

Handbook of Social Theory

The Embodied Foundations of Social Theory

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[p. 439 ↓]

Chapter 33: The Embodied Foundations of Social Theory

It is something of an irony that 'the body' has become an established, highly popular object of study in the social sciences since the 1980s. Issues central to the embodied constituents of agency and interaction, and the bodily referents of social structures, were evident in the origins of Western thought and maintained their place in the modern development of social theory (Snell, [1948] 1960). Earlier in the twentieth century, for example, the corporeal foundations of human agency had been examined by Marcel Mauss ([1934] 1973) in his analysis of 'techniques of the body', while Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1962) phenomenology suggested our bodies provide us with our 'opening onto', our 'vehicle of being in' and our 'means of communication with' the world. Erving Goffman's (1963) concern with 'shared vocabularies of body idiom' highlighted the constraints of the 'interaction order' for those seeking to maintain a social self as a morally worthy member of society, while Max Weber (1968: 975) had earlier analysed how bureaucratic structures depended on 'eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements' characteristic of embodied relationships. Emile Durkheim ([1912] 1995), in contrast, highlighted what he considered to be the *enduring* somatic foundations of social orders through his evaluation of the collective effervescence which turned a group of individuals into a community of people united by a morally binding collective consciousness (Shilling and Mellor, 2001).

Such developments occurred before the recent 'discovery' of the body, but have only been received gradually as important contributions towards a research programme on the embodied bases of social life. This can be attributed in part to the mind/body dualism characteristic of that tradition in Western thought which has marginalized body matters on the assumption that the mind makes us distinctively human. Snell ([1948] 1960) traces this dualism to ancient Greece. Soma, which subsequently came to mean 'body', referred to the corpse, while Socrates argued that lasting happiness came not

from the (perishable) body, but through the (immortal) soul; a division later mapped onto that between the 'irrational passions' and 'rational thought'. More generally, Greek ethics held that the soul's aspirations should be guided by a self-control termed 'healthy thinking' which opposed itself to the inevitable 'sufferings' of the bodily instincts and emotions, while the eye was frequently viewed as the mind's neutral gateway to knowledge.

This philosophical legacy helped devalue the body and promoted a related tendency to distrust the senses and interpret 'seeing' as a rational process: a 'highway' for the transport of knowledge between the 'outside' world and the 'inside' mind (Jenks, 1995). In devaluing the body, Kant ([1785] 1964) rejected the possibility that criteria for the good are grounded in the natural properties of humans, and sought a rational foundation for universal laws which elevated duty above desire. In distrusting the senses, Descartes' *Cogito ergo sum* ('I think, therefore I am') involved at one level a dismissal of all the body's senses. Descartes doubted the existence of his senses and argued in *The Meditations* that 'I am ... only a thing that thinks', and that 'my mind ... is entirely and truly [p. 440 ↓] distinct from my body and may exist without it' (Descartes, [1634] 1974: 105, 156). This philosophical approach was modified by an ultimate acceptance of the eye as a neutral conveyor of rational knowledge which promoted an 'I'll believe it when I see it' mentality (Classen, 1993; Slater, 1995; Synnott, 1991). Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding* emphasized the visual basis of mental activity, while Descartes ultimately accepted sight as the most important sense for science and technology.

There have, of course, been exceptions to this prioritization of minds over bodies. Hume ([1739–40] 1985) suggested that the 'light of reason' was only to be tolerated on a full stomach, and is part of a minority tradition in Western thought which posited 'passions' or 'sentiments' as bases of thought. Distinctive versions of the mind/sight/thought equation continue to be popular, however, while cognitive views of the human agent have exerted an enduring influence on modern thought. While this chapter is concerned with the embodied foundations of social theory, this emphasis can be highlighted via the specific development of sociological theory.

The Cognitive Agent in Sociological Theory

Sociological theory emerged from a dissatisfaction with the utilitarian emphasis on the rational pursuit of egoistic interest as the basis of society. The theoretical syntheses proposed by Talcott Parsons held that classical sociology converged on the understanding that shared *values* underpinned social action. Parsons' work has influenced theories of embodiment, as we examine later in this chapter, but despite discussing the expressive, ritual and affective aspects of socialization, he attributed most importance to *information* as a motive in individual choice. Drawing on cybernetics theory (the science of systems), Parsons suggested that cultural information in general, and 'ultimate values' in particular, became increasingly dominant in steering individual behaviour and social development. That element of the individual constituting an energy-rich behavioural organism, in contrast, is both low in information and important to the social system only as a constraining factor. The physiological body becomes a 'unit point of reference' whose study belongs to the natural sciences or psychology (Parsons, [1951] 1991: 541–2, 547–8).

With this formulation, Parsons was accused of proposing an 'oversocialized', disembodied conception of the individual whose internalization of norms was a predominantly cognitive process. His inability to deal fully with the creativity of embodied human interaction was evident in his eventual rejection of Simmel (a sociologist whose concern with the dynamism of human vitalism incorporated an interest in the senses) from his grand synthesis, and was reflected in Wrong's (1961) suggestion that sociology might avoid the limitations of Parsonian theory by starting from the suggestion that 'in the beginning there is the body'.

Parsons encouraged sociology to develop as 'the study of the rules and normative behaviour that proceed from people's beliefs' and not from their bodies (O'Neill, 1985: 18), while alternatives to his normatively driven actor did little to "reclaim" the body for the discipline. Wrong's suggestion to start with the body, for example, was actually a call to incorporate psychology into sociology. Homans' (1958, 1961) insistence that 'social structures' and 'norms' should be accounted for by the cumulative results of individual decision-makers paved the way for recent versions of rational choice sociology, but constitutes a partial return to utilitarianism in suggesting action is motivated by

a rationality underpinned by only a limited, under-explored set of 'bodily passions'. As Joas (1983, 1996) points out, theories of rational action tend to make several questionable assumptions about the body of the actor. They assume actors cognitively establish goals before acting (and thereby propose that the normal state of the body is lethargy). They view the body as a permanently available instrument of action (that is, autonomous *vis-à-vis* other people and the environment). Finally, they reduce the body to a mere medium of self-expression (underestimating the importance of human frailty and the unintended and unexpected events of life). These assumptions inadequately represent the varieties of human action and complexities of human life by implying that an actor who displays any loss of concentration on purposive action, any loss of bodily control, or any sign of dependency on others, departs from the norm of rational action. Human development is reduced to acquiring the capacities for rational action, while individuals who persist in acting non-rationally, whose actions cannot even be judged as exhibiting a 'masked' rationality, are evaluated as 'malfunctioning' actors (Coleman, 1990: 504).

This marginalization of the embodied nature of action was not overcome fully by interactionist sociology. Emphasizing *inter* subjectivity rather than normative or rational subjectivity, it nevertheless continued to emphasize action as driven by the cognitive mind rather than the sensuous body. A creative engagement with Mead's work has been central to recent writings on the corporeality of social action, as we [p. 441 ↓] examine later in this chapter, yet the essence of the modern self for Mead (1934: 173) was primarily 'cognitive', involving 'thought or reflection', rather than bodily affects. Aaron Cicourel (1974) has redefined ethnomethodology as 'cognitive sociology' (Wrong, 1994: 60–1), while Berger and Luckmann's (1966) sociology of knowledge reinforced this prioritization of the mind over the body by suggesting society could be understood in terms of cognitive processes. Goffman's work was more satisfactory, formulating a battery of concepts designed to examine the constraints placed on the 'presentation of self' within the parameters of bodily co-presence. Nevertheless, Goffman's analysis of the bodily foundations of human being, social selves and interaction has been criticized for proposing a theoretically 'shallow' view of the body. Hochschild (1983), for example, argues that for all Goffman's focus on embarrassment, we get little sense that his presentationally capable actors are deeply motivated by a range of emotions which may sometimes overwhelm cognitive responses to situations (CF. Shilling, 1998).

Contemporary theoretical projects frequently incorporate similarly cognitive conceptions of agency. Structuration theories and analytical dualism constitute two of the most influential attempts to overcome the reductionism of collectivist and individualist approaches to society by analysing the interplay between structures and agents. Analytical dualism is best known through the sociology of Archer (1995), while structuration theory has been formulated most coherently in the writings of Giddens (1984). Neither structuration theory nor analytical dualism, however, attribute to the body a productive role in mediating the formation of social structures (Shilling, 1997a). The body remains an 'organic constraint' (Giddens, 1984), providing us with 'non-social experiences of non-social reality' (Archer, 1995), constituting only a constraining condition for the constitution of society.

The Rise of the Body

Despite these cognitive conceptions of social action, the 1980s witnessed rising criticism of the mind/agency equation from within sociology, and a transdisciplinary explosion of work questioning the assumption that 'society operates upon us intellectually and consensually rather than directly upon our bodies' (O'Neill, 1985: 48). This avalanche of literature carved out a distinctive theoretical terrain. Writings on the social and medical consequences of interactions between culture and biology (e.g. Freund, 1982; Hirst and Woolley, 1982; Oudshoorn, 1994; Turner, 1991a), were accompanied by studies on the structural, communicative, political and interpretive dimensions of embodiment (e.g. Johnson, 1983; O'Neill, 1985), collections of essays (e.g. Davis, 1997; Featherstone et al., 1991; Nettleton and Watson, 1998; Scott and Morgan, 1993), books on the medical management of bodies (Martin, 1989, 1994); works that drew on and constructed histories of the body (Brown, 1988; Feher et al., 1989; Hillman and Mazzio, 1997; Laqueur, 1990; Sawday, 1995; Sennett, 1994; Synnott, 1993), reviews of the literature (e.g. Frank, 1990; Freund, 1988), distinctive theoretical approaches to the construction of embodied social theories (e.g. Burkitt, 1999; Butler, 1993; Falk, 1994; Grosz, 1994; Mellor and Shilling, 1997; Shilling, 1993; Turner, 1984), feminist theories of the body (e.g. Butler, 1990, 1993; Diprose, 1994; Grosz, 1994; Leder, 1990; Kirby, 1997; Shildrick, 1997), studies of health, illness, disability and the body (e.g. Frank, 1991, 1995; Freund and McGuire, 1991;

Peterson and Bunton, 1997; Seymour, 1998; Turner, 1987), analyses of the senses and the irreducibly embodied nature of emotions (e.g. Bendelow and Williams, 1998; Classen, 1993; Craib, 1998; Howes, 1991; Scarry, 1985); cultural geographies of embodiment (e.g. Ainley, 1998; Bale and Philo, 1998; Nast and Pile, 1998; Rodaway, 1994); assessments of ageing and of masculinity, femininity and the body (Connell, 1995; Davis, 1995; Featherstone and Wernick, 1995; Peterson, 1998); studies of biotechnologies and cyberbodies (e.g. Featherstone and Burrows, 1995; Kimbrell, 1993), and the establishment in 1995 of the journal *Body & Society*.

Four major factors assisted this development and stimulated distinctive lines of enquiry traversing important social issues and academic concerns. First, the prominence of the body in consumer culture provided an obvious focus of interest. Within advanced capitalist societies during the second half of the twentieth century there was a move away from the focus on hard work in the sphere of production coupled with frugality in the sphere of consumption. Instead, the proliferation of production oriented toward leisure helped promote the 'performing self which treats the body as a machine and symbol to be finely tuned and cared for; an approach reinforced by the body's status as a ubiquitous sign in advertising culture. Featherstone (1982) argues that the cumulative effect of these changes is that the body ceases to be a vessel of sin, as posited in Christianity, and presents itself as an object for display inside and outside the bedroom.

It is in this context that Tönnies' ([1887] 1957) *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft* distinction was drawn [p. 442 ↓] on by analysts concerned with the changing social importance and increased individualization of the body. Giddens (1991: 7, 98, 102) suggested the body was a 'given' in traditional societies, marked by communal signs of status, yet had been colonized by modernity and 'drawn into the reflexive organization of social life' to the extent that we are 'responsible for the design of our bodies'. This responsibility is facilitated by advances in modern science and technology, yet is qualified morally by the absence of answers to fundamental questions. Turner (1984: 108–9) makes a related point in contrasting the premodern 'housing' of the person in a persona, a public mask incorporated into the honour of a heraldic sign, with the modern concept of dignity based on the 'presentational body'. Similarly, Falk (1994) analyses modern and premodern bodies by drawing on Durkheim's understanding of mechanical and organic solidarity. Falk conceptualizes traditional society as an 'eating community'; a two-way order structured by the communal feast. Within modernity, however, the

boundaries of self became detached from the bonds of community and centred around the 'bodily surface and its sensory openings', while human association is facilitated by individualizing 'communicative (speech) acts' (Falk, 1994: 12–13, 36).

Second, since the 1960s 'second wave' feminism emphasized through a critical interrogation of the sex/gender divide that there was nothing natural about women's corporeality which justified their public subordination (Oakley, 1972). Various strands of feminist thought examined technology's potential to liberate women from the constraining effects of biology (Firestone, 1971; Haraway, 1985); traced the legal history of the female body as male property (Eisenstein, 1988; Williams, 1997); and highlighted the bodily bases of female oppression through the construction of 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Mackinnon, 1989), and the marginalization or 'erasure' of female sexuality in male culture (Irigaray, [1977] 1985; Kristeva, [1977] 1987).

The body was not, however, welcomed uncritically into feminist thought. This was partly because 'malestream' philosophers traditionally associated men with freedom and the mind, and women with 'unreason associated with the body' (Grosz, 1994: 4). Women were seen as '*more biological, more corporeal and more natural than men*', and therefore more suited to the world of private existence than men (1994: 4). This ambivalence to the body also derived from the influence of de Beauvoir's 1949 *The Second Sex*. Drawing on Sartre's existentialism, de Beauvoir suggested women's bodies made them amenable to being constructed as Other (sentenced to a life of immanence) for use by the male Self (de Beauvoir, [1949] 1993: 31, 214, 281). Despite such negative associations, however, feminists helped place on the agenda the project of 'reexploring, reexamining, notions of female corporeality' (Grosz, 1994: 14), and have interrogated the body in analysing sexuality, ethics and standpoint epistemologies.

Changes in governmentality provided a third impetus for the body's prominence. Instrumental here is Foucault's (1970, 1979a, 1979b) analysis of how modernity's creation of 'man' was accompanied by a shift in the *target* of governmental discourses (the fleshy body gave way to the mindful body as a focus of concern); in the *object* of discourse (preoccupation with matters of death was replaced by interest in structuring life); and in the *scope* of discourse (the control of anonymous individuals gave way to the management of differentiated populations). The eighteenth century witnessed a

large increase in discourses on sexuality, for example, which linked the sex of individual bodies to the management of national populations (Foucault, 1981).

While these modes of power were facilitated by developments in welfare provision (teaching hospitals, for example, were instrumental in developing medical norms), fiscal crises have highlighted the financial burdens associated with monitoring and managing, educating and caring for dependent groups. These are associated with declining infant mortality rates in the West, increasing life expectancies, medical advances and the rise of diseases such as AIDS requiring long-term care. Issues concerning the prioritization and distribution of particular treatments and medicines inevitably raise questions concerning whose bodies should/should not be treated. Viewed in a global context in which most of the world's population has inadequate supplies of food and clean water, this emphasizes the importance of the body to the structuring of social inequalities and 'risk societies' (Beck, 1992).

A fourth factor to raise the analytic profile of the body is a growing uncertainty about the 'reality' of the body. Advances in technology, transplant surgery, *in vitro* fertilization and genetic engineering have weakened the boundaries between bodies and machines. But while we may have the means to exert an unprecedented amount of control over bodies, including the ability to redesign them in particular ways, we are living in an age which has thrown into radical doubt our knowledge of what bodies are and how we should control them. Turner (1984: 7), for example, states that 'In writing this study of the body, I have become increasingly less sure of what the body is.' Such considerations have contributed towards an additional 'decentering' [p. 443 ↓] of the subject. The principle of individuality accepted by Enlightenment thought depended on identifying what was unique to a person across the contingencies of date and location, yet the malleability of the body threatens such constancies. This is reflected in postmodernist writings which have abandoned the modernist project of 'knowing' what the body is, and which threaten the body with the same fate as befell humanistic versions of the 'subject' or 'author'. The body becomes a 'blank screen' or 'sign-receiving system' ever open to being (reconstructed by social forces beyond its control (Kroker and Kroker, 1988), or alternatively, in the work of Deleuze and Guattari, an elusive 'body without organs'.

This 'uncertain body' has also been interpreted in aesthetic, sensual terms by those unhappy with postmodern attempts to dissolve the facticity of the embodied subject. Berger ([1967] 1990) and Giddens (1991: 45–7), for example, suggest that it is the contingencies and frailties associated with our embodied selves that can stimulate a loss of 'basic trust' or 'ontological security' leading to the experience of 'paranoid horrors' (Tudor, 1995). In this context, a 'will to purity' in the treatment, punishment and categorization of bodies has been associated with particular events that threaten the borders of the social body (Douglas, 1966; Theweleit, [1977] 1987). Placing this 'uncertain body' within such social and corporeal parameters relativizes the relativistic claims of postmodern writings on embodiment, suggesting, for example, that recent concern with the 'disappearing body' signifies not a permanent dissolution of the body's integrity but a resurgence of effervescent experiences of the sacred in a modern world in which the profane has become banal (Mellor and Shilling, 1997).

Resources for Social Theories of the Body

While contemporary writings suggest that social theory has traditionally treated the body as the province of another discipline, as an uninteresting prerequisite of human action, or simply has a target of social control, I have already noted the presence of body matters in the early development of Western thought. Indeed, a long tradition of writings has provided valuable resources for contemporary discussions of embodiment, and lends support to the argument that recent enthusiasm for this subject area is as much a recovery of important issues as it is the discovery of a new theoretical terrain. This becomes evident in a selective overview of writings drawn on by theorists of embodiment.

Feuerbach ([1841] 1957) turned to sensualism in criticizing the rationalist legacy of German philosophy developed by such writers as Hegel, and in contesting idealist conceptions of the agent with a more materialist emphasis (Turner, 1996). Marx engaged with this debate in constructing a *historical* materialism which proceeded on the basis that 'The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism (that of Feurbach included) is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the *object or of contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively' (Marx, 1970: 121). Humans had first to produce the means of satisfying

their basic needs, but *transformed* their corporeal capacities and desires, as well as their natural environment, through the social relations they entered into in satisfying these needs. The extent to which Marx's later writings were dependent on a prior view of human nature has been contested by Althusser and debated by other writers (Geras, 1983; McLellan, 1985). Nevertheless, Marx's ([1844] 1975) theory of alienation had as its referent a clear view of the bodily capacities of humans that were stunted by the instrumental nature of labour under capitalism and its associated division of labour.

Durkheim insisted that the subject matter of the discipline be kept separate from that of biology and psychology. Nevertheless, he associated social facts with moral rules which arise from and are consolidated through the 'special energy' of collective sentiments which transform the *homo duplex* nature of humans (Durkheim, [1914] 1973; 1982: 50–6). While accepting a nature/culture distinction which is anathema to most current theorists on the body, Durkheim was concerned with the ritual socialization of individuals and the interrelationship between the experience of collective effervescence, and the production and maintenance of social solidarity and the *conscience collective*.

Nietzsche's ([1871] 1993) contrast between Apollo and Dionysus has often been utilized in analysing Western culture, but has also been employed to analyse the 'internally divided' nature of human beings. The Apollo/Dionysus contrast may encapsulate struggles within humans, and between individuals and society, by illuminating the division between instrumental rationalism and sensual satisfaction. Weber continued to see the influence of Dionysus in the restricted spheres of eroticism and charisma within rationalized society, and his account of the sublimation of salvation anxiety within a work ethic can be read as a description of the non-rational, corporeal foundations of modern society which provides for a productive comparison with Durkheim. Additionally, the placing of Weber within the tradition of philosophical [p. 444 ↓] anthropology, rather than as a value-free sociologist of social action, has been used to emphasize his understanding of asceticism as both 'the basis of our modern civilization and as the necessary denial of our ontology' (Turner, 1991b: xxvi).

Adopting a distinctive approach toward the rational/sensual aspects of life, Marcuse (1955, [1964] 1972) warned that emotional responses had been harnessed to the ordering properties of markets in which the body is dominated by a 'performance principle' resulting in 'surplus repression'. The 'triumph of form over vitalism' that had

occurred in postliberal capitalism was associated with a one-dimensional society in which the possibility of class conflict, as Marx envisaged it, was no longer possible (Marcuse, [1964] 1972). Freud (psychologically) and Elias (sociologically) analysed humans' turbulent inner life as a necessary cost of civilizing processes which could sometimes break through the controlled 'presentation of self prized within modernity. While Freud tended to construct a universalistic view of human psychology, however, Elias linked the minutiae of individual consciousness and behaviour to large-scale changes in monopolies of violence and the division of labour.

Having already mentioned the emphasis placed on culture in Parsons' view of action, it appears odd to list his writings as a resource for theories of the body. Parsons recognized the importance of the biological organism as a constraining subsystem of action, however, and provided fascinating analyses of the major existential predicaments of the human condition such as sickness and death. Proposing a different approach to the body, recent critiques of Parsons have drawn on American pragmatism in order to focus on 'situated creativity'; on how 'new variations of action are generated by the tension of problems contained in situations' (Joas, 1996: 139). Here, bodily doing and problem-solving is an integral part of human action in a way that was missing from Parsons' sociology. Dewey's writings on ethics, education and play, for example, ascribe a more important role to experiential creativity than that contained within notions of normative action.

From a feminist perspective, the writings of de Beauvoir ([1949] 1993) did much to promote the 'Other' as a unit idea for feminist sociology. The embodied construction of the 'Other' is also relevant to historical writings on colonialism utilized by theorists of race. Central to imperialist thought was a process of associating 'racial Otherness' with bodily characteristics. European colonial powers did not initiate representations of physical Otherness, but embodiment and skin colour became central to these images, and proved suitable ways of indicating and legitimizing colonial rule. Bastide (1968), for example, shows how the symbolic import of 'black' was invested with a monstrosity in the Christian West even in medieval times. Jordan (1974) suggests this Otherness existed before contact with Africans (black was associated with biblical narratives of evil and beneficence, the devil and God), but was subsequently used to justify slavery. Associations between blackness and a dreaded Otherness continued in a non-biblical vein in the work of later political thinkers. As Gilroy (1993: 9–10) notes, the eighteenth-

century philosopher Edmund Burke's discussions of the sublime link blackness with the experience of horror and darkness. Blackness, then, existed as a visual, symbolic resource facilitating the 'racialization' of peoples as slaves and primitive 'Others', and contrasting with positive constructions of whiteness.

Finally, the work of Foucault has proved to be an almost infinitely flexible resource: being used by theorists interested in any amount of body-related matters, such as discourses of sexuality, technologies of power and techniques of the self. The influence of Foucault becomes evident when we examine the major thinkers to have shaped social constructionist approaches to the body.

Socially Constructed Bodies

The roots of recent theories of the body are diverse, but the most influential have drawn on those literatures that facilitate social constructionist analyses of the body. Minimally, all social theories of the body are constructionist in recognizing that society exerts *some* influence in shaping bodies. In this section, however, I reserve the term for theories that assert most strongly that human physicality can be derived from, or explained by, social phenomena; for theories which are powerfully deconstructive of conventional assumptions about the body's biological facticity.

The influence of social constructionism derived significantly from its apparent ability to combat naturalistic views of the body. These remain significant in sociobiology (if not in natural sciences with a more dynamic view of their subject matter), inform much popular thought, and view the body as a pre-social, biological entity which determines self-identity and social institutions. Culture does not create differences, it merely 'replicates' them within the social sphere or, at most, 'amplifies' them. Social constructionism, in contrast, has enabled critics to deconstruct such accounts by examining the historical, categorical and discursive creation of bodily differences (Laqueur, 1990).

[p. 445 ↓] Two authors have been particularly influential in shaping recent constructionist writings on the body. I focus initially on Foucault, and on an influential development of Foucault's concerns in the writings of Butler, and then examine the strong Parsonian influence in Turner's structuralist theory of 'bodily order'.

Post-Structuralism and the Deconstructed Body

Foucault's post-structuralism highlights the ubiquity of power within the 'discursive formations' that construct human embodiment. The importance of the body to Foucault is such that he described his work as constituting a "'history of bodies' and the manner in which what is most material and vital in them has been invested' (Foucault, 1981: 152). Central to this history is a mapping of 'the body and the effects of power on it' (Foucault, 1980: 58). This includes examining how the 'micro-physics' of power operates in institutional formations 'through progressively finer channels, gaining access to individuals themselves, to their bodies, their gestures and all their daily actions' (Foucault, 1980: 151–2).

There is, however, a tension in Foucault's approach. On the one hand, there is a real substantive concern with the body as an actual product of constructing discourses. Somewhat ironically, given the emphasis Foucault places on historical discontinuity, this leads him to treat the body as a transhistorical and cross-cultural unified phenomenon *insofar* as the body is always already to be constructed by discourse. Such a view provides no room for recognizing that different aspects of embodiment, such as illness and death, may be more or less open to discursive reconstruction depending on the specific characteristics of an era. On the other hand, Foucault's epistemological view of the body means that it disappears as a material and phenomenological entity; its existence and experience is permanently deferred behind the grids of meaning imposed by discourse (Butler, 1990: 129–30; Shilling, 1993: 79–80). Foucault (1977: 153) makes promising mention of how 'The body is moulded by a great many distinct regimes', but this moulding turns out to be a deconstruction whose effects can only be accessed via discourse. Turner (1984: 245) suggests such features mean Foucault's approach is insufficiently concerned with 'lived experience', while Dews (1987: 163) notes: 'Without some theory which makes the corporeal more than a tabula rasa, it is impossible to reckon the costs imposed by "an infinitesimal power over the active body".' Foucault's position changes significantly in his later volumes on the history of sexuality, in which

the material body comes more into view, but problems of discursive reductionism characterize what have been the most popular developments of Foucault's analyses.

Feminist scholars have made much of Foucault's work in arguing that power is invested in and exercised through bodies in ways that produce gender differences (e.g. McNay, 1992; Nicholson, 1990; Sawicki, 1991), and that 'the biological' is simply a manifestation of 'the social' and does not need theorizing as an 'objective' extra-discursive field of knowledge (Delphy, 1984; Wittig, 1982). Butler (1990, 1993) has been one of the most influential feminist interrogators of Foucault, and is centrally concerned with Foucault's aim 'To substitute for the enigmatic treasure of "things" anterior to discourse, the regular formation of objects that emerge only in discourse' (Foucault, 1989: 47). Critical of the Cartesianism governing de Beauvoir's analysis of the mind as freedom and the (female) body as constraint, Butler (1990) deconstructs the opposition between the sexual body (as foundational and natural) and normative gender (as product and cultural) by arguing that 'sex', 'body', 'gender' and 'identity' are *equally constructed* by the dominant matrix of heterosexuality.

Butler's (1990) *Gender Trouble* focuses on gender as stylized acting; 'a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance' (Butler, 1990: 33). There is no subject or sexed body prior to this stylized, regulated action and it is gender, therefore, which constructs sexual identity (e.g. Butler, 1990: 71, 88, 93; 1997). Butler's (1993) *Bodies That Matter*, in contrast, focuses on the category of sex. Sex refers to the *discursively constituted* materiality of the sexed body, 'a process whereby regulatory norms materialize "sex" and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms' (Butler, 1993: 1). Foucault (as well as Derrida and Lacan) remains influential in Butler's theorization of sexed bodies, but Althusser is also deployed to reveal how bodies are produced as sexed in order for them to engage in gendered doings. Althusser suggests subjects are 'hailed' or 'interpellated' to assume certain positions: ideological and repressive institutions participate in the 'girling' of the infant, a 'founding interpellation' reiterated to produce a 'naturalized effect' which sets boundaries and norms (Butler, 1993: 7–8). Once again, it is the power of discursive authorities to *construct* materiality that interests Butler (1993: 68). Indeed, Butler (1993: 29, ix) doubts whether feminists need to talk about the materiality of sex, and admits that in seeking to consider the

materiality of bodies, she found herself [p. 446 ↓] moving to other domains and 'kept losing track of the subject'.

Butler's work has proved productive in rethinking the sex/gender/body distinctions prominent in contemporary feminist theory. Her writing is by no means restricted to or uncritical of Foucault's analyses, but shares with them the problem of being unable to conceptualize the body distinct from *extant* power relations. This ignores the thousands of years of 'socio-natural' (Burkitt, 1999) evolutionary history that equipped humans with particular capacities, and makes it impossible to evaluate cultural practices in relation to people's bodily well-being.¹ If we do not have some idea of our body's *own* needs and abilities at a particular time, how can we judge whether an institution or a society is good or bad for our well-being? Soper (1995: 138), for example, argues that if we reject the idea of embedded, bodily pleasures and pains, 'we remove the objective grounds for challenging the authority of custom and convention, and must accept that it is only on the basis of personal preference (or prejudice) that we can contest the "necessity" of a practice such as clitorrectomy or foot binding, challenge the oppression of sexual minorities, or justify the condemnation of any form of sexual abuse or torture.' Post-structuralism may have been promoted with the aim of 'freeing up the subject from the policing of cultural norms' but ends up ceding to culture the right to arbitrate on matters bodily (1995: 138).

Structuralism and the Ordered Body

If Foucault's writings constitute an influential source for social constructionist analyses, Parsonian theorizing is also important. It is rare for Parsons to be associated explicitly with theories of the body, for reasons already outlined, but his work informs many sociological assumptions about the ability of bodies to be socialized and the social system's importance in this socialization.

Despite his consistent espousal of a voluntarist theory of action, Parsons is perhaps best known for his 'structural functionalism'; a functionalism that suggests social systems possess a structure that confronts them with a set of 'core problems' that have to be overcome if they are to survive. This feature of his work is central to Turner's

(1984) structuralist theory of 'bodily order', but Turner combines it with a resiting of Parsons' analysis of the behavioural organism. Instead of being a sub-system of action, the behavioural organism becomes for Turner the model for his analysis of the *overarching environment in which action occurs*. While maintaining its Parsonian form, this contrasts with Parsons' eventual positioning of culture as the environment for action (Alexander, 1998).

Turner examines the structural problems posed by the body for the government of social systems by combining Parsons' 'core problems' perspective with Hobbes' concern with the 'geometry of bodies'. For Turner, all social systems must solve 'the problem of the body' which has four dimensions: the reproduction of populations through time; the restraint of desire; the regulation of populations in space; and the representation of bodies. Having established this typology, Turner emphasizes the critical intent to his work and examines the control of sexuality by men exercising patriarchal power.

The scope of Turner's analysis ranges far and wide, examining a *mode of control* by which society has sought to manage each dimension of the government of the body, a *dominant theorist* of each dimension, and a *paradigmatic disease* liable to 'break down' bodies as a result of society's imposition of these tasks. Having learnt what gets 'done to' the body though, we get little sense of the agentic body or the 'lived experience' of what it is like to be an embodied subject at a particular time. Turner's 'core problems' approach might enable us to 'work down' from the problems confronting social systems to the choices confronting individuals but, like Parsons' 'voluntaristic theory of action', this is vulnerable to the criticism that these 'choices' only exist in relation to the norms of the social system rather than being concerned, at least in part, with the passions, emotions and conflicts within the embodied individual.

Structuralist approaches have instituted a valuable 'epistemological break' from commonsense thinking about the relationship between the body, self-identity and society, but ultimately produce unsatisfactory engagements with the social consequences of the body's materiality by substituting social reductionism for biological reductionism. Indeed, theorists such as Turner (1991a) have supplemented their work with foundationalist perspectives that distinguish between how the body is *classified*, what the body *is*, and how it is *experienced*. This accepts that the experience of ageing,

for example, can be shaped by gender and ethnicity, but insists that 'The human body has definite and distinctive biological and physiological characteristics' (Turner, 1996: 30). In highlighting people's *experiences* of their bodies, Turner also points us in the direction of phenomenological approaches developed by such theorists as Merleau-Ponty. The question of how these epistemological, ontological and phenomenological dimensions are articulated remains to be answered. Nevertheless, as Turner (1996: 28) [p. 447 ↓] points out, for theorists who refuse any significant notion of the experienced, sensuous materiality of the body, and remain entirely within the parameters of (post-) structuralism, 'the lived body drops from view as the text', or discourse, or the structural 'interpellation' of subjects 'becomes the all-pervasive topic of discourse'. This leaves us with a major gap as 'what differentiates the body as it is lived from any artificially constructed object is precisely the fact that it is a vital organism which is experienced subjectively' (Soper, 1995: 135), even if this organism is itself subject to reformations over time (Mellor and Shilling, 1997: 18–31).

Embodying Social Theory

Studies of the body have been concerned with, and influenced by, a range of issues central to social theory; provide distinctive interpretations of what classical theorists have to offer our understanding of modernity; and often contain within them a creative tension between traditional social theory and contemporary cultural theory. In what follows, I want to illustrate these features by focusing on recent debates on the consequences of corporeality for theories of social action, for theories of self-identity and (post-) modernity, for the sociology of knowledge, and for social theory's enduring concern with the relationship between the human organism and the social organism.

Embodiment and Social Action

Hans Joas' (1983, 1993, 1996) analyses of the intersubjective constitution of body-image, pragmatism and the creativity of action have done much to consolidate the argument that satisfactory theories of social action require an account of the embodied actor. Social theories that conceive action as taking place in relation to either a

normative system or a criteria of rationality formulated outside of the actor tend to presuppose the body as a factual basis of action, and as inert matter motivated by the mind. In contrast, Joas (1996: 158) draws on the work of Merleau-Ponty and the American pragmatists in suggesting that our corporeal-practical being makes it essential to recognize the 'situated creativity' involved in our bodily coming to terms with the world, and that the practical mediacy of the human organism and its situations precede all conscious goal-setting.

Taking account of this bodily being in the world has important implications for theories of social action. First, our practical ability to come to terms with reality is more immediately important to our social existence than any clearly defined value system. Instead of basing our action on fully elaborated cognitive maps, we are able to face the world with relatively few fixed cognitive expectations (Joas, 1996: 159). In Giddens' (1984) terms, practical consciousness is more important to our daily lives than discursive consciousness. Secondly, our corporeal-practical being in the world also allows us to switch between various forms of sensory perception and action. Sight can be supplemented by touch if we wish to find out more about an object while the knowledge we gain about the social world is not abstract-rational, but is related to the bodily modes by which we engage with objects and other people. Thirdly, opposing the idea that all action can be defined along a rational/irrational continuum, our perception of a situation 'is predefined in our capacities for action and our current dispositions for action' (Joas, 1996: 161; see also Bourdieu, 1984). Action is not subsequent to thought but is integral to thought.

Having established that our corporeal-practical being in the world is actively implicated in the creative and situated nature of social action, Joas argues for the necessity of ascertaining how the body becomes present to ourselves. This involves investigating how we acquire a body-image (an individual's awareness of the morphological structure of their body, its parts and postures, its capacities and limitations) that allows us to coordinate our actions and make our way in the world (Joas, 1996: 175). Referring us to the psychiatrist Schilder's work on the subject, for example, Grosz (1994: 83) notes that body-image is a necessary precondition for undertaking voluntary action as it 'unifies and coordinates postural, tactile, kinesthetic, and visual sensations so that these are experienced as the sensations of a subject coordinated into a single space'. Research on such issues as phantom arms and legs of amputees, on the inability to tell left from

right, and on disturbances in locating sensations in the body show that body-image is not unproblematically given to people.

The phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty (1962) provides us with one approach to the acquisition of body-image. Body-image is pre-reflective for Merleau-Ponty: intentionality can only exist as incarnate intentionality and there is a 'pregiven interrelatedness between our own kinesthetic processes and the laws of nature that surrounds us' (Joas, 1983: 200). Every conscious intention refers back to this structure which is constituted by the pre-reflective interaction of the body with itself (for example, when one part touches another) and with its environment. Merleau-Ponty (1962) also recognizes the importance of accounting for changes in body-image and distinguishes between a habitual body and an [p. 448 ↓] actual body when dealing with transformations brought about by ageing or infirmity. Joas (1983: 200–1) remains unhappy with this general approach, however, and argues that the pre-reflective field must itself have a genesis: 'it is biologically impossible for the human species to come to a self-control of the body and social abilities by mere maturation, without socialization.' Merleau-Ponty draws on Lacan in tying the constitution of body-image to the infant's experience of the mirror image, but Joas (1996) argues that this exaggerates the importance of visual experience and downplays the importance of emotional relationships. Instead, it is Mead who provides a way of developing Merleau-Ponty's concern with 'intercorporeite' (the interrelatedness of our experience of our bodies to our experience of others' bodies) (Joas, 1983: 200–1; 1996: 181).

The crucial idea Joas takes from Mead's published (1934, 1938) and unpublished work is that the process of constituting objects as permanent already presupposes elementary structures of role-taking engaged in by the pre-linguistic infant (Joas, 1983: 203). Opposing the priority of self-experiences in phenomenology, Mead suggests that the constitution of one's own body, and the constitution of permanent objects, are shaped through communicative interaction. Even to be able to identify a perception or sensation as coming from within oneself requires an attitude towards one's body mediated by significant gestures. Similarly, in the case of interaction between an embodied actor and the outside world, it is only the gestures involved in role-taking that 'renders possible the coordination of hand and eye and the transference into the objects of a substance that has an active effect' (Joas, 1983: 202–3; 1996: 182).

Joas concludes by arguing that if the relation of an individual to their body, and, therefore, to action, is not given but is shaped by pre-linguistic intersubjective structures, there must be a foundational sociality based on corporeal interaction. As Joas (1996: 184) puts it,

If an actor does not perceive his [*sic*] own body directly as present, but rather via a body schema ... constituted in an intersubjective process, then any ability to act rests on a further tacit assumption, namely that there is a *primary sociality* which has not yet been generated by conscious intentionality but has preceded such, in other words a structure of common action which initially consists solely of our interaction with other bodies.

This creative deployment of Mead's work seeks to overturn the assumptions of theories of social action which marginalize the body. Nevertheless, Joas' emphasis on primary sociality as a precursor to creative bodily action could be opposed if we accept there are natural propensities to act associated with a naturally generated body-image. This prompts Joas (1983: 203) to recognize the emphasis on social-cognitive development in Mead's work and to look elsewhere to integrate his analysis with a study of motivational and affective processes. It is writers like Durkheim, Joas suggests, who enable us to see that body-image and the ability to act are not given once and for all but are dependent on foundations that are periodically refreshed through the revitalization of collectivities.

Embodiment and Self-Identity

Mead's (1913) analysis of the emergence of the social self through the 'me'/'I' relationship, a relationship central to the role-taking discussed above, helped open a space for post-structuralists and postmodernists to more radically destabilize the notion of any durable identity, body-image or human agent. The advance of biotechnologies and the supposed disappearance of 'the social' as a durable system have informed arguments suggesting that identity and capacities for action are no longer given, or even dependent on a 'primary sociality', but have become a potentially infinitely flexible resource for either the individual or for technologies of control (Featherstone and

Burrows, 1995). The question posed by theories of embodiment, however, is whether the constitution of our corporeal being places any limits on this fragmentation of identity or on our capacities as actors.

In a strong version of the argument that embodiment provides a foundational basis for identity, Archer (1995: 287–8) proposes a ‘body + consciousness’ view of human beings: the body provides us with non-social experiences of non-social reality whose stability is complemented by a fundamental ‘continuity of consciousness’. Drawing on the anthropology of Mauss, Archer (1995: 383) argues that this corporeal and cognitive continuity equips humans with a ‘Universal Sense of Self’ over and above historically specific conceptions of personhood. Bourdieu's (1984) theory of the relationship between *habitus*, taste and social space also posits a strong relationship between people's embodied upbringing and their identity even if it opposes the universalism of Archer's work. Bourdieu argues that a ‘socially constituted set of cognitive and motivating structures’ result in a bodily *hexus* that provides people with class-dependent, predisposed ways of relating to and categorizing both familiar and novel situations (Brubaker, 1985: 758). The habitus is formed in the context of people's social location and inculcates in them an orientation to life based on and reconciled [p. 449 ↓] to these positions. As such, it tends toward reproducing the status quo (Bourdieu, 1984: 190, 466).

The idea that identities may involve a potentially intransigent structuring of bodily dispositions is repeated in recent writings on habit (Camic, 1986) and sexuality. Connell (1995) suggests that physical apprenticeships into masculinity result in deeply engrained and highly restrictive orientations to the flesh and emotions (see also Wacquant, 1995). Grosz's (1994: 117) analysis of theories of the sexed body as a text also suggests society can appear to shape the ‘body permanent’: ‘the tools of body engraving—social, surgical, epistemic, disciplinary—all mark, indeed constitute, bodies in culturally specific ways ...’ Coupled with her opposition to the view that sexual difference is forged out of undifferentiated bodies, and her statement that the possession of certain genitals ‘must play a major role in the type of body imagery one has’ (Grosz, 1994: 58), one argument of her book suggests an important degree of sexual stability in the link between embodiment and gendered identity.

While social theory has employed the body to critically engage with the postmodern decentring of the subject, other work suggests current forms of embodiment contribute to the *fluidity* of identity. Grosz, for example, shuttles between suggestions of fixity to analyses of fluidity in her model of the body as a 'Möbius strip' (the inverted three-dimension figure eight) used to mirror how flesh and mind flow into each other to produce a flexible body image which serves as a basis for sensory interaction and the production of a contingently coherent view on the world (Grosz, 1994: 36–43, 66, 99–100). The flexibility of self-identity is also central to Giddens' writings on modernity. While Giddens' structuration theory proposes a view of the body as an 'organic constraint', as a container of self-identity, he later argues that the chronic reflexivity and corporeal malleability characteristic of high modernity destabilizes identity. The ability to mould the body in line with our sense of self means identity is not located in an intransigent habitus, but 'in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going'—a capacity always at risk as a result of the 'until further notice' character of (self) knowledge (Giddens, 1991: 53–4).

Such contrasting views of embodied identity appear irreconcilable, yet we can establish a dialogue between them by looking historically at themes and metaphors of bodily fixity and fluidity. Such a perspective may suggest that any single formulation of embodied identity is incapable of dealing with the diverse forms of bodily-being-in-the-world, but that simple modern body/premodern body distinctions fail to grasp some of the shared potentialities characteristic of embodied identities over time.

Elias' ([1939] 1978; [1939] 1982) study of the relationship between state and personality formation argues that medieval persons possessed instinctual and emotional responses to events which tended to be more fluid (more impulsive, volatile and unpredictable) than their modern counterparts. The medieval habitus was formed in an environment characterized by intermittent violence and disease, where struggle for survival loomed large in people's actions, and where magic and superstition were aides to knowledge. Outside of the relatively controlled environments provided by Court Societies, these conditions did not promote the considered adoption of habits designed to cultivate the 'presentation of self' (Elias, 1983). Nevertheless, the volatility of the medieval era could co-exist with the flesh becoming a site for the pursuance of religious 'body regimes' (Mellor and Shilling, 1997). Body regimes are aggressive, if structured, flights into physicality which sought to harness the emotional and physical extremes

characteristic of the medieval era to religious goals. Body regimes were associated with the Catholic Church and pursued by a minority of the population (Bynum, 1987), but their adoption represented the development and restructuring of *already existing*, popular ways of implicating the body in magical and superstitious activities as routes to meaning and material benefit.

The development of the *early modern body* has been associated with various factors, centuries apart, but Protestant attempts to reform medieval bodies accelerated extant processes. First, by seeking to dislocate people from their natural, supernatural and social environments, and in prioritizing cognitive belief and thought as routes to knowledge, Protestantism made linguistic symbols and narratives a central source of people's self-identity. Secondly, the Protestant flesh had to be made subordinate to these (religiously justifiable) narratives; the body had, in other words, to be controlled by the mind. Thirdly, the inability of these narratives to control fully human emotions helps us understand the enormous anxiety stimulated in Protestants over those sinful aspects of their bodily selves (and the bodies of others) which threatened to become grotesque and out of control (Roper, 1994).

While Reformers tended to be suspicious of feelings, the arts, and entertainment, certain scripturally justifiable 'industrious pastimes' and 'rational recreations' were encouraged (Hill, 1966). The personal pursuit of healthy bodies also became important to many Puritans (dirt was symbolically linked with sin, while cleanliness and sobriety were markers of righteous [p. 450 ↓] living), and has been associated with post-reformation medical regimes and the development of capitalism (Turner, 1983). Indeed, the idea that Protestant sectarianism unwittingly provided capitalism with a sober, honest and industrious labour force is a general theme in historical sociology (Hobsbawm, 1964; Thompson, 1963).

In contemporary Western societies, it has been argued that the continuing development of certain rationalizing aspects of embodiment are matched by altogether different expressions of human corporeality marked by a sensualization of experience. What has been referred to as a 'baroque modern' form of embodiment (Mellor and Shilling, 1997) combines aspects of both these orientations. On the one hand, the pervasiveness of chronic reflexivity, the growing number of experts ready to proffer guidance for all aspects of life, and the technologies which increase our ability to alter our bodies in line

with our *ideas*, point to the extension of the cognitive characteristics of the early modern body. On the other hand, a new fluid sensuality is also increasingly evident, as explored in Ferguson's (1992) discussion of a 'recovered sensuousness', Lash and Urry's (1994) analysis of the emergence of 'aesthetic reflexivity', the notion of the reappearance of the baroque (Buci-Glucksmann, 1994; Turner, 1994), and Maffesoli's (1996) account of the spread of a Dionysian, irrational and emotional resacralization of contemporary bodies.

Bodies and Knowledge

In examining the embodied bases of knowing, theories of the body have challenged the dominant tradition in Western philosophy which associates the mind with what makes us human, and rational thought with our ability to acquire knowledge and control. I have already mentioned the philosophical influence of Descartes' principle *cogito ergo sum* as the foundation for knowledge, and Kant's ranking of duty over bodily desire. Of most interest to social theorists, however, are the practical uses to which such perspectives have been put. Turner (1996: 9) argues that an adapted Cartesian 'world-view' became part of early modern individualism, 'scientific rationalism and [a] Protestant spirit which sought to dominate external nature' through instrumental rationality. He also suggests this facilitated the growth of colonialism in which 'other cultures were subordinated to the instrumental control of Western technology and civilization' (Turner, 1996: 10).

In deconstructing the objectivist view of the world behind Western modes of control and oppression, postmodern thought sought to destabilize metanarratives which have the potential to be associated with 'final solutions' (Bauman, 1989); relativize the foundations of 'knowledge' and 'truth'; and promote deconstructionist epistemologies. Deconstructionism relativized knowledge, while standpoint epistemology prioritizes experience and has its roots in Marx and Engels' (1970: 51) argument that 'Consciousness is ... from the very beginning a social product.' As Gilroy (1993: 52) points out, standpoint epistemologies are often based on essentialist premises which divide people on the basis of their gendered or racial identities. Other theories concerned with explicating the shared bodily bases of knowledge, however, have sought to develop a *corporeally situated* theory of knowledge in which communication is possible because of what unites us as humans, as much as what divides us into social groups.

Elias' (1991) theory of 'symbol emancipation' starts by emphasizing the links between knowledge and embodiment; links characteristic of the entire human species. Symbol emancipation results from evolutionary processes which provided humans with the physical means of communicating, thinking and orienting themselves to reality via symbols. This gave humans the ability to act in the light of learned knowledge and provided them with an evolutionary advantage over other species. Humans have a unique ability to learn and synthesize symbols, to develop these into language marked by reflexivity, variability, precision, flexibility and a high degree of 'reality congruence', and to transmit accumulated knowledge between generations in the form of symbols (Elias, 1991: 31–2, 43, 131). Symbol emancipation enabled humans to reflexively monitor their own behaviour, to adapt to new circumstances independently of biological changes, and represented a breakthrough of the evolutionary process to a 'post animalistic' level (Elias, 1991: 43, 31–2).

This is no sociobiological conception of human communication, but suggests that if we are to understand the social world we have to take notice of the intertwining of social and natural processes, transformed as they are by the historical relationships of interdependent individuals. Symbol use may be impossible for Elias without minimal biological equipment, but it remains dependent on individuals learning language and an array of social contingencies that have their own impact on the bodily basis of knowledge. In their study of a divided community, for example, Elias and Scotson ([1965] 1994) show how spatial separation and contact based on limited sensory information can lead to the stigmatization of social groups and the proliferation of 'fantasy knowledge' about others. [p. 451 ↓] Related observations have been made in Hirsch's (1976) study of the defensiveness represented by the construction of 'armoured villages' and Sennett's (1994: 366) suggestion that 'The fears of touching which gave rise to the Venetian Ghetto have been strengthened in modern society as individuals create something like ghettos in their own bodily experience when confronted with diversity.'

The 'experiential realism' of Johnson (1987) and Lakoff (1987) reinforces this view of the embodied bases of knowledge; emphasizing that explanations of meaning and rationality should account for the sensory structures through which we grasp our world. Johnson focuses on 'imagination' (how we abstract from certain sensory experiences and contexts to others in making sense of new situations) and 'categorization' (how the

classificatory schemes we use typically depend on our perceptual capacities and motor skills). In contrast to objectivist theories of knowledge, Johnson and Lakoff demonstrate how 'Thought begins at a pre-verbal level, in a primary experience of embodiment' and suggest that our basic bodily experiences form 'image schemata' which enable us to 'connect up a vast range of different experiences that manifest this same recurring structure' (Frank, 1988: 158; Johnson, 1987: 2).

These perspectives suggest that instead of discourse determining the body, the body is integrally involved in the *construction* of discourse; we can talk literally of 'bodies of thought' (Burkitt, 1999). Distinctive forms of knowing are integrally related to those shifting forms of embodiment that have formed bases for, and are subsequently transformed by, successive historical epochs. Historical reformations of embodiment involve changing sensory hierarchies, techniques of the body, and types of *habitus*, which provide people with distinctive means of acquiring knowledge about the world (Mellor and Shilling, 1997).

The problems associated with ignoring the embodied bases of human knowledge can be illustrated with reference to writings on communicative rationality and moral development. Habermas ([1981] 1984, 1987) prizes the capacity of linguistic communication and argumentation to enable people to transcend the particularities of their own situation and reach agreement. As Young (1990) points out, though, his account of communicative rationality tends to ignore the social actor as an emotional being. Reason is opposed to affectivity and desire and, in contrast to earlier critical theorists such as Marcuse, there is little recognition of how the repressive socialization of the body can depress people's capacity for rational thought. Habermas' theory presupposes concrete speakers but, as Crossley (1997: 27) notes, having rejected Freud's theory of the instinctual basis of personality, Habermas provides us with no account of the 'pre-linguistic mutuality' of speakers, or of how perceptual awareness and body language enters into communication and understanding. There is a need here to explain how people with radically different forms of *habitus*, for example, can be represented adequately as 'a community of scholars rationally debating a problem which can be objectively described in a theoretical manner' (Delanty, 1997: 34).

Gilligan's (1982) critique of moral philosophy makes a related point. In highlighting the limitations of traditional, cognitivist and masculinist accounts of moral development,

Gilligan distinguishes between an 'ethics of justice and rights', and a contrasting 'ethics of care and responsibility'. For Benhabib (1987), this distinction reflects divergent forms of embodied development: traditional moral philosophy relies on a conception of the moral agent disembodied from emotional, personal relationships and able to take the stance of the 'universal other'. The sphere of moral justice, from Hobbes, through Locke and Kant, is here pictured as involving independent, cognitive beings released from obligations of 'the domestic-intimate sphere' which might interfere with their universalizing impartiality. Yet this vision serves to exclude 'An entire domain of human activity, namely, nurture, reproduction, love and care ... from moral and political considerations' (Benhabib, 1987: 83). It proposes an analysis of the universal moral agent which might be theoretically coherent, but which threatens to have little relation to the embodied, interdependent character of humans. As Benhabib (1987: 89) puts it, 'The conception of selves who can be individuated prior to their moral ends is incoherent. We could not know if such a being was a human self, an angel, or the Holy Spirit.' Gilligan's concern to explicate a theory of moral development from the multiple contextual commitments which humans are immersed in from birth, in contrast, proposes a view of the moral agent as a *concrete other*. This possesses a flesh and blood, sensual and emotional existence which Benhabib (1987: 95) suggests must be incorporated into moral philosophy if it is to develop 'a more integrated vision of ourselves and of our fellow humans as generalized as well as "concrete" others' (Benhabib, 1987: 95).

Individual Bodies and Social Bodies: The Embodied Bases of Community

Recent writings on images of the body in consumer culture have explored the flow of symbolic interchanges between the individual and social [p. 452 ↓] body, but have taken less note of classical theory's implicit concern with *emotional exchanges* between individuals and social systems. In seeking to emancipate the new discipline of sociology from moral philosophy, Comte linked the 'science of society' to biology and invoked the 'organismic analogy' in which 'a true correspondence between Statistical Analysis of the Social Organism in Sociology, and that of the Individual Organism in Biology'

could be developed (Turner and Maryanski, 1988: 110). Spencer continued Comte's tendency to analogize from animal organisms to social systems, and a long tradition in sociological theory has taken 'literally the metaphor of society as a body' (Levine, 1995: 168). Especially prominent in, but not confined to, French sociology, this was associated with the conception of society as a 'system' with its own 'needs', which possessed characteristics that could be evaluated as 'normal' or 'pathological'.

Symbolic analogizing between human and social bodies was not new. The doctrine of the 'King's Two Bodies' provided a convenient justification for monarchical power by suggesting the King possessed a political, sovereign and permanent body which received its authority from God, as well as an earthly body subject to death (Kantorowitz, 1957). This conjoined the ideas of Christ's mortal and eternal body with a 'sociological distinction between an individual body and a collective body', and developed 'when the doctrines of corporational and organic structure of society began to ... mould most significantly ... political thinking in the high and late middle ages' (Kantorowitz, 1957: 198–9).

Prominent in political and sociological thought, this symbolic exchange was also influential in anthropology. Douglas' ([1970] 1996) theory of the 'body as classification system', for example, is predicated on the assumption that the human body is the most ubiquitous image of a system available to people. Douglas suggests that the structuring of social systems, and the delineation of established and outsider groups, are reflected in dominant attitudes toward the body.

This focus on the body as symbolically 'good to think with' captures only one side of the human body/social body relationship, however, and illustrates the cognitive bias characteristic of much theoretical work on the subject. Douglas' concern with the body as symbol draws on Durkheim, but her suggestion that his appeals 'to the emotions' have 'to be eliminated' as 'psychologistic waverings' overlooks the embodied foundations of what Durkheim referred to as the "precontractual foundations of social contract' (Durkheim, [1893] 1984; Douglas, 1996: xv). Durkheim is often interpreted as a positivist theorist of social facts, yet this marginalizes his complementary analysis of society as a 'fiery furnace' whose formal features are dependent on the 'recharging capacities' of collective effervescence (Durkheim, [1912] 1995; Shilling, 1997b).

Durkheim intended 'collective effervescence' to capture the idea of social force at birth, and his analysis suggests individual-social body relations be analysed in terms of their emotional as well as their symbolic dimensions. Collective effervescence works on people mentally and emotionally in their confrontations with sacred phenomena, mediates tensions between non-rational passions and rational thought, and between individuals and society, and can, during times of social change, stimulate acts of 'superhuman heroism and bloody barbarism' (Durkheim's, [1912] 1995: 213; [1914] 1973: 152, 162).

Durkheim's analysis has been developed through theories of how effervescent manifestations of the sacred can result in virulent conflict as well as communal cohesion, and is being increasingly utilized by theoretical work on the body. Callois (1950), Hertz (1960), Bataille (1962) and Girard ([1972] 1995) all provide distinctive developments of the emotional flows between human and social bodies, while Maffesoli and Mestrovic provide contrasting recent examples of the potential of this approach.

Maffesoli (1991, 1996) discusses the 'reinvigoration' of *puissance* in modernity; a revitalization of the sacred, the appearance of new forms of sociality, and the return of an emotionally grounded category of the moral. Maffesoli suggests this morality is shaped by an 'ethic of aesthetics' based on the body, experienced through fleeting participation in various 'neo-tribal' groups (Maffesoli, 1991, 1996), and rooted in a deep vitalism apparent in the structural changes of Western societies and in 'the smallest details of everyday life lived for their own sake' (Maffesoli, 1996: 32). This accords with Durkheim's ([1912] 1995: 209) assertion that the spread of effervescent vitalism, and its effects on social solidarity, occurs irrespective of utilitarian considerations. Nevertheless, Maffesoli marginalizes Durkheim's emphasis on the contrasting social consequences of effervescent manifestations of the sacred, and thereby neglects its potentially violent characteristics. Maffesoli's (1996) 'keeping warm together', for example, is a process which one-sidedly shields people against the impersonality and 'cold winds' of modernity. This is provocative, but overlooks the fact that neo-tribes may "get burnt together" and may also enjoy '*burning others together*'. The effervescence produced by the Freikorps, by gangs, by paramilitary survivalists and by the Ku Klux Klan, for example, is based on a hatred and fear that can undermine broader collectivities (Shields, 1996).

[p. 453 ↓] In opposition to Maffesoli's optimism, Mestrovic' (1991, 1993, 1994) concentrates on the promotion within modernity of effervescent manifestations of fear and hatred. Mestrovic's (1991, 1993) analysis is also rooted in a Durkheimian framework, but Mestrovic' argues that the sensual and cognitive experience of modern societies is bound up with ethnic and racial conflict (Mestrovic', 1993, 1994). In this respect, Mestrovic' (1994: 2) observes a scenario which is not confined to North America when he notes 'the race riots that spread from Los Angeles to many other cities in the USA in April 1992 led many commentators to remark ... that America suddenly seemed like the Balkans ... they could not believe that the US of A could be racked by ethnic conflict this late in its historical development.'

This focus on the relationship between diverse social groups and distinctive forms of collective effervescence has been supplemented by the methodologically individualistic analyses of Collins (1993) and Scheff (1990) which suggest humans are emotional beings wedded to particular interactional contexts and social bodies by the accumulation and discharge of emotional energies. This concern with emotions and social order has strong roots in the sociological tradition and can be traced not only to Comte's and Durkheim's concern with the effervescent forces that connect individuals to collectivities, but to Weber's analysis of the processes involved in charismatic leadership, and Simmel's ([1908] 1971; [1918] 1971) concerns with social forms and the vitalism of life that sustains and supersedes the parameters of these forms.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has sought to situate the recent growth of writings on the body in a broader context, and to suggest that a theoretical understanding of embodiment is central to mapping the constitution of society. There are, however, important issues that remain to be addressed in advancing this area of thought. Turner (1996: 33–4) suggests that we need a more comprehensive philosophical understanding of embodiment; a view of how the body functions in social space; an understanding of the communal nature of embodiment; and a greater historical sense of the body's cultural formation. Turner (1996: 34) further argues that 'We do not have to develop a sociological appreciation of the physicality of the body since the "natural body" is always and already injected with cultural understandings and social history.' Now, 'Natural', physical bodies are

indeed pervaded by cultural understandings, and contain a social history. As Benton (1991) implies, the evolution and generational development of human bodies involves processes that cannot be located unambiguously in either the social or the natural world. Nevertheless, the body's social history is irreducibly bound up with human physicality and it is the history of this physicality that is central to understanding how bodies both shape and are shaped by the structures of society into which we are born. Bodies may be extremely flexible and subject to all kinds of cultural representation, but the fact that 'all human bodies are subject to process of growth, reproduction, illness and mortality' remains consequential for social theory as it is just such processes which provide the preconditions for the construction and decline of particular social systems (Soper, 1995: 133).

The body has been evolving for thousands of years and forms a basis for human societies: those species capacities we have at birth (for example, the potential for walking, speech and tool use) allow us to forge particular types of social and cultural structures. Clearly we are, to some degree, 'fated' to live in particular bodies, but it is also important to recognize that the parameters of this fate change historically and culturally. Firestone's (1971) study of the social consequences of biological reproduction and reproductive technologies may exaggerate the social inequalities deriving from sexual difference, for example, but recognizes the potential of technology for reducing these differences; a potential which has further been explored by Haraway (1985). At the same time, however, bodies continue to shape the limits of these developments. Recent discussions of biotechnologies and cyberspace, for example, suggest that 'virtual reality' and other developments that reduce the boundaries between humans and machines may significantly transform modes of work and sociality. Nevertheless, the time people spend in virtual environments is limited by their biological need for food and drink and by the difficulties people have in adapting to these environments (Heim, 1995). As long as the body remains irreducible to both society and nature, then, it will remain necessary for theorists to examine how human embodiment is partly shaped by society, yet also influences its social development.

Note

1 The use of 'evolution' or 'socio-natural' history by theorists of the body does not invoke a crude sociobiology, but points to the interrelation of long-[p. 454 ↓] term processes relevant to the development of humans which cannot be located unproblematically within the conventional categories of 'social' or 'natural' (Benton, 1991), but which may nevertheless highlight the intransigence of the body in relation to a specific social system or discursive order. This has the analytical benefit of suggesting that while the body may be resistant to certain forms of social construction, it also constitutes an important agentic basis for the reproduction of institutions and knowledges.

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