

RE-FORMED BODIES

In our introduction we suggested that understanding the particular character of the modern world requires an appreciation of both what sets apart contemporary forms of embodiment from their predecessors, and how they 'overlap' with previous forms. In this chapter, we focus on the chief features of the baroque modern, Protestant modern and medieval bodies that help illuminate this particular character, and which therefore lie at the heart of this book. Comparing and contrasting bodies associated with such different sociological contexts presents us with considerable problems of evidence. Nevertheless, excellent work already exists on the dominant sources of identity people have drawn on through different eras (e.g. Taylor, 1989), the sensory pathways they have used to gain knowledge about their environments (e.g. Corbin, 1986), and the different ways in which they have represented and oriented their bodily selves to their world (e.g. Delumeau, 1990).

Such research enables us to construct broad, summary pictures of particular forms of embodiment, and we are concerned here with what these bodily forms have incorporated within, and excluded from, themselves. In tracing the main contours of these baroque modern, Protestant modern, and medieval physicalities we are clearly pursuing a limited, 'ideal type' analysis. Each of the bodily forms we describe has been differentiated according to gender, status and other variables; it has coexisted with less influential counterparts; and it has existed in a state of relative flux, rather than stasis. While seeking to convey a sense of the variety and dynamism within these general forms of embodiment, however, we concentrate on the *distinctions between them* as having the potential to tell us most about the modern experience of the world. By focusing on these contrasting bodily forms in this chapter, we prepare the ground for our subsequent analysis of those forms of sociality and their changing relationships with the sacred which are implicated in their re-formation.

Medieval bodies

We have already noted the sociological tendency to underestimate the dynamism of premodern bodies (Levine, 1985), and drawn attention to the volatility of medieval embodiment (Classen, 1993; Kay and Rubin, 1994; Delumeau, 1990; Thomas, 1973 [1971]). This form of embodiment is worth examining further for two major reasons: first, it provided the

context out of which early modern forms of embodiment emerged; and second, understanding this context illuminates those contemporary changes in Western societies which reflect forms of knowing and life not as far removed from medieval forms as people often imagine them to be (Sennett, 1994; Maffesoli, 1996).¹ Initially, however, we intend to concentrate on *differences* between medieval and modern bodies.

Norbert Elias has suggested that medieval persons possessed instinctual and emotional responses to experiences and events which tended to be more impulsive, volatile and unpredictable than those of their modern counterparts (Elias, 1978 [1939], 1982 [1939]). This has to be set against an awareness of the relative *stillness* of day-to-day medieval life, much of the time, in contrast to the noise and bustle of modernity (Huizinga, 1995 [1954]: 10), but the overall context was marked by an evident volatility. The medieval habitus was, after all, formed in an environment where violence and disease could easily lead to the loss of food, shelter and even life, where the struggle for survival loomed large in people's actions and interactions, and where magic and superstition were aids to knowledge (Delumeau, 1990; Manchester, 1992; Mennell, 1985).

Body regimes

These conditions did little to promote the view that ordinary people were in charge of their own lives, and were hardly conducive to the general prioritisation of cognitive reflexivity, to the Enlightenment rule of the mind over the flesh, or to the carefully considered adoption of habits designed to cultivate the 'body beautiful'. In short, these circumstances did not encourage those forms of embodied identity-construction which came to characterise modernity. Outside of the relatively controlled environments provided by court societies, such approaches to the body were usually extremely rare (Duby, 1977; Elias, 1983). Nevertheless, this does not mean that structured approaches to the body were lacking in the medieval era. Indeed, the volatility of the medieval era could coexist quite happily with a tendency for the flesh to become a site for the pursuance of what can be referred to as religious 'body regimes'. Body regimes can be defined as aggressive, if structured, flights into physicality which sought to harness the emotional and physical extremes characteristic of the medieval era to religious goals.

Body regimes were associated with the Catholic Church and pursued by a minority of the population. These included monks, religious ascetics, and holy women whose uncompromising treatment of their flesh made them into corporeal receivers and carriers of religious meaning (Bynum, 1987; Brown, 1988; Miles, 1992). Their adoption by religious specialists does not make body regimes unimportant, as they represented the development and restructuring of *already existing*, highly popular ways of implicating the body in magical and superstitious activities. As Keith Thomas (1973 [1971]: 27–58) argues, people frequently sought meaning and material benefit through bodily immersion in supernatural activities. Many of these

activities were drawn on and developed subsequently within a religious context by the medieval Church; a situation which changed their significance as a result of their removal from local contexts, and their relocation within a sacred cosmology (Thomas, 1973 [1971]: 761).

Medieval body regimes were the development of a long history of Christian preoccupation with the body. As Peter Brown (1988) points out, physicality was central to ancient religiosity as early Christians 'seized upon' the body as a symbol of Christ's victory over death and the old and corrupt human order. While regimes of caring for the self existed in the pre-Christian world (Foucault, 1988 [1984]: 41), early Christianity developed these by encouraging people to transform their fallen, sinful flesh. Christians viewed the body as an integral whole, but the Fall had produced a tension between passion and spirit that needed overcoming (Bottomley, 1979: 30, 57–58; Richardson, 1988).² The body could not be ignored or disciplined out of existence then, yet Christianity also implied that the individual could never be contained entirely by the flesh and was obliged to reach beyond the constraints of existing corporeality.

This approach towards the body persisted and expanded in the Middle Ages when the flesh continued to be at the heart of rituals designed to transform an irreligious habitus, and bring outsiders into the Catholic community (Cameron, 1991; McGrath, 1993). Baptism involved not just a lengthy preparation of the body, but the stripping of clothing to a state of nakedness and, after baptism, the donning of a white linen garment. As Margaret Miles points out, the key to Christian victory resided in fasting, sexual abstinence, vigils, prayers and exorcisms that 'effectively deconstruct the person's physical and social habits and make possible the reconstruction of a new orientation. Just as the unbaptised were seen as the property of the Devil, bearing evil in their bodies, so the baptised became, body and soul, flesh of Christ's flesh and bone of his bone' (Miles, 1992: 37). Far from being caught up in a human culture of ideas and objects, medieval bodies maintained a sensual relationship with the sacred.

As Michel Foucault has made clear in his studies of the history of sexuality, medieval religiosity was focused to a significant extent on the body as sinful flesh (Foucault, 1981 [1976]). Nevertheless, this did not occasion a cognitive distancing or flight away from the body, but brought about a flight *into* physicality no less intense or passionate than its counterpart: the maximum enjoyment of pleasures (Bynum, 1987; Mellor, 1991). Remedial action to be taken against sins could include such apparently extreme behaviours as self-flagellation and walking around with pins stuck in the flesh which were constantly agitated by clothes. Comparing these behaviours with the norms of contemporary culture, Piero Camporesi (1988: 43) has argued that 'No one, in these days of mass beauty culture and sublimated corporeality, would be prepared voluntarily to transform his or her body into a gruesome dummy of dead and larval matter.' In medieval Europe, though, devout penitents 'burned ... with a desire to annihilate their physical selves in the most repugnant manner possible'.

Having emphasised their distinctiveness, it is also necessary to note how medieval regimes bear a striking resemblance to the form, if not the content, of contemporary body orientations in their *preoccupation* with the body. They also echo their successors in enabling certain individuals to reconstruct their self-identities. As Caroline Walker Bynum (1987) has shown, fasting, religious charity work, and the experience of bodily states of 'ecstasy', allowed a number of women to escape the roles of food preparer and nurturer, and bypass certain forms of clerical control. These identities were often surrounded with dangers; male priests could judge religious ecstasies to be inauthentic or even demonic. Nevertheless, these women drew on particular religious traditions, and integrated them into personal biographical narratives which provided status in the form of religious 'careers' and challenged extant male hierarchies (Bynum, 1987: 221, 227; Lawless, 1991; Mellor, 1991). This was not *all* they were doing – these women understood themselves to be finding ultimate truth, the reality and presence of God, through their bodies – but truth and sensual symbol were inextricably tied to one another.

Religious body regimes had as their main cultural context the social and political power of the Catholic Church in this period; a power which was concentrated initially in population centres, but which took strenuous steps to incorporate the rural hinterland in the early part of the thirteenth century (Cameron, 1991; McGrath, 1993). As the Church extended its reach over greater portions of Europe, ecclesiastical authorities sought to structure the volatility of medieval bodies by the use of certain practices, experiences and disciplines associated with religious ritual and knowledge. It is for this reason that the term 'body regime' describes these activities more accurately than 'body option' or 'body project' which assume a greater degree of voluntarism, choice and reversibility (Shilling, 1993a). Entered into on the basis of religious criteria, and saturated with sacred meanings, the value and purpose of these ways of managing the self were not subject to the fluctuations and changes associated with contemporary consumer culture.

The internal instability of the medieval body

The medieval Church also sought to sustain a more general, related approach to the body through the collective effervescence of sacred forms of sociality stimulated by religious ritual. In contrast to the Protestant focus on words (used to distance people from their surroundings and make language the route to individual knowledge and inspiration), medieval people often shared a less mediated relationship with their natural, social and supernatural environments. In this context, Church rituals stimulated a structured opening of the medieval body to its sacred surroundings, exhausted the meaning of discourse, and made the flesh into a route to religious experience.

Instead of dislocating individuals from their environments, then, the medieval Church sought to *manage* the immersion of people within the natural and supernatural world. Seeing itself as the Body of Christ, and having as its main cultic act the Eucharistic eating of Christ's Body, the Church sought to 'eat into' the identity of its adherents. It did this by stimulating the sensory and sensual experience of 'right/wrong' and 'good/evil' categories through contact with the sacred. This involved minimising the importance of cognitive choice, and promoting the 'close contact' senses of touch and taste as paths to religious knowledge (Falk, 1994). Religious rituals were not merely 'symbolic' of more spiritual, cosmological concerns. Instead, they were meant to produce 'religious truth' by harnessing the sensuous experience of the body to the goals of an institution which had a highly developed awareness of the symbolic values of human and supernatural bodies (Asad, 1983). The promotion of experience over abstract thought did not, however, eradicate a sense of flux and change from the world of medieval persons.

If medieval identities were frequently bound up with acting on and monitoring the body, they also involved anxieties related to the *instability* of the body. As we have already suggested, the frequency with which people could suffer from disfiguring illness and disease never provided a basis for the widespread modern obsession with outer appearance. Issues relating to the reliability and predictability of the body figured prominently in the medieval imagination though, and could be exacerbated by the strong emotional responses stimulated by religious ritual.

Worms have, for centuries, been associated with sin and decay and in medieval times were often thought to live *inside* the body. As Ariès (1974: 42) notes, the 'worms which devour cadavers' were not thought to come 'from the earth but from within the body, from its natural "liquors"'. Disease and sin were frequently associated with the existence of worms and snake-like creatures in the body, and stories of their expulsion from various orifices were often seen as signs of healing. The association between worms and humans was also close in other ways. As Saint Augustine argued, what are all 'men born of flesh if not worms'? Worms were, like people, 'born of decay; man from fetid sperm, from stale blood, fed in the womb by the same putrid blood that also produced snakes' (Camporesi, 1988: 89). The fear of worms may not be such a pressing concern for modern people, but the issue of the body's stability (manifest, for example, in contemporary fears of HIV, AIDS, cancer and even ageing: Featherstone and Wernick, 1995) is obviously not an entirely modern phenomenon.

Concerns about the body's stability also extended to the area of gender identities. In contrast to the 'biology of incommensurability' dominant nowadays, a 'one sex/one flesh' model dominated thinking about sexual difference from classical antiquity to the end of the seventeenth century (Laqueur, 1992 [1990]). In many respects gender identities were not as strong in medieval times as they became in modern societies. The striking

religious imagery of Christ as embodying both male and female, and the acceptance of flux and change in the body, meant that categories of sex were not opposites. This did not, however, eradicate sexual anxieties. If men used up too much of what was considered to be their superior heat and energy, for example, the concern was that their bodies could lose their maleness and become identified with the bodies of women (Brown, 1988; Laqueur, 1987; Miles, 1992; Sennett, 1994).

Anxieties were also closely related to the confrontation with death in the medieval era. Once again, though, this confrontation illustrates how identities of that era were bound up with immanence of sacred meanings within the fleshy body. The confrontation with death involved anxieties and fears surrounding one's own *bodily* resurrection (Bynum, 1991: 276–280; 1995), and the contrasting fates of bliss or torture awaiting those who had been saved or damned (Camporesi, 1988: 26–27). Not surprisingly, this resurrection anxiety contributed to the fear and terror which surrounded death in the medieval period. However, this was not a terror which could provide the basis for Peter Berger's (1990 [1967]) implication that reminders of death are required for the maintenance of civilising processes. While images and sermons of hell and damnation could shock people into conformity, the overriding precedence given to religious salvation and the afterlife in the Middle Ages provided a justification for forms of torture, interpersonal violence and war. These often linked the materiality of the human body to the sacred Body of Christ. As Anna Sapir Abulafia (1994: 134) argues, we can find this association in 'the fervour of the crusaders to win back for their Lord the land they believed he trod as a man'.

A close and often anxious association between the body and self-identity is not peculiar to the modern period. What is different about these medieval anxieties, however, is that they were often contained within religious meanings, and had a different, sensuous, focus. For example, public rituals provided a context and a pattern of expected behaviour from those facing death (Ariès, 1981 [1977]). The flexibility of the Church also allowed people to invest holy objects with powers which could assist them in the confrontation with death. A scapular or friar's coat, for example, was coveted as an object to be worn as protection from pestilence and buried as a short cut to salvation (Thomas, 1973 [1971]: 35). Furthermore, in the case of body regimes, John McManners (1981) has noted how one established medieval view held that God created a body to match the soul placed in it. Temptations, trials and other corporeal ordeals that confronted individuals were not arbitrary, then, or subject to the vagaries of 'high velocity fashion' (Baudrillard, 1993a; Tseelon, 1995), but were measured and structured precisely to match the capacities and durabilities of the individual.

The variation in these approaches to the body does not support simplistic readings of an open body/closed self model in which collective influence on the bodily habitus rules out individual differences. Nevertheless, medieval cultures did *not* encourage the development of what modern persons would

regard as distinctive, individual selves. A person's taste, shape and nutritional intake tended to be structured by the social whole, and consumption was based upon the collectivity 'eating into' the individual's identity. The medieval body provided relatively little impetus for *individual* innovation or social change (Falk, 1994). It was not always the Church, though, that formed the basis of this collectivity; a point which is illustrated by the development of medieval carnival.

John Bossy (1985) has suggested that, despite certain appearances to the contrary, carnival was a thoroughly Christian phenomenon. As a period of time and a moral conception, 'Carnival was one half of an entity of which the other half was Lent' (Bossy, 1985: 42). Carnival usually occurred in the build-up to Shrove Tuesday or *mardi gras*, and was intended to represent and reveal the workings of sin in order that it might be got rid of before Lent. It included massive displays of consumption (in Nantes, Shrove Tuesday was dedicated to Saint Dégobillard – Saint Vomit) and sexuality (prostitutes were essential, as were symbols of lechery). Also central to these occasions were the symbolic overturning of hierarchies, collective expressions of envy and jealousy, and a carnival figure who dominated the feast and was tried and condemned at the end of it.

Carnival may have been closely aligned to religious purposes, to a carnal indulgence leading to a purging of the body, but the body's location within the festivities displayed a celebration of the grotesque which had a tendency to go beyond the goals of the Church. As Bakhtin's (1984 [1965]) analysis of *Rabelais and His World* shows, this intensified with the waning of the Church's power in the late Middle Ages. Carnival infused bodies with grotesque imagery and encouraged behaviour which reinforced this transcendence of the individual's bodily boundaries and the breaking of body regimes. The devouring, lascivious, laughing body was marked by open orifices which facilitated a merging with other people and with the wider environment and resisted categorisation. Instead of purging the body in preparation for a regime of denial during Lent, these carnivals were associated with an intensification of the body's loss in both itself and in the fleshy bodies that were other people.

Protestant modern bodies

The volatility, sensuousness, and dynamic religious potentialities of medieval bodies have not always been adequately accounted for in those sociological studies which have attempted to draw sharp contrasts between the modern and medieval eras (e.g. Giddens, 1990). In contrast, there has long been consensus on the dynamic nature of modern forms of embodiment, specifically with regard to the classical modern project's dependence on the 'disciplined individual' able to make rational decisions on the basis of 'autonomous self-interest' (Smith, 1950 [1776]), and to the prioritisation of cognitive thought expressed through the pervasiveness of plans, projects and designs (Bauman, 1995).

In tracing the development of the early modern body, it is important to note that the origins of the modern individual have been associated with quite different periods in history. For example, sociology has customarily associated the emergence of the modern individual with the Enlightenment and the development of industrial capitalism. In opposition to this, Colin Morris and other medieval historians have identified early but highly significant signs of individualism in twelfth-century religion (Morris, 1972, 1980; but see also Bynum, 1980), while Bryan Turner has produced a sophisticated analysis of how distinct components of the modern individual emerged in distinct eras (Turner, 1991). Taken together, these analyses suggest the inherent dangers of searching for the precise origins of modern, individualised bodies. The multiple processes which underpinned these bodies were both varied, and prominent at different points in time (Elias, 1978 [1939]). Nevertheless, Protestant attempts to re-form medieval bodies produced a significant acceleration and crystallisation of those processes. First, by seeking to dislocate people from their natural, supernatural and social environments, and in prioritising cognitive belief and thought as routes to knowledge, Protestantism made linguistic symbols and narratives (which could be thought with, spoken and read) a central source of people's self-identity.

Second, the Protestant flesh was something which had to be made subordinate to these (religiously justifiable) narratives; the body had, in other words, to be controlled by the mind. Third, the ultimate inability of these narratives fully to control human emotions and passions helps us understand the enormous degree of anxiety stimulated in Protestants over those sinful aspects of their bodily selves (and the bodies of others) which threatened to become grotesque and out of control.³ The establishment of Discipline Ordinances serves as a manifestation of this; being enforced by courts while being mocked and ignored by sections of the population (Roper, 1994). Taken together, these three factors were essential not simply for the formation of a Protestant rationalised 'spirit', as Weber (1991 [1904-5]) has suggested, but for a more general (male-dominated) bodily form which could support contractual relations based on abstract ideas (Turner, 1992b).

The autonomisation of language

First, then, Protestantism was an important factor behind the formation of modern, individualised, bodies insofar as it encouraged people to lose their bi-directional relationships with nature and with sacred forms of sociality, and placed increased priority on 'the Word' as a source of self. The urban Reformers became separated from the 'natural world' by making nature, and the sensual experience of nature, suspect, robbing nature of its previous status as a source of religious inspiration. Protestantism was also associated with an intensified attack on magic, superstition and witchcraft (Turner, 1984). The world was divested of immanence of the sacred, so that any

manifestation of the supernatural was liable to be interpreted as evil. In place of this immanence of sacred meaning, the significance of mind expanded as a recipient of the Word of God (Bossy, 1985; Thomas, 1973 [1971]). Finally, as Protestant believers stood alone before God, they also became separated from effervescent forms of sociality; a separation symbolised by the increasingly hostile attitude to ritual.

These conditions meant that Protestant bodies became 'closed' to tradition. Identity, consumption and routine were no longer given by a social group or sacred milieu, but had to be decided upon *individually* through an engagement with the Word of God. As Watt (1957: 92) notes, traditional social relationships were rejected, and networks of personal relationships had to be constructed on new, more conscious, patterns. The sacred communities of the medieval Church were deconstructed, and more self-conscious, profane associations took their place. In this context, the proliferation of diaries and biographies from the sixteenth century shows how significant the manipulation of linguistic symbols was as a means of sustaining and reflecting on narratives of self-identity (Haller, 1938). The individual, narrative journeys that Protestants embarked on contributed to the discursive symbolisation of religion brought about by the Reformers. To be made pure, religion was to be symbolised by words, or discourse, and alienated from sinful bodies and institutionalised sacred referents. The sight or sound of the word was meant to provide an inspirational source for the construction and maintenance of righteous self-identities.

As Pasi Falk (1994) notes, such developments represent an 'autonomisation of language'; a process which begins when the magical ties that bind words and things together are broken, and when words become detached from bodily states. Instead of being subordinated to social relationships, then, words were meant to be experienced in Protestantism as a liberated means of expression and representation (Falk, 1994: 32). Words, of course, were important ways of representing the world long before the Reformation. Medieval hagiographies, for instance, used words to illustrate holy lives and reinforce the sanctity of the Catholic Church. Nevertheless, the Protestant focus on the 'Word of God' was fundamentally different as it prioritised the linguistic signs of the Scriptures above all other sensory knowledge. Icons, paintings and even elaborate engravings and decorations were frowned on as 'graven images': their emotive character was viewed as implying a blasphemous portrayal of God (Gombrich, 1989). Reading or listening to the Scriptures, in contrast, involved Protestants in calm, considered thought which enabled them to conceptualise their lives as religious narratives; as possessing an origin, a development, and a goal which could sustain a sense of bodily self isolated in its relationship with God.

Cognitive narratives of the self

The emphasis placed on the word can be seen as part of a Protestant attempt to control the body through cognitive narratives of the self. By

making the body individual, Protestantism helped remove it from the sensual experience of effervescent sociality and turn it instead into a vehicle for thought and belief. Deprived of institutional or sensual validations of identity, it was individuals' responsibility to discipline and cognitively reflect on their own embodied identity (MacIntyre, 1981). Instead of being driven by sensual desire, Protestants sought to ensure that their bodies would fit their narratives of self. In contrast to medieval bodies, this meant that Protestants gave priority to their 'distant contact' senses. These enabled individuals, distanced from their surroundings, to visually and aurally monitor, judge and anticipate natural and social phenomena *before* making close contact with them (Falk, 1994). To smell, to taste or to touch someone or something before this monitoring, in contrast, would run the risk of spoiling the integrity of one's identity by incorporating something 'impure' into the body; a danger which still exists in relation to the maintenance of self-identity (Goffman, 1968).

It is in this context that Protestantism sought to discipline and mould the flesh by engaging it in religiously justifiable activities (the status of which varied for Lutherans and Calvinists). So, while Reformers tended to be suspicious of natural desires, feelings, the arts, and nearly all forms of entertainment, certain 'industrious pastimes' and 'rational recreations' which were scripturally justifiable were encouraged (Hill, 1966). Approved activities could include the reading of historical works, gardening and the considered discussion of business matters (Weber, 1991 [1904-5]). In addition to these actions, the personal pursuit of healthy bodies became important to many Puritans. This was associated with the fact that dirt was symbolically linked with sin, while cleanliness and sobriety were markers of righteous living.

Removing our gaze from the immediacy of Protestant bodies for a moment, we can see that this early modern concern with *health* has been extremely durable. The Protestant concern with pure bodies has been associated with post-Reformation medical regimes, while Turner (1982) has pointed to a possible link between dietary management and the development of capitalism. Indeed, the idea that Protestant sectarianism unwittingly provided capitalism with a sober, honest and industrious labour force has become a general theme in historical sociology (Hobsbawm, 1964; Thompson, 1963). Individuals were responsible for their own spiritual and moral health, and this responsibility had to be discharged through a careful monitoring and control of the body (Rosenberg, 1979; Turner, 1982: 29). Such bodily concerns did not remain at the level of the individual, however, but became incorporated into the body politic. The relationship between food, calories and lifestyle, for example, emerged as a major issue in social policy (Rowntree, 1902), and ultimately informed the central principles of scientific management (Littler, 1985; Taylor, 1964).

The body becomes an object and, indeed, a project in Protestantism by being placed under the control of the active mind. The Protestant body has to be made healthy by being purged of sensuality. In place of heraldic

forms of identity in medieval society (which indicated an affective bonding with the shield), Protestantism promotes the cognitive control of the flesh as a means to a worldly source of identity.

Grotesque passions

In contrast to the medieval body, the Protestant modern body was relatively dislocated from its surroundings and attempted to draw on the discursive Word as a central source of self. It also prioritised notions of cognitive control more than its medieval antecedent as a result of its efforts to subordinate the flesh to the mind through an engagement with religious narratives. Nevertheless, this could not prevent Protestants from experiencing a high degree of concern over their fleshy passions.

Words had to guide Protestant narratives of the self, but words alone could never encompass the stirrings and 'complaints' of a flesh which remained outside the control of reflexivity yet refused to be silent. The eye, the ear and the mind were validated insofar as they could access the Word of God. Fleshianness could not be owned entirely happily by Protestants, however, as it belonged to a 'natural', profane sphere of life which had been removed from the reassurances provided by the Catholic cycle of sin, repentance, confession and absolution. Furthermore, even when Protestants were able to still the flesh, they could never be certain that the particular ways in which they achieved this were entirely justifiable. As words and language had been removed from rituals and divested of ecclesiastical guarantees, the relationship between linguistic symbols, meanings and events assumed an inevitable degree of *contingency* (a contingency which could only be fought through belief) (Campbell, 1987). Protestants helped autonomise language from the flesh, then, but insisted that this flesh be contained within a potentially unstable language; a task which is, as Elaine Scarry (1985) has demonstrated, impossible.

The flesh was in constant danger of overspilling the boundaries of religiously justifiable narrative, but these dangers were more prominent for women than they were for men. Women were seen as more superstitious, more emotional, and more lascivious than men, and this made them particularly susceptible to the temptation of evil. During the period between 1563 and 1727, women constituted between 70 and 90 per cent of witchcraft suspects in northern Europe (McLachlan and Swales, 1980). Witchcraft had been common in the medieval era, but the Church had sought to deal with it by a syncretistic embrace of magical elements into its own ritual practices (Thomas, 1973 [1971]). Protestantism's cognitive orientation deprived people of this ritual containment of witchcraft, but it continued to spring up and to challenge this orientation (Turner, 1984). The extreme dangers of witchcraft and the more diffuse problems associated with women's embodiment tended to blur into each other. As Turner (1984: 132) notes, the prevalence of 'female witchcraft' suggests that men treated women as 'pre-social creatures whose lives were more determined

by "natural" (or "unnatural") passions than by culture'. This was part of the environment in which women were made into objects of extreme suspicion by Calvin and other leaders of the Reformation (Prestwich, 1985; Wendel, 1965).

This attempt by Protestants to contain the flesh within discourse stimulated something of a subject/object split for these early modern individuals. Protestants were faced with a body which was sinful, but which could not be abandoned. They 'inhabited' a physical self which could not be absolved from sin and which provided a constant reminder of a corporeal path to damnation. In this respect, the confrontation with death proved a particular source of anxiety for the Reformers as it marked the ultimate limits of language.

Protestants were keen to remove the sacramental reassurances and public rituals surrounding death characteristic of medieval Catholicism (Duffy, 1992). However, the death of fleshy, breathing bodies was not sequestered during the post-Reformation era, and dead bodies provided constant reminders to Protestants of the wages of sin. Indeed, instead of providing reassurances to believers in the face of their departure from this world, Protestantism encouraged the individual confrontation with death while leaving people with only linguistic or textual resources to deal with this prospect (Berger, 1990 [1967]: 112). As the Reformers rejected some of the sensuous dimensions of medieval beliefs in resurrection (Richardson, 1988: 274), believers were left trapped in, and alienated from, a body which had no future in this world or the next (MacIntyre, 1967).

To summarise, Protestantism proved well suited to people who were in the process of developing individualised bodies as a result of their participation in urban exchange relations. Its focus on the word and the mind shifted the boundaries of identity and control away from medieval collectivities, and towards the private body. Protestants could no longer immerse themselves in collective, sensual rituals (Bossy, 1985; Cameron, 1991), but were left as individuals to construct narratives of selfhood through an engagement with those textual sources containing the Word of God. An engagement in shared texts remained, but these had to be interpreted individually. So, while the Protestant body was progressively 'closed off' from others (Falk, 1994), the self became more open as a space to be filled according to 'personal inspiration' (Bossy, 1985; Cameron, 1991). The Reformation did not, of course, affect all bodies in this way, nor was it the only factor which stimulated these individualising developments (Elias, 1983; Manchester, 1992). Nevertheless, the influence of the Reformers belonged to a period in which people began to stand as *individual bodies* outside those sacred communities which had previously 'eaten into' their bodily identities.

This focus on reflexive thought and the text characteristic of Protestantism has much in common with the 'disengaged reason' of the Enlightenment (Lash and Urry, 1994: 51). Seidler (1994: 25-26) has discussed how in modern societies people, especially men, have been encouraged to construct

forms of selfhood based on the 'clear voice of reason', in contrast to the troublesome emotions, feelings and intuitions which race around the body. He has, furthermore, emphasised the influence of Protestantism in this process, to the point of calling modernity 'a secular form of Protestantism'. Cognitive monitoring is at the very centre of this tradition of selfhood, which refuses to allow rationality to be impeded by nature or by the body. It is also central to the 'pure relationships' discussed by Giddens (1992), and, more generally, the 'talking revolution' discussed by Lawson (1988) and Habermas's (1987, 1989) notion of the 'ideal speech' situation.

It is our view, nevertheless, that theorists such as Giddens (1990, 1991, 1992) are wrong to imagine such patterns of self-identity and forms of knowing to be of overriding centrality in contemporary Western societies. They are an important *part* of contemporary forms of knowing, but are increasingly challenged by other forms. Consequently, we have to acknowledge that the Protestant modern form of embodiment which anticipates, in certain respects, the 'official face' of modernity is also subject to contemporary challenges. Indeed, debates centred on the ending or transformation of the modern project (Baudrillard, 1983; Lyotard, 1984; Turner, 1991; Touraine, 1995) point towards a further re-formation of embodiment which involves the reappearance of the sensuality that Protestant modern bodies sought to subjugate to cognitive control.

Baroque modern bodies

The bodily forms characteristic of contemporary Western societies are not simply *post* modern, but can be seen, metaphorically, as straddling the borders between the past, present and future. The disciplined, cognitively focused bodies of early modernity persist, but are increasingly accompanied by a resurgent sensuality which has caught the attention of a number of social theorists and sociologists. Buci-Glucksmann (1994), Turner (1991, 1994), van Reijen (1992), and Maffesoli (1996), have all associated this sensuousness with the 'baroque', indicating its similarities to the intense sensuality of the baroque cultures of Counter-Reformation Catholicism (Martin, 1977; Maravall, 1986; Rovelstad, 1993).

Our use of the term 'baroque modern bodies' is intended to capture something of both this 'recovered sensuousness' and the continuing importance of a modern prioritisation of the cognitive. Between these two dimensions of contemporary embodiment there are all sorts of fantasies and imaginings, related to technological developments and the contemporary dominance of the eye, which point towards further re-formations of embodiment. In contrast to Maffesoli (1996) then, who tends both to overestimate the extent of this resurgent sensuality and to underestimate the conflicts endemic to contemporary Western societies, we understand contemporary bodies to be *internally differentiated, prone to all sorts of doubts and anxieties, and to be arenas of conflict*.

Cognitively oriented bodies

There is nothing 'postmodern', about the middle class's continuing preoccupation with dieting, fitness, the perils of smoking, and the dangers of 'excessive' drinking: it reflects a neo-puritan desire to subject the body to cognitive control which has developed intermittently through the modern period, and is intimately tied to Christian attitudes to the care of the body (Ehrenreich, 1990: 233–234; Turner, 1991: 118–119).⁴ Neither can the emergence of a highly paid 'cognitive elite' (Hernstein and Murray, 1994), trained in the sophisticated mental work valued in Western societies (Webster, 1995), easily be associated with the notion of postmodernity. As Meštrović (1991) has noted, the modernisation process itself can be understood as promoting and valuing cognitive factors above emotional and sensual ones, while, as Ehrenreich (1990: 233) has suggested, this tendency allows the body to become a semi-autonomous zone in which a disciplined, 'hard body' can be worked upon.

Frank Webster's analysis of contemporary theoretical accounts of the increasing importance of information-management is worth considering with regard to this cognitive emphasis. He notes a general tendency amongst social theorists to attempt to conceptualise a major shift in modern societies, in terms of both their constituting practices and their manifest goals, through notions such as Daniel Bell's 'post-industrial society', Herbert Schiller's 'advanced capitalism', Jürgen Habermas's 'decline of the public sphere', Jean Baudrillard's postmodern 'explosion of signs', and various accounts of the 'information society' (Webster, 1995). Common to all, however, is an emphasis on the growing importance of the informational content of knowledge, coexisting with a decline in the 'direct experience' of this knowledge and a spiralling self-referentiality within modern cultures (Webster, 1995: 23, 36).⁵

Changes in the construction of self and contemporary culture arising from interactions (or 'interfaces') between bodies and new (or imagined) technologies are often associated with notions of postmodernity (Poster, 1995). The notions of cyberspace, cyborgs and cyberpunk certainly point towards a significant reconfiguration of embodiment, and imply the 'fragmentation of self' central to much postmodernist discourse (Robins, 1995). While cybernetics is already an established part of modern science (Tomas, 1995), and virtual reality technologies exist and are already beginning to transform the embodied experiences of certain groups of people (Heim, 1995), such developments point towards a *possible future* more than a present reality. It is also important to note that, despite the aesthetic and sensual possibilities opened up by these phenomena, they tend to take a certain Cartesian emphasis upon cognitive factors to new extremes. Inspired by the science fiction of writers such as William Gibson (1984, 1993), such imaginings of 'new disembodied subjectivities' (Featherstone and Burrows, 1995: 12) often reflect, rather than transcend, the culture of the 'head' which concerns Meštrović (1991).

Cognitive body options

Technology and science have for some time offered people the ability to alter the appearance or contents of their flesh, but they now confront individuals with an unprecedented range of 'body options'. Body options can be defined as technologically informed methods of radically restructuring human embodiment which extend the possibilities associated with *having* a body, by a direct assault on the limitations connected to *being* a body. The flexibility and variety of these options challenges the limits of more conventional body 'projects', such as those related to health and fitness programmes (Crawford, 1987; Fussell, 1991). While earlier body projects help us explore the possibilities of living in *one* body, the options associated with virtual reality and cyber-technologies promise us the potential of exploring and even occupying bodies which differ substantially according to time and place.

Many of these developments lie in the future, others may never happen, yet scientific and medical interventions into the flesh already hold out the possibility that a body may be radically reconstructed several times over a single lifetime. Nanotechnology has the potential to provide micro machines which can be injected into our veins to repair arteries or break down cholesterol deposits (Rucker et al., 1993), while the possibility of computer chip brain implants may ultimately provide us with new languages, the ability to undertake millions of mathematical operations in a split second, and the capacity to process and present large volumes of data in a flash (Tomas, 1991). Virtual reality may shortly be able to simulate this same degree of change in a *single evening* (Benedikt, 1991; Rheingold, 1991, 1994).⁶

The social potential of body options can be explored through Jean Baudrillard's (1993a, 1993b) discussions of the 'code', a term which signifies his view of technology's theoretical ability to remove finalities, absolutes and opposites. For our purposes, the code is best seen as belonging to a *possible* future scenario in which nature has been controlled by and absorbed into socio-technological procedures and institutions. Contemporary examples of what this means can already be found in the DNA code of biology, the binary code of computers, and the digital code of television and sound recording (Baudrillard, 1993a). Each of these codes possesses the potential to make anachronistic our ability to simply copy or counterfeit objects by production or imitation. Instead the code makes possible the reproduction of 'originals'.

This reproduction of originality, operating through such technologies as artificial evolution (Kelly, 1994), could ultimately make human life entirely self-referential; nothing would be outside our control because nothing would be outside our power to reproduce (Csicsery-Ronay, 1991: 192; Robins, 1995: 144). Even death, we are told, may one day become obsolete if science acquires the ability to regenerate life through cryogenics or a single human cell (Kimbrell, 1993). In this context, the options available to

people in their daily lives could make malleable those evolutionary developments which have occurred over hundreds of thousands of years, and invalidate traditional sociological conceptions of 'reversible' and 'irreversible' time (Giddens, 1984: 35). In Braudel's (1973) terms, individual time could triumph over that of the *longue durée*. The spatial and temporal flexibility of body options could also challenge the conventional parameters associated with what it means to be an individual by undermining the 'singular body'. As Ian Watt (1957) notes, the principle of individuality accepted by Enlightenment thought depended on the possibility of identifying what was unique to a person across and outside the contingencies of date and location. Developed to their logical extreme, body options may remove any such continuities. An individual may, one day, no longer resemble herself or himself from one occasion to the next in terms of size, appearance, disposition or even gender.

The notion of body options is an umbrella term which refers to a variety of future-oriented methods through which it is possible to control, re-form and transform the body. We have concentrated here on some of the most spectacular cases, but it is important to take their potentiality seriously. These options may mean, for the first time in human history, that bodies can become transformed, rather than simply re-formed, in a manner that ruptures people from much of their evolutionary inheritance. Before we get carried away by the novelty of these body options, however, we should note that even the most spectacular cases that have been explored by sociologists (e.g. Featherstone and Burrows, 1995) build on *previous* inventions in architecture, temperature control and transport which distanced people from their climate, environment and neighbours, and increased the level of control they could exert over their bodily and social environment (Sennett, 1994). It may eventually become difficult to distinguish humans from machines, but people have long transformed themselves by transforming the environment in which they live (Marx and Engels, 1970 [1846]). Furthermore, the extent of these changes would have made them appear virtually unrecognisable to their ancestors (Elias, 1978 [1939]: xi).

Sensuously oriented bodies

Just as it is important to contextualise these cognitive fantasies of, and projects for, radical transformations of embodied humanity in a broad historical context, we must bear in mind that the sensuous dimensions of humanity persist in spite of dreams of cyborgs and a life in cyberspace. In fact, in contemporary Western societies these sensual dimensions are reasserting themselves. Maffesoli's (1996) account of the contemporary re-emergence of 'Dionysian values', expressed in highly sensual forms of embodiment, for example, points in another direction, away from the 'head' and towards the 'heart'. Analogous interpretations of contemporary bodies are also evident in Ferguson's (1992) discussion of a 'recovered

sensuousness' and Lash and Urry's (1994) analysis of the emergence of 'aesthetic', rather than 'cognitive', reflexivity.

This reappearance of sensuality is related to the increasing importance and changing reception of images. The sensual dimensions of baroque modern bodies, which heighten visual sensitivity and tend to *tighten* and *sensualise* the relationship which exists between people's physical selves and images in consumer culture, can be both liberating (for individuals who feel restricted by their bodies), and deeply disturbing (for those who feel overwhelmed and even threatened by the body options available) (Kroker and Kroker, 1993; Tudor, 1995). Reactions such as these highlight the continued relevance of a paradox which has long marked the development of modern bodies. While modern people have the means to exert an unprecedented amount of control over their bodies, they are living in an age which has eroded their knowledge of what bodies are and undermined their capacity to make moral choices as to how they should control them (Shilling, 1993a: 3). This paradox is hardly new. What distinguishes baroque modern bodies from their Protestant modern counterparts, however, is the tendency towards an emotional and aesthetic framing of these conditions. Rather than being a matter of mainly cognitive doubt, the baroque modern body confronts and experiences this paradox through a resurgence of fleshy passions and somatic anxieties which are intimately related to sensual imagery.

Anthropologists of the senses have associated modernity with a growing importance of the eye, and a partial diminution of the body's close contact senses (Classen, 1993; Corbin, 1986). The baroque modern acquisition of a heightened visual sensitivity, however, involves both the dominance of sight and the channelling and experiencing of other senses via the activity of looking. As Pasi Falk (1994) notes, this post-traditional eye does not simply 'see' objects, but is a 'voracious eye' that anticipates, judges and consumes in a manner that involves other senses. Our mouths may water when seeing something sweet and forbidden (James, 1990), for example, but we can also become sad or angry when watching a movie, or aroused when viewing erotica (Falk, 1993; Williams, 1989). So, baroque modern bodies may 'read' and 'decode' images, but they increasingly experience these *sensually* (McLuhan, 1964; Ong, 1977, 1982; Meyrowitz, 1985).

This visual sensitivity has its commercial counterpart in the sensual imagery circulating in consumer culture. As Scott Lash and John Urry (1994) suggest, designers, marketing experts and image consultants have all been significant in reinforcing and exploiting this sense of sight. Vance Packard's (1981 [1957]) study of the advertising industry, for example, illustrates how advertisers promoted visions of the 'good life' to consumers who were seen as bundles of day dreams and yearnings particularly sensitive to image-based communication. These 'sensual images' have been produced and circulated at an ever faster rate since the Second World War and have come to pervade all aspects of our lives (Virilio, 1994). The multiplication and acceleration of sensual imagery is associated with

advances in video and satellite technology (Spigel, 1992), and the growth of a television culture in which a small 'black box' can now be described as a 'Leading Object' in consumer culture (Silverstone, 1994: 87; Lefèbvre, 1984).

Psychologists have suggested that people are initiated into this tactile form of sight early in infancy and especially through the medium of television (Winnick and Winnick, 1979; Hodge and Tripp, 1986). Visual sensitivity can increase the influence of images of the 'body beautiful' which look good partly because they *feel* good. 'Healthy' and 'ill' bodies, for example, may remain important as ideas, but they are also attached to 'feel good' or 'feel bad' factors derived from *appearance* (Wolf, 1990). The consequences of this become much more significant as technologically informed body options weaken the boundaries which previously separated flesh and image. As this happens, people are more able to engage in what we might refer to as 'imaging their bodies': reconstructing their appearances and experiences in line with images in consumer culture. It is this imaging of the body that provides metaphorical support to the idea of the body as a 'screen' on which signs flicker, register and circulate (Baudrillard, 1983: 12; Featherstone, 1991). The body may never become an extension of network television, as Baudrillard suggests in his more ironic and playful moments, but images have become a significant source of the embodied self (Rojek and Turner, 1993).

The body images we see in consumer culture, then, appeal because they are made sensual. As Walter Ong argues, part of the reason for this is that these images are accompanied by voices, plots and narratives which seek to seduce and can be seen as part of a 'new collective culture' (Ong, 1971, 1982). This visual culture is still permeated by long-standing social distinctions. Images of black and white peoples tend to be permeated by different sensual charges (Dyer, 1986; Lyman, 1990), for example, while it remains easier for men than women to cultivate a visual sensuality at a time when women often remain the *object* of sensual looks (Berger, 1972). Nevertheless, the general effects of this culture differ from the individualising tendencies of print (Silverstone, 1994), as our bodies are (*re*)opened to collective influences. Baroque modern bodies differ, in this respect, from their early modern Protestant antecedents in that fast-changing 'images of self' have rivalled stabilising 'narratives of the self' as an important source of embodied identity.

Dangerous crossings

The full development of the baroque modern body remains a future possibility. Nevertheless, people's visual sensitivity, and their existing ability to change their bodies, is already creating greater space in their identities for the influence of collective factors. The consequences of this are difficult to specify with any precision. Unlike the 'past-oriented openness' evident in

traditional societies (where people's identities were 'filled up' with rites and customs: Falk, 1994), baroque modern bodies are immersed in a fast-changing world of images which tends to be future oriented. That is, these images tend to speak to what people could become and refer mainly negatively to what they used to be. Nevertheless, this future-orientation has itself prompted very different reactions.

On the broadly positive side, people have used body options and sensual imagery to extend the possibilities of who they are, and sometimes to make themselves anew. Sexual radicals have sought to construct appearances and 'outlaw bodies' which escape the restrictive framings of heterosexual aesthetics and the conventional use of binary oppositions (Bell, 1993; Kroker and Kroker, 1993). Similarly, the potential of electronic communication allows people to engage in 'dangerous crossings' (Butler, 1993), to 'try out' new sexualities in a 'game of masks' unconstrained by the limitations of convention (Wiley, 1995: 157; Russo, 1994). Combining technology with a visual sensitivity can, then, provide very real benefits. The flexibility and sensuality of baroque bodies may also predispose certain people toward contingent and creative 'tribal' forms of association (Maffesoli, 1996). However, this immersion in the world of images causes a number of general problems which can alienate people from both themselves and others.

On the negative side, image-directed, technologically informed body options can easily implicate people in the signifying practices of others (Pfohl, 1993). Images of the 'perfect female flesh', for example, continue to exert a massive influence over women (Wolf, 1990). While the gains of feminism and identity politics may have helped some women take advantage of the opportunity to develop new and more independent bodily selves, the influence of sensual images of the 'ideal body' is a reason why women embark on major programmes of cosmetic surgery. Furthermore, the quantity and velocity of choices body options make available to people threatens to leave individuals uncomfortable and uneasy, as well as dissatisfied, with the choices that face them and the choices they have made (Simmel, 1968). This does much to explain the contemporary sense of nostalgia evident in people who seek to 'lose their inhibitions' and express their 'natural feelings' as a way of escaping from a body they can no longer feel at home in (Featherstone, 1995a; Turner, 1987).

Taken to their extreme, it has been suggested that body options can stimulate a loss of 'basic trust' or 'ontological security' (Berger, 1990 [1967]; Giddens, 1991: 45-47) which can lead to the experience of 'paranoid horrors' (Tudor, 1995) and 'body panics' (Kroker et al., 1989). This is because the flexibility of body options disrupts conventional meanings associated with the flesh and can make the body internally nomadic – cut free from a stabilising centre (Zukin, 1988, 1990, 1992). So a reaction against certain forms of body options has become part of the conservative 'will to purity' in the treatment, punishment and categorisation of bodies (Kroker and Kroker, 1993). This consists of a repressive and

potentially violent response to those who have transgressed conventional norms which Mary Douglas has suggested is based partly on a fear of the dissolution of body boundaries (Douglas, 1966, 1970).

More broadly, the spiralling of these body options casts further doubt upon the roles of both cognition and corporeality in what it means to be a human being. Baudrillard (1993b: 52), for example, notes how the cognitively focused interactions between people and technologies can make a person into a 'physical cripple', but also a 'mental cripple'. He may be exaggerating to say that the anthropological question 'Am I a man or a machine?' no longer has an answer (Baudrillard, 1993b: 57), but it is clear that such fundamental anthropological questions no longer have taken-for-granted 'answers'. This returns us to our earlier point about the aesthetic and emotional framing of the paradox which results when our ability to transform the body undermines our knowledge of what bodies are and how we should develop them. This paradox is not simply cognitive, then, but stimulates a sensual equivalent which travels through the senses and emotions and is manifest in feelings of desire, unease and even fear which lack an immediately corresponding object (Beck, 1992). Without such an object, this sensuality is turned both outward, to the bodies of others, and inwards to the embodied self.

Given these insecurities and instabilities about what the body is, it should perhaps come as no great surprise to learn that social theory is sprinkled with references to the 'death of the body' (in addition to the much heralded 'death of the subject' and 'death of the author') (Barthes, 1977b; Baudrillard, 1983). The prevalence and possibilities of body options has made the task of hanging onto a stable bodily referent increasingly difficult, which has given rise to this idea of the modern body's demise. This is exacerbated by the contemporary sequestration of actual death; something which robs people of regular encounters with that most intransigent of bodily referents (Mellor and Shilling, 1993), and encourages the concept of 'death' to be used as a flexible metaphor. Furthermore, as 'death' comes to assume the status of an image-laden metaphor used to describe certain aspects of the living body, such as its instability or its social or existential isolation (Kroker and Kroker, 1993), it is hardly surprising if our impressions of life become saturated with macabre imagery (Bossy, 1985).

This development contributes to a banalisation of contemporary culture, as humans begin to lose contact with something that has always been an essential part of themselves. The contemplation of actual death used to be considered an opportunity for self-revelation, a moment of contact with the sacred (Bataille, 1992 [1973]), but modern culture seeks to tame death by turning it into an image (Ariès, 1974). Yet it cannot rid this image of an uneasiness and a feeling that something is fundamentally wrong, out of place. As Baudrillard (1993a: 147) argues, 'death ceases to be the Grim Reaper', and becomes a much more general and diffuse 'anguish concerning death':

Pursued and censored everywhere, death springs up everywhere again. No longer as apocalyptic folklore, such as might have haunted the living imagination in certain epochs; but voided precisely of any imaginary substance, it passes into the most banal reality. (Baudrillard, 1993a: 185)

Similarly, the notion of 'evil' is banished from many areas of contemporary culture, but continues to 'bubble up' amidst the banality of everyday life (Baudrillard, 1993b: 81).

To summarise, baroque modern body options may well prove disruptive and disturbing to the conventional modern notion that humans possess *one self* which corresponds to *one body*. Their potential to alter the body rapidly, and to weaken the stability of any fixed habitus, also serves to increase the importance of individual-time to an understanding of modern bodies. The human potential to 'image the body' creates a space in which individuals are *potentially* able to construct and express their identities outside of an 'iron cage' (Tester, 1995a: 158–159), but can be also co-opted by consumer culture and may well create a degree of self-referentiality which stimulates unease and anxiety. Baroque modern bodies are still emerging and remain, at least in part, a future possibility. Bodies can be more or less baroque, then, and continue to exist alongside more classically modern forms of embodiment. Furthermore, in the 'two-thirds/one-third' societies that have emerged within the 'affluent West', issues of poverty, homelessness and basic civil rights are likely to remain much more visible for those struggling with the necessities of survival both in and outside of our 'brave new' global cities (Sassen, 1991).

Knowing bodies

The forms of embodiment we have described in this chapter illustrate how the conditions associated with humans both *being* and *having* bodies change over time. Baroque modern, Protestant modern, and medieval bodies are characterised by quite different organisations and hierarchies of the senses, for example, and these are related to contrasting ways of representing and gaining knowledge about the world. But what does all this add up to? What are the consequences of these forms of embodiment for how humans associate together, intervene in, and seek to organise their world? We analyse the broader religious, cultural and social environments that both shaped and were supported by these bodily forms in subsequent chapters. In the remainder of this chapter, we want to focus on how these bodies were involved in different ways of gaining knowledge about themselves and their worlds. This returns us to one of the themes that has been central to this chapter: the potential of linguistic symbols to orient people towards the world.

Each of the bodily types we examine was, as Elias (1991) points out, formed *after* the evolutionary lift-off provided by symbol emancipation. However, successive developments in the use of symbols (which could be

thought with, spoken, written and read) reinforce our picture of how bodily identities were constructed for medieval, Protestant and baroque modern persons, and tell us much about how and why humans related to each other and to their surroundings in different ways. The terms carnal knowing and cognitive apprehension were used in Chapter 1 as a way of referring to different sensory ways of gaining knowledge about the world. We employ them here in order to develop our analysis of the varying relationships that exist between bodies, symbols and knowledge. Carnal knowledge and cognitive apprehension can coexist and intermingle, something which becomes especially clear in the case of baroque modern bodies, but their relative prominence varies across historical and cultural contexts, as we can see with regard to different forms of (auto)biography.

Hagiography

Carnal knowing refers to a form of gaining information about the world which is thoroughly embodied and connected to people's senses and sensualities. It is tied to specific social locations (Miles, 1992: 9), highlights the fusion that exists between experience and awareness, and reminds us of the mind's location within a fleshy body which is itself affected by material conditions and social relationships (Johnson, 1987). The 'open body' of medieval times tended to be immersed in, rather than dislocated from, its natural, social and supernatural environments, and this is reflected in its gaining of knowledge. Of course, there were different degrees of carnal knowing, and the Biblical interpretations of a learned clerical elite contained strong elements of cognitive apprehension, demonstrating that 'carnality' was not the only means of knowing the world in the medieval era. Nevertheless, women mystics, for example, pursued states of religious ecstasy through their bodies rather than through the cognitive interpretation of texts (Lerner, 1993: 66). More generally, the important point is not that linguistic symbols were made redundant in carnal knowing but that they were contained within wider contexts.

The consequences of carnal knowledge for the potential of linguistic symbols to orient people to the world can be clarified by looking at hagiographies. Hagiographies (biographies of saints) can be distinguished from modern biographies in the sense that they were not concerned with individualising their subjects in relation to various and changing social conditions, but with presenting them as purified Christians who had achieved sanctity (Head, 1990; Stauffer, 1930; Whittemore, 1988). Hagiographies were primarily resources used to promote the continuation of the Church and religiously approved forms of living. It is in this sense that Donald Stauffer judges biography as an art to be 'static' in the Middle Ages, and as something whose comparatively solid and unchanging characteristics served as a background 'for the diversity and richness of the biographies written in England after the Renaissance' (Stauffer, 1930).

Hagiographical texts were considered extremely important in the medieval era, but the status of discourse within them was subordinated to wider religious goals. It is in this context that hagiographies reflect an era of carnal knowing by appealing to a form of understanding dependent on a sensory and sensual contact with the sacred. This is why hagiographies make little sense as 'real life' representations to us now; they were reliant on a more general context in which words were surrounded by rituals which provided contact with the sacred through the experience of liminality (van Gennep, 1960). As Thomas (1973 [1971]: 37) notes, what stood out was 'the magical notion that the mere pronunciation of words in a ritual manner could effect a change in the character of material objects'. The Eucharistic eating of the body of Christ, for example, took place in a ritual context where words acted to help turn bread and wine into the flesh and blood of Christ (Bynum, 1987). Language was not self-referential, then, but provided people with a route to the sacred and the experience of sacrifice.

The hagiographical depiction of saints provides an immediate indication of the place of linguistic symbols in these texts, and the carnal form of knowledge presupposed by them. Hagiographies emphasised the holy dimensions of saints' corporeality; a corporeality that received sacred meaning through effervescent forms of religious sociality. The most extreme physical tortures could be withstood given the grace of God, and hagiographies contain stories of how saints were able to levitate, protect entire communities from physical disaster (Hamilton, 1986), and undergo lengthy periods of fasting (Bynum, 1987, 1991). In the story of Lidwina of Sciedam (who died in 1433), for instance, three-month-long fasts were accompanied by the loss of *sweet smelling* bits of skin, bone and entrails (Bynum, 1987: 124). Other hagiographies detail the holy resistance of Saint Lucy, who became immobile and could not be moved even by a thousand men, and the spontaneous rejuvenation of Saint Agatha's mutilated body (Burke, 1983). Saint George was eventually burnt to death, but not before his holy body had resisted poisoning, boiling oil, and being tortured on a wheel (Whittemore, 1988). In each of these examples, the bodies of saints assume an 'extra-discursive' quality as a result of their holy powers and 'magical' qualities (Thomas, 1973 [1971]: 29–57).

The emphasis on the physical body and the senses prominent in so many of these accounts has a much wider relevance because it meant that there was no need and little possibility for autobiography to serve as a constructor of self-identity. Literacy rates were low and one gains an account of medieval life much more by examining how life-styles were directly inscribed upon the body, than by looking at written accounts of individuals (Camporesi, 1988). As Peter Brown has pointed out (1988: 442) 'The pain of Christian asceticism consisted in the fact that the present human person was an unfinished block, designed to be cut into the form of an awesome model. The body required the deep chisel-bites of permanent renunciation, if the Christian was to take on the lineaments of the risen Christ.'

These medieval biographies are the product of a time in which bodily identities and the world are explored within the parameters of ritual structures and transpersonal meaning systems. They are associated with open bodies and carnal ways of relating to the world in which human physicality and the senses are embraced as an integral component of knowing oneself and one's world. In the case of medieval persons, words filled the profane world of everyday life, but were often at their most significant in terms of their status as things which facilitated contact with the sacred. They were often unintelligible (the language of the Church was Latin) but were also seen as having powers to act on the physical world (as in spells). Far from being an autonomous means of representing the world, then, words were often seen saturated with extra-discursive significance. In contrast to modern autobiography, where language is perceived as providing a key to the self, it is interesting to note the widespread suspicion with which discourse was treated in the medieval period outside of ritual context which provided it with a legitimate purpose (Duby, 1988: 306).

Biography

While carnal knowing tended to flow from medieval bodies, there was a gradual shift in the post-Reformation world to a position whereby the prominence of the word meant that people tended to orient themselves to the world through cognitive apprehension. This was not something which could be attributed exclusively to the Reformers, but they did much to accelerate the processes leading to this change. Cognitive apprehension is endemic to the Protestant focus on the text as a source of religious truth and is intimately linked to the Enlightenment's stress on the acquisition of scientific knowledge through reason and rationality.

While carnal knowing embraces the *body* as an integral element of adopting a relationship to oneself and one's world, cognitive apprehension rejects the body and autonomises the linguistic symbol. Cognitive apprehension assumes that valid knowledge is gained from mental activity freed from the bodily prejudices of emotions, and considers the mind and body to be fundamentally separate entities. It is the mind, cognition and symbols that can be thought with, that should serve to motivate action, and that mark off humans as 'noble' and autonomous creatures. Somewhat ironically, cognitive apprehension presupposes that one can increase knowledge only by losing a degree of sensory and sensual contact with that knowledge.

Cognitive apprehension is evident in those Protestant diaries and biographies which balanced an individual's spiritual books and lent a narrative coherence to their lives. It has been said that in New England 'almost every literate Puritan kept some sort of journal' (Watt, 1957: 75). Haller (1938: 37) suggests that the diary, the forerunner of the autobiography, was the Puritan's confessional where fear and weaknesses found in the heart could be offered to God in texts. Such an emphasis on the constitution of the self

through narrative was not entirely alien to Catholicism, and the roots of such an autobiographical strategy can be traced to Saint Augustine's *Confessions* (Lerner, 1993: 47; Duby, 1988).⁷ In Protestantism, however, this textual orientation became both widespread and normative. Diaries provided a way for Protestants to record their noble and baser deeds (Stauffer, 1930), biographies provided examples of lives lived properly (Whittemore, 1988), while the Reformers' individualised confrontation with death was eventually supported by 'consolation literature' (Douglas, 1977). As Haller (1938: 98) notes, a mass of biographical writings rapidly accumulated as the Puritan movement progressed, often explicitly encouraging others to record the good and bad things that had happened during the day, a 'daily posting of one's accounts with God', in order to find order and comfort in these events. According to Watts (1957: 49), by far the greatest category of books published in the eighteenth century was that of religious books, with Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* going through 160 editions before 1792, while at least ten devotional manuals had over thirty editions during the eighteenth century.⁸

The shift from carnal knowing to cognitive apprehension is usually said to result in an increase in knowledge, rationality, and the ability to control the environment. It is no accident that the autonomisation of language as a means of representation from the Renaissance through to the Enlightenment was associated with a massive growth in knowledge about science and society (Manchester, 1992). However, the processes involved in this shift were not unambiguously emancipatory. Focusing on 'the word' enabled people to become reflexively aware of their embodied selves and, indeed, gave rise to thoroughly modern forms of artistic expression such as the novel which broke 'with the earlier literary tradition of using timeless stories to mirror the unchanging moral verities', subordinating plot to the pattern of the autobiographical memoir, and linking truth to individual experience (Watt, 1957: 15–22).⁹ For Protestants, though, this reflexivity was accompanied by several problems.

To begin with, the dominance of the word led to the body being viewed with suspicion, disgust and even fear. Partly because the ritual structures which allowed the body to become a route to transcendence had been done away with, the body became almost exclusively a vessel of sin which needed controlling. Many Protestants treated their own and other people's bodies as objects to be tamed and trained, but were confronted sooner or later with the realisation that the body could not be controlled fully by the mind (Campbell, 1987). Furthermore, the dominance of the word had its own problems. Words abounded but they had to be read with an appropriate depth of belief or they could mislead. This contingency of meaning (a contingency which postmodern theorists have mistakenly associated with recent times) informs Campbell's (1987) excellent analysis of the Protestant immersion in melancholy and despair that was stimulated by a search for divine inspiration via the Scriptures.¹⁰ There was always the possibility that the meaning Protestants derived from words could be both misleading and

infused with fantasy knowledge. Instead of providing direct contact with the sacred, words outside a ritual context came for Protestants to assume a contingent relation with the extra-human world.

Cognitive knowledge was not simply apprehended, then, but came coated in a layer of doubt derived from the evacuation of the supernatural from daily life. As Zygmunt Bauman argues (1995: 85–86), Protestants may have sought to strip the world of its fleshy and sacred contents, but they were left with the difficult problem of constructing their identity in this 'desert'. As a result, the importance of autobiographical work for many Protestants was matched by the difficulties associated with undertaking this work successfully or with any great conviction as to its outcome (Campbell, 1987). The biography the individual held in mind was only one of many that could be constructed and the subjective recognition of this caused Protestants considerable doubt and anxiety. The establishment of a 'united' self required constant vigilance and continual work. Individuals had to continually integrate events that occurred in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing cognitive 'story' about the self. As Charles Taylor (1989) puts it, 'in order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going'. This was made even harder for Protestants who existed through a sinful act, who were often unable to tell with any certainty whether their life's route was valid, who were unable to validate positively most of their fleshy passions and emotions, and who may very well already have been damned (Weber, 1991 [1904–5]).

Imaging words

Apprehending the world through cognitive, symbol-oriented thought continues to occupy a position of immense importance in many sectors of the contemporary Western world. However, Protestantism was not simply associated with the promotion of cognition, but acted as its *defence* against the sensual forms of knowledge prevalent in the medieval era. In this respect, the decline of Protestantism has paved the way for a resurgence of fleshy means of knowing about the self and the world. This is not a simple reproduction of medieval forms of knowing, though it does show the affinity that certain modern developments have with their historical antecedents, but represents a more 'controlled' and mediated encounter with the senses through a heightened visual sensitivity.

The decline of Protestantism, and the gradual loss of faith in universal rationality, can be associated with a shrinkage in the power of discourse and a rise in the importance of images. It was not just that the word occupied a contingent relationship with the sacred, but that language couldn't even cope with the socio-natural world. As Scarry (1994) argues, the structure of language may be similar to the structure of life in certain ways but these are *ontologically distinct* phenomena. Furthermore, it is extremely difficult to impart meaning to experiences using a language that has become increasingly self-referential; which many suggest contains

meaning only insofar as signs refer and relate to other signs. Images (which are themselves saturated with sensory and sensual information) become more important conveyors of meaning. These images inform the body options we discussed earlier in this chapter, and while the increasing use of sensuous images to portray and interpret life does not represent a simple return to carnal knowledge, it does herald a resurgence of sensual intimation within the human body.

The changing representational power of the word and the image is illustrated by the work of Marguerite Duras. Through film, drama and writing, Duras seeks to convey emotional, embodied experiences which can never be fully translated into representational forms. Loss, love and death are evoked, rather than discursively elaborated upon, through the style of writing employed, through the deliberate incorporation of absences, and through a refusal to construct her work around conventional oppositions (Duras, 1985, 1986). Duras's work has been read by Julia Kristeva as a 'commentary' on the crisis of representation that has followed such twentieth-century horrors as the Holocaust and Stalinism (Lechte, 1990), but it also seeks to represent life by tapping into some of those very bodily experiences which Protestant biography sought to deny, control and eradicate (Hill, 1993).

This same phenomenon is also reflected in what is rapidly developing as the flipside of autobiographical narratives: the writing of lives *through* or *on* bodies. Pasi Falk (1995) has highlighted some of the ways that this can occur by analysing permanent and temporary transformations. If the contemporary importance of imaging the body continues to increase, the 'autobiographical stars' of the future may not produce paper texts, but may write on their bodies. As Myers's (1992) and Vale and Juno's (1989) studies of 'modern primitive' tattooists and body piercers suggest, we may be entering an age in which the flesh and the symbol have once again joined forces as equal partners. Cognitive narratives may be all too fragile and subject to revision, but marking the flesh can potentially provide a design of the self which is more enduring and stable precisely because it draws for its support on a far wider range of senses and sensualities.

Knowing and civilising

The bodily variations we have examined in this chapter help us to understand the analytically distinct orientations to the world which can be associated with different forms of embodiment. Here it is worth engaging with Norbert Elias's (1978 [1939]; 1991) observation that the speed with which experience is translated into concepts and actions varies historically. Elias argues that in contrast to the volatility of medieval persons, generations from later eras developed self-controls manifest in 'rational thought' which interposed themselves between 'spontaneous and emotional impulses, on the one hand, and the skeletal muscles, on the other', and allowed for

the deferral of action (Elias, 1978 [1939]: 257; 1983: 243). Self-control, foresight and cognitive reflexivity all vary between forms of embodiment. More specifically, the power of 'rational thought' to motivate is related to the importance of linguistic symbols (that can be spoken, thought with and written down) and the degree to which people are able to *restrain* other sensual forms of motivation.

This relation between linguistic symbols and human senses does not entail a direct correspondence between the importance of 'the word' and the consequences of physical restraint. As the administration of the Holocaust illustrates only too well, actions motivated by cognitive thought and planning can lead to bloodshed on a larger scale, and more systematic basis, than those propelled by rage, jealousy and emotional terror (Bauman, 1989). Nevertheless, the prominence and decline of linguistic symbols can tell us much about how particular forms of embodiment are oriented toward their social environments. Medieval bodies were frequently structured through an engagement with Catholicism which subordinated cultural ideas to religious experiences. Protestantism stimulated an explosion of the cultural sphere by emphasising the importance of texts at a time when the printing press was enabling these ideas to spread to a larger populace (Scribner et al., 1994). Having traced the main contours of these bodies, and their baroque modern successors, it is now time to examine how these religious, cultural and social environments were shaped by, and served to reshape, these forms of embodiment.

Notes

1. While being attentive to their differences, Maffesoli (1996: 42) draws an analogy between the villages, hamlets, communes and cantons of the medieval era, and the neighbourhoods, ghettos, parishes and tribes of the late modern metropolis.

2. This was based on an ontology of the inseparability of the soul and flesh – the two elements represented by the Hebrew words *nepesh* and *basar*, and was central to theological accounts of Christ's Incarnation and Resurrection and the sacramental character of communion.

3. This is particularly important in understanding the concern with which women's bodies were viewed. Immersed as they were in cycles of blood and birth, women had to be both protected from their own passions and prevented from inflaming the passions of men. Protestantism may have relieved women from some of the burdens of kinship relations, but it could also place even stricter confinements on their physical movements and legal status (Stone, 1977).

4. On this issue, Turner (1991: 118) suggests that the contrast between Catholic and Protestant approaches to health and diet was 'insignificant'. This view tends to underestimate the immense changes in forms of religious life apparent in the development of the Protestant Reformation (Chatellier, 1989; Delumeau, 1987; Elton, 1963).

5. The implicit marginalisation of embodied experience endemic to this informationally based self-referentiality is even evident with regard to warfare. As Frank Barnaby (1986: 2) notes, direct human intervention is no longer necessary, and wars could now be fought entirely with machines and computerised missiles (Webster, 1995: 54).

6. Linked up to others via a computer, stimulated by bodysuit responses connected to electronic graphics, one could slip into a 'virtual suit' to do battle as a Borg chasing the

Starship Enterprise before lunch, experience the thrill of being a champion ballroom dancer after dinner, and end up enjoying as Marilyn Monroe a quiet drink with Fidel Castro before retiring to bed.

7. As Duby (1988: 540–541) notes, the autobiographical narrative 'did not spring fully formed from the head of the now legitimate individual hero. It emerged gradually from other forms of narrative which centred on the individual in society. Authors felt an irresistible urge to put in a word for themselves, to indicate their presence at the side of the road when history passed, to remark on events, to place before the eye of God the example of their own tribulations. In other words, egocentric narrative sprang sometimes from the model of Augustinian confession, sometimes from the concern of prudent administrators to remind themselves and their families of the lessons of everyday experience, and sometimes from the habit of recording memorable events in conveniently accessible form.'

8. Haller (1938: 102–103) notes that these texts were always supplemented by a strong oral tradition, so that if a 'saint' had failed to write an autobiography, his deeds were often conveyed for many years through legend, reminiscence and anecdote. Nevertheless, Haller also details the vast numbers of spiritual autobiographies which became an important part of Protestant religious experience and were often collected in anthologies such as Samuel Clarke's *The Marrow of Ecclesiastical Historie, contained in the Lives of the Fathers, and other Learned Men, and Famous Divines, which have Flourished in the Church since Christ's Time, to this present Age*.

9. According to Watt (1957: 14), 'Defoe and Richardson are the first great writers of our literature who did not take their plots from mythology, history, legend or previous literature ... from the Renaissance onwards, there was a growing tendency for individual experience to replace collective tradition as the ultimate arbiter of reality; and this transition would seem to constitute an important part of the general cultural background to the rise of the novel.'

10. The construction of meaning through such biographical narratives is still evident in contemporary discussions of autobiography which continue this early modern search for meaning through a text (Erben, 1993). For a further discussion see Shilling and Mellor (1994).