

# CULTIVATING THE BODY: ANTHROPOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGIES OF BODILY PRACTICE AND KNOWLEDGE

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## INTRODUCTION

Since the body mediates all reflection and action upon the world, its centrality to the anthropological endeavor seems assured, but a perusal of the canon of social and cultural anthropology indicates that the body's explicit appearance has been sporadic throughout the history of the discipline. In much the same way as Munn noted that the topic of time has often been "handmaiden to other anthropological frames and issues" (178:93), the body, despite its ubiquity, has suffered a similar fate, thus remaining largely unproblematized. The majority of researchers have in effect simply "bracketed" it as a black box and set it aside.

There have been recent reviews of topics that implicate the body, including the politics of reproduction (81), human sexuality (39), the emotions (164), and shamanisms (6). A prolegomena to an anthropological physiology has also appeared (20), but aside from two edited collections from the 1970s (14, 201) and one position piece (159), there has been no substantial review of research in connection with an anthropology of the body per se. I believe this lacuna highlights a long-standing ambivalence on the part of many anthropologists

toward theorizing the body, an ambivalence that is gradually being dispersed and replaced by some exciting developments.

Keat has pointed out that contemporary philosophers and social scientists have spent a great deal of time discussing the distinctiveness of human beings, but at the same time have held firm to an assumption about the “non-distinctiveness” of the human body (127). Because human evolution and variation among human populations have always been part of the anthropological bailiwick, anthropologists have proved a good deal more alert to the theoretical challenge posed by the body than have other social scientists (237:8). Nevertheless, they have tended to accept that the physical body falls “naturally” into the domain of the basic sciences and is therefore beyond the purview of social and cultural anthropology. Until recently the individual body usually has been conceptualized as a universal biological base upon which culture plays its infinite variety (78, 94, 189), although one or two researchers have sought to counter this position (12, 14, 201).

A shift in perspective can be observed since the late 1970s. Berthelot has recently noted that the “body would appear to be everywhere” (13). Paradoxically, since closer attention has been paid to bodily representation, the body has become more elusive, fluid, and uncontrollable. Many researchers who have attempted to theorize and grapple with epistemology have become progressively eclectic in their efforts to portray the body in its infinite complexity while becoming increasingly aware that the “problem” of the body will not be settled (66, 154, 203, 227, 228, 232, 233).

Although certain sociologists continue to create elaborate body typologies (72, 236), anthropologists, by contrast, have virtually abandoned this project, although the problem of framing analyses, delineating boundaries, and demarcating just what is signified by the “body” remains a source of creative tension. Decentering the physical body of the basic sciences and questioning the epistemological assumptions entailed in the production of natural facts has radicalized and relativized our perspective on several recalcitrant dichotomies, in particular, nature/culture, self/other, mind/body, while at the same time inciting increased reflexivity with respect to anthropological practices as a whole.

In this essay, I selectively limit my coverage to those researchers who have endeavored explicitly to situate the body as a product of specific social, cultural, and historical contexts; who have engaged the nature/culture or mind/body debates in a substantial way; or who have grappled with the poetics and politics of the production and reproduction of bodies. This type of research has brought us to a radical position with respect to the truth claims of the medical and epidemiological sciences. My objective in emphasizing this approach is not to create an impasse with scientific knowledge, but to move toward an improved dialogue, while remaining inherently suspicious of universal truths, entrenched power bases, and intransigent relativisms.

## MAKING THE BODY SOCIAL

A perceived opposition between nature and culture, now recognized as a product of Western metaphysics (15, 109, 227) has influenced anthropological theorizing since the end of the last century. Durkheim in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* wrote that “man is double,” making a distinction between the universal physical body and the “higher” morally-imbued “socialized” body (52). For the Annales group, the corporeal body was a *tabula rasa*, the “first and most natural tool of man”—an artifact from which the social order was created (171:75). Mauss believed that all bodily expression is learned, nevertheless he tried, through comparative taxonomy, to demonstrate the interdependence of the physical, psychosocial, and social domains, and both he and Van Gennep showed that body techniques, whether used primarily in ritual or in everyday life, correspond to sociocultural mapping of time and space (172, 244).

Durkheim’s pupil, Hertz, stimulated anthropological imagination in the early part of this century about how the body “is good to think with.” After arguing for a biological basis to the dominance of the right hand, Hertz claimed that the asymmetrical practices and associated intellectual and moral representations about the right and left hands are categories “anterior to all individual experience” and products of the “structure of social thought.” He concluded that such transcendent representations appear as “facts of nature” to the individuals on whom they are practiced (101:22). Evans-Pritchard, inspired by Hertz’s essay, was struck by how “[a] slight organic asymmetry is made the symbol of absolute moral polarity” (58:1).

Analyses of metaphorical and metonymical uses of natural symbols in reproducing the social order have resulted in a substantial literature on homologous relationships commonly constructed among physical topography, domestic architecture, social arrangements, deportment, and parts of the body. Such homologies create and reproduce a moral landscape through time and space—the dominant social and moral order—an arrangement that researchers have assumed remains largely unquestioned because it is taken as “natural” (7, 8, 90, 106, 182, 206, 240). Such classificatory systems, while overtly embracing principles of holism, unity, and inclusion, are also used to justify hierarchy, difference, and exclusion (49, 50, 106, 182, 192, 207, 231, 243). Related research has shown how social categories are literally inscribed on and into the body, which, with prescriptions about body fluids, cosmetics, clothing, hair styles, depilation, and ornamentation, acts as a signifier of local social and moral worlds (10, 16, 103, 128, 136, 142, 161, 227, 239–41).

As a British structuralist explicitly at odds with the universalism of both Freud and Levi-Strauss, Douglas gave emphasis to the variation apparent in body symbolism that she asserted arose from the structural constraints of

society. Douglas was uncompromisingly relativistic in her claim that every “natural” expression is culturally determined (50). However, Skultans, analyzing the significance of menstruation and menopause in Wales, found no simple analog between society and body symbolism (225). Sahlins’ analysis of basic color discrimination posited selective attention to biological universals as being culturally constructed (213), while other anthropologists have claimed that physical structures not only constrain perception but also determine certain forms of universally-found pictorial representation (173).

Ellen has called for recognition of a dialectical relationship between “the cerebral, the material and the social” (54:370). He concedes that because cognitive structures are biologically grounded, body classifications cannot be arbitrary; culture simply provides the appropriate lexical labels to affix to physical sensations. Ellen also claims that in another sense culture can be dominant, and nature, including the body, is then redefined and reified largely in terms of culturally determined categories—rather than perception dominating classification, it is the classificatory system itself that becomes concretized. The shifts in orientation of authors such as Ellen, Douglas, Sahlins, and others stimulated a fundamental reformulation of the problem of the body as one of semiosis, in other words, how the body functions as both a “transmitter” and “receiver” of information, in turn a function of the positioning of the individual in society. Nevertheless any connection between knowledge and practice remains essentially obscure, as does the problem of individual meanings attributed to cultural symbols and their manipulation, related in turn to relationships of power.

Over the past twenty years, conceptual approaches to the body have tried to overcome a radical separation of knowledge and practice (in poststructuralist terms, of text and enactment), largely through decentering the cognitive construction of knowledge. Interpretations that seek explicitly to collapse mind/body dualities, or that are essentially dialectical or montage-like in form, are now privileged. The body is no longer portrayed simply as a template for social organization, nor as a biological black box cut off from “mind,” and nature/culture and mind/body dualities are self-consciously interrogated. This conceptual shift mirrors theoretical changes that have taken place throughout anthropology and other social sciences. However, the recouperation of the female body and its politicization by feminists (81, 105, 110), and from a different direction, a broadening of the anthropology and sociology of knowledge to include analyses of scientific texts (21, 141) have had a particular influence on the anthropology of the body and the kinds of questions asked about bodily representation and its relationship to practice.

The question of the body requires more than reconciling theory with practice. It brings with it the difficulty of people both having and being bodies (236:1); subjectivity and its relation to biology and society cannot be ignored.

As a result, conceptual dichotomies inevitably metastasize into one another. One approach has been to try to preempt the emergence of classical analytical dualities at the site of production by opening up the black box and conceptualizing embodiment as prior to consciousness.

## EMBODIMENT: SUBJECTIVITY AND THE SOCIAL ORDER

Bourdieu started out his influential theory of practice by supporting phenomenology to counter what he understood as a “misplaced objectivity.” He was concerned that practical activity should not be constituted simply as representation. Drawing on a reformulation of Mauss’ concept of *habitus*, Bourdieu’s theory was explicitly grounded in the repetition of unconscious mundane bodily practices (19). Formulated in opposition to Levi-Strauss, it was designed to overcome a rigid dualism between mental structures and the world of material objects. Bourdieu can be accused of ignoring dissent and social transformation, but he has had, along with de Certeau (40) and Elias (53), a pervasive influence on anthropological thinking about the bodily practices of everyday life, their reproduction through enculturation, and their relationship to discourse (16, 24, 44, 109, 151, 185).

B. Turner has pointed out that both the German tradition of philosophical anthropology and Merleau-Ponty’s work, grounded in Husserlian philosophy (174), point toward a phenomenology of embodiment that is relevant to the social sciences (23; see also 194, 195). Several anthropologists have used phenomenological theory as a starting point to counter what they see as the mistaken enterprise of interpreting embodied experience in terms of cognitive and linguistic models of interpretation (31, 43, 73, 89, 107–9, 256). Jackson, for example, is concerned that the semantically produced body is reduced to the status of a sign, which is both epistemologically unsound and renders the body passive (109:124). Jackson’s “radical empiricism” is “based upon a bodily awareness of the other in oneself” (p. 130). He takes inspiration from Boas’ work on gestures and postures (15) as well as from Mauss and Bourdieu in order to develop a theory of embodiment grounded in mimeticism. Jackson argues that creative freedom in mimetic play is circumscribed by the constraining *habitus*, and then turns to a second transposition in which “patterns of body use engender mental images and instill moral qualities” (109:131). Jackson uses Kuranko initiation rites to show that, in a discussion reminiscent of V. Turner (241), bodily practices mediate a personal realization of social values.

Devische asserts that symptoms of illness are culturally patterned manifestations of a “dismembered symbolic operation.” He posits that efficacy of ritual and healing ceremonies lies in the cultural framing of subjectively experienced feelings of inchoateness (16, 17, 27, 32, 33, 67, 74, 117, 145, 242),

thus producing “symbolic closure” (102). Devische examines how this is accomplished through body boundary signification among the Yaka of Zaire related to their concepts of spatio/temporal order (43, 44). Csordas, working on charismatic healing in America, has proposed a theory of embodiment drawing on both Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu as a paradigm for anthropological research (31).

The impact of disability on patients in North America, where mobility and independence are highly valued and reinforced by the medical system, often produces contradictions in individual embodiment (73, 89, 119, 125). Kaufman has shown that biography created around serious illness represents both knowledge of the self and an expression of “part of the self” (125; see also 57, 215). Personal experience of major physical disability and illness has resulted in several moving accounts that testify to the powerful effect of changes in embodiment on subjectivity, which in turn has consequences for the individual in society (46, 179, 212, 258).

## THE CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF SELF AND OTHER

The concept of a reflexive “I,” a mindful self independent of the body and nature at large, is essential to the “view from nowhere” characteristic of a post-Enlightenment approach to knowledge (143). Comparative research on the cultural construction of concepts of mind, body, self, and emotions has contributed to a questioning of the autonomous, rational, disembodied self as a gold standard for successful personhood, and has at the same time renewed anthropological interest in the body (79, 165).

Fluid boundaries, between individuals and society and between individuals and nature, are normative constructions that have significance for the creation of explanations about inequality, misfortune, illness, and for the moral order (97, 146, 198, 199, 205, 234). Daniel argues that Tamils conceptualize themselves as having different kinds of bodies and personalities based on the qualities taken in from the soil at their birthplace. Using a semiotic approach, he shows how gendered relationships, sexual activity, and the flow of bodily fluids are culturally constructed and contained. Daniel then inserts experiential daily life into a larger cosmic and religious order (34), an approach that allows entry into the communicative aspect of the lived world of Tamils, but that does not explicitly engage a decentering of social science epistemologies with respect to either persons or bodies.

In a somewhat similar vein, Obeyesekere examines the process whereby public symbols relating to the body become infused with personal meaning (187). His reliance on psychoanalytically derived categories ensures, however, that no radical perspective on embodiment emerges, although he demonstrates

effectively the choice individuals have of adopting or rejecting public symbols.

It has been suggested that an anthropology of the body should include a theory of emotion—that such a theory could help to bridge post-Enlightenment epistemological dichotomies (159). However, a recent review has shown how most extant research works within the framework of the very dichotomy—cultural sentiments vs natural passions—that a critical approach seeks to overcome (164). Lewis (146) and M. Rosaldo (209) stress that emotions inevitably involve both meaning and feeling. People everywhere learn to attach culturally constructed labels to subjective feelings; these concepts, semantically different across cultures, act as bridging concepts across bodily and semantic domains. Thus emotions cannot simply be captured as either cognitive judgments or visceral reactions, and reductionistic approaches fail to consider what Rosaldo terms “embodied thought” (see also 112, 146, 163, 210, 248).

In discussions of the role of the state in authorizing and prescribing particular forms of emotional discourse, Jenkins and the Goods work toward a politics of embodied emotion (84, 113). Others have sought a “moving together of reason, emotion, and body” while seeking to deconstruct conventional dichotomized social science categories derived from Western philosophical thought (198:141, see also 188). Zimmerman, for example, deplors what he terms “the mourning paradigm” of much medical anthropology, a paradigm that describes the ills of the world through a pathological, psychiatric lens. In contrast, he explains Hindu pain and loneliness through an analysis of love tales and songs (257). Favret-Saada cautions that there are limits to the human capacity for symbolization and that human emotion may at times be devoid of representation (64; see also 36).

Desjarlais takes issue with research that interprets local discourse on emotion solely as a culturally-sanctioned rhetorical strategy with possible political import (41). Desjarlais makes a case for incorporating “felt experience” into analyses of emotion on the basis of work among the Yolmo of Nepal (see also 112). He questions the assertion that investigations into the subjective experience of distress must inevitably be epistemologically unsound, and suggests that feeling can be portrayed in part through empathy—through a “visceral engagement with symbolic form.” Drawing on Bourdieu’s politics of aesthetics, and Bateson’s physiology of aesthetics (9), Desjarlais attempts to represent a phenomenology of aesthetic experience, including aesthetics of harmony and control, with respect to healthy and sick bodies (41, 42).

Ethnographic accounts in which olfaction, taste, sound, and touch take center stage have opened up new horizons, with great potential for a politics of aesthetics grounded in felt experience (35, 65, 104, 137).



## BODIES DOCILE AND RESISTANT

Foucault's discussion of biopower has had a profound effect on anthropological representations of the body. Central to this theory is the concept of "surveillance," institutionalized through disciplinary techniques, resulting in the production of docile bodies (69, 70). Foucault, concerned with the epistemic shift to modernity, which he critiqued with respect to its "objectifying practices," has been roundly castigated for not spelling out the implementation of the "micro-physics" of power in praxis (98). Nevertheless, Foucault's work has profoundly shaped the anthropological understanding of hierarchy, one in which the relationship of power to knowledge is made explicit (30, 151, 208, 251).

The reintroduction of history into an anthropology of the body must be attributed largely to Foucault, although Marx also has been influential (169). For example, through an analysis of Tshidi precolonial cosmology and ritual, Comaroff discusses how politico-ritual control is imposed on the domains of production, exchange, sexuality, and nurturing (24:260). She also uncovers transformations between Tshidi consciousness and the consciousness of European colonizers throughout the colonial period in which bodily practice is central (see also 231). Comaroff focuses on bodily signification as societal memory—significant changes in the social and political order must be accompanied by changes in the "mnemonic scheme inscribed in physical form" (24:124; see also 196, 197). Although presenting no direct challenge to the dominant colonial order, Comaroff asserts that Zionism functions as a resistance to the infiltration of the hegemonic power apparatus into the structures of the natural world (p. 261). Such ritualized resistance is neither apolitical escapism, nor simply a liminal interlude, but a serious attempt to address oppression in a situation fraught with danger. More recently, Comaroff has examined the dialectical interplay between nineteenth century medicine and the colonizing project, in which the "savage native" becomes the target of disciplinary practices including regimens of hygiene, healing, and bodily restraint, institutionalized largely through public health practices (25).

Boddy pays less direct attention to history than does Comaroff, working instead to dissect the "informal logic of everyday life" in Hofriyat, northern Sudan. She is concerned with the inherent contradiction between the cultural construction of women in Hofriyat according to the male dominated Islamic-derived ideology, and the cultural productions of the women themselves, manifest largely in ritual and narrative associated with the Zâr cult. Boddy discusses how women in Hofriyat are irrevocably made into "living vessels" of their culture's moral values through pharaonic circumcision (17:16). In trance, however, it is possible through a negation of the Other—usually men or *Zayran* (spirits)—to play with ambiguity, to create a reflexive, coun-



terhegemonic discourse that permits women to some extent to renegotiate their sense of self (16). This gendered discourse, although muted, is nevertheless empowering, Boddy claims. Like Comaroff, she argues for a mnemonics of the body. Thus in the Zâr, the historical consciousness of the village is expressed implicitly through the bodies of “its most potent icons,” the women (17:9).

Seremetakis, in her work on the Inner Mani, is similarly concerned with “identifying strategies of resistance that emerge and subsist on the margins” (224:1). She analyzes poetics, in particular death laments, as a means of female empowerment, and discusses Mani death rites with respect not only to history and society, but also to the cultural management of bodies both living and dead. Rather than focusing on the physical domination of subjects by institutions (5, 69, 215, 231), Seremetakis analyzes the expression of pain by individual subjects, interpreting it as a challenge to hegemonic order. Through an examination of the semiotics of expressed grief and its relationship to shared moral inferences, she shows that truth claims can be asserted through emotion, and concludes that it is particularly when the subject is in conflict with the social order that emotions are forcefully expressed (224:4).

Bodily dissent has been interpreted until recently as marginal, pathological, or so much exotica, or else has been passed over, unnoticed and unrecorded. Historicized, grounded ethnography, stimulated by the close attention paid for the first time to the everyday lives of women, children, and other “peripheral” peoples has led to a reformulation of theory. The body, imbued with social meaning, is now historically situated, and becomes not only a signifier of belonging and order, but also an active forum for the expression of dissent and loss, thus ascribing it individual agency. These dual modes of bodily expression—belonging and dissent—are conceptualized as culturally produced and in dialectical exchange with the externalized ongoing performance of social life.

## SICKNESS AS CULTURAL PERFORMANCE

Until recently biomedical categories have been exempt on epistemological grounds from anthropological scrutiny, although the existence of discrepancies between diagnostic taxonomies and the subjective experience of illness, which have major consequences for the well being of patients, was established early in medical anthropological circles (3, 28, 83). Good’s concept of a “semantic illness network” (105), in which popular illness categories are interpreted as part of congeries of words, metaphors, and images that condense around specific events, has been widely emulated (77, 170, 183). It has also been shown that in institutional settings, individual distress is systematically transformed into the amoral, decontextualized signs and symptoms of biomedicine,

or is alternatively psychologized and moralized with implications for the allocation of responsibility (26, 74, 176, 230, 251, 254). This critical approach to medical anthropology encourages epistemological questions and has also spurred anthropological reflection about the sick body as a lively participant in the social order.

Kirmayer points out that our “aching bodies remind us there are at least two orders of experience: the order of the body and the order of the text.” He discusses the body’s “insistence on meaning” and gives emphasis to how it presents itself in substance and action rather than simply being an implement for reflection and imagination. Kirmayer suggests that the body provides “a structure of thought that is, in part, extra-rational and disorderly,” inevitably related to emotional, aesthetic, and moral worlds (130:325). Although participation in possession cults, exorcism rites, and traditional healing and mourning rituals has long been recognized as cultural performance (117, 118, 138, 147, 186, 242), this recognition has not usually been extended to sickness in general. In trying to read the sick body more effectively, Frankenberg postulates a general theory of “sickness as cultural performance” (74), purposefully designed to bridge the expressive/instrumental dichotomy, and Scheper-Hughes & Lock discuss illness as bodily praxis (222).

The widely disseminated cultural category of *nerves/nervios/nervos/nevra*, usually classified as a culture-bound or culturally-interpreted syndrome (92, 162), can usefully be interpreted as cultural performance. In clinical literature nerves are characterized as “disvalued bodily states,” and often medicalized as “somatization” (211); anthropologists have attempted to counter this pathologizing approach by explaining the specific cultural meanings attributed to attacks of nerves and some have pointed out a relationship between the incidence of nerves and structural inequalities in society (38, 51, 92, 111, 245).

Lock suggests that nerves can be interpreted as cultural performance, as part of the repertoire whereby those who lack overt power flex their muscles. The concept of nerves and other idioms of distress expressed in the polysemic language of natural symbols then become, in common with the entire domain of semantics of emotional states, bridging concepts between mind and body (135, 152). Narrative analysis of such concepts reveals that their employment is at times unconscious, sometimes partially articulated, and at other times fully conscious (149). Although painful, nerves can be empowering—as an everyday form of resistance, they facilitate the acting out of “hidden transcripts” (223), together with spirit possession and related genres of cultural performance through which social contradictions are enacted (1, 38, 132, 177, 193). Thus bodily distress has both individual import and political possibility, although the potential for medicalization and depoliticization is considerable (131, 133, 150, 166, 218, 255). A performance approach to sickness has the

potential to foreground the sickening social order, while paying attention to body semiosis and individual distress.

Ong analyzes attacks of spirit possession on the shop floor of multinational factories in Malaysia as part of a complex negotiation in which young women respond to violations of their gendered sense of self, difficult work conditions, and the process of modernization (193). Similarly, the refusal of Japanese adolescents to go to school can be understood as a muted form of resistance to manipulation by families, peers, and teachers, and to the malaise of modernity (151). Farmer interprets “bad blood” and “spoiled milk” in Haiti as “moral barometers that submit private problems to public scrutiny” (59:62). Farmer has also shown that epidemiological, historical, and politico-economic analyses of AIDS in Haiti are inadequate unless attention is given to individual embodiment, the “performance” of subjective experience, and local narratives about disease etiology (60, 61). The Nichters, drawing on Bateson, Bourdieu, and de Certeau’s semiotics of popular resistance, examine the naturalization of the slimness ideal in America, relating this to values of control and release embedded in capitalist ideology, and then showing the possibilities for individual resistance to this ideology (185). The Kleinmans analyze narratives of chronic pain in China to show the association between chaotic political change at the national level, collective and personal delegitimation in local worlds, and the subjective experience of physical malaise. Narratives, reconstructed from past events, convey a subtle moral commentary and indirect social censure of the hegemonic Chinese social order (135). In Scheper-Hughes’ epic analysis of impoverished shantytown dwellers in Northeast Brazil, she interprets an epidemic of *nervoso* as having multiple meanings: at times a refusal of men to continue demeaning and debilitating labor, at times a response of women to a violent shock or tragedy, and also in part a response to the ongoing state of emergency in everyday life (220; see also 231). Scheper-Hughes examines the consequences of the medicalization of these problems and the semi-willingness of people to participate in this process because they share in part the same moral world as their oppressors (218, 220; see also 84, 135, 151, 193, 254). She suggests that *nervos* has been used as a metaphor for hunger and child malnutrition in northeast Brazil because of the inherent dangers there of openly discussing malnutrition and its causes (218).

Although DiGiacomo agrees with Taussig (230) and the above authors that reification of disease entities reproduces capitalist ideology, she also argues that reifying illness as resistance or protest potentially “recruits suffering into the service of an ideological agenda” (47:126). DiGiacomo rejects this “moral economy of illness,” (p. 133), calling for “random misfortune” to be recognized as an etiological category, and for the voice of the individual sufferer to be accorded analytical status. Most anthropologists working on the body would agree with this position (126, 133)—not all illness episodes represent

protest (against childhood trauma or social inequality), but nevertheless, ethnographic analyses and narrative accounts reveal an intimate relationship between illness and politics.

## MONTAGE, MIMESIS, ALTERITY, AND AGENCY

Taussig points out that “context” should not be thought of as a “secure epistemic nest in which our knowledge eggs are to be safely hatched” (233:44). His criticism is that anthropologists tend only to contextualize the Other and ignore the “colonial nature of the intellectual relationship to which the contextualized other has for so long been subjected” (p. 45). Taussig calls for a “science of mediations” in which Self and Other are both explicitly implicated, for the juxtaposition of “dissimilars”—for montage. He explores the mimetic faculty—the compulsion to become the Other—in the history of the colonizer and the colonized in southwest Colombia, a compulsion that eliminates any simple telling of history or anthropology (233). He deplores previous analyses of healing rituals that have focused exclusively on the restoration of order, and talks instead of the mingling of chaos, humor, and danger—a disorder that can also be liberating and healing (232).

Working in Northern Ireland, Feldman discusses how, following Nietzsche, power is embedded in the body, which becomes an instrument of agency when politicized. He documents the convergence of body and topographic space in Belfast, and shows how material artifacts and politicized senses are used to simulate a “historical narrative in the flesh of the Other” (66:59). Individual bodies disappear (literally) and reemerge through narrative reconstruction as part of a terror-controlled moral and spatial order. Feldman claims that the ethnicity of the body is built in its dismemberment and disfigurement in Northern Ireland—it is made into a political token which becomes part of local lore—a recitation of the dead with which to organize historical experience.

Taussig and Feldman incite a radical questioning of the epistemology of bodily knowledge that claims to be culturally contextualized. When these author’s insights (see also 25) are combined with a decentering of scientific knowledge (21, 140), to be discussed below, the body ceases to exist as a stable analytic category over time and in space.

## EPISTEMOLOGY AND BODY POLITICS

Foucault’s premise that the language of biomedicine is produced through discourse, creating its own objects of analysis (68, 71), has had a profound influence on how anthropologists have approached biomedical categories such as “disease,” “patient,” “physical examination,” and “the clinic” (4, 250). Young was probably the first anthropologist to question explicitly why episte-

mological scrutiny should be suspended for biomedicine (252; see also 23). Since that time, numerous anthropological analyses of biomedical and epidemiological discourse and classificatory systems have appeared (28, 75, 76, 88, 99, 157, 253). This work has been complemented recently by a radical approach to all medical knowledge and practice, which seeks explicitly to expunge the shadow of Occidental epistemology lurking even in the culturally sensitive work of an earlier epoch (2, 63, 100, 144, 148, 154, 158, 190, 202; see also N. Adelson, unpublished PhD thesis, McGill University).

“How do patients and practitioners know what they know?” is a central question posed in the recent volume on Asian medicine edited by Leslie and Young (144:14). Emphasis is given to ethnoepistemology, situated discourse, and the cultural production of the body as an unstable contested object, the result of ongoing encounters and exchanges between local and global knowledge.

Comparative and historical documentation of the “discovery” of diseases (114, 120, 134, 154, 247) and of competing explanatory systems through time and space (48, 131, 158, 235); the conversion of distress into medicalized illness and deviance (45, 160, 180, 216, 217, 251); the relationship of medical knowledge to both transformations in basic science knowledge and to social and political reformulations about what bodies and populations mean to society (61, 121, 122, 124, 166, 231, 255); and the progressive reduction of life cycle transitions to biological events; together with the creation of, for example, the fetus and more recently the embryo as patients, then subject to medical management (93, 115, 123, 154, 175, 204, 217; see also K. Bassett, unpublished PhD thesis, McGill University) have contributed to the demise of a biomedically defined body, stable in time and space.

Martin documents how metaphors of reproduction have changed over time, reflecting larger paradigmatic shifts in knowledge production in the Euro-American tradition. She analyzes scientific textbooks to reveal gendered stereotypes present in the scientific language of biology, in particular with respect to both immunology (167), and the egg and the sperm (168), as well as metaphors of failure and dissolution built into the language associated with menstruation and menopause, negative metaphors that reinforce a subjective experience of fragmentation and alienation among American women, especially in medical encounters. Martin also discusses to what extent resistance to the dominant ideology relates to ethnic and class differences (166).

Lock’s work on menopause in Japan has shown that reporting of symptoms at the end of menstruation is significantly different from that which is taken to be universal. This finding, linked to established differences between the epidemiology of heart disease, osteoporosis, and breast cancer in Japan and the West, suggests that “local biologies” may be at work, influencing cultural constructions of professional and popular textual and narrative representations

about the menopausal body (154). It cannot be assumed, therefore, that dialectics exist between an infinity of cultures and a universal biology, but rather between cultures and local biologies, both of which are subject to transformation in evolutionary, historical, and life cycle time bytes, and to movement through space [see Worthman for a scientific discussion of the “contingency of corporeal selves” and for the emergent (as opposed to determined) properties of biology (249)].

Young examines the use of the category of post-traumatic stress disorder in treating Vietnam War veterans in a psychiatric institution. He shows that in contemporary psychiatric discourse, moral agency is located in a concept of mind, identified with a common-sense notion of a unitary, rational, and autonomous self. Young notes, however, that everyday talk, in contrast to psychiatric discourse, gives the impression that consciousness apprehends itself through a number of selves or “quasi-selves” that constitute the subject of the person’s experiences at some point in time and, furthermore, that individuals are usually not troubled by inconsistencies among “narrative selves.” He shows that this reality of multiple selves is not in accord with the “pared-down” self of psychiatry. While Young agrees that the rational common-sense self does indeed exist, he suggests that it must be repositioned and not “accepted on its own terms” as the authentic self (254:81). Young claims that multiple selves are morally important because they give reasons for and meaning to a person’s purposeful acts; nevertheless, “the embodied person and not any particular self is the locus of moral responsibility.” Young concludes that the idea of multiple selves encourages an examination of our “mistaken faith in the unity of mind” (p. 82). Young’s work, which challenges the core of the post-Enlightenment philosophic tradition, poses one of the most radical challenges to date of psychological and psychiatric discourse, and of much of contemporary anthropological theorizing about mind (254–56).

## NORMALIZATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF BODIES

Foucault’s interest in the production of bodies and their discipline and normalization through discursive formations has been extended by Armstrong, who examines the introduction of the “technologies of the survey” into turn-of-the-century British medicine (4). Kaufert & O’Neil’s research among the Inuit of the Hudson Bay (123, 124) shows that an epidemiological language of risk in connection with neonatal and perinatal mortality rates is used by both clinicians and administrators to implement a policy of systematic evacuation for birth in southern hospitals. They also discuss the Inuit language of risk, which is at odds with the epidemiological perspective. A central concern for Kaufert & O’Neil is the contested nature of the language of epidemiology and its



relationship to the lived experience of the Inuit [see also Gifford's analysis with respect to "lumps" in the breast (80)].

Lock has shown how professional and popular discourse about the end of menstruation is historically and culturally produced, and conveys different meanings in Japan and North America. In North America the language of risk has come to dominate the vocabulary of popular, medical, and policy making to such an extent that life-long drug therapy is recommended for virtually all middle-aged women. An aging population combined with bodily commoditization, in turn stimulated by circulating knowledge about an inherent unnaturalness and inevitable decline in the female body once past reproductive age, has contributed to the transformation of the end of menstruation into a category of epidemiological risk with major political consequences. In Japan, despite the presence of advanced capitalism and ready access to North American scientific and popular knowledge, a different discursive formation has ensured that the end of menstruation goes largely unmedicalized. Middle-aged female bodies are normalized as nurturers of the elderly, thus techniques of the survey are used, not to combat the aging body, but to fuel government initiatives to restore the extended family in which women's bodies should continue to provide unpaid care for their elderly family members. In this climate only "selfish" women suffer menopausal problems, a discourse circulated as part of a Japanese national identity set up self-consciously in opposition to the West (154, 155).

Nichter contrasts the discourse of international health, with its implicit assumption of a universal normative body, with indigenous South Asian explanations about fertility, anatomy, diet, and medication, etc (184). Justice describes how health programs in Nepal are evaluated in terms of universal biomedical measures and not with respect to local knowledge (116). Cassidy shows that in contrast to the "food-secure" West, big bodies are desirable in many parts of the world (22), and Das discusses "the repressive ideology of health" (37).

In recent years, developments in biomedical technology, particularly in genetic manipulation, have increased possibilities for normalization of the body. Rabinow believes that the two poles of bodily practice and discourse discerned by Foucault—*anatamopolitics* and the control of populations—are in the process of being rearticulated into a "postdisciplinary" (rather than a postmodern) "rationality" (203). In light of an ethnographic study of the Human Genome Project and its adjacent institutions and enterprises, Rabinow concludes that the potential for eugenic practices will differ fundamentally from earlier social eugenics, "cast in biological metaphors." Rabinow coins the term "biosociality" to gloss the type of autoproduction associated with the new genetics. This process will entail the remaking of nature into culture—into something artificial (203:242). Under this regime, the concept of risk will be



extended to populations emergent from computer sets of shared traits and other decontextualized information not applicable to our present understanding of a “subject.” Nature will be “operationalized” for the “good” of society (see also 95, 96) and, as Rabinow emphasizes, will exist side by side with earlier technologies and classificatory systems (203:245).

Strathern concerns herself with the new reproductive technologies, suggesting that the way in which choices to assist reproduction are formulated will affect ideas about kinship and in turn, about “relatedness” between human beings. Like Rabinow, Strathern speculates about whether culture and previously “secure” concepts such as society have a future. Contrasting the British and Melanesian conditions, she shows how, with the problematization of culture as a concept, it is no longer clear what is an artifact, particularly when the metaphorical status between body and machine is collapsed. Strathern analyzes how technology “literally helps ‘life’ to ‘work;’” thus classical analogies that assisted us in separating culture from nature no longer hold, with far reaching implications for fragmentation, particularly of the female body (228:60). Strathern insists that society and the body are equally collage, and that the individual, the centerpiece of the Euro-American nature/culture divide, is now imagined away, with profound implications for the anthropological construct of kinship (227).

Influenced by Darwinian theory, Marx (169) and Engels (55) discussed the transformation of the body physical through physical labor and technology. In the late twentieth century, culture’s invasion of nature is complete—the basic dualities of earlier anthropological theory are exploded. Even in this biosocial world of collage, however, the collapse of nature into culture is not uniform, for local knowledge and politics informs and delimits technological incursions (156).

## ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE BODY

The relationship between theory and practice takes on special meaning for those writing about the body. Anthropologists often find themselves or their work used in medicine or for political ends; alternatively, they may position themselves self-consciously with respect to their research findings, sometimes taking an advocacy role (18, 56, 62, 92, 153, 219, 220). As the text about our most natural tool (albeit less natural than in Mauss’ day), an anthropology of the body provides an excellent forum to reflect not only on theoretical dilemmas, but also on the politics of the practice of anthropology and its use beyond the confines of the discipline. Despite increasing pressures we should, I believe, resist all pressures from the Other to produce tidy answers and “Just So” stories, remain eclectic in our approach, and be content with a body that refuses to hold still.

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