



## Notes towards a corporeal feminism

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# ARTICLES

## Notes Towards a Corporeal Feminism

Elizabeth Grosz

The word 'body', its danger, how easily it gives one the illusory impression of being outside of meaning already, free from the contamination of consciousness-unconsciousness. Insidious return of the natural, of Nature. The body does not belong: it is mortal-immortal; it is unreal, imaginary, fragmentary. Patient. In its patientness the body is *thought already* — still just thought.

Maurice Blanchot<sup>1</sup>

**A**fter a considerable period of distrust regarding the body, feminists today have become increasingly interested in the role the body plays in the social constitution (and problematisation) of sexual identity. Feminist research has effected major changes in the ways bodies are represented and theorised. No longer reduced to naturalistic or essentialist explanations, the body can be seen as *the* primary object of social production and inscription, and can thus be located within a network of socio-historical relations instead of being tied to a fixed essence.

This resurgence of feminist interest is both negatively and positively motivated, an effect, on the one hand, of growing dissatisfaction with humanist notions of subjectivity or identity; and on the other, by a post-humanist recognition that if there is no female essence or *a priori* femininity, then it is only through an understanding of their

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corporeality that women's identities can be conceived. Humanisms (of all kinds) rely on an (implicit) essentialism; or else on a process of homogenising and recuperating women's specificities, attributes and characteristics, reducing them to a formal equality with men, thus submerging their *positive* particularities.<sup>2</sup> Women are represented as human only through an implicitly male-defined notion of 'humanity'.

If feminists are to avoid a reverse essentialism, in which a determinate form of femininity is universalised, providing a female 'version of humanity', then concepts, which explain both the commonness women share cross-culturally, and their cultural and individual specificities, are necessary for women's positive self-definition. A 'genuine' female universal, if not located in a fixed identity or psyche (as implied by humanism), can be corporeally located. Women's carnal existence, their corporeal commonness, may provide a universal 'raw material', which is nevertheless pliable enough to account for cultural, historical, class and racial specificities distinguishing concrete women from each other. Only a notion like the body — which is both universal in its generality, yet 'open' to any culture's particular significations and requirements — satisfies these two conditions of feminist researches into women's identities.

The female (or male) body can no longer be regarded as a fixed, concrete substance, a pre-cultural given. It has a determinate form only by being socially inscribed. Each sex is not differentiated on the basis of some unique substance or the possession of distinguishing organs alone. Rather, sexual differences are purely *relational*, each sex being defined only by its negative or differential relations to the other sex(es). Out of a spectrum of sexually differential bodies, the continuum is polarised around two sexes, one conceived in terms of the absence, lack or deprivation of the other. The relations between the socially distinguished forms of body, and the positions occupied by each, may help to provide the bases for a non-essentialist, non-humanist conception of sexual/personal identity.

In contesting the prevailing theoretical paradigms through which the body has been theorised (including biology and physiology, at the expense of alternatives which may be based more on social, political, representational and psychological concepts) feminists have

articulated a conception of the *constitutive* embodiment of sexed subjects. As a socio-historical 'object', the body can no longer be confined to biological determinants, to an *immanent*, 'factitious', or unchanging social status. It is a political object *par excellence*: its form, capacities, behaviour, gestures, movements, potential are primary objects of political contestation.<sup>3</sup> As a *political* object, the body is not inert or fixed. It is pliable and plastic material, which is capable of being formed and organised in other, quite different ways or according to different classificatory schema than our binarised models. If it is a social object, the body can be redefined, its forms and functions can be contested and its place in culture reevaluated or transformed.

Feminists have attempted to rethink many of their long-term programmes (e.g. abortion, contraception, health, sexuality, violence, harassment etc.) that have centered on the body, but have not been adequately theorised or conceived in corporeal terms. The body need no longer be an object of theoretical aversion and ideological suspicion, for feminists need not commit themselves to essentialism or biologism if the body is conceived in avowedly social terms. Conceptions of the body compatible with transformations or upheavals in social relations, non-biologistic, non-reductionist and anti-essentialist notions of the body, may thus provide some of the critical tools by which the masculinity of prevailing knowledges can be recognised, and women's specific experiences articulated.

I hope to provide some rough notes towards establishing a 'corporeal feminism', that is, an understanding of corporeality that is compatible with feminist struggles to undermine patriarchal structures and to form self-defined terms and representations. First, I examine why the body has occupied a negative place within feminism until relatively recently; second, I examine some of the challenges feminists have posed to prevailing conceptions of the body; and third, I explore some of the implications of theorising the body as a psycho-social object. These are merely preliminary gestures towards the larger project — left untouched here — of formulating a theory of *embodiment* or *corporeal incarnation* compatible with autonomous conceptions of the sexes.

It is apparent from everyday experience that the body plays a crucial role in subjectivity. There are few philosophers willing to deny this claim. However, the problem, articulated throughout the history

of philosophy, has been to provide terms and a conceptual space in which their interaction, their togetherness, can be theorised. In starting their researches from the evidence of experience, many feminists begin their researches from a less abstract and self-distanced conception than is generally available in philosophical speculation. Nevertheless, many feminists remain wary of concepts of the body and have considered them a theoretical and political danger. Why has this occurred? In sketching an answer, I will draw on the ways in which the body has been traditionally theorised in the biological or natural sciences, and also on common presumptions governing its position and status in the social sciences and humanities. Given the kinds of theories and conceptions of the body privileged in the social and natural sciences, it is not entirely surprising that feminists tend to remain wary of the idea of the body in their researches, particularly when the notion of the female body has been used to justify women's physical and social subordination.

With rare exceptions in the history of philosophy, the mind and body have been conceived in isolation from each other, functioning as binary or mutually exclusive terms. The attributes of one are incompatible with those of the other. In, for example, Descartes' influential writings<sup>4</sup>, the body is defined by its extension, that is, its capacity to be located in, to occupy, space. By contrast, the mind is considered as conceptual, based on Reason. It is non-spatial and the body is non-conceptual. The binary formulation of mind-body relation — that is, *dualism*<sup>5</sup> — identifies subjectivity and personhood with the conceptual side of the opposition while relegating the body to the status of an object, outside of and distinct from consciousness.

This binary opposition is commonly associated with a number of other binary pairs: nature and culture, private and public, self and other, subject and object. These help to provide the mind-body dualism with positive contents. The mind becomes associated with culture, reason, subject and self; while the body is correlated with nature, the passions, object and other. Not unexpectedly, the positive side of the opposition, mind/culture etc. is also associated with masculinity, and their opposites, with femininity.

Significantly, the natural sciences are divided from the social sciences and humanities according to a mind-body dualism. The

conceptual side of this opposition becomes the object of the humanities, (their object is consciousness, mind or ideas); the body is given the status of physical object, and becomes the object of a natural scientific investigation. Thus excluded from notions of subjectivity, personhood or identity, the body becomes an 'objective', observable entity, a thing. The human being is distinguished from animals only by mind or reason. As an organism, the human body is merely a more complex version of other organic ensembles. It is not qualitatively distinguished from other types of existence: it poses similar general questions to those raised by animal physiology. The body's sensations, activities, and processes become 'lower order', natural or animalistic factors of the human subject, tying it to nature. It becomes one part of an interconnected chain of organic forms, whether construed in cosmological or ecological terms.

The body has been identified with brute matter in our recent intellectual history. For Descartes, for example, it differs from other material objects only in its degree of complexity. He considers it contiguous with the organic, and part of the physical order. He construes the materiality of the body as fundamentally similar to the materiality of a rock or tree. The natural and life sciences, while distinguishing the organic from the inorganic, nevertheless place them in a(n evolutionary) continuum in which inorganic gives rise, through its increasing complexity, to the organic. The animation and *interiority* of the body, the fact that it is the point of origin of a *perspective* and that it occupies a conceptual, social and cultural point of view, cannot be explained on such a model. The corporeality of a subject *must* differ from the corporeality of a stone or of an animal insofar as the human body is capable of thinking and talking, is subjected to meanings, values, and decisions arising from *within*, while the latter are animated or subjected to meanings only externally. In other words, the *humanness* of the body, its *psychical* status, has been ignored.

Patriarchal oppression justifies itself through the presumption that women, more than men, are tied to their fixed corporeality. They are thus considered *more* natural and biologically governed, and *less* cultural, to be more object, and less subject than men. Women's circumscribed social existence is explained — or rather, rationalised — in biological terms and is thus rendered unchangeable. Relying on essentialism, naturalism and biologism, misogynistic thought

confines women by tying them to a biologically and logically necessary dependence on men, ensuring its own continuity through the ascription of a biologically determined female 'nature'.

Women's bodies are not only used as fixed elements to dictate 'efficient' or adaptive roles for women in culture, they are also used to reduce women to a pseudo-evolutionary function in the reproduction of the species, which supposedly acts as a compensation for women's social powerlessness. It supposedly assures women of a socially recognised and validated function — maternity. Women's biologies, it seems, are distinguished from men's insofar as *only* women's reproductive organs and activities characterise them (doctors dealing with so-called 'women's problems', for example, are gynecologists or obstetricians). The allocation of only a reproductive specificity, at the expense of other functions and capacities, once again confirms the presumption that somehow (because of particular biological, physiological and endocrinological transformations that they involuntarily undergo), women are closer to biology, corporeality and nature than men.

Where patriarchs used a fixed, given concept of the body to contain women, it becomes understandable that feminists would resist such conceptions and their implied limits on the possibilities of social change. The hostility directed towards women and femininity is commonly rationalised, explained away, with reference to the functions and capacities of the female body. Yet, although prevalent and socially legitimised, these biologicistic reductions of women's social capacities are not the only possible accounts of female corporeality and sexuality available.

Feminists working in the sciences and humanities increasingly resist these reductions of the body, and have explored alternative concepts of corporeality which, on the one hand avoid biological reductionism, and, on the other, present more appropriate conceptual models to specify women's bodies and experiences than those given in prevailing, male-defined paradigms. In other words, many feminists today seem to agree that the body can be extricated from biologicistic and socio-biologicistic accounts to provide the basis of a positive identity and representation for women.

There are at least two possible directions in which the body may be rethought in terms outside the limits of biological models, which

tend to reduce it to genetic or hereditary factors. Bodies are the result of *more than* biology. Social, economic, psychical and moral relations are not just *experienced* by subjects, but are, in order to be experienced, integrally *recorded* or corporeally *inscribed*. The project known as 'the construction of the subject', which has been focussed on the acquisition of appropriate ideological values can be explained as well on a model of corporeal inscription. Yet claiming that the body is an extra-biological phenomenon does not mean that biology is irrelevant in understanding it. Yet it may imply that biological theories and scientific paradigms, as we know them, now need to be reformulated. Their basic presuppositions and methods can, like other knowledges, be seen as a reflection of the male dominance of culture as a whole. A biological theory, which, for example, takes as its starting point the autonomous definition of two sexes, may provide the conceptual and experimental space in which the female is not seen as an aberration or variant of the male, may develop an altogether different understanding of women's (and men's) corporeality. Theories of the body, those compatible with feminism, should account for both the biological (universal, transhistorical) elements of the body as well as for the body's capacity to be 'molded', 'constructed' or socially in-formed, or culturally specified.

If biology is reconsidered starting from its most fundamental assumptions, it could be regarded in continuity with social, cultural and psychological relations rather than in opposition to them. It would have to refuse the pervasive dichotomisation of mind and body, and nature and culture. *Biology must itself be amenable to psychical and cultural transformation*, to processes of re-tracing or inscription. Moreover, while clearly sharing many features in common with animal bodies, human bodies should also be seen in fundamentally or qualitatively different terms. Among the most relevant differences here is the fact that only human bodies create culture, and, in the process, transform themselves *corporeally* (as well as conceptually). Human biology must be *always already cultural*, in order for culture to have any effect on it. It is thus a threshold term between nature and culture, being both natural and cultural. Or, formulated more paradoxically, it is *naturally social*. That culture, history and language exist at all must, in some broad sense, be in the 'nature' of human biology, if the term 'biology' refers to the complexity of products and the capacities of the organism. This may be the



consequence of the fact that 'instincts' have little or no place in sustaining human life in the earliest years; the child *must* (biologically) depend on others for its survival for a far longer period than other animals (indeed, precisely the length of time it takes for the child to acquire language). In human bodies, instinctually governed survival skills are replaced with, or displaced by, emersion in linguistic and learned, culturally meaningful behaviour.

In short, human subjects *give meaning* to their biologies, to their bodies and their existence. They take up attitudes to their bodies that do not correspond to the behaviour of animals. Humans love or hate, have narcissistic or paranoid investments in, their bodies. Their bodies always *mean something*, to themselves and to others. The subject's relation to its body is always *libidinal*: this is a necessary condition of its ability to identify the body as *its own*. The body, when experienced-as-a-whole as well as the preceding phase of motor fragmentation that Lacan has described as 'the body-in-bits-and-pieces' — that is, the body and its various organs and orifices — are always psychically or libidinally mapped, psychically *represented*, as a condition of the subject's ability to use them and to include them in his or her self-image. These libidinal or eroticised investments are not simply or clearly psychological rather than physiological; they blur the boundaries between the psychic and the somatic, bridging their division and making their (conceptual) separation possible. As Freud claims, the *affect* or energy of libido is neither conscious nor unconscious, for it is not psychical but rather the coupling of the psychical or libido and the (erotogenicity of) an organ. This implies that the body itself, which is continually traversed by organic-psychical drives, is *both* biological and psychical. This understanding of the body as a *hinge* or *threshold* between nature and culture makes the limitations of a genetic, or purely anatomical or physiological account of bodies explicit. If the body is purely natural, an object or form, of otherness, that has value and status relative to subjectivity or consciousness, this means that the body's *biological capacity* for consciousness and subjectivity remains uninvestigated.

Feminists have found unexpected allies in the writings of a number of wayward male philosophers (e.g. Spinoza, Leibniz, Nietzsche, Foucault) who have proposed a unified or *monist* rather than a dichotomised or *dualist* understanding of corporeality, and

subjectivity, and have located the body as a social, historical and political object. However, in their explorations and questioning of the specific ways in which the *female body* can be reconceived, feminists are unlikely to find much support in the writings of, say, a Nietzsche, a Foucault or a Deleuze. With very rare exceptions, these male theorists are blind to or silent about the implications of acknowledging the sexual specificity of different bodies. Each in his own way cannot acknowledge the masculinity, the phallocentrism, of his own position.

Reconceptualising the body in feminist terms entails recognising the existence of *two* kinds of body, two sexes — or rather, of *at least* two. Binary divisions are, of course arbitrary; they divide what may be considered a sexual continuum (a realm of 'pure sexual difference') into mutually exclusive categories. If these divisions are arbitrary, the continuum could be divided in quite different, non-binary, ways. The differences between the sexes do not have universal 'content', meaning or value. Although in our culture, we discern two types of (sexed) bodies, we could also categorise this continuum in ternary or other terms, depending on social needs.

Feminists have increasingly recognised that there is no monolithic category, 'the body'. There are only *particular kinds of bodies*. Where one (the youthful, white, middle-class male body) functions as a representative of *all* bodies, its domination must be overcome through a *defiant affirmation* of the autonomy of other kinds of bodies/subjectivities. It may turn out that a subversion is accomplished by the proliferation of a number of different types of ideals or representatives for the range and type of bodies.

There are at least two possible lines of research feminists may undertake in reevaluating women's (and men's) corporeal subjectivities. In one case, the body can be approached, not simply as an external object, but from the point of view of its being lived or experienced by the subject. Rather than defining the subject in terms of a mind, as traditional philosophies have done, the subject's corporeal existence can be explored from the 'inside' as it were. Here, psychoanalysis and phenomenology — however incompatible they are — may provide some basis for analysis of the corporeal framework within which all experience is made possible. While neither phenomenology nor psychoanalysis can be considered

discourses of 'corporeality', in Freud's and Lacan's understanding of narcissism and the circulation of libido throughout the body, and in Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the body as the threshold of identity and of the subject's being-in-the-world<sup>6</sup> there are at least the rudiments of an account of an embodied subjectivity. In the second case, the corporeal may be approached, as it were, from the outside: it can be seen as a surface, an externality that presents itself to others and to culture as a *writing* or inscriptive surface. (Here, the writings of Nietzsche, Foucault and Lingis may prove fruitful in highlighting the socio-political production of determinate historical bodies.)

Psycho-social explanations of an always embodied and always acculturated subject are crucial to feminist accounts of women's oppression. The techniques through which the body is unified, coordinated, structured and experienced are productive (diet, exercise, movements, pleasures) and constitute, maintain or modify it (shrinking or expanding it, removing some things, adding others by surgical means, requiring a certain type and level of performance from it) are necessary for seeing it as an *interface* between 'privatised' experience and signifying culture. Yet, as a cultural product, the body must not be seen as a mere shell or 'black box' whose interiority has no relevance. Rather, the inscription of its 'external' surface is directed towards the acquisition of appropriate cultural attitudes, beliefs and values. In other words, the metaphor of the body as a writing surface explains the ways in which the body's interiority is produced through its exterior inscription. Theories of subjectivity or experience, which approach the body from the direction of its internal, psychical operations similarly do not merely focus on the subject's wishes, phantasies and attitudes; they are concerned with the ways in which subjects are able to act, to move, to locate themselves within the boundaries of their corporeality. They too can be seen as approaches to the body's externality, its material existence as an object in-the-world and for-others. The exteriority of the body and the confinement of the subject to its interior are effects of the ways in which the subject makes his or her own body meaningful, the way each eroticises the body and lives (in) it as its own.

In refusing self-evident concepts and 'natural' presumptions about the body, feminists may be able to develop new images and representations by which the lived experiences of bodies can be

more adequately inscribed. There are a number of different directions in which this research could go, schematically, if somewhat arbitrarily, outlined below. To formulate different conceptions of corporeality, it may be necessary to:

1. Explore non-Euclidean and non-Kantian notions of space. If Euclidean, three dimensional space organises hierarchised perspectives according to the laws of point-for-point projection, then different 'pre-oedipal' or infantile non-perspectival spaces, for example, may provide the basis for alternatives to those developed in dominant representations of corporeality.<sup>7</sup> This may entail research in post-Einsteinian concepts of space-time; or, in an altogether different vein, psychological or fantasmatic concepts of space, for example, the kind experienced by the infant before vision has been hierarchically privileged and coordinated the information provided by the other senses into an homogeneous totality.<sup>8</sup> This is necessary if the representational grid which produces conventional patriarchal representations of the body is to be superseded. Exploring other conceptual schemas which rely on different initial premises and different forms of argument prove useful in showing, at the least, that Euclidean/Cartesian conceptions are not the only possibilities;

2. Explore other conceptions of temporality more adequate to the representation of the *two* sexes than patriarchal conceptions. For example, instead of a temporality fundamentally modelled on spatiality — that is, a temporality understood by discrete digital units of regular sequence,<sup>9</sup> a notion modelled on rhythms, cycles and repetitions may provide some clues in this direction. The digital rendering of units of time — a key presumption in notions of chronological progress, lineage, descent — is uniquely unsuitable to represent the bodily cycles and processes located in women's bodies, even if it may describe men's. Solar time is based on the *mathematisation of time*; lunar temporality, by contrast, is based on repetition. A cyclical and non-progressivist time, one beyond the teleological constraints of Hegelian models or Vico's reworkings, however, is not necessarily alien to notions of history, nor even progress, although it does problematise progress conceived as directional or goal-seeking. Repetition and cyclical time, as Nietzsche so astutely understood, is not the repetition of the same, or the (self)-identical, but that by which difference is generated.

Taken together, 1. and 2. question the Cartesian coordinates by which we conventionally represent the space-time grid in which bodies are positioned and conceptualised. At best, it is *one* means of representing space-time, but not the necessary one. The Cartesian grid renders the space-time continuum *quantifiable*; it becomes incapable of representing the experiences of *both* sexes.

3. Redefining the notion of the body also entails reconceiving notions of power: if the body is one of the major objects contested in power relations, then power can no longer be equated with either ideology (in which it is ideas and conceptual systems that are at stake) nor with physical coercion (in which constraint and threat operate directly on the body with brute, repressive force). Rather than see the body as an intervening *medium* between ideological/social systems and individual belief systems, the body can be regarded as the object of dual power relations which inscribe it both socially and idiosyncratically, both 'externally' and 'internally'. The body is both the means by which power is disseminated and a potential object of resistance to power.

Bodies, then, are not outside of power, for power relations constitute them as such. Power generates ideological effects and systems of coercion only through the production of a socially specific body. Individuals' beliefs and value systems, their practices and expectations are propagated through the codification and control of bodies. Prevailing accounts of socialisation or enculturation, that is, theories of imprinting, internalisation or stereotyping (learning theory) presume a passive, pliable subject, indeed a subject incapable of resisting (whatever resistances or imperfections occur, they are effects of inconsistent expectations and cultural demands, not the products of a subject who rebels). Power relations do not simply impose a set of values and preferred practices on individuals; rather, the subject is 'branded' or inscribed, a subject who, while relatively passive during inscription procedures, must nevertheless actively assume the social tattoo as his or her own in order to have a place in culture. In short, power actively produces rather than inhibits the subject's activities.

4. Other systems of signification and representation, which can describe women in their own terms are also necessary. This means not only the creation of new words, syntactical and grammatical rules

and formal structures, but the creation of different representational structures, different ways of using language, different contexts in which discourses can function. It implies *re-appropriating language* by speakers who have been disqualified as such from enunciation. It is thus not a *new* language that is required, but, more feasibly, the construction of new knowledges. This seems necessary insofar as bodies themselves are never brute objects external to discourses and representations; it is relevant then, that the activity of making meaning be reordered so that the bodies it conditions and the social subjectivities it makes possible can be changed.

Biology, for example, could be reformulated, starting from premises that do not automatically regard women as the passive counterparts of men. The humanities and social sciences could become more open to women's interests and perspectives. Indeed, instead of the disinterested objective status of knowledges, they could now be recognised as products of sexually particular perspectives. This recognition would not mean that feminist texts are biased relative to mainstream knowledges, but rather, that *all knowledges*, all discourses, are produced by interests, values and political perspectives. Acknowledging its representational limits may entail the formation of entirely different kinds of knowledge than those which aspire to an eternal, truthful status, a universal validity, or an unambiguous, transparent meaning.

5. Accounts of the sexually differentiated, socially produced body need to transform, integrate, and re-categorise hitherto diverse methodologies and knowledges. This is correlative to the transformations and upheavals in textual norms already suggested. If the boundaries between prevailing knowledges and disciplines remain intact, the body will not be amenable to a psycho-social and biological analysis. Feminist accounts of the body require experiential or phenomenological concepts of the body as the site for an interior or psychical map (of the world, of its own *corporeal* outlines, of others) — as well as accounts of the ways in which bodies are manipulated, produced and controlled in order to develop different conceptions of the *lived body*. The 'lived body', the body-and-consciousness has been spuriously defined as 'gender' in most feminist literature on sexual identity.<sup>10</sup> Yet, to avoid the bifurcation between a purely biological 'sex' and a purely social 'gender', which reinforces a mind/body opposition, feminists must take seriously the

'internal' or psychical evidence of the body's externality, and concepts of the body as an external surface which, when appropriately inscribed, engenders psychical or internal attributes. The body's reconceptualisation implies seeing it as a surface for social inscription, a material, external and social writing surface, on which social law is etched; and psychical systems, which are always anchored in the body's perceptual, sensory, and libidinal sensitivity. The introceptive or experiential notion of the body must not be opposed to or seen in distinction from an extroceptive, social concept. These are two sides of a single coin. The social inscription of bodies, particularly in the socialising processes of the kinship structure, produce meanings and structures necessary to live the body as one's own.<sup>11</sup> And the psychical investments in the body's zones and organs, correlatively, is the condition of the body's use for and integration with subjectivity. They mutually condition each other.

The construction of alternative models of corporeal or carnal existence, if they are to represent both sexes adequately and without reductionism, should place special emphasis on women's particular corporeal experiences. Specifically female biological processes like ovulation, menstruation, childbirth, lactation or other processes — have always been inscribed in patriarchal terms and analysed only according to men's interests. Women's bodies are reduced to biology, which in turn presumes them to be passive relative to the (implicitly male) norm of 'humanity'. When women's *psychical experiences of their bodies* are coupled with revised biological models more appropriate to women, can women provide a new starting point for reconceiving their corporeality? For example, women's experiences of menstruation — the archetypal 'symptom' of women's unique biologies — are not simply responses to hormonal and biological imperatives, but are effects, in the first instance, of the ways in which menstruation is represented in culture, and as the way it is lived or experienced by women — its meaning *for them*. In a culture where it is regarded as a wound, a sign of castration, lack or imperfection (as is common in patriarchy), it is likely to be experienced as a dreaded burden or debilitation, unpleasant or painful.

This does not, however, mean that the body's responses to biological processes can be explained by the opposite extreme — psycho-somatic causes, produced by the mind. Rather, it means

that lived experiences are made possible and structured as such only through the social construction and inscription of biologies, physiologies or anatomies. Women's specificities, their corporeality and subjectivities, are not inherently resistant to representation or depiction. They may be unrepresentable in a culture in which the masculine can represent others only as versions of itself, where the masculine relies on the subordination of the feminine. But this is not logically or biologically fixed. It can be contested and changed; it can be redefined, reconceived, reinscribed in ways entirely different from those that mark it today.

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### Notes

- 1 M. Blanchot *The Writing of Disaster* (University of Nebraska Press), Lincoln, 1986, p. 45
- 2 For a feminist critique of egalitarianism, see M. Thornton, 'Sex Equality is Not Enough for Feminism', in C. Pateman and E. Gross *Feminist Challenges: Social and Political Theory* (Allen and Unwin), Sydney, 1986
- 3 This seems to be one of the major implications of Foucault's 'genealogical' analyses, in for example, *Discipline and Punish* (Pantheon) New York, 1976 and *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1: An Introduction* (Pantheon) New York, 1977
- 4 For example, in R. Descartes 'The Meditations' in E. Anscombe and P. T. Geach (eds) *Descartes: Philosophical Writings* (Nelson) Edinburgh, 1954
- 5 20th century positions tend to be reductionist rather than monist. Most commonly, modern proponents of mind/body split advocate reducing one to the terms of the other. Where the body is explained in terms of mind, idealism results, and where the mind is explained in terms of the body, materialism is the consequence. Reductionism in both forms simply explains away the 'other' term instead of integrating them or explaining their connections. Today, the materialist reduction of mind to body — particularly the reduction of the mind to the brain — is the most typical 'answer' to the problem of dualism.
- 6 The psychoanalytic material is located in the various papers centred on the pre-oedipal period — including 'On Narcissism: An Introduction' (SE Vol. 14) 'The Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality' (SE Vol. 7) and 'The Ego and the Id' (SE Vol. 19) in Freud's work, and the conception of the 'imaginary anatomy' in Lacan's work on the mirror-stage, especially 'The Mirror Stage As Formative of the Function of the I' in *Écrits: A Selection* (Tavistock), London, 1977, and 'Some Reflections on the Ego', *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, No. 34, 1953. In the case of Merleau-Ponty and phenomenology, the concept of embodiment is forcefully outlined in *The Primacy of Perception* (Northwestern University Press), Evanston, 1964.
- 7 The infant's perception of space is not yet structured in terms of adult notions. It has not yet learned to distinguish virtual/specular from real space (Spitz, Merleau-Ponty). It does not understand perspectives or the relations between figure and ground, which require oppositions that the child has not yet acquired. For the infant, space is not yet conceived as a regular grid into which objects are placed or from which they can be removed. Space, in other words, is never 'empty', simply subsisting without objects. This requires an abstraction from its experiences and an ability to position *itself* as an object available for inspection by others. Instead, the child perceives within a pre-oedipal space which is largely orally or kinaesthetically, not visually, structured. The child perceives a 'space of adherence' (Merleau-Ponty), a space that clings to objects and images without distinguishing them.




8. Rather surprisingly this pre-oedipal space — which is occasionally invoked in dreams — is close to mathematical and physicist views which develop non-Euclidian notions of space — Riemannian space, the curved space-time of Einsteinian physics, the 'impossible' space of the Mobius strip and the Klein bottle, Finsler's space are all 'impossible' notions on a Euclidean model.
9. See, for example, Irigaray's comments on the spatialisation of time and the temporalisation of space in her analysis of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, in her text, *L'Ethique de la difference sexuelle*, (Edition de Minuit) Paris, 1984.
10. cf. M. Gatens' 'A Critique of the Sex Gender Distinction', in J. Allen and P. Patton (eds.) *Beyond Marxism? Interventions After Marx* (Intervention Publications) Sydney, 1983, pp. 143-162.
11. For a discussion of the conditions under which the body is claimed as one's own, see E. A. Grosz 'Language and the Limits of the Body: Kristeva and Abjection' in *Futur\*Fall. Excursions into Post-Modernity*, (Power Foundation), Sydney, 1987.

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