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The Body – The New Sacred? The Body in Hypermodernity

Prefatory Remarks

The subtitle of this article is ‘The Body in Hypermodernity’. This requires an explanation. I call the present state of advanced western societies ‘hypermodernity’ for the following reasons: these societies have arrived at a stage when new technologies are more intrusive in manipulating the body and its image by introducing technologically driven procedures for human reproduction, for curing illnesses – actually or doing research (e.g. stem-cell research) – but also for cosmetic changes. Moreover, genetic technology raises the possibility of producing ‘bespoke’ or ‘designer babies’ by selecting the gender, height, eye colour and so on of the expected child, even by selecting the DNA characteristics of the future parents, enhancing the physical or mental abilities of people. Research into human cloning pushes the technologization of the body to its extremes.¹ Another feature of hypermodernity is the spread of microelectronic technology and its collateral, ‘virtual reality’ – an oxymoron by itself. It disembodies the body, insofar as it eliminates the natural, spatial relations and the temporal rhythm of the body. Also, it diminishes the frequency of intimate everyday interactions. It has brought about a qualitative change in previous communication technologies because the Internet, among others, allows one to shop by images instead of using our other – tactile, auditory, etc. – senses as well. It also makes it possible to communicate without physical presence, and present (or misrepresent) the self the way the sender wants it. And the ‘libidinal body’ can have ‘virtual sex’ without encountering a living body, thus transforming the object of libido to an image.²

Marcel Mauss, in his famous essay ‘Techniques of the Body’, was still using the term ‘techniques’, by which he understood ‘the ways in which men, in each society, know how to use their body’ (Mauss, 1968: 365). In hypermodernity *technologies* of the body take over, which results in the ever greater objectivization and externalization of the body.

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Hypermodernity is not a break with postmodernity but rather enhances features and tendencies inherent in postmodernity. Postmodernity, in my view, is an excess of modernity and at the same time the expression of its crisis. It is not an absolute break with modernity, as modernity is not an absolute break with premodern conditions; societies we call modern still contain elements of premodern thought that are often in contradiction with the dominant social structures and relations. Also, in certain fields, especially in the public presentation of the body, there is a marked tendency to returning to premodern customs, e.g. body ornamentation or scarification. However, as I argue later, these are manifestations of the precarious position of the individual in postmodern society rather than true returns to previous sociocultural conditions.

The body is at the intersection of nature and culture, of the individual and society, of space and time, of corporeality and spirituality (mind), and as such, it is subject to social control but is also seat of the individuality, the material substrate of our physical existence, thought and social relations. It is therefore obvious that great philosophical and religious systems paid attention to the body–spirit relationship. Their answers were different, insofar as they considered mind (spirit) superior to body, or else, the two being equal in the chain of being. What is fascinating, however, is that the mind–body duality, whether in Platonic, Cartesian, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, etc. formulations, was never really overcome. I argue that there are reasons for that duality, and the efforts to overcome it are at best only partially successful. Probably Freud and phenomenology (especially Merleau-Ponty) came the closest to overcoming this problem.

Postmodern conditions and technological innovations introduced a new dimension in human beings' relation to the body, namely 'virtual reality', including the 'virtual body'. While the natural rhythm of the body – from birth to death – includes a time sequence, the 'virtual body' is not subject to it. The 'virtual body' has no emotions; it is immortal but not in the sense of the immortality of the soul or bodily resurrection as many religions believe. The 'virtual body' can be rejuvenated, moved around on the time scale, in the best traditions of science fiction. This illusion can, and often does, create confusion about the nature of the real body and its limitations.

Furthermore, developments in biotechnology and reproductive technologies carry the potential of altering the body or parts of it to interfere in natural processes of the body. I do not wish to make moral, ethical judgements about these technologies; they could be beneficial to the individual, but they could also serve selfish or even frivolous interests.

The problems concerning the body are manifold; they include broader issues too, such as what we eat, how we care for our health (including what we consider to be healthy), how we present the body in public: i.e. the symbolic body (fashion, modesty), the private body, the body as simulacrum,

body politics and last but not least, love and sexuality are issues in which philosophy, theology, psychology (analytical and other) and anthropology are involved. A great number of sociologists, classical and contemporary, e.g. Simmel, Fromm, Foucault, Bataille, Gehlen, Goffman, Baudrillard, O'Neill, Shilling, B. Turner, to name just a few, have devoted their attention to these problems. And, of course, feminist theories have attempted to reinterpret and reformulate theses and assumptions developed in past and present theories. Feminist theories re/claim the female body, and even though there are differences among them concerning female sexuality, the presentation of the female body, etc., they agree in criticizing (one could say, often ahistorically) the gendered approach to the body. The preoccupation with the body is ever more expanding and intensifying in modern theories, sociological and otherwise. Within the framework of this article, however, I cannot deal with all aspects of theoretical approaches and practical consequences.

Presociological Approaches to the Body

Sociology as separate discipline emerged in the 19th century. However, as social thought existed before the rise of sociology, so did ideas concerning the body and the body–soul relation in philosophical, theological and later anthropological thought. Broadly speaking, in western philosophical and theological ideas, there were two approaches: the horizontal and the vertical (see Rommeru, 1992: 7–12). Thus begins the distinction between body and soul.

The vertical scheme implies a hierarchy of values, from top to bottom. This means that the spirit is superior, of higher value than the body because the latter by its weight is pulled down to earth. But even within the body, the lower parts are of less value: the head is nobler than the heart, which, in turn, is nobler than the stomach. This approach was embraced by Platonism, Christianity, Islam, etc.

The reverse direction – from bottom up – regards the body not as something that chains us to the sensual world but rather as a springboard allowing humans to liberate themselves from it. In this view, the body is not an object of rejection or contempt but rather an instrument for a possible ascent from the sensual to the spiritual realm. Buddhism is perhaps the best representation of this approach. It treats body and bodily hygiene as important.³

The horizontal approach does not consider the human body as distinct from animal bodies or other life forms. It is characteristic to cultures that are in close relationship with nature. In those societies, bodily marks such as tattoo, body painting and scarification are common and have a social function, marking a person's belonging to an ethnic group (signifying the 'we' and distinguishing from the 'other'), to manifest a person's position or

rank, and among the warriors, the state of peace or readiness for war. The mainly Durkheimian analysis of totemism indicates the closeness or even identification of humans with the non-human nature. Even anthropophagy carries a spiritual meaning; it is a rite of communion. (A certain similarity with the Catholic and Orthodox communion comes to mind.) In these cultures the body is a means of communication with nature, and these do not make a clear-cut distinction between body and spirit because they consider the ancestors as living in a different form and believe in the omnipresence of spiritual powers in their society and everyday life.

The Eastern religious cultures do not acknowledge the inferiority of the body. Hinduism, at least in its pre-Vedanta form, does not entertain the idea of the original sin and does not malign the flesh. The human body is the seat of a vital energy which can join the cosmic energy. Thus, the body is the path through which spirituality flows. Later developments, however, established a vertical vision of the world in which the body – low in the scale – becomes the frame in which the soul assumes the consequences of previous lives.⁴ Hinduism, in spite of its reverence towards all life forms, values the human body more than the animal ones, and acknowledges the cycle of reincarnations.

Buddhism, while maintaining the belief in the transmigration of souls, aims at ending the cycle of reincarnations because it believes that existence is suffering. It denies to things and beings any permanence, sees the nothingness behind the appearance of the concrete, identifies life with pain and thus discredits the flesh. The supreme goal is the *nirvana* (extinction), which liberates the soul. For this purpose human beings ought to suppress and eliminate desire. Nevertheless, the body is not an insurmountable obstacle to the liberation of the soul; on the contrary, it could be its instrument provided the soul can control the body. Hence the importance of meditation. (Tantra yoga is a good example illustrating the control of desires by the soul.) Both Hinduism and Buddhism attribute a lower value to life, and this is reflected in the status of the body. However, the body–soul dichotomy has been maintained in these world-views.

In western thought, these distinctions found their reflection in the differences between the Hellenistic and Christian approaches to the body and to the body–soul relationship. Without going into details, one could observe that the prevailing (though not exclusive) idea of Hellenism was expressed by Protagoras: ‘Man is the measure of all things’. The value attributed to the human body was indicated by the belief that gods had the image of human beings thus the body is the model of perfection. This current of thought believed in the unity of physical beauty and moral and intellectual quality, which was expressed by the concept *kalokagathia* (from *kalos* = beautiful and *agathos* = good). Hence the importance of physical beauty and fitness and the elevated place of the *gymnasium* (from the word *gymnos* = naked) as well as the *askésis* (= exercise) which was directed to the physical and moral

aspects of life. Similarly, education included the teaching of dance and music: thus the visible qualities of the body together with the moral and intellectual qualities of the mind were taken in their unity. And the meaning of *cosmos* was the unity of the world, its order and its beauty. Humans were different from the gods by their mortality; while their beauty and strength were consumed by Time, the gods enjoyed eternal youth and beauty (see Garivier, 1992: 14–18).

There was in Greek thought another stream as well. Pythagoras juxtaposed the Earth, the seat of imperfect forms, with Heaven, the home of the perfect forms: the circle and the sphere. The heavenly bodies were spherical, they are the gods. The soul is of heavenly nature while the body is of earthly nature. After death, the soul ascends to Heaven and waits there for its new incarnation. Consequently, the body is the tomb of the soul, and this thought was expressed in the *soma, sema* (body, tomb) word play, apparently first used by Xenophanes and taken up by Plato. This distinction was continued by neo-Platonism and Christianity.

Judaeo-Christianity, incorporating Pythagorean ideas – and, in general, Greek spiritualism – declared the soul, of divine origin, superior to the body. The Old Testament (Genesis 3:19) saying: ‘For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return’ is a good indication of the status of the body. The idea of the original sin included not only the consumption of the fruit of knowledge but also the sufferings of the body. ‘In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children’ (Genesis 3:16) and ‘In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread’ (Genesis 3:19). Christianity professes the doctrine of bodily resurrection at the Last Judgement. Following St Augustin, the Catholic Church up until the 18th century (and orthodox Judaism) considered sex for procreative purposes only.⁵ ‘Control, discipline, even torture of the flesh is, in medieval devotion, not so much the rejection of physicality as the elevation of it . . . into a means of access to the divine’ (Walker Bynum, 1989: 162).

Islam does not reject the pleasures of the body. However, it regulates the body by prescribing personal hygiene, by determining the posture at prayer, by commanding fasting during the month of Ramadan, which the believers deem to purify the soul, and by proscribing the consumption of alcohol which would unsettle the movements of the body. As Islam also believes in bodily resurrection, promising carnal pleasures in Paradise, it advocates the control of desires in this world. However, the blatant differences in controlling the male and female body are justified by considering the woman as a body of temptation, with a mixture of fascination, fear and condemnation. Hence the restrictions on displaying the female body or parts of it in public (scarf, veil, *chador*, *burka*), the strictness of which depends on the level of orthodoxy in Islamic societies. Islam also forbids the artistic depiction of the human body (which, however, does not prevent television broadcasting of human beings in Islamic countries).

This very brief and incomplete description, which does not even mention the historical and cultural variations of the artistic depiction of the body, shows that in modern/postmodern society, in spite of certain changes, traditional and religious views are still influencing many prevailing ideas about the body.

The Emergence of the Body as Social Problem and Subject of Anthropological and Sociological Investigation

The second part of the 19th century brought about an intensified interest in the body. It was caused by two events: the enhanced interest in, and information about, non-European societies and the growing concern about the squalid life conditions, together with the demographic as well as public health consequences, caused by the impoverishment of the masses of industrial workers.

The anthropological/ethnographic information that came from travellers and from specialized scholars (the latter were often employed or supported by the administration of colonial powers) described cultures in which the public presentation and significance of the body were drastically different from their home – European – societies. The encounter with the largely or fully uncovered but altered (by tattoo, scarification, painting) body elicited astonishment and feelings of superiority, to some extent among anthropologists but mainly among the public. This gave rise to the image of the ‘savage’ or of the ‘noble savage’. It was only later that anthropologists, having studied more closely the extra-European societies and become better acquainted with their beliefs and customs, came to realize the significance of body ornamentations or alterations for the cultures under their study.⁶ Apart from the interest in different, and for a westerner unusual, family forms and attitudes to sexual relations, they also discovered that the body had not only a restraining function (i.e. delineating the individual from other individuals) but also a communicative (i.e. social) one. This was perhaps best expressed by Mary Douglas, who – in connection with her analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo as responses to the risks, uncertainties and dangers life entails – considered the body to be the main classificatory system through which a society differentiates between disorder and order (see Douglas, 1979).

Mary Douglas also called the attention to the symbolic character of the body (see Douglas, 1978, esp. Chs 4, ‘Grid and Group’, and 5, ‘The Two Bodies’):

The social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society. There is a continual exchange of meanings between the two kinds of bodily experience so that each reinforces

the categories of the other. . . . The care that is given to it, in grooming, feeding and therapy, the theories about what it needs in the way of sleep and exercise, about the stages it should go through,⁷ the pains it can stand, its span of life, all the cultural categories in which it is perceived, must correlate closely with the categories in which society is seen in so far as these also draw upon the same culturally processed idea of the body. (Douglas, 1978: 93)

These statements retain their validity for contemporary society as well. However, the cultural forms mentioned by Mary Douglas are increasingly altered under the conditions of postmodern culture. These are mentioned later.

The analysis of Marcel Mauss (1968: 365–83) concerning the techniques of the body also retains its pertinence to modern conditions. Mauss said that ‘The body is the first and most natural instrument of man. Or, more precisely, [the body is] the first and most natural technical object, and at the same time the technical means, of man’ (Mauss, 1968: 372). He emphasized the impact of culture on those, usually unnoticed, actions that are considered natural, such as feeding, cleaning the body, the posture when walking, etc. and first and foremost, sex. While they are taken for granted, the influence of culture is paramount.⁸

Indeed, the social body is subject to social norms, values and manipulations. The contemporary substitution of ‘wellness’ for ‘health’ is a good example for it includes not only physical but also mental and social well-being.

The body as social problem called the attention of the medical profession and social scientists in about the middle of the 19th century. The abysmal life conditions of the rapidly growing industrial working classes caused widespread alcoholism, tuberculosis, sexually transmitted diseases, malnutrition and below the average life expectancy. Physicians and experts of the emerging discipline of public health were seriously concerned about these symptoms as well as about the declining birth rate, and began to talk of a ‘degeneration’ in the population (Berthelot et al., 1985: 9–18).⁹ They were in particular troubled by the decreased fertility rate among women workers and the high level of infant mortality, which could affect the reproduction and health of the working population. Also, the army needed able-bodied soldiers. Both the ruling classes and various socialist critiques addressed this situation.¹⁰

Apart from the practical aspects, anthropometry became fashionable. Bodily features, such as height, cranial size, the proportions of the body, etc. were studied, and compared in different ‘races’. This, combined with the emerging ideas of social Darwinism, gave rise to racial theories which culminated in the Nazi ideology of racial superiority and the practice of extermination of the ‘inferior’ races. The individual body had been transformed into the collective body – the race.

Classical Sociological Approaches to the Body

As David Le Breton explains, sociology underwent three phases in its approach to the body.

1. Implicit sociology of the body that does not neglect the corporeality of humans but does not really stop there. It touches on the condition of the actor in his or her different components and while it does not omit the body, still dissolves it in the analytical specificity;
2. A fragmented sociology (*sociologie en pointillé*): it provides solid elements of the analysis concerning the body, however, without systematizing their unity;
3. A sociology of the body: it investigates more specifically the body and reveals the social and cultural logic in it (Le Breton, 1992: 13).

The classics of sociological thought did not place the problem of the body at the centre of their theories. This would correspond to the first phase in Le Breton's periodization. The relative neglect of the body by classical sociology can be understood by the radical changes capitalism brought about. Nineteenth-century sociology was primarily preoccupied with the analysis of the emerging new type of society – urban, industrial – with the new relations, not simply in the field of production and class structure but also in interpersonal relations (e.g. in the family, or the emergence of the public sphere). Sociology was first and foremost interested in the general characteristics of modern societies and their difference from the premodern ones.¹¹

Nevertheless, the classics paid attention to human beings' bodily existence, but considered it rather a prerequisite for, or influenced by, society. They treated the embodied social actors as subjects of culture (Durkheim), of capitalist production (Marx), of bureaucratic rationalization (Weber) and of social control.

Marx, in correspondence with his materialist philosophy, considered corporeal existence a prerequisite of thought and language, the brain as the material – physical – substrate of thought. But, in contrast to Durkheim, he viewed the development of the senses as the product of history, and sensuousness as '*practical*, human-sensuous activity'. Also, he regarded the individual as the sum of his or her social relations (see *Theses on Feuerbach* and the chapter 'Feuerbach' in *The German Ideology* [Marx and Engels, 1977: 13–15, 16–80]).

The question, then, arises whether Marx continued or overcame the Cartesian dualism of mind and body. There are strongly argued suggestions that he did, indeed, overcome that dualism. Richard Bernstein, in his book *Praxis and Action* (1972) claimed that Marx managed to go beyond the body–mind dualism. In the article 'Psychoanalysis and Marxism', Richard Schmitt (1985: 451–3) distinguishes between an anti-Cartesian reading of

Marx and the ‘Cartesian’ Marx of the Second International.¹² In the psychoanalytic interpretation of Wilhelm Reich, Marx did overcome the Cartesian duality by postulating that human beings first have a mental vision of the goals they want to achieve by their actions. However, the juxtaposition of the material conditions of life (‘base’ or ‘infrastructure’) and the dependence on the mental creations (belonging to the sphere of ‘superstructure’) makes questionable the suggestions that Marx managed to go beyond the dualistic conception of the subject.

Durkheim, in his effort to establish sociology as a science on its own grounds, rejected any naturalistic explanations of social facts. He was against what was called ‘biological sociology’ like the Spencerian organicism, and against psychologizing sociology because he viewed psychic factors as pre-social albeit he acknowledged that ‘sociology . . . draws on psychology and could not do without it’ (Durkheim, 1964: 325).¹³ ‘Humans, then, were marked by a nature/society dualism, and the biological body for Durkheim was placed firmly in the sphere of nature’ (Shilling, 1993: 25). In contrast, the social body, including ‘our mental states’, even ‘the most important ones, are of social origin’ (Durkheim, 1964: 325).

However, Durkheim upheld the body–soul dualism in human beings. In his essay ‘The Dualism of Human Nature and its Social Conditions’, he wrote about the ‘constitutional duality of human nature’. ‘In every age, man has been intensively aware of this duality. He has, in fact, everywhere conceived of himself as being formed of two radically heterogeneous beings: the body and the soul’ (Durkheim, 1964: 326). This could be best seen in the actuality of the decomposing body after death and the belief in the afterlife of the soul, and ‘although the body and the soul are closely associated, they do not belong to the same world’ (Durkheim, 1964: 326). This is, for Durkheim, the distinction between the sacred and the profane. However, as we see, Durkheim gave a more encompassing understanding of his notion of the sacred.

Even in the mental sphere, there are ‘two different forms: on the one hand, are sensations and sensory tendencies; on the other, conceptual thought and moral activity’. These are ‘two poles [that] are not only distinct from one another but are opposed to one another’ (Durkheim, 1964: 327).

When we satisfy our hunger, our thirst, and so on, without bringing other tendency into play, it is ourselves, and ourselves only that we satisfy. [Conceptual thought] and moral activity are, on the contrary, distinguished by the fact that the rules of conduct to which they conform can be universalized. Therefore, by definition, they pursue impersonal ends. (Durkheim, 1964: 327)

Weber did not look at the body as subject for theorizing. In spite of his greater appreciation of the subject’s role, the Weberian analysis of the forms of social action was influenced by the German *Kulturphilosophie* that,

perhaps as a reaction to Darwinism, maintained the nature–culture dichotomy and considered culture the only determinant of human behaviour.

The Breakthrough: Georg Simmel

In classic sociology, the real breakthrough came with Georg Simmel. While other classics of sociology, as mentioned, were also attentive to the social conditions modernity brought about, they did not pay (or not too much) attention to the body. Nor did they succeed in overcoming the mind–body dichotomy. Marx and Durkheim gave priority to society, to the social and viewed the individual either as sum of his or her social relations or the senses as results of history (Marx), or considered society *sui generis* (Durkheim) creating the collective consciousness that imprints itself upon the individual.

In contrast, Simmel developed the dialectic of the individual and society. I cannot examine here the underlying philosophical, epistemological roots of his theories but it is indicative that he asked ‘How Is History Possible?’ (Simmel, 1971a: 3–5) and ‘How is Society Possible?’ (Simmel, 1971b: 6–22), paraphrasing Kant’s question: ‘How is nature possible?’. Simmel’s answer in both cases centred around the individual. (His questions could be contrasted with Durkheim, who could have asked ‘how is the individual possible?’.) Simmel, by developing the theory of differentiation and reciprocity of action, which included the role of the senses, especially of the sight, broke with the conception that the mind and not the body constituted the substance of the individual. True, he did not exclude the mind – or culture – from his investigations into human behaviour. However, he fused it with the investigation into culturally influenced phenomena, such as fashion, flirtation, womanhood, etc., taking into account the embodied subject. Also, his formal sociology, which begins with the examination of dyadic and triadic relationships, indicates his concern about the role of individuals in creating the cultural conditions that impose themselves on the individual or, at least, influence his or her behaviour, attitudes and ideas.

‘... there is a decisive difference between the unity of a society and the unity of nature’ (Simmel, 1971b: 7).

In the Kantian view (which we follow here), the unity of nature emerges in the observing subject exclusively; it is produced exclusively by him or her in the sense materials, and on the basis of sense materials, which are themselves heterogeneous. By contrast, the unity of society needs no observer. It is directly realized by its own elements because these elements are themselves conscious and synthesizing units. (Simmel, 1971b: 7)

And:

Society may be conceived as a purely objective system of contents and actions connected by space, time, concepts and values. In such a scheme, personality,

the articulation of the ego (in which, nevertheless the dynamics of society is located) may be ignored. However, the elements of this system are heterogeneous. Every action and quality within it is individual and is irrevocably located in its specific space. (Simmel, 1971b: 19)

... social life exists as if all of its elements found themselves interrelated with one another in such a manner that each of them, because of its very individuality, depends on all others and all others depend on it. ... This a priori provides the individual with the basis for, and offers the 'possibility' of, his being a member of a society. An individual is directed toward a certain place within his social milieu by his very quality. This place which ideally belongs to him actually exists. Here we have the precondition of the individual's social life. *It may be called the general value of individuality.* (Simmel, 1971b: 20; my emphasis)

Quotes from Simmel emphasizing the role of individual and individuality could be multiplied; suffice it to say that for him the individual and individualism were the clue, the guiding principle of modernity. Viellard-Baron interpreting Simmel, says that 'Society is always in tension between the tendency towards continuity and cohesion which allows it to maintain itself, and the tendency toward discontinuity and division which is the individualist claim of modern thought' (Viellard-Baron, 1989: 23).

As Dahme and Köhnke remark in their 'Introduction' to Simmel's essays collected in the book *Schriften zur Philosophie und Soziologie der Geschlechter* ('Philosophy and Sociology of the Sexes') (Dahme and Köhnke, 1985: 16), his concept of 'qualitative individualism' entails that the individual is under the influence of the socially established 'objective culture' but in modernity the individual is unable to assimilate the totality of the objective culture. Nevertheless, qualitative individualism means that it is not socially determined, and 'Qualitative individuals possess the power to establish their own norms according to an ideal which is only their own, to conduct their life according to a law which is only theirs' (Dahme and Köhnke, 1985: 16).¹⁴

Simmel's interest focused on the *social*, and not on the *natural* body. (In this sense, it belongs to the third phase in Le Breton's periodization, although Simmel's analysis of the role of the senses suggests that he represented a transition between the second and the third phases.) His pioneering works on women's issues show that Simmel grasped the importance of the problems of women in the modern world. His essays, 'Flirtation', 'On Love' and 'Fragments of a Philosophy of Love' (Simmel, 1984: 133–52, 153–92; 1985: 183–6) as well as his writings on the philosophy and sociology of the sexes (see Simmel, 1985) combine sociocultural and psychological as well as mental and physical aspects of human behaviour. The essay on flirtation, to mention just one example, touches on such features of human existence as the interplay between missing and possession, to have and not to have, the playfulness in human relations, physical and mental attraction, revealing parts of the body and modesty, male and female roles, etc.

Excursion: Psychoanalysis and the Body

I cannot examine in depth the contribution of Freud¹⁵ to the understanding of the mind–body–society relationship. His theories concerning the inter-relations of instincts, drives and the culture of a society or the ego–id–superego relations put in a new light the mind–body connection. In my view, Freud's theories overcame the mind–body dichotomy by linking the somatic and psychic processes. Advances in neurobiology, neurochemistry and postulates of cognitive science seem to support his assumptions.

First of all, Freud distinguishes two kinds of body. He calls them *Körper* and *Leib*. While dictionary translations render both as 'body', the difference between the two is that *Körper* signifies the 'inner body', the corporeality proper, while *Leib* is the source of internal excitations.

The body is in fact the *Körper*, the real body, a material and visible object, extended in space and can be defined by a certain anatomical cohesion. But it is *Leib* too, that is 'the body perceived in its own living substance . . . it is not only a body but the Body, the principle of life and of individuation' (Assoun, 1992: 40). Freud considers the ego foremost a body ego, meaning that the ego ultimately derives from bodily sensations originating primarily from the surface of the body (i.e. sensory perceptions).

According to Freud the id contains everything that is present at birth. It is not organized, developmentally precedes the ego, is fixed in its constitution and houses the instincts. Freud, by analogy, called the id 'chaos'. In contrast, the ego is organized, is under the influence of the external world and represents reason and common sense. The Freudian distinction between drives and instincts is an important indication of his view on the relation between the psyche and the soma. The instinct is

. . . organically determined patterned behaviour . . . a response of the organism governed by its nervous system and identified with and triggered by a specific context of sensory information. A *drive*, by contrast, is a more complex somatic/psychological formation. . . . The context of expression, its objects, and the resultant pattern of behaviour are psychically shaped and determined. Drives, nevertheless, do have a definite somatic foundation and functional effect on the organism . . . Freud never abandoned the *somatic* element in the drives . . . it has effects on the psychical apparatus (but *through* psychical representation) independent of any conscious choice on the part of the subject. (Hirst and Woolley, 1982: 143–4)

This brief excursion was not meant to describe the complexity of Freud's ideas, or the controversies around them, or their different interpretations by psychologists, sociologists and philosophers. Its sole aim was to call the attention to a pathbreaking theory concerning the body–mind relationship. Nevertheless, there seems to be a parallel between the Freudian analysis of the id and ego – and I hope I am not stretching the analogy too far – on the

one hand, and, on the other hand, the chaotic character of postmodern culture which is ever more marked by a preoccupation with the body.

I return to these characteristics later.

Modern Sociology of the Body

Late modernity, and especially postmodernity, brought about a radical change in people's relationship to, and outlook on, the body, especially their own. This has been expressed as well as fostered by philosophical, sociological and psychological theorizing. This is the third phase in Le Breton's periodization whereby the social and cultural logic of the body as well as its symbolism became the subject of sociological investigation.

There are several reasons why investigations into the body moved closer to the centre of theoretical interest.¹⁶ First of all, preoccupation with the individual and its role in modern and postmodern societies expresses the decline of traditional social bonds and the corresponding individualistic attitudes and perspectives. The ever more self-centred attitude of people brought about an enhanced interest in the body. Modernity meant, among others, materializing as well as scientificizing the body. It is increasingly being studied as subject of the laws of nature: advances in biochemistry, genetics (especially in the research into the human genome), dietetics, etc., together with their often watered down popularization, spread the image of the scientifically determinable natural body. The healthy body – in itself not a bad thing – is more and more associated with scientific advances. At the same time, many other cultural and symbolic aspects of the body disappear from the popular consciousness. Mass media and popular culture only reinforce this trend.

Modern industrial production required a regimentation of the bodies of workers. The introduction of shift-work disrupted the circadian cycle, the body's natural rhythm (and modern communication and transportation have even enhanced this). Marx and Engels developed the idea that workers' bodies were linked and subordinated to the machinery. At the same time, Marx was interested in the levelling effects of industrial mass production. These ideas are, however, limited insofar as they analyse factory conditions in an earlier period. With the widespread application of microelectronic technology, the worker who labours under conditions where robots perform more and more tasks cannot be simply viewed as an extension of the machinery, and the computer is not simply an extension of the human brain. As a matter of fact, Marx foresaw this development when he predicted that human labour would lose its importance in producing real wealth. Instead, the creation of wealth will depend 'on the general state of science and on the progress of technology, or the application of this science to production'

(Marx, 1973: 705).¹⁷ Indeed, today science and technology have become forces of production.

The changed and still changing attitudes to sex have also contributed to the enhanced scientific and public interest in the body. Contrary to a superficial view that dates this turn from the 1960s, I suggest that it began after the First World War – the ‘roaring twenties’ – and has continued, more or less, ever since. Obviously, attitudes have been shaped by the culture, mainly by the religious culture, of a society or groups and by class. As more and more people chose from religious teachings the moral elements that they deemed befitting for themselves, irrespective of whether they corresponded to the official ones (this is part and parcel of the so-called ‘do-it-yourself religion’), individualism shaped sexual mores. For example, the legal discrimination of so-called ‘illegitimate’ children ceased; many countries legalized heterosexual and even same-sex partnership.¹⁸ There were other reasons for the change. Both world wars caused a tremendous depletion of population, mainly among men, and the need for replenishment contributed to the shifting attitudes.

The spread of contraceptive devices allowed one to have sex not only for procreative purposes and, largely preventing unwanted pregnancies, was also conducive to the acceptance of premarital sex. But there was in postmodernity another factor. Helmut Schelsky, in the chapter ‘Sexualität als Konsum’ (‘Sexuality as Consumption’) in his book *Soziologie der Sexualität* (Schelsky, 1955: 118–27), contrasts the regulated life structures in large-scale organizations, be they industrial, corporative or of the state, with the perceived (or relative) freedom in the private sphere. However, leisure time came under the pressure of consumption. Acquisition of consumer goods, fostered by relentless advertising, causes people ‘in their free time [to come] under the constraint and laws of consumption induced by the industrial society, as [they are] in working time under the constraint of the industrial-bureaucratic form of production; both equally act as depersonalizing and equalizing factors of behaviour’ (Schelsky, 1955: 120). Schelsky, then, characterizes contemporary sexuality as ‘pleasure without remorse’.¹⁹ Even though the book was published half a century ago, its description of features of society and sexual behaviour retains its validity. There are signs nowadays that even the AIDS epidemic has not brought about substantial changes in sexual behaviour.

Advances in medicine, medical technology, eradication or significant containment of certain epidemic diseases, improvement of public hygiene have contributed to the increasing life expectancy of the population in the developed and in many developing countries. This has led to the emergence of gerontology and the public’s preoccupation with health. Indeed, the proportion of elderly people (euphemistically called ‘senior citizens’²⁰) in the population is increasing. This fact creates a number of social and personal

problems. The ratio of the active adult population to the elderly is changing; there are fewer and fewer working people whose contributions maintain the pension funds, the traditional forms of the extended family are disappearing, which compels the state to make the individual more responsible for his or her retirement. Therefore, individualism gains reinforcement in the economic sphere.

Another consequence of the increasing life-span is the expectations people have of longevity. However, as Daniel Callahan, a renowned medical ethicist, stated, ‘Far from profiting from old age, many elderly people seem to have their lives preserved too long, well beyond the point of continuing satisfaction and meaning’ (Callahan, 1987: 19).

This, then, by implication means that the thought of death has acquired a quasi-obscene meaning – definitely one that has to be chased away from thought. Philippe Ariès, in his book *Western Attitudes towards Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (1974) and in other writings, describes changing attitudes over history. Death, which has ever been a natural event, accepted as such, even though it was painful for the families, is now becoming a failure to be avoided or at least pushed far away into time. (As Woody Allen has satirically remarked, ‘in North America death is optional’.) Roger Caillois, in his essay ‘La Représentation de la mort dans le cinéma américain’ (‘The Representation of Death in American Film’; Caillois, 1951), analyses that representation as well as the phenomenon of the ‘funeral parlour’ and concludes that their atmosphere aims at sanitizing death and the dead. He states that the American attitude to death and its popular cultural representation excludes any concept of the sacred. Anthropological findings show that in many societies death is seen as the physical demise of the person who nevertheless lives as spirit among the living. Metaphorically speaking, it is as if in modern or postmodern societies salvation could be attained in this world. Indeed, scientology, the most postmodern among the new religions, declares that perfection can be achieved in this world, that the living person can realize his or her spiritual essence and this, combined with the belief in reincarnation, promises eternal life without referring to the notion of the other world.

Of the modern theorists, it was Michel Foucault who accomplished the most important turn in the conception of the mind–body relationship. Foucault, in his genealogy of the modern soul, emphasized the role of a kind of technology over the body. ‘The soul is the effect and the instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body’ (Foucault, 1978: 30). This was a radical break with the long-held view that the body was the prison of the soul. He placed the body at the centre of regulation, healing, punishment and surveillance. But the claim that the ‘soul is the effect and the instrument of a political anatomy’ also means that regulation, healing, punishment and surveillance are realized not only by exercising control over the body as

machine but also by ideological means. In this sense, Foucault's ideas show a certain affinity with Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony', inasmuch as it is stipulated that the regulation and discipline of the body are carried out not only by coercion but also by establishing ideals and norms of 'normalcy', health or the desirable body.²¹ Establishing ideological control over sexuality by defining what is moral or immoral in a given social context provides another example of the normative control over the body.

The disciplining the body, optimizing its capabilities, increasing its usefulness, submitting it to economic controls (see Foucault, 1978: 139) means exercising power over individuals. Family, schools, workplace, army are places where relationships of power and discipline are exercised because of the unequal positions of embodied individuals. Even such trivial rules as dress codes are expressions of power.

Foucault also introduces 'an epistemological view of the body as produced by and existing in the discourse' (Shilling, 1993: 75). In doing this, he shifts the emphasis from the natural body to the mindful body, that is to a body that possesses consciousness, intentions and language (see Shilling, 1993: 76). Therefore, the control over it is not exercised by force but rather by surveillance and stimulation.²² In *Discipline and Punish* (1974), Foucault describes the change from physical punishment to a rationally managed institution where the goal is to have access to the mind. Also, the discourse on sexuality has changed from the flesh to the intentions, i.e. to the mind.

Foucault, however, did not succeed in overcoming the body–mind dualism; as Shilling suggests, he dissolved the body in the discourse: 'Bodies that appear in Foucault's work . . . are produced, but their own powers of production, where they have any, are limited to those invested in them by discourse' (Shilling, 1993: 81). However, the discursive approach to the body, especially to sexuality, aims at regulating and facilitating reproduction, which on the surface is a private matter but in essence concerns social reproduction.²³ The state also uses the discursive technique, coupled with material incentives or even with punitive measures, to foster or restrict population growth.

Nor did Foucault take into account the subversive techniques for escaping from control and surveillance (e.g. anti-fashion fashion or joining certain subcultures). Moreover, the question arises whether the disciplining of and control over the body as described by him can be applicable in a society ever more dominated by consumerism and the service sector. It does not mean that they have disappeared but the methods have changed. One could even hypothesize with Baudrillard that simulacra, manifested in the symbolic value of consumer objects, have taken over from the institutional regulations as a significant element in controlling behaviour.

However, the development of the concept of biopolitics or, in Foucault's

terms, the ‘anatomy-politics of the human body’, represents a significant contribution to the understanding of the social body. It is the product of modernity and enhanced in postmodernity; it changes the discourse on the body, on the regulating institutions, consequently on society itself.

Biopolitics is a complex phenomenon that extends into many walks of life. The symposium organized by the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research in May 1994 in Vienna (see Heller and Puntischer Riekman, 1996) included papers ranging from theoretical approaches to case studies on the postindustrial transformation of work, the impact of biopolitical ideologies on new social movements, immigration and policy-making, population policies, etc. Here one can touch upon the main theoretical considerations only. However, the practical-political consequences for everyday life are far reaching.

Biopolitics is intrinsically related to identity politics – a typical phenomenon of postmodernity. It takes natural features of the body – such as gender, race, ethnicity, age – to use them for political purposes. Thus it promotes particularism as opposed to universalism. Moreover, if a group is presented as homogeneous on biological grounds, it blurs the other differences within the group. Women can be taken as same gender but socially and ethnically there are differences among them. (One could ask, what is there in common between, say, a poor black woman and the First Lady?) The same applies to groups that define themselves along racial or ethnic criteria. National identity politics also refers to common roots: ethnic, genetic similarities and the territory they inhabit, which is, however, shrouded in a mythical imagination that disregards the class and cultural differences within. (This is the *Blut und Boden* – the blood and soil – ideology promoted by fascism, which was easily translated into the ideology of ethnic superiority.) Ferenc Fehér, in the concluding remarks of his paper at the Vienna symposium, attributes the pervasiveness of biopolitically influenced ideologies in their various forms to the disappearance of a politics based on grand narratives or of class politics or of a redemptive politics in postmodern societies (Fehér, 1996: 65).

In their book *Biopolitics*, Fehér and Heller (1994: Ch. IV) succinctly analyse the political agenda behind the issue of health and emphasize that ‘it was mainstream modernity that separated [health issues, religious-ritual matters and political problems] through the private–public–intimate differentiation’ (Fehér and Heller, 1994: 63). I would add to this that postmodernity and certain ideas (e.g. some feminist claims of fusing the private and the public) not only do not eliminate this differentiation but rather tend to do away with civil society. Namely, civil society assumes privacy of citizens as well. The intended elimination of privacy (not to be confused with intimacy) would expand the control of society over the private sphere and thus virtually abolish the spontaneous actions of individuals.²⁴

The Body, Consumption and Reproduction

Several sociologists have addressed the relation between the body and consumption. Obviously, consumption is necessary for the maintenance of the body. Marx already mentioned the dialectic of production and consumption. What has changed is that the availability and accessibility of material goods have increased in modernity, but also the role of consumption has been modified. A capitalist economy is dependent on the growth of consumption, but in modernity, and particularly in postmodernity, the symbolic value of consumption has undergone significant changes. Moreover, modern sociologists have advanced the idea that consumption is not merely the satisfaction of – historically changing – needs but also a means of domination and manipulation.

Pierre Bourdieu links the problem of domination to consumption. He examined the process of social reproduction, and the role of the body in this process. ‘The body for Bourdieu . . . is an unfinished entity which develops in conjunction with various social forces and is integral to the maintenance of social inequalities’ (Shilling, 1993: 127). The ‘unfinished body’ in Bourdieu’s view expresses social differentiation. To explain the ‘distinction’ (see *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*; Bourdieu, 1984), he introduces three concepts: social location, habitus and taste. The first refers to the class-based conditions that determine an individual’s life conditions including the place of residence, the assets he or she may have, etc. It plays an important role in the development of the body. Habitus is formed by the social location and manifests itself in the body and the way people treat their body. It is expressed in everyday life, in the techniques of the body and affects the outlook on the social world. And, finally, taste refers to the processes through which individuals make their lifestyle choices – under the influence and/or constraints of the first two factors. Bourdieu mentions as an example eating habits, the consumption of healthy or unhealthy food, etc., and claims that the three factors determine the reproduction of the body but also of societal inequalities.

Body is a form of physical capital but also has become commodified in modern societies. As physical capital, it is part of production, leisure, etc., and is usually converted to economic capital. As cultural capital, it is embodying the acquired education, knowledge and access to those institutions that transmit knowledge and culture. And as social capital, it is part and parcel of networks, milieux. (The review *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, established and edited by Bourdieu, published many articles dealing with the concrete manifestations of cultural and social capital.) But access to these different forms of capital is unequal and expresses class differentiations.

In Bourdieu’s view, coercion gave way to domination mediated by taste. The dominant classes define the taste, which is often imitated, and therefore

appropriated, albeit often in a watered down manner. (Fashion would be an example: the haute couture indicates the style, the off-the-peg clothing follows.) Lifestyles do have an impact on the body, which can be seen, for example, in neglect of the body or being a member of a health club.

Bourdieu has certainly contributed in an important way to the understanding of the impact of social conditions and differentiation on the body. Nevertheless, postmodern conditions do modify his scheme. Part of the class differences remain, especially as far as cultural and social capital are concerned, but the levelling effect of mass (or pop) culture and media cannot be neglected, especially in taste.

The Body in Postmodernity: The New Sacred?

Is there a specific postmodern body? Or else, has postmodern culture changed the way people look at and treat their bodies? What are the social expectations concerning the body?

Without doubt, the regulation of the body in post- or hypermodernity has increased. This may sound paradoxical because in many respects the body has been for a large part of the population freed from the constraints previously imposed on it. As mentioned already, religious ideas about sexuality or coercive regulations of the body have been weakened, even rejected by many. Superficially, 'freedom' over one's own body has expanded. However, more subtle regulations persist. They operate through images, symbols, creation of desires, of 'public opinion' – none of them are results of spontaneous ideas and actions – let alone by means of surveillance (be it physical, electronic or medical, such as the HIV test.)

One cannot neglect the underlying material and technological aspects either. As has already been mentioned, consumption of objects or, as Baudrillard would want us to see it, of signs or simulacra, is vital for the maintenance of the economy. Bataille calls it the general economy of excess – and one could add that it is not just an excess of material consumption.

The emphasis on the autonomy of the subject culminating in a 'hyper-subjectivity', on the individual, on individualism (which is somewhat similar to Simmel's qualitative individualism) veils the fact that these are images, simulacra rather than reality. My interpretation of the individual is not the singular person but the one who takes responsibility for his or her acts and their consequences, who is critical and selective, and whose aim is not 'keeping up with the Joneses'. Mass culture, however, does not propagate this type of personality.

In their essay 'Theses on the Disappearing Body in the Hyper-Modern Condition', Arthur and Marilouise Kroker (1987: 20–33) describe the state of the body under postmodern conditions. The body is subordinated to

the fashion industry 'as skin itself is transformed into a screen-effect . . . for a desperate search for desire after desire' (Kroker and Kroker, 1987: 21).

Technology externalizes the body insofar as natural functions have been substituted or enhanced by technological devices or processes. Indeed, *in vitro* fertilization and other forms of reproductive technology, much as they could help people desperately wanting a child, apply a rationally devised procedure which is external to natural processes.²⁵ The spread of plastic surgery, breast implantations, etc., is showing the external intervention into the body, but also the power of images – of the desirable body.

Microelectronic technology – 'virtual reality' – disembodies the body. While the advantages of the Internet are indisputable, virtual flirting and virtual sex substitute for interpersonal relations and bodily encounters. It reduces love or even personal encounter to figments of imagination.

It is therefore understandable that the Krokers – in my view, exaggeratedly – state that the body has become 'second order simulacra' which subordinates the body 'to the apparatus of (dead) power'.

They write:

In technological society, the body has achieved a purely *rhetorical* existence: its reality is that of refuse expelled as surplus-matter no longer necessary for the autonomous functioning of the technoscape. Ironically, though, just when the body is transformed in practice into the missing matter of technological society, it is finally free to be emancipated as the rhetorical centre of the lost subject of desire after desire; the *body as metaphor* for a culture where power itself is always only fictional. (Kroker and Kroker, 1987: 21)²⁶

Indeed, the metaphorical aspect of postmodern culture is all-pervasive. Suffice it to evoke Susan Sontag's books, *Illness as Metaphor* (1989) and *AIDS and its Metaphors* (1988), in which the author – not always correctly – mentions the metaphorical connections contemporary culture associates with certain diseases.²⁷ But one could also evoke Baudrillard's ideas on simulacra or the fascination with virtual reality in order to argue for the metaphorical character of contemporary culture.

The aforementioned fragility of the individual allows one to paraphrase Susan Sontag and say that therapy is also a metaphor. The dissolution of the collective conscience coupled with the widespread concern with mental health has caused the proliferation of therapeutic groups, including self-help groups (an example would be Weightwatchers Anonymous). These groups create a community (for which the metaphor stands) but a transitory one only. They signify the individuals' desire to belong but at the same time their inability to take responsibility for their problems and find solution. Actually, the more society is presented as being individualistic the more people turn to outside help for resolving their problems. Hence the growth in the need for individual, couple or group counselling. As in many instances the

minister, priest or rabbi became therapists, so now the therapist assumes the role of minister, priest or rabbi.

By and large, healing, which used to be largely a religious or spiritual act, under postmodern conditions is primarily directed towards the body. Nevertheless, certain 'New Age' religious movements also emphasize health, even in a rather elusive form spiritual or mental health, and faith healing is practised in some evangelical Christian communities, but the majority of those communities are in Africa or South America and mostly practise a syncretistic form of Christianity.

The preoccupation with the body is also shown by the greater popularity of body ornamentation. Tattooing, i.e. placing a permanent mark on the body, has become quite widespread. In tribal societies, tattooing, body painting, etc. had a defined social meaning – belonging to a group, or used for religious ceremonies, or by warriors waging war.²⁸ In contrast, contemporary tattooing, scarification or body piercing, or even mutilation (burning, cutting) express the individual's wish to distinguish him- or herself from the others.

Researchers (e.g. Myers, 1992) and practitioners of body alteration often explain their motives by referring to the body as the last remaining seat of individual control over one's own self. In one sense, this is a revealing statement about the lack of alleged individuality in postmodernity because if this is so then one can only assume that the pressure of regulation is so strong that the individual finds refuge in a permanent and painful modification of his or her body.²⁹ As some individuals who have undergone body manipulation testify, it gives them a feeling of community and belonging. Myers quotes an anonymous man describing how he feels: 'You see all the guys at the bar and you know they are pierced and tattooed, and it gives you a good feeling to know you're one of them' (Myers, 1992: 292). Originally it constituted a subculture, with its own reviews like *Modern Primitives* or *Body Art* and organized around such 'scenes' as Tattoo Expo, Torture Garden, Stainless Steel Ball. As one of the co-founders of the Torture Garden Club in London explained, originally it was a meeting place for like-minded (one should rather say, like-bodied) people but with the increase of the participants it became blurred, mixed into other subcultures because 'it never established a defined philosophy, a fashion or music trend. . . . By the end of the 1990s piercing lost for some its appeal because it became a mainstream phenomenon.' However, it could trigger the desire, even among the masses, 'to explore a new terrain, be it of sexual or ritual nature or even beyond the body' (Wood, 1998: 7). And, as one woman interviewed remarked: 'The shaping of the flesh reflects the nature of the spirit' (Wood, 1998: 59).

I have referred to the metaphorical character of postmodern culture. The sacred, too, has a metaphorical and symbolic meaning. If one understands the sacred as something intangible, a supreme guiding principle around which

people centre their values, surrounding it with awe and adulation, then its symbolic and metaphorical character but also its permanence can be asserted. This does not mean that the content of the sacred remains the same. Nor does it mean that the sacred is always identical with religion. As Jacques Ellul stated, 'the sacred is not a category of religion, . . . religion is one of the possible translations of the sacred'. And goes on: 'The Sacred is the world's Order. . . . The sacred is an organization of the action in a space and at the same time the organization of the geography of this space where the action can be carried out' (Ellul, cited in Tessier, 1991: 65). According to Ellul, the experience of the sacred in the modern world moves along two relatively new axes: the one is the state and its opposition, the revolution, and the other, the technique and sex (see Tessier, 1991: 30).

For Durkheim, in every society there is a constituent element which can be called sacred but need not necessarily be linked to the transcendent (in its religious sense). He said that 'the sacred character assumed by an object is not implied in the intrinsic properties of the latter: *it is added to them*' (Durkheim, 1976: 229). A territory can be endowed by sacredness, as contemporary nationalist ideologies show. (Nationalism may be associated with a defined type of religion, although it is more a political or cultural phenomenon than directed towards salvation.)

When Durkheim spoke of the 'religion of humanity', of 'civic morals' or of 'the cult of the human person' (see Prades, 1987: 308–12) he meant the aforementioned guiding principles. In fact, the 'cult of the human person' intimates that in modernity the individual assumes the status of the sacred. Durkheim was quite explicit in this respect.

Certain modern interpretations go even further. As Tessier states, in our society one can, indeed, witness, in the form of the 'savage' sacred, the return of the sacred from the transgression of the rules. According to R. Bastide and M. Maffesoli, who associate the sacred with the forbidden in the primitive cult, and the profane with the permitted, one can witness the encroachment of the profane by the sacred and the disappearance of the possible relationship between these two spheres in the name of the much too long restrained carnal passion (Tessier, 1991: 40).

Other interpretations, more in the spirit of postmodernity, stress the individual definition of the sacred. Michel Leiris, a founding member of the Collège de sociologie, speaks of *my* sacred, meaning things and events that a person conceives of as 'the shift from a profane state to a sacred state' (Leiris, 1979: 72). And still on the basis of subjectivity, reminiscing his childhood experiences relating to events of everyday life, Leiris defined *his own* concept of the sacred as 'something prestigious, . . . unusual, . . . dangerous, . . . ambiguous, . . . forbidden, . . . secret, . . . vertiginous, . . . something that I did not barely imagine otherwise than of in one way or another marked by the supernatural' (Leiris, 1979: 74).

Roger Caillois (1960), another member of the Collège, referred to the sacred as being ambiguous, and contrasted the pure and impure, analysed the ambiguity of the sacred and argued that the opposition of the sacred and the impure (profane) is relative. For Caillois the sacred was present at all times, in two complementary modalities: one refers to the order of the world represented by the state and technology, the other is linked to the transgression of the forbidden, manifested by revolutionary action and abandoning traditional sexual behaviour.

The question, then, arises whether in hypermodernity the sacred has shifted from the individual to the body. My answer is that the developments outlined here indicate that, indeed, this shift is taking place. Postmodern culture can best be compared to *chaos*, as opposed to the order of *cosmos*. It is not surprising therefore that the individual who is living under the pressures of everyday life and in value-uncertainty, turns his or her main concern to the body. But one could question whether in a society the culture of which is dominated by mass media and mass culture, the ancient Roman ideal *mens sana in corpore sano* ('sound mind in sound body') is still valid and realizable.

Postmodernity largely, albeit not fully, accomplishes the mind (spirit or *pneuma*)–body separation by giving primacy or at least preference to the body. The preoccupation with the body and corporeal processes is a strong indication that the body has become sacred, if not 'the sacred' but at least 'a sacred', in hypermodernity.

Notes

- 1 Apart from the physiological uncertainties associated with the genetic manipulation of the body, these procedures involve serious, and controversial, ethical problems that we are just beginning to grasp. They are highly divisive because people are led by their religious beliefs or ideologies in taking a position.
- 2 Hypermodernity also enhances the trend that began with modernity and has been boosted by postmodern conditions, namely, enhancing the iconic culture. Visual images, however, are no substitutes for conceptual thinking.
- 3 The contrast between a Buddhist monk's and, say, a medieval hermit's treatment of his bodily hygiene is quite telling.
- 4 It is interesting to note that scientology entertains similar ideas.
- 5 Which did not prevent some dioceses maintaining bordellos after the Great Plague, up until the replenishment of the population.
- 6 Missionaries never accepted the display of partially or fully naked bodies and compelled those people to dress according to western standards of modesty.
- 7 Philippe Ariès, in his work *Centuries of Childhood* (1962), portrays the different concepts and practices concerning childhood throughout western history. One could add that the ascribed life phase 'adolescence' is a relatively recent social invention.

- 8 The posture and the movement of the arms while walking which can be observed among many young women (at least in North America) are reminiscent of a military drill. Concerns about health, nutritional guides and advice from government sources and in the media also reflect the impact of culture.
- 9 The issue 'Les Sociologies et le corps' of *Current Sociology* (Vol. 33, No. 2, 1985) provides a broad overview of the emergence of the body as topic of social concern and of sociological theories of the body, based mainly on the work of French scholars.
- 10 See Louis Blanc's (1911) *Organization of Work*, Friedrich Engels's (1968) *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Karl Marx's (1930) *The Capital* (Vol. I, Book II, Ch. 15) as well as the various Royal Commissions in England or the establishment of the Ministry of Work in France or Bismarck's welfare reforms, combined with his anti-socialist laws, in Germany.
- 11 Even Marx, in spite of his various definitions of the so-called 'progressive forms of socio-economic formations', distinguished between precapitalist and capitalist societies. See the segment 'Forms which Precede Capitalist Production' in *Grundrisse* (Marx, 1973: 471–9).
- 12 It is not a matter of pure chance that there were neo-Kantian, psychoanalytic, etc. efforts to complement Marx's concepts of human beings or human nature because Marx did not develop a rounded theory of the subject.
- 13 This Durkheimian thought was amplified by Marcel Mauss.
- 14 Simmel's concepts of the individual and 'qualitative individualism' presage a post-modern approach to the individual and individualism. I return to this point later.
- 15 I focus on Freud's theories only. Certainly, later schools of psychoanalysis – Jung, Adler, Lacan, Kristeva and others – added new and different insights but those cannot be considered here.
- 16 I do not claim that the body became *the* focal point of sociological investigation, but the fact that in the last five or six decades an increasing number of books and essays on the subject (apart from anthropological studies) have been printed, and that the journal *Body and Society* has been published since 1995 and the Working Group 'The Body in the Social Sciences' of the International Sociological Association has been established, indicate the recognition of the importance of the body in social life.
- 17 Marx, however, did not follow up this idea developed in 1857, and in later works, especially in *The Capital*, considered so-called 'complex labour' to be a multiplication of 'simple labour'.
- 18 The Supreme Court of Canada, in its decision of 12 December 2004, left to the Parliament of Canada to redefine the meaning of marriage as a union of two persons leaving out the qualification 'of the opposite sexes'. As seven provinces and one territory already issue marriage certificates to same-sex couples, there is a fair chance that in 2005 Parliament would enact this new definition.
- 19 The German word *Genuss* means both 'pleasure' and 'consumption'.
- 20 Use of euphemisms, especially in reference to health or physical and mental disabilities, is a characteristic feature of postmodernity (or rather its later accompaniment, political correctness).
- 21 A similarity between the Nazi and the Communist systems' depiction of the ideal

- body in visual arts, the mass gymnastic displays, etc. points to state ideological control of the body by having people internalize those norms.
- 22 One could add that in totalitarian societies people are cognizant of the possibility of application of brutal force (torture), and in modern societies the increasing pervasiveness of surveillance (whether by the state or in their workplace) influences their behaviour.
 - 23 Arguably, the position of the Catholic Church or for that matter some fundamentalist religious positions on sexuality and reproduction as well as the so-called 'family values' advocated by conservative politics serve the same purpose.
 - 24 This critique does not mean that I would condone violence, incest, etc. that usually happen in the private sphere. Rather, it is directed to the generalized intention of fusing the private and the public domains. It would add to the increasing pressure on contemporary civil society exercised by heightened surveillance and control.
 - 25 This is not a value statement. I am not rejecting applications of reproductive technology. However, it is a prime example of the exteriorization of the body.
 - 26 One ought to qualify this statement. Power is real, even in postmodern society. Economic and political decisions affect the lives and life conditions of individuals. The fictional character of power can be understood as fiction only. Symbolic protest behaviour (body ornamentation, disregard for traditional dress codes, etc.) does not free one of the impact of real power; it may only create the illusion of freedom and individuality.
 - 27 Sontag, for example, says that tuberculosis has often been regarded 'sentimentally, as an enhancement of identity' (Sontag, 1989: 12). However, the East European peasants who up to the end of the Second World War constituted the largest group suffering from tuberculosis (today, the infected in the developing world) had no sentimental feelings about their illness. They did not read *The Magic Mountain* and did not use the metaphorical expression 'consumption'.
 - 28 Ted Polhemus in the anthropological reader (Polhemus, 1978) devotes a section to body 'Decoration' which points out its ritualistic aspects in different premodern cultures.
 - 29 I am not talking about unobtrusive tattoos or nose-rings, etc. that might be fashion fads but rather about multiple ornamentations or tattooing large surfaces of the body.

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