretely experienced, as it is "lived," is fundamentally different from the body as it is objectively observed (cf. Schrag 1979). For example, my hand, as a part of me, is not the same as the entity which my doctor sees when observing it for signs of injury; it is not the same as the object of my music teacher's attention when advising about my fingering; it is not the same as the object of my students' attention when I am writing on the chalkboard. My hand, as an integral part of the living body, is identified with myself. As Marcel (1952:315) emphasized, "I do not make use of my body. I am my body." We experience actions done to our bodies as done to our very selves. Our bodies are manifestations of ourselves in our everyday worlds. At the same time, embodiment is our way of knowing those worlds and interacting with them. Through our bodies, we see, feel, hear, perceive, touch, smell, and we hold our everyday worlds. While each individual is uniquely embodied, the experience is also profoundly social. For example, our experience with our bodies is mediated by learned roles and other expectations; it is shaped by the immediate social context, as well as by historical antecedents of which the individual may not even be aware; and it is apprehended and communicated indirectly through language and other cultural symbols. If we abandon our dualistic notions of how humans relate to their worlds, we should consider the possibility that the body has a direct role in knowing (see Csordas forthcoming). Exploring the somatic component of ways of knowing may give us a better approach for understanding alternate states of reality, religious healing, the effectiveness of ritual, and such spiritual modes of knowledge as "discernment," "prophecy," "anointing," and so on. For example, a number of years ago, a colleague of mine, Peter Freund, was studying some of the somatic features of meditation in the Divine Light Mission. He was frustrated that, as a sociologist, he could not deal with "premies' " reports of actually tasting spiritual "nectar" and seeing lights during meditation, without implicitly disconfirming the somatic reality of those experiences. My examples of how our understanding of the body and self-experience might inform our analysis of religion are drawn from two very disparate fields: (a) the study of illness, pain and suffering, and (b) analyses of gendered bodily experience. Illness, Pain and Suffering My focus on the body as a matter of sociological interest grew out of my study of ritual forms of healing, such as Christian or psychic or Eastern forms of religious healing. These healing groups utilized body rituals as ways of transforming their selves. 3 Consistent with its underlying Cartesian dualism, Western medicine treats illness as a pathological condition of the body; illness for which no physiological pathology can be identified is often assumed to be psychosomatic, practically translated as "all in the head," and therefore is treated as fundamentally unreal. Because these paradigmatic "blindness" are so thoroughly learned in medical training, many doctors are unable to deal with their patients' experiences of illness, pain, and suffering and so they subsequently disconfirm those experiences. Suspending the dualistic approach of biomedicine, we find that illness is a profoundly human experience. It calls into question normal expectations about our bodies and capacities. When illness is not part of our life, we take the relationship between our bodies and ourselves for granted. Indeed, we are not likely to think about our bodies or to be particularly conscious of many bodily sensations. In health, we expect our bodies to be able to function, to sustain a presentation of ourselves as normal, reliable participants in social interaction (Dingwall 1976:98). What we call "illness" is a disturbance in body processes or experience that has become problematic for the individual. The experience of illness, even if only temporary, reminds us of our limitations, our dependencies (present and potential), and our ultimate mortality. Our bodies inform us that they cannot always be counted on to be "able" for what we want them to do. Since our important social relationships, our very sense of who we are, are intimately connected with our bodies and their routine functioning, being ill is disruptive and disordering. We identify ourselves with our bodies, as exemplified by one injured person's introspective account: What seemed, at first, to be no more than a local peripheral breakage and breakdown now showed itself in a different, and quite terrible, light - as a breakdown of memory, of thinking, of will - not just a lesion in my muscle, but a lesion in me" (Sacks 1984:67; emphasis in original). 3. Similar transformation of the body-self can be seen in the ritual process of the pilgrimage, which is a bodily transition in space and time (see Frankenberg 1986). Most everyday illnesses are not profoundly disruptive, although they, too, remind the sufferer of personal limits and dependencies. Other illnesses, however, are deeply disruptive,

threatening important relationships, the individual's exercise of personal agency, and the ill person's very sense of self. Several features of such disruptive illness highlight the intimate connection between body experience and sense of self (see Murphy 1987). Loss is one factor that can make an illness experience profoundly disruptive. People actively grieve, because the loss of body parts (e.g., amputation of an arm) or body functions (e.g., partial blindness) represent a loss of integrity, a disruption of the wholeness of the person (Cassell 1982). People suffer, not only from loss of present capacities and roles, but also from being robbed of their future: the teenager who is paraplegic after a car accident, the young and childless woman who has a hysterectomy, the elderly musician whose arthritis makes playing a beloved instrument impossible. Chronic illness and pain, in particular, force the sufferer to come to new terms with time. Sometimes life-threatening acute illness or a serious accident has this kind of impact, but acute illness is by definition temporary. Chronic illness often leads to a radical reassessment, in light of changed and yet-changing capacities, of one's self in relationship to past and future. The experience of chronic illness involves both a sense of loss and a heightened self-consciousness (Charmaz 1983, 1987). Chronic pain poses basic problems for the sufferer's sense of self. Unlike acute pain, chronic pain is a "somatic reminder that things are not right and may never be right. This reminder, phenomenally situated in one's own body, is inescapable" (Hilbert 1984:370). The body as subjectively experienced is transformed into an object with pain, resulting in a form of alienation from one's own body. In one "moment one is one's body; [in] the next one has a body" (Bergsma 1982:111). Illness is also especially damaging to the self when it is experienced as overwhelming, unpredictable and uncontrollable. Such illness paralyzes the person's ability to manage life, to plan, to act - in short, to exercise agency. Enormous attention must be given, not merely to actual crisis periods in the illness, but also to such minute, mundane worries as: "Can I negotiate the path from my car to the store?" (cf. Kleinman 1988:44). Unpredictability and uncontrollability result in a disjunction between the person and the body; the taken-for-granted functioning is gone and the person experiences, in effect, "I cannot count on my body; 'it' fails me." The body becomes "other," at best an unpredictable ally. Such experiences of suffering, pain, and illness are not merely "in the body" or "in the mind or spirit"; rather, they are experienced by the whole person as assaults on the self. For this reason, many attempts to identify and measure a person's "well-being" are obfuscated by the extent to which an individual's phenomenal "being well" involves a complex interface of such emotional and social influences in that persons' very bodily experiences. If we approach pain and suffering from the perspective of Cartesian dualism, we end up with an image of religious responses as epiphenomenal add-ons, something the mind was doing after the body was suffering. This perspective has led to a sociology of religion which has focused exclusively on ideas about the body and its suffering: e.g., theodicies (a highly useful concept, but limited by its idealistic assumptions). If, by contrast, we have an image of a mindful body, then spiritual responses may be simultaneously part of the mindful-body responses to pain and illness. Thus, we can better understand the impact of religion on the body itself, not just on ideas about the body.

**Gendered Bodies**

If our bodies are important in our self-experience, how does it affect my being that I am embodied in the world as a female rather than as a male? Biologically deterministic answers to this question result in incredible, simplistic pictures of "engendered" bodies. Probably only minimal aspects of self experience are derived solely from biological factors, exclusive of cultural and historical influence. There are very few (if any) self-experiential features, characteristic of all women in all cultures\_ and times, which they share by virtue only of their being embodied as females, and which no men share due to their embodiment as males (Gerber 1979). Culture shapes even experiences of biological events such as childbirth and menopause; the fact of female embodiment is not sufficient to predict the individual's experience of self even during such intensely biophysical processes. On the other hand, gender is not irrelevant to one's self-experience. All features of our embodiment affect our interaction with our social and physical environments. For example, if my body is extremely thin, or if I am exceptionally beautiful, if I am missing a leg, or if I have brown skin, if I cannot see, or if I am tall - all such features of my embodiment affect how I interact with my world and, indirectly, my self-experience. However, as the above examples of experiences of pain and illness show, the influence of this embodiment on people's self-experience is not simply a matter of individual variation. If my culture teaches its members to respond to blue-eyed persons as highly valued, and I happen to be embodied as blue-eyed, then I have a disproportionate likelihood of experiencing my blue-eyed self as valuable, as honored. Likewise, if my culture holds that femaleness is dangerous, polluting, ensnaring, and I happen to be embodied as female, then my self-experience is likely to be influenced by this cultural evaluation. Note that it is not just that I have an idea of negative values about women; rather, to the extent that I have internalized these interpretations, I experience them as part of my experience of my own body, my own self. As influential as these socially constructed gender valuations may be, however, they are not fixed or deterministic. Rather, social constructions of gender are fluid, and the power to control the reconstruction of "engendered" embodiment (for instance, in the context of changing contemporary societies) is specifically political power (as described further below; cf., Bourdieu 1977:165-168). One good place to begin an appreciation of that social reconstruction is precisely the realm of emerging religious ritual, myth, and narrative (Cooley 1989). Some interesting research in women's studies and religion is investigating these attempts to reconstruct integrations of body-mind and culture-nature. Thus, it is tackling central issues, not just quaint little peripheral topics for separate sessions at professional meetings. Our discipline has been aware, at least since Durkheim, that human bodies are important symbols of cultural and social structural meanings. Body symbolism is important in our cosmologies. Similarly, imagery drawn from the body - its parts, its postures, its functions - is linked with conceptions of the self and its relationship to a larger material and social environment. Numerous anthropological studies have revealed that often the bodily localization of a particular illness represents culturally meaningful idioms of distress. For example, when an Iranian woman complains of a "pressed heart," her expression of distress is linked with a larger set of social concerns: infertility, attractiveness, sexual intercourse, pollution, old age (Good 1977). There exists also a substantial literature on body imagery, as linked with body boundary conceptions, distortions in body perceptions, perceived locus of control, and so on. Little of this literature has, however, been brought to bear upon the study of religion, perhaps because so much of the focus was upon psychopathological situations assumed to be irrelevant to normal religiosity. Some 15 years ago, a minor study attempted to identify the salience of traditional Christian body symbolism for a sample of hospitalized persons diagnosed as schizophrenic and for a presumably normal sample. The analysis foundered, due

primarily to the author's incorrect assumption that the social meanings of Christian body symbolism could be derived deductively from theology. Nevertheless, some of his conclusion is probably accurate: that none of the traditional Christian body symbols, as defined in their theological purity, holds strong salience for contemporary believers, whether schizophrenic or not (Ruth 1974). While this finding probably surprises no one, we should not be too quick to assume that therefore no body symbolism or personal body imagery has powerful significance for modern Westerners. Indeed, the prominence of body imagery in media advertising, in the culture of fitness, in the worlds of popular music, literature, sport and art, all suggest that body symbolism and personal body imagery are of central importance in understanding modern social structure, culture, and personality. Religious and quasi-religious themes are clearly important in this symbolism. Symbolic and structuralist anthropologists have considered the human body, its parts (e.g., specific organs), and products (e.g., tears, milk, blood) to be something of a cognitive pattern or map, representing important social relations. Mary Douglas (1966, 1970) has reminded us that the body is a "natural symbol" which can be used metaphorically at several levels of meaning simultaneously. She observed how concerns about the body frequently are metaphors for social concerns, such as order and boundary maintenance. The cosmology of the Qollahuayas of the South American Andes exemplifies this metaphorical linkage of the social body with the individual body. This people identifies the human anatomy with their mountain environment; both mountain and body have head, chest, breast and nipple, heart, stomach, feet, etc. Illness is attributed to disruptions between people and the land; social conflicts between, for example, the residents of the head and the residents of the feet must be resolved by healing, a ceremony by which concerned members ritually feed and restore wholeness to the mountain and thus to the group (Bastien 1985). In a similar vein, Victor Turner (1968) observed that the healing rituals of the Ndembu tribe of Africa acted upon the body of the afflicted metaphorically to heal social conflicts in the larger social group. My own research on spiritual healing among middle-class American suburbanites found remarkably similar metaphorical linkages between individual bodies and social bodies. Healing results were often accomplished through the actual practice of a metaphorical connection or transition. For example, in a Jain yoga and meditation group, the metaphor of a well person as a firmly grounded, erect, and balanced tree was literally effected through the practice of the "tree pose" (McGuire 1988). A larger part of the effectiveness of the social meanings of the body is that they do not need to operate at the level of consciousness. In socialization, the individual acquires, to some degree, what Bourdieu (1977:124) has called "a socially informed body," which is structured by its learned tastes and distastes. Its socially shaped senses include not only such senses as smell or touch, but also the sense of beauty, business sense, sense of propriety, moral sense, sense of humor, sense of the sacred, sense of responsibility, and so on. For example, in America, the socially informed body senses both the distinctive odor of the underarm and the culturally appropriate revulsion to it. Similarly, the socially informed body experiences not only the bodily sensation of a burn, but also the culturally shaped sense that this is pain. As socially constructed reality, however, these senses, along with their practical use in everyday human life, are open to change. Since traditional Western body schemata are no longer taken for granted as givens, a struggle over the power to define these symbols is evident. Bourdieu (1977:165) has reminded us, "The specifically symbolic power to impose [such] principles of the construction of reality ... is a major dimension of political power." Religion has historically had a prominent role in such symbolic power. Contemporary official religion enjoys far less power in shaping today's "socially informed body," but religions and quasi-religions are still very much involved in the struggle for symbolic power, and specifically over the meanings of the body and its senses. Good examples are the meanings proffered (both as ideas and as "senses") by such diverse movements as New Age religions, the anti-abortion movement, movements for alternative women's spirituality, Creationism, and the Green movement. Consistent with our aim of re-materializing the body, however, we must remember that body ritual is not merely the manipulation of abstract symbols derived from the body. Rather, it is always produced in the context of specific ecological, economic, and social conditions (Bourdieu 1977:113ff.) - thus its political significance and its potential role in social change, as well as in social stability. So the social meanings of the body are necessarily linked with the political body.

### THE BODY AND POWER RELATIONS:

The expression of specific power relationships in body terms, as illustrated by the writings of ancient and medieval philosophers, is a very old practice. An impressive example of the political uses of body imagery is the medieval fiction of the king's two bodies (one being natural and subject to passions and death, the other being the body politic). Accordingly, the king was incorporated as head with his subjects in the body politic, which was not subject to death or passions (see O'Neill 1985:67-90). In these political uses of the body, religion often figured importantly as a legitimating force for the exercise of power and privilege. The social sciences of religion have, from the classical formulations of Freud, Marx, and Weber to the present, focused primarily upon religion's role in the social control of the body. Much of this theorizing, however, has been flawed by assumptions of a mind/body dualism (and in many cases there has been disproportionate emphasis upon cognitive processes). O'Neill (1985:48) has suggested that this bias may be due to our preference for imagining ourselves as being controlled through ideas and consensual relationships, since the prospect of being controlled through the body and coercive relationships seems slavish. By uncritically accepting a body-mind dualism and tending toward cognitive biases in understanding social control, however, the social sciences may be unable to grasp the enormous potency of modern social control mechanisms. O'Neill (1985:152) has argued that we must "think of all technology as biotechnology - to see ... that every power over nature is a power over ourselves. Such power is not only present in our machines but proliferates in the discursive production of the human sciences designed to control life, thought, health, sanity, and knowledge " (emphasis in the original). The relative lack of importance of explicitly religious legitimations for contemporary social control (at least, in the public sphere) may distract us from awareness of the highly ideological, but masked as rational, elements of potent forms of social control. Modern forms of social control, masked as therapy, masked as medical intervention, masked as workplace incentives, masked as entertainment, are particularly potent, because they operate indirectly upon the person's entire mindful body. Contemporary masks for ideological exercises of power over people make these forms of social control especially insidious. The following suggests a few concrete examples of how the human body is linked, directly and

indirectly, with power relations in modern Western societies. The Body at Work At an elementary level, work is something embodied individuals do to sustain themselves. We work to obtain and prepare food; we work to clothe and shelter ourselves and our families; we work to arrange our lives within our physical and social environment. Some crippling of mind and body occurs as a byproduct of all forms of work. For example, when I am bending over a hoe to till a field, my mind and body become tired, perhaps misshapen or broken, regardless of whether it is my field or that of an agribusiness, regardless of whether my labor will feed me and my family adequately or poorly. Marx observed, however, that certain work relationships are particularly crippling, such as when the division of labor separates mental from physical labor, and when the conditions of work create an alienation from self and from inner and outer environment. Marx (1977:548) noted, "Factory work exhausts the nervous system to the uppermost, at the same time it stifles and restricts the free expression of mind and body." Work under early capitalist modes of production required different bodies from those working under other forms of production. One important function of social control then became the development and maintenance of the appropriate bodies for wage labor. Not only within the factory itself, but also in the educational system and (to some extent) within the family, social control mechanisms contributed toward producing bodies ready for work under capitalism: They needed to be docile, capable of being constrained to do . For a critical review of this literature and a proposed corrective point of departure for further theorizing about the mindful body, see Freund, 1988. repetitive tasks in a limited range of motion, and controlled enough to take breaks for food, elimination or rest only at times allowed by management. Such bodies must fit themselves to the time, space, and motion limitations of production. In modern forms of production, social control and the production of appropriate bodies are just as important, but the nature of the desirable worker has been redefined, and increasingly the modes of social control operate internally. A good example is the socialization of flight attendants, as documented by Hochschild (1983). An integral part of the flight attendants' work is the production of emotional responses to customers that are consistent with the company's image of service and friendliness. In training, flight attendants are schooled, not merely to act friendly and helpful, but indeed to try to make themselves feel those attitudes and emotions. Modern methods of workplace management often effectively disguise power issues: Well-trained workers come to view social control as merely "self-control." Nevertheless, workers' mindful bodies can be hurt, diseased, or broken, even by these seemingly more benign forms of social control. Indeed, there is impressive evidence that many of today's debilitating chronic diseases are byproducts of harmful emotional and bodily "self-control" (Freund 1982, 1988). The Disciplined Body Not only in the arena of work, but also in most major institutional spheres, modern bodies are disciplined bodies. Foucault has argued that contemporary societies have developed numerous "technologies of power" to regulate the body, bodily expression, attitudes, emotions, and emotional expression simultaneously. Accordingly, these forms of social control, because they work subtly upon the body and mind at once, are more potent, not merely assuring superficial compliance but indeed capable of penetrating the individual's "soul." In contrast to simple, repressive social control, these mechanisms are constitutive, generating forces (Foucault 1980, 1977). Bryan Turner's work (1984) has failed to appreciate Foucault's emphasis upon how society acts upon the body itself; however, his analysis does build fruitfully upon Weber's theories of rationalization. Body discipline is, in many respects, a prime example of modern rationalizing tendencies: In the disenchanted world, all aspects of life become subordinated to bureaucratically organized patterns of behavior, i.e., regimens. Turner has examined body regimens like diet, table manners, exercise, and hygiene as rationalization of human bodies consistent with the exercise of power in modern social structures (Turner 1984). He has also noted that modern body regimen aims to reproduce not only disciplined workers, but also disciplined consumers, who have learned to need to consume systematically a vast array of special foods, cosmetics, medicines, clothes, leisure activities, and so on. The comprehensive discipline of mind and body evident in these regimens becomes a peculiarly modern form of asceticism. Anyone who doubts this role of regimen has but to spend a week trying to practice the fitness prescription of "gung-ho" health spa. Each meal, each muscle group, each pattern of breathing, each posture, becomes subject to its specified discipline. Furthermore, there are ideological supports for these regimens, which transform "bad" body practices into modern forms of sin, for which the individual is held morally responsible (Crawford 1984; Glassner 1989). These uses of body discipline, and their linkage with modern forms of legitimation of power and modes of social control, suggest that they are certainly appropriate focuses for the social sciences of religion. Power and Female Bodies As noted above, gender is one important element shaping how the individual perceives self and the world. The "engendered" body is also both the instrument of power and the site of struggles over power. The most obvious power struggle is in the arena of reproductive control, in which religious legitimations and organizations are prominent. Numerous micro-technologies of power, subtle little practices, also are used to subordinate female bodies; for example, the power to touch or to interrupt another are assertions of power used far more frequently by men towards women than by women or by men towards other men (see Henley 1977). Following Foucault, Bordo (1989) has analyzed how the cultural definition of femininity is inscribed upon women's bodies. As with the workers' bodies, power is exercised over female bodies, not merely by external social controls, but also from within. They become "docile bodies," "useful bodies," whose energies and expressions are regulated and "improved" by the organization of women's regimens of diet, make-up, clothing, schedule, and space. In this context, Bordo has suggested that we might best understand several women's disorders as political gestures of defiance against the social controls of femininity. Contemporary pathologies, such as bulimia, anorexia, and agoraphobia, could constitute protests. Although they are ultimately self-defeating and counterproductive. They may be viewed as assertions of power and sexuality in the face of modern "technologies of power" which inform women that, to be appropriately feminine, they must control what they eat and limit what space they may occupy. Bordo has suggested that modern feminists need to examine critically their own assumptions that women should manage their bodies to fit a newly defined "politically correct" body. Are women necessarily more free when, instead of practicing walking in high heels and girdles, they now exercise extraordinary bodily management in weight-lifting, martial arts, and marathon running? The Political Abuse of Bodies: Torture and War Another political use of bodies is to torture and kill them. These are hardly new practices, but contemporary societies seem to spend considerable effort to expand and refine their methods for these tasks. Elaine Scarry's (1985) difficult book, *The Body in Pain*, has argued that political torture exists to convert the real pain of the victim into the



fiction of power of the torturer. The structure of torture shows that it systematically robs the sufferer of agency and even of a voice to express the self in pain; simultaneously, the torturer appropriates that agency to its collective self (e.g., a regime). Scarry states: Similarly, Lock (1989) has argued that many expressions of illness, such as the culturally wide-spread "attack of nerves," are political statements, i.e., counter-assertions against the power structures that simultaneously rob the subordinate of an effective voice. In the very process [torture] uses to produce pain within the body of the prisoner, it bestows visibility on the structure and enormity of what is usually private and incommunicable, contained within the boundaries of the sufferer's body. It then goes on to deny, to falsify, the reality of the very thing it has itself objectified by a perceptual shift which converts the vision of suffering into the wholly illusory but, to the torturers and the regime they represent, wholly convincing spectacle of power (Scarry 1985:27). While not legitimated by the putative needs of a regime, similar ends are accomplished by rape and spouse abuse: The violence transforms the suffering of the victim into the fiction of power of the rapist or abusive partner. While not explicitly condoning these acts of violence, many religious groups in this society tell the victims, in effect, that they are responsible for their own suffering (for example, that the rape or abuse would not have occurred if the woman had been a "good girl"). Similarly, Scarry has argued that war is an exercise of power over bodies, in part because it takes place between political bodies and between bodies of armies, and in part also because it accomplishes its ends specifically by the destruction of human bodies. When it suits political ends, the casualties of war are glossed over; instruments of destruction are renamed with words like "cherry picker" or "little boy," and the enemy is described as "neutralized," "cleaned out," "liquidated." The physical issue of dead and wounded bodies is translated into verbal issues, such as freedom or fatherland or jihad or racial purity or national security, and so on. Scarry concludes: The dispute that leads to the war involves a process by which each side calls into question the legitimacy and thereby erodes the reality of the other country's issues, beliefs, ideas, self-conception. Dispute leads relentlessly to war not only because war is an extension and intensification of dispute but because it is a correction and reversal of it. That is, the injuring not only provides a means of choosing between disputants but also provides, by its massive opening of human bodies, a way of reconnecting the derealized and disembodied beliefs with the force and power of the material world (Scarry 1985: 128). This discussion is a useful cautionary reminder of the dehumanizing consequences of certain political uses of human bodies. In the past and present, religious institutions have often legitimated (and frequently directly participated in) torture and war. In the face of the horrors of modern warfare and gross abuses of power, religion is also one important source of a prophetic voice for human rights and peace.



## II

### Post structuralism view:

Within post-structuralism, the body is understood as a cultural, not (just) a 'natural' object; as something socially inscribed and produced 'within a network of socio-historical relations instead of being tied to a fixed essence'. And it is through this complex process of inscription and performance that the philosophical underpinnings of phallogocentric culture exist as a material power – a physical and productive power – not just an ideological one. Which is to say that we don't just absorb the ideologies of patriarchy through our minds, but these are inscribed into our very being in the world through our relationships with our bodies. The body, in this sense, in its 'openness to cultural completion' is the 'interface' or point of contact between the political and the personal, with knowledge / discursive practices (or thought) as the dynamic link between power and bodies: that which 'invests', 'contours' and 'animates' them. If power (or culture) is in Michel Foucault's terms, a complex strategic situation, a field of force relations, then the body is both an effect of this, and its vehicle. The body is both product and agent, with the interactions and relationships between the embodied subject and its culture as the means by which and through which both are produced simultaneously. For power is not simply enacted upon individual subjects, but is involved in forming or constituting them in the first place; our subjectivity, for instance, formed 'by virtue of having gone through such a process [as] "assuming" a sex.' Thus power exists in the things that produce us (and produce things for us), not just in the things which constrain or limit us; with the body not just an object of power, but a powerful object; each of us taking an active role in the inscription of both ourselves and others throughout our lives. For our identity or 'self' is not something we are born with, but something born out of a complex of recognitions, comparisons, exclusions, demarcations, divisions, alignments and realignments. We identify ourselves within a shifting field of images defined (made sense of) by language, and imbued with power relations. Our bodies are also powerful (and objects of power) in the way that knowledge is extracted from them – via science and medicine, for instance, as well as through their centrality to the juridical process. This knowledge then works back onto bodies to invest them in a complex and dynamic process of continual exchange. In Michel Foucault's rendering, this power that operates on and through bodies exists as 'a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity.'. Power is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away; power is exercised at innumerable points. ...Relations of Power are not exterior to other types of relationship (economic processes, knowledge relationships, sexual relations), but are immanent in them... It is the moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power, but the latter are always local and unstable. This is the omnipresence of power: not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere: not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. Judith Butler also looks at the body as an historically and culturally specific performance of materiality – as a discursive field in which discourse produces and marks (differentiates) what it names – rather than as a universal 'natural' or pre-given entity. In particular she looks at the way gender is regulated and produced through a complex process of reiterative performativity, a process that continually resignifies gendered and 'heterosexual' bodies as normative. In this view, you don't walk like a man because you are a man, but to become one, constantly reinforcing (or reinscribing) your gender to yourself and others. Thus, Butler says, 'identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results'. The reiterative power of discourse – the

relationship between bodies and knowledge – is further explored and played with in the work of Luce Irigaray. If phallogocentric logic ‘reconstructs anatomy in its own image’, Irigaray’s tactic is to deconstruct this logic by choosing a different organ to represent female sexuality, one that operates quite outside of the phallogocentric sexual economy which offers women the either/or of clitoris or vagina and (thus) the either/or of being represented as the opposite (complement) to the male, or the same (but inferior). While Iris Marion Young talks about breasts as ‘a scandal’ for phallic sexuality, being ‘a multiple and fluid zone’ of erotic pleasure<sup>16</sup>, Irigaray takes not the doubled breasts but another double, the ‘two lips’ as her focus, developing this into an evocative metaphor of transgressive expressiveness, in both speaking (discourse) and sexuality. The two vaginal lips (literally) embrace both the vagina and the clitoris, as well as each other. Always in touch, as a metaphor they provide a ‘tissue of implications’ for a new economy of sexuality (or knowledge) based on touch rather than penetration. With touch there is no source or recipient, no one and then the other, no ‘master’ organ, no master(y) act. The sources of pleasure are diffuse rather than specific; multiple instead of unitary; not the property of one person or another but the shared product of an exchange. In the words of Irigaray: ‘You don’t ‘give’ me anything when you touch yourself, when you touch me: you touch yourself through me.’ Touch defines an economy of pleasures in which giving and receiving are one. To define sexual intercourse in terms of its tactility – and thus in terms of its carnal rather than its purely genital aspect – it becomes possible to begin to collapse the system of binary oppositions that define the heterosexual couples so that the self-other relationship becomes re-inscribed as one of contiguity rather than penetration, recognition rather than reconciliation, adjunction rather than possession, difference instead of opposition. Irigaray’s work is a strategy, rather than a theory of women’s ‘true’ sexuality. It is not a description aimed at supplanting the prevailing view, or supplementing it, but a textual performance concerned to deconstruct it – to question its given-ness or ‘naturalness’: a glimpse of what might happen if you break open the closure of the representative process, if you can unfix the locks. As a metaphor, touch takes us towards being able to collapse the dualities that underpin not just sexual expression and bodies, but all forms of relationship and knowledge. The body in touch with itself doesn’t require a reflection from another, but is part of an interconnected and interdependent experience. As a metaphor, touch might provide a more productive image, perhaps, with which to approach questions regarding the materiality of the body, and the ways in which matter and consciousness are related. In her thoughtful and evocative book, *Telling Flesh: the Substance of the Corporeal*, Vicki Kirby notes the tendency of some post-structuralist theorists to read the body as if it were only a surface. This ‘somatophobia’ or reluctance to go ‘inside’ the body, to think through it, she suggests, would seem to be yet another ‘legacy of phallogocentrism’s mind/body split’. It is as if: the body is a dangerous supplement that we possess, or are possessed by. It is as if we are held hostage within the body, embodied, such that the site of self, the stuff of thinking and consciousness, is an isolate made of quite different matter.<sup>23</sup> Kirby also questions the way that ‘human identity underpins what we mean when we say “the subject”’ – that is, the assumption that only humans have consciousness, and are unquestionably and in all ways distinct from ‘nature’ (153 ff). For many feminists and post-structuralists working in the humanities, science and biology have long been considered ‘off limits’ as a topic for anything other than cultural critique. There are two main aspects to this argument. On theoretical grounds: the materiality of the body is considered ultimately untheorisable (unknowable), because there is no culturally, geographically or temporally objective position from which to make valid or universal observations. (For instance, it is always gendered subjects studying gendered subjects.) On political grounds: as an historically essentialist activity science has often been used to explain culturally differential traits according to notions of a natural body or natural gender distinction, and thus could in the future be used (as it has been in the past) to justify differential treatments and expectations. As such it can be a sensitive issue, and Kirby’s description of the difficulties she faced when wanting to discuss questions usually associated with an endorsement of the science of bodies with her colleagues, struck a chord with me with regards to my own research for this project (1ff). For instance, I often felt caught between what I was reading in queer theory (and what was considered legitimate to discuss openly in academic circles) and what I was reading in writings by gender activists – who, for instance, often welcomed contemporary scientific explanations, or even spiritual explanations, for their mind-body experiences and felt that these were important. But as Kirby points out, in a sense the debates about essentialism versus anti-essentialism could be seen as coming from the same ‘place’. ‘Where,’ Kirby asks, ‘is the evidence for either essentialism’s error or anti-essentialism’s truth to be situated, and in what does it consist?’ (72) Indeed, she suggests that post-structuralist feminism and queer theory’s rejection (and repression) of discussion of biology runs the risk of merely inverting the nature/culture opposition – and thus of playing into and repeating the split – rather than deconstructing it. Kirby’s book – along with the work of a number of other academic theorists in the past decade – suggests that effectively deconstructing the nature/culture and mind/body splits would necessarily involve conceiving of the body as more than just a passive material surface for the inscription of culture, but as having its own cognitive input. That is, to look at ‘the whole question of how matter and intelligence is paired’ – might entail looking at the dynamic two-way conversation or relationship between nature and culture, mind and body, humans and the planet. This rethinking of the notion of the body-mind or the matter of matter – including the limits and definition of ‘mind’ or consciousness is a question and exploration that is increasingly significant within science and especially medicine. As such was deeply relevant to my research on a range of issues raised by my topic such as difference and transgender, cancer therapies, and the implants controversy. It is also a feature of what could be termed the ‘new ecological spiritualism’ as influenced by a range of indigenous, pre-modern and East Asian spiritual traditions. In the next chapter I would like to look at the three great paradigm shifts of the twentieth century – quantum physics, ecological spirituality, and post-structuralism – at what they might have in common, and the implications of this shift in thinking for understanding the nature and culture of embodiment.

## III

**Conclusions:**

The problem it poses is what is the role of the body in society? How do contemporaries see the social bodies? What meaning is it given in our culture? In that way we trace the social shift biological body to fragmented social bodies including medical zed body, exercise body, sociological body, working body, female body and male body, each one dealing with a different approach. In each case, attitudes and prejudices surrounding the different situations are gently probed from a sociological point of view, modestly but ultimately in a very challenging way.

We are reminded, for example, in Bill Hughes' chapter on 'Medicalized bodies' that biomedicine has long been regarded by sociologists as an institution of social control. For Foucault at least, despite its claim to scientific certainty, modern medicine has been involved in the disciplining and surveillance of populations. But in the contemporary, secular, de-regulated world, a good deal of the policing of human behaviour—which is traditionally in the powers of religion and law—is carried out in the name of health.

Then, Elizabeth Jagger, in the essay entitled, 'Consumer bodies' takes the reader deftly through the sociological deconstruction of consumerism, leading us to the conclusion that ultimately we are what we buy or, "we become what we consume". That each act of consumption carefully shores up the image of ourselves, that "identity is chosen and constructed", and social differences are subtly or not so subtly maintained. That worth is inextricably bound up in taste, and taste is a system of social classification. Jagger pursues her point with a nice piece on female bodybuilding and the way it is used by some participants to assert female subjectivity.

In contrast to these body-empowering images, Ken Paterson and Bill Hughes dwell on the oddity that as the working body becomes less physically relevant, the disabled body becomes almost more marginalized in a paternalistic, non-disabled culture. This is challenging stuff. It is refreshing to see that Marxist analyses of social and economic problems are alive and flourishing. And interspersed with a fairly dense sociological prose are lighter, media-influenced, intriguing conclusions. ". . . The question that will face human kind in the future is that of 'how to make thought without a body possible?' —*a question based on the proposition that the body will become increasingly viewed as a liability, and as such, will be superseded by the computer as the depository of thought and creativity. Indeed, we can already observe how the development of new technologies of communication and entertainment, particularly those associated with computer-generated realities and the emergence of cyberspace as a domain of human interaction; have cast doubt as to the necessity of the material body to our everyday lives.* . . ."

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