

Afterword

Embodiment, Identity and Theory

I wrote *The Body and Social Theory* in the early 1990s for several reasons. At that time I thought it was important to try to map out a field of what we might now refer to as 'body studies', and to highlight existing theoretical resources that contained within them an appreciation of the social significance of the body. I also sought to develop a broad theoretical approach towards embodiment which took the materiality of human physicality seriously, and chose to do this by building on the writings of Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens and, most significantly, Norbert Elias. In this new afterword, I want to build analytically on three themes that were central to the first edition in the context of the most important recent developments in the field. These themes resonate most strongly with current debates in the area, and with my contemporary work on the subject, and highlight distinctive dimensions of the ongoing endeavour to construct a fully embodied sociology. Reflecting the order in which I deal with them in this chapter, they are the 'absent presence' of the body in social thought, the relationship between the body and self-identity, and the question of how to advance theoretically the study of the body in society.

These three themes are related in that the problems associated with conceptualizing the body as an absent presence continue to pervade dominant conceptions of self-identity in the literature and have yet to be overcome fully within general theories of the body. Such problems have contributed to the sense that there has been something of an *impasse* in theorizing the body in recent years; a situation that has been reinforced by the tendency for dominant approaches to the subject to be presented as general theories when they actually revolve around the conceptualization of completely different and often equally partial views of embodiment. If we want to improve upon this situation, I argue, we need to recognize the particularity of these approaches without throwing away the genuine gains they have made, and to acknowledge the full presence of the body in the constitution of identity and society. In this context, I introduce a broad framework for a more comprehensive theory that builds on the position I developed in the first edition (avoiding the essentialisms of naturalistic and constructionist approaches, while recognizing the body as a physical phenomena centrally grounded in social action which both shapes, and is

shaped by, its social environment), and that provides the beginnings of a basis for the consolidation of body studies.

Absent-present bodies

During the 1980s a number of books prepared the way for the establishment of a field of body studies by addressing themselves to various issues concerned with the body/society relationship (e.g. Feher, Naddaff and Tazi, 1989; Freund, 1982; Hirst and Woolley, 1982; Johnson, 1983; Martin, 1989; O'Neill, 1985, 1989; Turner, 1984). These varied analyses were enormously important in establishing the body as a legitimate subject of theoretical concern. Nevertheless, they were also often characterized by agendas that ultimately subordinated the materiality and sensuality of the body to *other* factors. These included the concern to incorporate a view of the body as a governed *object* into a theory of the social system (as in Bryan Turner's [1984] ground-breaking 'core problems' theory), viewing the body from the perspective of a particular *sub-discipline* (as in Peter Freund's [1982] excellent analysis of the social implications of health and illness), and using the body as a way of establishing an interdisciplinary *dialogue* between sociology, biology and psychology (as in Paul Hirst's and Penny Woolley's underrated [1982] *Social Relations and Human Attributes*). For all the undoubted accomplishments of such writings, the body tended to be subordinated to, or restricted by, these other concerns. The 'absent presence' of the body in theoretical writings remained a real problem: while the body had become an undoubted stimulant to the sociological imagination, it still tended to fade from view in favour of a concern with more traditional analytical concerns.

This absent presence was not, of course, new. Writings on the body were struggling against the dominant philosophical approach in Western thought which had for centuries prized the thinking mind above the physical flesh. Descartes's *Cogito ergo sum* ('I think, therefore I am') involved at one level a dismissal of all the body's senses. He argued in *The Meditations* that 'I am . . . only a thing that thinks', that 'my mind . . . is entirely and truly distinct from my body and may exist without it', and that our bodies prompted us towards irrational sentiment and impulsiveness (Descartes, 1974: 105, 156). There were exceptions to this denigration of the body. Humanists like Montaigne held that 'part of our humanity is to accept responsibility for our bodies, our feelings', and sought to limit the truth claims of abstract thought (Toulmin, 1990: 40). Nevertheless, the most influential philosophical thought tended to examine the body only insofar as it interfered with the supposedly transcendent powers of the mind. Thus, Kant (1985 [1797]) viewed bodily passions and emotions as impediments to self-determining actions, and conceptualized moral orientations as deriving from the inherent human capacity to *transcend* desires and comply with the universal 'categorical imperative'. The body was not completely absent in

these writings, then, but it was viewed with suspicion and tended to be marginalized in relation to the allegedly self-determining powers of the mind.

Given its interest in the workings of industrial society and the lives of modern people, and the elementary processes underlying these phenomena, it is not surprising that classical sociology paid more positive attention to issues of embodiment. Emile Durkheim, for example, refers to the natural body as profane, but also argues that the ritual practices that have historically surrounded human flesh and fluids suggest that the body 'conceals in its depth a sacred principle that erupts onto the surface in particular circumstances' (Durkheim, 1912 [1995]: 138). Manifest via cutting, scarification, tattooing, painting or other forms of decoration, these eruptions affirm the communion of individuals in a shared moral whole and hence serve to bind together society (Durkheim, 1912 [1995]: 138, 233). Such direct discussions of the body can be found elsewhere in classical sociology, but they did not solve the problem of the absent presence of the body because the totality of the embodied subject frequently remains fragmented and fades from view. Comte, Durkheim, Weber and Simmel, for example, have left us with a rich variety of analyses of 'effervescent attachments', 'moral sentiments', 'vitalistic energies', 'affectual actions', 'pre-social' contents, 'psychic responses', 'passions' and related phenomena. These seek to explain how people are propelled to or alienated from particular types of social relationships, and they have clear implications for what the body is, and for the lived experience of embodiment (Shilling and Mellor, 2001). Nevertheless, such concepts also often serve as ways of leaving behind the conceptual significance of other aspects of the body, and frequently provide routes through which the body can be subsumed beneath the 'real' topics of interest such as the social system, the metropolis, or the coordination of the division of labour. This is exemplified by the work of that great visionary of the sociological tradition, Talcott Parsons. He identified the physical organism as a 'unit point of reference' for sociology that 'is never safely neglected' (Parsons, 1991 [1951]: 541-2, 1969: 13), but also insisted that the social significance of the body was given to it by society. This is the context in which Parsons could argue that health was *not* primarily a quality of the biological body but referred to the 'underlying capacity' of individuals to contribute to the productive resources of society (Parsons 1991 [1951], 1978: 21, 81).

These comments do not, of course, suggest that classical writings are of no use if we wish to understand the significance of the body to individuals, groups and nations in the contemporary era. At the very least, however, it is necessary to explicate and build on the implicit theories of embodiment contained within the works of its major representatives and this is something that has been a central aim of my ongoing work in this area (Shilling, 2001, 2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2004). It is also necessary to recognize that it is all too easy for the apparently exclusively social referents of body studies (be they concerned with cultural understandings of sexuality, elite sports or

the commodification of human physicality) to tear discussion of human physicality *away* from our blood, flesh, bones and senses and *towards* a disembodied vision of organizational, technological or other factors. It is precisely this problem that continues to characterize many recent developments in the area.

Hollow bodies

If philosophy imparted the body with a good deal of negative content, and classical sociology was unable to restore human physicality fully to the conceptual landscape, this left contemporary writers seeking to invest the body with more theoretically productive meanings with a relatively high degree of latitude. By the 1990s, indeed, it became clear that the body had assumed the status of an underdetermined concept that was able to 'stand in' as a malleable signifier for things *other than itself*. Different theories proceeded to define the body in widely contrasting ways and invested it with incompatible roles. The body was a surface phenomena which had become a malleable marker of commercial value subject to the vagaries of fashion for theorists of consumer culture. It was a sexed object that had been used as a means of justifying women's subordination for feminists. It was an object that had been rendered passive by changing modes of control for analysts of governmentality. It was changed into an uncertain and even a rapidly disappearing remnant of pre-technological culture for those interested in the meeting of meat and machines which had occurred with the development of 'cyborgs'. It was defined in terms of its frailties for those interested in developing a new universal system of ethics. It was even reduced to a positive conceptual category (i.e. a category that could explain phenomena previously marginal to a theory) for those concerned with addressing problems within their own discipline.

In this context, 'the body' became one of the most unstable and contested concepts in the social sciences, with its analysis constituting something of an intellectual battleground over which the respective claims of post-structuralism and post-modernism, phenomenology, feminism, sociology and cultural studies have fought (e.g. Howson and Inglis, 2001). Tied to competing agendas, the body became little more than a metaphor through which particular concerns could be pursued. The body was all things to all people and there seemed to be no agreement about how it should be conceptualized. In being tied to these other agendas, however, the physical *materiality* of the body was not only subordinated to them, but often disappeared over the theoretical horizon. This is exemplified by Judith Butler's attempt to place the body at the centre of her analysis of the cultural enforcement of sexuality through the 'heterosexual matrix'. Butler develops her work through the notion of 'performativity', but concludes that the gendered body 'has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality' (Butler, 1990: 136). Such an approach ultimately results in a loss of the fleshy physicality of our embodied being.

As Butler (1993: ix, 29, 68) admits, in seeking to consider the materiality of bodies she found herself moving to other domains and 'kept losing track of the subject'.

This fading of the body is chronic within those writings which conceptualize human physicality exclusively as a *location* on which structures, cultures or relationships 'imprint' themselves, 'inscribe' their effects, or 'hail' subjects. If the body is 'always already' invested with discourses and structured by society, an argument which remains the norm in so much body theory, then it becomes perfectly legitimate to focus on these extra-corporeal factors. However, we should not pretend that such an approach is really interested in, or can throw much positive light on, the physical materiality of the human body. If, in contrast, we wish to understand how the body can be a *source* of, as well as a location for, 'social forms' (even if some of these 'forms' may have ossified and become separated from their founding desires and dispositions) then I would want to reiterate the argument I made in the first edition of this book. In order to overcome the problem of the absent presence of the body in social thought, we need to conceptualize the body as a simultaneously biological and social phenomenon that is both shaped by but irreducible to contemporary social relations and structures. To rob the body of its *own* history and characteristics, in contrast, is to neglect how our embodied being enables us to remake ourselves by remaking the world around us.

The body and self-identity

The damaging consequences of allowing the body to become an absent presence are not confined to abstract theoretical debates about the content and viability of body studies, but are related directly to the second theme of this new afterword: the conceptualization of self-identity. The debate about the relationship between the body and self-identity is one of the most important and contentious to have stimulated writings on the body, intruding as it does on the beliefs of several academic sects, and can be illuminated through an analysis and comparison of three approaches that have informed much debate in the area.

In recent decades people have become increasingly preoccupied with the appearance, size, shape, texture and performance of their bodies. This has been encouraged by the centrality of the body in consumer culture (Featherstone, 1982) – a culture which appears to idolize as sacred the young, sculpted and sexualized body only to suggest that it is actually available to us all. Such a view of the body appears to highlight one of the problems involved in viewing human physicality as an absent presence; it simply cannot cope with any culture or identity which revolves around the flesh and its desirability. Not everyone would agree with this diagnosis of the body, however, and it is ironic that one of the most powerful studies of the phenomenology of bodily experience that has been published in recent

years *embraces* the idea of the absent present body. In this respect, I want to start this section by examining Drew Leder's theory of the latent body as it reflects the traditional theoretical view that the body is, under 'normal' circumstances, marginal to our sense of self. This view has been immensely popular in Western philosophy and remains highly influential in much contemporary social thought, but a critical interrogation of Leder's book can highlight the problems associated with this approach to embodiment. I then turn to the notions of the body as a 'project', an 'option' and a 'regime' (related conceptions of identity which constitute in certain respects the opposite to Leder's analysis), before examining two contrasting visions of the 'body as a mask'. The section concludes with an analysis of the general underlying processes which can be seen as shaping the acquisition of varied embodied identities.

Self-identity and the latent body

The conception of self-identity Leder outlines in his (1990) *The Latent Body* is predicated on the argument that the body remains latent for individuals while they are engaged in that purposeful action that tends to dominate our modern lives. It is based theoretically on an unlikely combination of phenomenology and deconstructionism. Leder's starting point is Merleau-Ponty's (1962) phenomenology of perception which focuses on the foundational, lived experience of our given body: the habits and routines of our bodies provide us with our 'vehicle of being in', and our necessarily partial 'point of view' on the world. Drawing on the deconstructive argument that every presence is dependent on a corresponding absence, however, Leder (1990: 2, 62) also argues that the phenomenological body is neither 'fully fleshed out with bone and guts' (e.g. it ignores the 'recessive' features of our bodies such as our internal organs), nor does it enable us to understand the importance of *corporeal absence* to people's lived experiences. This issue of corporeal absence is particularly important to Leder's thesis.

As the modern world promotes and rewards outcome-oriented, rational action, our working lives and leisure activities immerse us in the pursuit of goals that are *external* to our bodies. We may be immersed in writing an assignment, responding to complaints in a call centre, or attempting to score a goal on the soccer field, but our bodies are rarely at the forefront of our minds when interacting unproblematically with physical objects or other people. Instead, they slip from view and disappear from consciousness:

When reading a book or lost in thought ... I experientially dwell in a world of ideas, paying little heed to my physical sensations or posture. Nor is this forgetfulness restricted to moments of higher-level cognition. I may be engaged in a fierce sport, muscles flexed and responsive to the slightest movements of my opponent. Yet it is precisely upon this opponent, this game, that my attention dwells, not on my own embodiment. (Leder, 1990: 1)

Several factors contribute to this corporeal absence. First, we usually have a practical command of our bodies which enables us to perform actions such as walking, talking and reading without thinking about them. Second, this taken-for-granted practical command also applies to specialist working or sporting skills (Leder, 1990: 33). A competent tennis player, for example, will move to and strike a ball travelling towards them on the court without consciously thinking through what they are doing. Third, the process of engaging in any activity, such as reading a book, requires that countless skills and motor schemas remain unused. Indeed, in the general process of sensing the world around us 'the perceptual organ remains an absence or nullity in the midst of the perceived' (Leder, 1990: 13–26). Finally, our internal visceral organs provide an example of 'depth disappearance'. We may be suffering from dangerously high hypertension or cholesterol levels, for example, without having any awareness of our condition, and without them causing any interruption to our reading a book or playing a sport. Unlike the 'view' provided to us by sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste, then, our internal organs are phenomenologically 'marked by regional gaps, organs that although crucial for sustaining life, cannot be somesthetically perceived' (Leder, 1990: 26, 43, 53).¹ This is why doctors must be skilled at reading bodily signs that may be symptoms of deeper problems.

None of these points should be taken to suggest that our body literally disappears. It remains part of our 'corporeal background', but does ordinarily fade in the context of our lived experiences. If the properly functioning body recedes from our consciousness, however, Leder also recognizes that pain, illness or the embarrassment caused by 'slips' or 'gaffes' (Goffman, 1956) can make the body *reappear* with a vengeance.

The dys- or re-appearing body

Utilizing the Greek prefix 'dys' (signifying 'bad', 'hard' or 'ill' and deployed in an adapted form in such words as 'dysfunctional'), Leder (1990: 84) employs the term *dys-appearance* to refer to when the body reappears as a thematic and sensory focus of our experience but in a biologically pathological or socially deviant form. In contrast to our normal engagement with the world, dys-appearance alienates us from the social world and throws us back onto the limited world of our bodies.

Pain provides us with the clearest example of this dys- or re-appearance. Unexpected pain can 'take our breath away' and remove us completely from the activity we were engaged in. Intense pain makes us acutely aware of our bodies as we search for its location and cause. The body is no longer a background medium of foregrounded action, and we can become lost in a world of pain whose parameters consist of a highly restricted body image shot through with stabbing, piercing, searing agony (Scarry, 1985). Our primary aim is to rid ourselves of this pain, to escape from the dys-appearance of the body and to restore ourselves to a state of normal functioning in which the body recedes from our minds and experience.

Pain is not the only sensation to effect this reappearance of the body. Our rational calculations can be completely overwhelmed by the emotional body in the face of sexual passion or in the context of other strong emotions such as fear (Smith, 1992). Unexpected sensations or bodily events can also cause us to focus on a particular aspect of our body. Leder provides as an example the actions of rubbing our eyes and squinting prior to refocusing on something we see but disbelieve. Other examples include one's first period, or the breaking of one's voice. In each of these, a particular bodily 'state' foregrounds itself within our experience and identity (e.g. Prendergast, 2000).

There is also a social equivalent to this painful or emotional dys-appearance of the body, and it concerns that bodily consciousness which can arise when there is disruption to social interaction. Goffman (1956) is particularly insightful on this point and suggests that when the orderly flow of interaction breaks down, as a result of inappropriate gestures or expressions, the offender becomes acutely conscious of their body. Embarrassment often follows and this can be accompanied by dryness of the mouth, a tenseness of the muscles, and a feeling of wobbliness which results in disruption of the social encounter (Goffman, 1956). Individuals become acutely aware of their bodily dys-appearance as the mutual attunement of people to each other is ruptured, and as the dyad is dissolved and the encounter is reduced to two isolated, awkward bodies. The effects of social dys-appearance are not confined to embarrassment and disrupted interaction, but can even lead to illness (Leder, 1990: 99). Anorexia nervosa and bulimia, for example, have been associated respectively with cultural pressures on women to achieve an 'ideal' body shape and with the tensions involved in a society which values the contrasting bodily activities involved in productive labour and hedonistic consumption (Bordo, 1993; Turner, 1984).

Leder's analysis of the latent body constitutes a radical challenge to writings that seek to make a relatively continuous sense of the body central to people's self-identity. His work can be taken to suggest that the body is relatively unimportant to people's sense of self in the contemporary era: it tends to absent itself from those external activities and social roles from which individuals acquire and develop their identity. At the very least, it provides us with a sophisticated phenomenological understanding of how it is that Western philosophy has historically prioritized the mind over the body as that which makes us distinctively human beings and moral actors. If, in deep thought, the body fades from view, it is no wonder that the abstract and speculative concerns of philosophy should relegate its significance. Despite its radical appearance, however, Leder's vision of the latent body resonates strongly with some of the most traditional figures in the sociological tradition. Leder is not the first to conceptualize illness and pain in relation to the disturbance of purposeful action. Parsons (1991 [1951]) associated sickness with a disruption in the smooth functioning of normal social roles and the expectation that individuals would seek help in order to

make the dysfunctional body disappear. The effect of Leder's thesis, indeed, is to provide a corporeal rationale for classical conceptions of modernity as a system characterized by the coordination and integration of purposeful actors.

Deconstructing the latent body

Despite its subversive effects, a deconstructionist approach to the body can itself be deconstructed by uncovering the principles through which it makes (in)visible certain aspects of embodiment. The body for Leder is invisible when immersed in purposeful action, yet his argument that 'It is precisely because the normal and healthy body largely disappears that direct experience of the body is skewed toward times of dysfunction' appears to be based on the experiences of healthy heterosexual males in their mid years. Indeed, Leder (1990: 86) acknowledges this in part by drawing on Iris Young's (1990: 147-8, 163) argument that women's bodies often do not disappear in the same way that men's do. For women, transcendence is laden with immanence. In the case of pregnancy, for example, there is a 'doubling' of the subject: boundaries and body images shift and undergo flux yet an 'awareness of my body in its bulk and weight does not impede the accomplishing of my aims' (Young, 1990: 163, 165). Nevertheless, Leder's central thesis remains unchanged. There is little suggestion here that the body can become a major, prolonged focus of attention in its 'normal' state.

The problem with this thesis is that it tends to marginalize those people for whom the body is regularly foregrounded as an essential part of their identity. One central effect of racism is to make those affected feel deeply self-conscious and uneasy about their skin colour (Fanon, 1984 [1952]). In similar manner, theorists of sexuality have pointed out that individuals who do not conform to dominant norms of heterosexual identity can be made to feel alienated from their appearance and actions and must regularly censure their behaviour in order to protect their personal security (Diprose, 1994). Individuals who have experienced marked upwards or downwards mobility are also left frequently feeling ill at ease with their manners and appearance as they negotiate unfamiliar social environments and new vocabularies of bodily idiom (Goffman, 1963). Bourdieu (1984), indeed, attributes such unease as a fundamental characteristic of the *petite bourgeois*, a group that is filled with reverence for and striving towards a higher-status bodily demeanour that they are unable to attain with any comfort or assurance. Instead of expanding upon the implications of such cases, Leder seems to assume that there exists a fit between people's bodily *habitus* and the social fields they inhabit.

This vision of corporeal latency also disallows for the possibility that the body has become a project in recent years. The only major time the body becomes a project for Leder, in contrast, is when the imperative of pain demands the attention of the individual. This raises more questions about

the cultural and historical specificity that forms a background for, yet fades away within, his analysis. Hunger, disease and fear is a chronic part of daily life for millions of people across the globe, and enters into the 'normal' state of their bodies. Here, it might be more applicable to talk of the emergence of the healthy, fully functioning body as a process of *reappearance* rather than disappearance.² Furthermore, early, medieval and early modern Christian regimes promoted a constant monitoring of the flesh, albeit in different ways and, again, cannot be used readily to support the notion of the normal body's absence (Mellor and Shilling, 1997). The experiences of certain people with impaired mobility may also question the assumptions underpinning Leder's analysis. Sufferers of arthritis, for example, can experience their body as chronically dys-functional, regularly having to foreground the movement of their legs and hands in relation to steps, bumps, slopes and handrails, and apparently hyperactive offspring intent on using them as a trampoline or climbing frame. On a more mundane level, the frequency with which the body intrudes into our awareness is illustrated by the cycles of feeling hungry, thirsty, tired, uncomfortable, and the need to empty the bladder and bowels that characterize our daily lives.

Despite these limitations, the notion of the latent body issues a strong challenge to the field of body studies and does much to explain a particular phenomenological experience of the body. Leder's writings have informed important work in the sociology of health and illness, and can also help explain why social theory sometimes focuses selectively on particular aspects of embodiment such as vision, a focus made possible by allowing other aspects of people's embodied identities to disappear. If we wish to examine how the body may have been more permanently prominent and foregrounded for people, however, it is useful to turn to the closely related analyses of the body as a 'project', an 'option' and a 'regime'.

The body as a project, option and regime

The idea that people are commonly involved in body projects or options, and that some were once immersed in the demands of body regimes, is in direct opposition to conceptions of our physical selves as latent. This is because each of these conceptions of bodily identity suggests that the sizes, shapes, appearances and sensual experiences of the flesh are integral to the picture we have of ourselves. In each of them, the body is treated as an enterprise to be worked on, and altered, in line with a developing conception of self. As the notion of body projects is a key theme of the original text of *The Body and Social Theory*, and I developed the notions of body options and regimes with Philip Mellor in *Re-forming the Body*, I do not want to spend much time exploring them here. For the purposes of comparison, however, it is necessary to summarize their main features and to explicate and develop their theoretical basis.

Body projects

The notion of body projects develops Anthony Giddens's (1991) suggestion that the self has become a reflexively organized construct in the contemporary era of 'high modernity', and Max Weber's (1991 [1904–05], 1948 [1919]) examination of the irrational consequences of rational action. To summarize, Giddens suggests that late modernity is characterized by a qualitative advance in technological control and an intensified concern with consumption in which the body becomes a central object of cultivation in its *own* right. The purposeful, externally directed rational action Leder discusses has turned *inwards* to encompass the body as an object of attention. Weber's concern with the irrational consequences of rational action, in contrast, alerts us to how purposeful interventions in the body can become *meaningless* in a modern world characterized by an absence of moral criteria that previously informed how people developed their embodied identities. As the body becomes a project, the limited referents for intervention identified by Leder (based, for example, on removing physical pain) undergo a massive expansion, and become dislocated from firm goals and exposed to the vagaries of fashion.

Two characteristics of the high modern world have had a particular impact on this increased prominence of the body. First, there has been a decline in those religious, political and other 'grand narratives' which attributed people's lives with meaning in relation to some transcendent totality such as an afterlife or communism. This development was accentuated by the rise of possessive individualism associated with a succession of right-wing governments that presided over North America and Britain during the 1980s. Second, the contemporary era appeared increasingly 'out of control' (Giddens, 1990). In this context, the body was seen as one last 'raw material' over which the individual could exert influence. Subject to an unprecedented degree of rationalization, bodies are now seen and subject to intervention in terms of their genes, blood pressure, cholesterol, size, shape, appearance, aerobic capacity, colour, weight, and a host of other variables. As such, they can *appear* to provide a firm foundation on which to construct a reliable and meaningful sense of self in the modern world.

This increased prominence of the body has also been affected by the irrationalities and limits of rationalized interventions into the organism. The potential for enhanced bodily control among the affluent remains compromised by the absence of ultimate guidelines concerning *how* people should treat their body as a project. Thus, while modernity provides us with unprecedented opportunities to intervene in and change our embodied selves, it also stimulates a chronic reflexivity which exacerbates the problem of finding answers to the question of whether and how we should make such changes (Weber, 1948 [1919]). The benefits of enhanced body control are also limited by those aspects of our bodily being that remain outside the reach of science. Despite advances in new reproductive technologies, for example, infertility continues to be a major and growing problem. Bodies

also often refuse to be moulded in line with our intentions. Over 95% of all weight taken off during diets is put back on again, while the body can react to dieting by reducing the rate at which calories are consumed and by storing greater amounts of fat as a safeguard against future periods of 'starvation'. Thus, body projects can have the irrational consequences of making desired bodily ideals more difficult to achieve. More generally, all bodies age and decay, and the inescapable reality of death can appear particularly disturbing in a modern age obsessed with the body. As our hips give way under the pounding of running marathons, we may console ourselves with strict dietary regimens and regular gym workouts before injuries prompt us to turn to swimming and then, perhaps after muscular pulls have interrupted this particular activity, the meditative but gruelling discipline of Tai Chi Chuan. Short-term reversals apart, however, the gradual decline of the body continues and, as we get older, it becomes increasingly difficult to find ways of rejuvenating the physical flesh.

Whatever the problems associated with body projects may be, they are unlikely to 'fade into the background'. Indeed, recent technological advances may make this focus on the body even more intense through the creation of *body options*, forms of radical physical transformation that may make obsolete the 'blood, sweat and tears' involved in body projects.

Body options

Body options can be defined as technologically-informed methods of restructuring human embodiment which extend the possibilities associated with *having* a body, through a direct and radical assault on the limitations connected to *being* a body (see Mellor and Shilling, 1997). While more prosaic 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.

Certain of these developments lie in the future, others may not be fully realized, but there exists the possibility that a body may one day be radically reconstructed several times over a single life. Nanotechnology has the potential to provide micro machines which can be injected into our veins and 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, 1994). Linked to others via a computer, stimulated by bodysuit responses connected to electronic graphics, one could before lunch slip into a 'virtual suit' to do battle as a Borg chasing the Starship Enterprise, participate before dinner in an orgy set in ancient

Rome, and finish the day as Marilyn Monroe enjoying a quiet drink with Fidel Castro before retiring to bed.

The social potential of body options can be explored through Jean Baudrillard's (1993) 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, however, can already be found in the DNA code of biology, the binary code of computers, and the digital code of television and sound recording. Each of these codes possesses the potential to make anachronistic our ability to simply copy or counterfeit objects through 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 (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 Braudel's (1973) terms, individual time could triumph over that of the *longue durée* of evolutionary time. 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 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 sex.

Before we get carried away by the novelty of body options, however, it is necessary to recognize that they may simply exacerbate the problems associated with body projects. 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. It is also important to note that even the most spectacular cases 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 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). People have, indeed, long engaged in practices which bear a striking similarity to contemporary body projects, and

this becomes clear if we examine the *regimes* which were popular ways of structuring self-identity in the medieval era.

Body regimes

The medieval habitus was formed in an environment characterized by violence, disease and food shortages, and was clearly uncondusive to the adoption of habits designed to cultivate the 'body beautiful' (Elias, 2000 [1939]). Nevertheless, the flesh could become a site for the pursuance of religious body regimes: structured programmes of disciplining the body which had a long history within Christianity. Early Christians had 'seized upon' the body as a symbol of Christ's victory over death and the old, corrupt human order, and entry into the Christian community resided in a baptism involving fasting, sexual abstinence, vigils, prayers and exorcisms (Miles, 1992). It was medieval Christianity, however, that refined these regimes into more generalized programmes of physical discipline involving diet, prayer and a severely ascetic lifestyle.

In contrast to modern body projects, medieval body regimes often appeared to centre on a destructive hatred of the flesh. Fighting one's sins could include self-flagellation and walking around with pins stuck in the flesh constantly agitated by clothes. Comparing these behaviours with the norms of contemporary culture, Camporesi (1988: 43) argues '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' (ibid.). Despite their apparent contrast with contemporary practices, however, the medieval religious focus on the sinful flesh did not occasion a flight *away* from the body, but brought about a flight *into* physicality no less intense than their modern counterparts (Bynum, 1987; Mellor, 1991). Furthermore, when we think of some of the chemical and surgical procedures people now endure for the sake of their identity, and the hours of painstaking exercise and dietary deprivation they are prepared to undergo in order to 'purify' their bodies of 'sinful' fat, alcohol and nicotine, the gap between these practices narrows further. It is not that such practices as obsessive dieting, for example, display a simple 'hatred' of the body but that they signify an involvement in restructuring the body which can be described as associated with an almost religious devotion to an ideal self.

Medieval body regimes may bear a striking resemblance to the form of body projects not only in terms of their preoccupation with the body, but in allowing 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 role of nurturer, and bypass certain forms of clerical control. These identities were surrounded with dangers (male priests could

judge religious ecstasies to be inauthentic or even demonic), but illustrate how women drew on religious traditions, and integrated them into personal biographical narratives which provided status, religious 'careers' and challenged male hierarchies. If body projects are drawn on by individuals seeking to stabilize their identities in a 'runaway world' (Giddens, 1990), moreover, body regimes were often used to combat medieval anxieties about the *instability* of the body. Worms have, for centuries, been associated with sin and decay and were, in medieval times, often thought to reside *inside* the body as manifestations of sin (Ariès, 1974: 42), and ascetic body regimes were thought to minimize their destructive effects.

The notions of the body as project/option/regime, in contrast to the conception of the latent body, do not provide us with a general theory of bodily experience. Nevertheless, they can be seen as a conceptual inversion of the latter. Instead of fading into the background of purposeful activities, the body becomes foregrounded as a purposeful activity. Certain parts and senses may still pale relative to others, but the notion of body projects/options/regimes challenges the appropriateness of 'disappearance' and 'disappearance' as ways of typifying contemporary bodily orientations. The idea that the body is positively central to people's identities has obvious limitations when it comes to dealing with the bodies of the poor, the homeless and the starving for whom survival is a full-time concern (though this entails its own preoccupation with the body). Nevertheless, it does seem to capture how the body can become integral to people's identities. However, the notions of the body as a project and an option are not *complete* opposites of Leder's vision of the latent body. Given the emphasis they place on the cognitive monitoring of the body (as opposed to the carnal knowledge of the flesh characteristic of body regimes), there is a sense in which conceptions of body projects and options underestimate the extent to which the body intrudes on our identities irrespective of our conscious designs (Mellor and Shilling, 1997). Some of the more futuristic visions of body options, for example, seem to ignore how our basic bodily needs and capacities have themselves shaped and limited the development of virtual environments (for more on this, see Heim, 1995; Sobchak, 1995).

There is another, perhaps more significant, concern about the adequacy of utilizing the notion of the body as a project or option as a way of conceptualizing the self in the current age. Medieval body regimes were entered into on the basis of religious criteria, and saturated with sacred meanings: their normative source was clear to those engaged in them and their pace of change was relatively slow. There were, furthermore, ready alternatives to these regimes. Carnivals, for example, may have been closely aligned to religious purposes, to a carnal indulgence leading to a purging of the body, but these festivities displayed a corporeal celebration of the grotesque and a sensual transcendence of the individual which went beyond the goals of the Church (Bakhtin, 1984). The physical ideals associated with body projects, in contrast, are increasingly pervasive and raise the issue of who is able to control 'images of the desirable'.

If social norms and classifications filter into our bodily self-image, our efforts to mould our bodies may have less to do with the exercise of creative agency, and more with seeking to live up to dominant norms of appearance: norms which may help reproduce social inequalities by implicating people within the signifying practices of others (Pfohl, 1993). In recent decades, for example, there has been a profusion of procedures to 'lighten' or 'whiten' the skin, face and features of black peoples. 'Passing' as white – or indeed as middle class or masculine – is not new. Nevertheless, these technological advances offer the means for more radical and sinister 'racialized' reconstructions of the human body, and the accentuation of a new form of corporeal imperialism. In short, the issue of who controls the norms which act as criteria against which individuals seek to mould their bodies raises the possibility that images of the body beautiful may constitute an oppressive mask forced by one group of people on another (Bartky, 1988; Bordo, 1989). Alternatively, is it just possible that there may be enough room within and outside of these norms for body images to be used as flexible 'masks', to be donned and removed by individuals as a way of exercising agency and maximizing their opportunities for self-expression?

The body as a mask

The image of the *body as a mask* is evident in those theories of gendered, racial and generational identities which suggest that visual norms of appearance contribute toward the disadvantaging or oppression of one group by another. It has also become popular in a range of writings, informed by social interactionism, that are interested in how individuals manage their bodies in order to 'give off' particular impressions to others and focus on the playful, changeable and indeterminate qualities of embodiment. Each of these approaches implies, in very different ways, that bodily appearance constitutes as a 'second skin' (Fanon, 1970), a symbolically charged mediator of our biological bodies. The former approach points to those occasions when the 'masking' of a body involves the imposition of negative stereotypes which make people acutely self-conscious about their bodies. Here the body becomes a *straitjacket* or in extreme cases a *prison*. The latter approach, in contrast, suggests that appearance is carefully constructed and managed by the presentationally skilled individual, projecting a range of identities to others according to the needs of the social situation. Here, the body becomes a *performance* and is integral to the exercise of agency (though performance must still account for situational norms).

These contrasting views of the mask as a straitjacket and a performance, then, focus on the symbolic meanings associated with bodily appearance, and on the various degrees of self-awareness, control and choice, and imposition and constraint, that individuals feel they possess over that appearance. They also suggest that appearance and vision have become *the*

media through which modern social relationships are constructed, consolidated and reproduced (Evans and Hall, 1999).

The mask as a straitjacket

Frantz Fanon's (1984 [1952]) analysis of the relationship between the construction of blackness and colonialism examines how the 'body as mask' can constitute an oppressive 'second skin' imposed on one group of people by another. Fanon discusses how the white male colonial gaze helps create a social and visual space in which black peoples are equated with, and reduced to, their bodies. There is no disappearance of the body here, and no hope of treating the body as an agentic project. Instead, a negatively stereotyped 'blackness' becomes the essence of what the self is, an essence seen through a 'white mask' and filled with shame and self-contempt. Talking about his own experiences, for example, Fanon notes how the white 'generalized other' reflected his bodily being back to him in a highly oppressive manner. As he explains, 'My blackness was there, dark and unarguable. And it tormented me, disturbed me, angered me' (Fanon, 1984 [1952]: 117).

More generally, colonial associations of blackness with lasciviousness, with animality and with immorality, mean that 'the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema'. Consciousness of the body becomes 'solely a negating activity' which fills the body's space with uncertainty, with a 'third-person consciousness' which makes even the process of reaching for a pack of cigarettes and a box of matches an activity full of awkwardness (Fanon, 1984 [1952]: 110). The imposition of such 'white masks' on black peoples is associated with various strategies of exposure and concealment. Fanon characterizes French colonial resolve in Algeria, for example, with a determination to 'conquer the women; we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves and in the houses where men keep them out of sight' (Fanon, 1970: 37-8). Here, the colonial gaze sought to penetrate all those spaces which might prevent the imposition of a white mask on black bodies. Alternatively, in many West African countries, 'the colonialist offensive against the veil is replaced by the missionary offensive against the breasts'. Here 'it is the very exposure of the body, its unabashed exhibition' which characterizes, 'for the Western mind, the African man's primitive promiscuity and possessiveness' (Fanon, 1970; Kanneh, 1992: 347). If there is no single colonial mask, however, the logic remains the same: to rob colonized bodies of their autonomy and to subject them to the physical and behavioural norms of the colonists.

The gendered character of the colonialisms analysed by Fanon can serve to introduce us to feminist writings that examine body masks as essentially patriarchal. Efrat Tseelon (1995: 124) argues that women have constantly to wrestle with a normative mask which reflects male notions of female essence. Women are 'trapped' in a visual space which defines them in terms of their body and appearance, yet which opposes this essence to the

superior male spirit of the mind. Tracing the archetypal features of this mask back to the legends of Pandora, Eve and Lillith, Tseelon (1995: 12) suggests that the mask of womanhood is framed as a manipulative essence masquerading behind 'false decoration': its 'beauty and finery' acts as a 'vehicle to dazzle men to their destruction'. In such a context, women's 'essence' is ever present as a normative and reductionist judgment focused around the flesh.

This masking process has a major impact on women's self-identity. If the 'generalized other' which affects how women view themselves is a 'masculine other', as feminists suggest, girls from the earliest of ages have more pressure placed on their physical appearance than do boys. Their subsequent development is caught between the cultural demand to attain a beautiful appearance and the damnation of that appearance as evidence of low moral character. In this context, it is hardly surprising that research into body image consistently finds that women are more concerned and dissatisfied about their bodily attractiveness, weight, and appearance than are males. One manifestation of this is the high numbers of teenage and even pre-teenage girls who are already caught in harmful cycles of dieting (Grogan, 2000).

Analyses of social responses to ageing provides us with another area in which this notion of the body as an oppressive mask has been developed. Of particular significance here is Mike Featherstone's and Mike Hepworth's (1991) argument that old age is frequently experienced as if it were an obdurate mask which veiled the real identity of the individual. This is exemplified in J.B. Priestley's account of what it feels like to be old:

It is as though, walking down Shaftesbury Avenue as a fairly young man, I was suddenly kidnapped, rushed into a theatre and made to don the grey hair, the wrinkles and the other attributes of age, then wheeled on stage. Behind the appearance of age I am the same person, with the same thoughts, as when I was younger. (cited in Puner, 1978: 7)

We often hear the expression that people in their seventies and eighties are 'young at heart', but Featherstone and Hepworth highlight how ageing is also shaped by the experience of being masked in an old skin which evokes negative reactions from individuals immersed in a consumer culture which places enormous symbolic capital on the values of youth. Thus, some of us may sometimes still feel like freshers at university (and remember with increasing fondness being able to party until late before putting the world to rights with friends over a few bottles of wine and copious cups of coffee until dawn, and then watching the sun come up while jogging in the local park). Unfortunately, one look in the mirror while shaving or making-up confronts us with furrowed brow, crow's eyes, and bags under the eyes. We can reassure ourselves that a 'lived in' face is a sign of character, but it is not simply the existential sign that death is coming closer that disturbs us. Corporeal signs of ageing are saturated with negative images and these images appear to be determined to mummify our experience of ageing.

The notion of the 'mask of ageing' highlights three key issues of general relevance to this approach towards the body as a straightjacket. First, 'the image of the mask alerts us to the possibility that a distance or tension exists between the external appearance of the face and body and their functional capacities, and the internal or subjective sense or experience of personal identity which is likely to become more prominent in our consciousness as we grow older' (Featherstone and Hepworth, 1991: 382). Second, the mask that people place on ageing bodies helps 'fix' people in limited roles, such as grandparent, which allow little room for individuality and variety (ibid.; Fairhurst, 1998). Third, while the image of the mask seems accurately to capture the experience of ageing for many of the present generation, there are signs that 'a new language of ageing with a much greater expressive range has been gradually emerging' (Featherstone and Hepworth, 1991: 383).

This analysis possesses parallels with those which examine the imposition of negative 'masks' on the skins of black peoples and on women. Instead of facilitating voluntaristic performances, these studies suggest that bodies can be central to the process of *stigmatization*. Originated as a term to refer to 'bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier', to be stigmatized now tends to refer to 'the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance' (Goffman, 1990 [1963]: 9, 11). Goffman identifies three major types of stigma (physical 'abnormalities', failings of character, and tribal stigmas such as racial identity), yet emphasizes that *social relationships* determine what is and is not stigmatized. An attribute 'that stigmatizes one type of possessor can confirm the usualness of another, and therefore is neither creditable nor discreditable as a thing in itself' (p. 13). A stigma, therefore, is a special kind of relationship between attribute and stereotype' (p. 14). Masks are not, then, necessarily permanent. Indeed, if social relationships are the crucial factor in determining which bodily identities get stigmatized, we should expect changes in the meanings of particular racial, gendered and generational masks when there is a change in the power ratios and degrees of interdependency between groups. In this respect, it is interesting that Paul Gilroy (2000: 23) argues that legions of athletes and performers have helped begin to change blackness from a 'badge of insult' into an 'increasingly powerful' signifier of prestige, while there has in recent years been a large growth in the association of 'blackness' with the most prestigious forms of popular music, street fashion and youth identity.

The mask as a performance

While writers concerned with bodily appearance as a straitjacket conceptualize the flesh in terms of 'constraint', those interested in appearance as performance focus on the agentic capabilities associated with our visual

selves. This is clear in their widespread use of dramaturgical images and their interpretations of the work of Erving Goffman. Goffman's writings are characterized by a battery of concepts, such as 'make work' and 'civil inattention', which describe how individuals manage their appearances and actions in order to convey particular impressions to others. The use of props (such as a newspaper to hide an inappropriate smile), memory (fixing on a sad event from the past in order to appear sombre in the present), make-up or plastic surgery (to hide signs of ageing and promote the look of youth) are just three examples of how the body can act as a mask in projecting particular appearances (Goffman, 1969 [1959], 1990 [1963]).

In addition to the obvious significance of appearance, two contextual factors are of particular importance for the construction and display of facial and bodily masks commensurate with different performances. First, Goffman suggests there is a common *moral* understanding that we take people for what they appear to be, at least until evidence to the contrary arises, and will engage in reciprocal 'turn taking' and even interactional 'repair work' to help ease a presentational performance. Second, while an individual may construct and project a different bodily mask for different audiences, and can relax and distance themselves from all of these masks or identities in 'back-regions', performances for the same audience need to be *consistent* if they are to be regarded as authentic (Goffman, 1983, 1990 [1963]). The management of space and locale, then, as well as cooperation between embodied actor and audience, are essential to the creation and success of different masks of identity (Tseelon, 1995).

There is considerable disagreement about whether this conception of the body as a mask for the presentation of self implies that individuals seek to deceive and manipulate others. Efrat Tseelon (1992), for example, discusses the work of 'impression management researchers' who analyse the 'mask-like' properties of the body as integral to individuals' attempts to *misrepresent* themselves in order to gain benefits from others (e.g. Baumeister, 1986; Snyder, 1987). These researchers suggest that there exists a private, authentic self behind the shifting identities projected by the donning of different masks: masks designed to create false impressions of an individual's social status, economic worth, or moral trustworthiness. In contrast, postmodern views of identity suggests there is no such thing as an unchanging, authentic self, and that social life is dependent on us projecting different embodied identities to various audiences (Gergen, 1991; Tseelon, 1992). One sign of the creativity, and perhaps ambiguity, of Goffman's writings is that both approaches have employed them to support their arguments (Tseelon, 1995).

If there exists disagreement over the moral consequences of managing the body as a mask, Sennet (1992) points out that the idea that social life represents a theatre in which people stage performances is one of the oldest views of society. Plato conceived of human life as a puppet show staged by the gods, Petronius analysed society as a theater, while Christian

thought held that God looked on in anguish at the masquerades of His children below. More recently, Balzac, Baudelaire, Mann, and even Freud have each made the identification between theatre and society (Sennett, 1992: 34–5). Sennett examines the processes by which people living in the eighteenth century came to see each other, rather than God, as the audience for their performances. The play acting and pretences of people's dress, appearance and social performances were there to be enjoyed, if somewhat cynically. In mid-eighteenth century Paris, for example, the body was treated as a mannequin 'on which wigs, elaborate hats, and other adornments were to be placed' in order to create a sense of character and a public face that would facilitate communication between strangers (Sennett, 1992: 40–1).

Sennett's historical perspective reveals how treating the body as a mask facilitated communication between people during the eighteenth century. Sumptuary laws sought to restrict certain fabrics and styles to the socially privileged but these were rarely enforced. The mask of the body could, then, be a flexible means of presenting different faces to different public and private audiences. If Sennett provides an historical context for Goffman's concern with the presentation of self, however, he is less sanguine about the present meanings associated with appearance. By the end of the nineteenth century, Sennett suggests that bodily masks came to be seen as fixed indicators of people's personality. Phrenology (which sought to deduce character from the shape of the head) contributed to this change of perspective, as did advances in surgery which viewed the body as a route to the essence of human being, and Darwin's suggestion that individual emotions manifested themselves directly in physical appearance. According to Sennett, these developments meant that the mask of the body no longer provided individuals with a means of communicating in public, but had become an inflexible prison revealing the deepest depths of one's soul.

The image of the bodily mask as a performance highlights the agentic potentialities of the physical self in a manner which has similarities with the idea of body projects. In both cases, the body is viewed as a relatively flexible yet central aspect of people's self-identities. In perceiving the body as significant, at least partly because of its *appearance*, however, both analyses also raise (yet do not answer fully) the question of who sets the criteria by which bodies are evaluated. It is these norms that theorists of race, gender, disability, and age (and other variables along which social inequalities are structured) take as central to their deliberations on the body as a straitjacket. With certain exceptions, however, there is a tendency for these writings to underplay the fact that bodies are irreducible to representations of them, and to overlook the physical capacities of individuals to make at least some difference to their surroundings in all but the most exceptional and oppressive of circumstances. Does this mean that we have to start afresh in considering the relationship between the body and self-identity?

Complementarities and body image

Conceptions of the body as latent, as a project/option/regime, and as a mask provide us with clear alternatives, but can also be brought into productive dialogue. Such dialogue can proceed if we recognize that there exists a partial complementarity between them which can be used to expand their explanatory power. It can be enhanced if we acknowledge that there may be certain common processes concerned with the development of any particular orientation to the body; processes which enable at least the more viable elements of these orientations to be seen as culturally and historically specific forms of embodiment.

Points of contact

In terms of their partial complementarity, while the latent body focuses somewhat unhelpfully on the normal body as a receding body, it can still help explain how certain features of embodiment escape the attention of body projects. Used creatively, a selective combination of the conception of the latent body, body projects and the body as mask can also help explain why it is that people undertake routinized physical activities without being fully committed to them. Debra Gimlin's (2002) analyses of women's involvement in different elements of the beauty industry, for example, suggests routinized work on the body (such as that accomplished by regularly attending aerobics classes) can excuse one from not meeting body norms and can allow one's body to fade into the background at least to a limited degree on some occasions. As Gimlin (2002: 6) argues, 'By engaging in body work, women are able to negotiate normative identities by diminishing their personal responsibility for a body that fails to meet cultural mandates'.

Moving to conceptions of the bodily mask as a straitjacket, such oppressive impositions can be interpreted as a social dys-appearance of the body (albeit in a form mediated by symbolic codes) and as determining the status attached to various body projects. Finally, the notion of the body as a mask can be analysed as having important implications for which aspects of the body may fade into the background during its 'normal' functioning, and as revealing the social relations and power inequalities associated with the criteria of body beauty and stigmatization informing people's motivations for embarking on particular body projects.

If these images of the body can be drawn upon selectively in order to rectify some of their individual gaps and weaknesses, this has something to do with them each being associated with analyses of modernity. They may concentrate variously on the modern age as purposeful, as reflexive, and as a stage where appearance is central to agency and oppression, yet these are each features of the *same* modern system (even if they have not been confined to this system). Modernity is an age which prioritizes purposeful and productive activity, yet has also stimulated a high degree of reflexivity,

and has historically been predicated on the colonization and corporeal denigration of much of the globe by Europe and America (Connell, 1997).

The body schema

In addition to putting these conceptions of bodily identity in dialogue with each other, it is possible to examine the common basis on which each of them may develop by drawing on research that has been conducted into the issue of *body schema* or *image*. The concept of body schema was developed to address the problem of how it is we are able to coordinate our bodies to perform actions without having complete sight of them or consciously monitoring our every movement. It suggests that self-identity and social actions are dependent on us building up a non-conscious psychic picture of our corporeal appearance, size and capacities, which provides a basis on which we can coordinate our sensory and motor facilities. As Elizabeth Grosz (1994: 83) argues, our body schema 'unifies and coordinates postural, tactile, kinaesthetic, and visual sensations so that these are experienced as the sensations of a subject coordinated into a single space'.

The body schema develops from two major sources. First, it is fostered by the feelings, perceptions and movements of the physical body as it 'bumps into' and learns to deal with, and problem-solve in, the world around it. The body schema is not identical to these experiences, however, and neurophysiology has long established (through the investigation of such cases as 'phantom limbs' when amputees report pain and sensation in their missing arms or legs) that it is not a replica of the topography of the physical body.³ This point is reinforced when we realise that physical objects, such as a stick or clothes, can also be taken into our body schema. As Simmel (1971 [1918]: 356) implies in his discussion of how technological developments can expand our sensory capacities, the formation of such a schema means that we have socially 'transcended the compass of our natural being'. The second factor associated with the development of a body schema is social interaction. This involves the elementary structures of role-taking (and the affects and expressions involved in this interaction) engaged in with early care-givers by the pre-linguistic infant (Joas, 1983, 1997; Mead, 1938; Schilder, 1935). The experience and image we have of our own bodies, then, is not wholly given by phenomenological self-experience, but is derived significantly from the experience and image we have of *other people's* bodies (and their reactions to our body).

Sociologically, these two sources of the body schema are of particular importance as they suggest that the biological body is open to cultural meanings which focus on and define symbolically particular body parts or appearances, yet which must also take account of the *physical materiality* of the body and the environment. As George Herbert Mead argues, body schemas develop on the basis of a *practical* intersubjectivity (Joas, 1997), the interactional effects of bodily selves on each other as they are engaged in the manipulation of physical things (Mead, 1932: 169).

Having drawn on Mead's writings to identify the processes involved in the formation of a body schema, his work is also useful if we wish to examine why individuals develop particular embodied identities. The practical intersubjectivity that is one central factor in the development of a body schema is governed for Mead by the need individuals have to adjust their own actions to those of the group. This adjustment stimulates a reflexive self-consciousness which enables individuals to contemplate their bodily being from the viewpoint of other people. As Mead (1934: 138) argues, 'The individual experiences himself as such . . . from the particular standpoints of other individual members of the same group, or from the general standpoint of the social group as a whole to which he belongs'. Mead refers to the subjective internalization of this group standpoint as a 'generalized other': an other which acts as a censor and filter for the development of embodied identity. The process through which an individual develops a coherent embodied self-identity is not a simple internalization of the group attitude, however, but an internal dialogue between the 'me' (the identity that others attribute to us) and the 'I' (our subjective reflection on this identity) (Mead, 1934). We must also remember that the continuity of this particular group-influenced bodily identity is also subject to its ability to facilitate successful interventions in the physical environment. Those stigmatized within a community because of a physical disability, for example, may critically reflect on their 'spoiled identity', discover that they are much more capable than society assumes, and reject their bodily identity in favour of a radical alternative.

These insights have major implications for the notions of the body as latent, as a project/option/regime, and as a mask. They suggest that the relevance and applicability of each form of embodiment will be dependent on the subjectivities forged through practical interactions and their efficacy in relation to the social *and* physical environment. If the dominant social group is a colonizer, or a patriarch, those subject to this oppression are likely to develop restricted and constraining body images which hamper their opportunities to exercise agency. It is no accident that the notion of 'generalized other' illuminates Fanon's notion of white masks imposed on black peoples in colonial spaces. The notion of body projects, in contrast, suggests the dominance of a social context in which individualism is valued to the extent that people are expected to manage and enhance the value of *themselves* as well as of the goods and services they work with, yet must do so without enduring guidelines as to how to accomplish this task. Finally, the phenomenological experiences behind the notion of the latent body (overstated as these are) can be interpreted as promoted by an interactional context in which the mind and purposeful action is valued above the body and sensual experience. Such notions as the latent body, body projects and body masks should not, therefore, be reified and treated as signifying approaches to the body that are equally relevant irrespective of historical and cultural context. The common interactional significance of the body to the sense of self an individual possesses can itself result in identities which

are radically different historically and cross-culturally depending upon the practices and values considered sacred within a community (Shilling, 1999, 2003). As such, the analyses of self-identity we have examined here may more productively be seen as representing parts of a typology (although Leder's thesis gets a role not because the body is chronically absent but because it can help explain why certain aspects of the body slip into the background at certain times). That is, they may be seen as approximations to different forms of embodied identity which may become more or less relevant over time and will almost definitely need to be supplemented with additional visions of the body and identity.

New directions in body theory

This discussion of the common processes underpinning the development of a body schema highlights three dimensions of embodiment that I want to suggest are absolutely necessary to the development of new directions in body theory. In the development of a pictorial body schema the physical body is at once a *source* of self-identity (involving experiences, feelings, and perceptions), and a *location* for the effects of society (group norms permeate the individual's sense of self and their evaluation of this sense of self). Given its continued engagement in practical interventions in the physical environment, that can serve as a catalyst for a changing sense of identity or commitment to that identity, the body also constitutes a medium whereby people can be *attached to* or *repelled from* their social milieu. This view of the body as a multi-dimensional phenomena provides us with the key not just to analysing the relationship between the body and identity, but to constructing a sociological vision of the constitution of society which is more fully embodied than existing perspectives in the area. This is not because it works at the level of the individual and, therefore, could and should be extrapolated to the level of the social system, but because it captures vital, irreducible and generalizable dimensions of the body's productive and receptive capacities. I begin this section by examining and critically evaluating those perspectives which remain or have become dominant in the last decade, before identifying the outlines of a more satisfactory approach to analysing the body's relationship with society.

For all the diversity and variety of body theories, three now exert most influence in the area. Over the last decade, social constructionist analyses of the ordered body, action or phenomenological approaches towards the lived body, and conceptions of the body in structuration theory have not only imparted this area with a developing identity, but have provided valuable insights into the social significance of the body and continue to set agendas which steer much writing in this area. Despite their achievements, however, each of them is characterized by serious theoretical limitations and by radically different views of the body which seem to make this subject more rather than less elusive. Having examined the first and third of

these theories in the main text, I shall confine my discussion to brief analyses of their developments and continued limitations, though it is also worth noting that I adopt a more critical view of the analytical worth of structuration theory than is evident in the first edition.

Social constructionist analyses of the ordered body

Social constructionist analyses of the ordered body view human physicality as an object which is produced and regulated by political, normative and discursive regimes. Studies which developed this approach did much to initiate and consolidate the form taken by the corporeal turn in social theory. Thus, Bryan Turner's (1984) structuralist *The Body and Society*, and later post-structuralist studies such as Judith Butler's (1990) *Gender Trouble* and (1993) *Bodies that Matter*, established the *governmental management* of the body as key to the external environment in which social action occurs.

Turner's and Butler's analyses may appear to have little in common, and Turner (1996) is critical of Butler's conception of the body. Nevertheless, their analyses converge in so far as Butler (1990, 1993) focuses on two of the systemic problems identified by Turner, the restraint of desire and the presentation of self. Butler's specific interest may be the cultural enforcement of heterosexuality, but she remains, like Turner, concerned with the ordering and regulation of bodies. The influence of Michel Foucault is also readily apparent in these studies. Foucault (1977) conceives of the body as 'the inscribed surface of events' and as 'totally imprinted by history'. There are no irreducible 'essences' that define people's identity or actions for all time, just 'inscriptions' of identity which change over time.

Theorists concerned with the governmental environment in which the body is controlled have not relied exclusively on Foucault, however, but combined his insights and methods with those of other thinkers. Turner's (1984) study, for example, is heavily steered by Parsons (as well as by Hobbes and Foucault). This use of Parsons is particularly creative. Instead of being a sub-system of action as it was for Parsons, the behavioural organism becomes for Turner the model for the *overarching environment in which action occurs*. This enables Turner to draw on innovative thinkers such as Foucault, while blunting the radical consequences of their analyses by containing them within a Parsonian framework. Similarly, Butler's (1993) concern with the 'heterosexual matrix', which positioned the body as an object and target of gendered power relationships, drew on Althusser in arguing that individuals are 'hailed' to perform particular subject positions. Again, the impulse towards order for an apparently radical theory is firmly established.

These theories may have been effective at illuminating how the body was ordered and inscribed by power relations, but frequently remained silent about the 'lived experience' of embodied action. Turner, for example, condemns phenomenology for providing 'an individualistic account of embodiment from the point of view of the subject' which is 'largely devoid

of historical and sociological content' (Turner, 1984: 54). Sociologically, he insists, 'the body' should be examined as 'socially constructed and socially experienced' (ibid.). The body remains an object, and one which is ultimately attached to its social milieu by the dull compulsion of structures and matrixes over which it has no control.

Phenomenological and action-oriented studies of the 'lived body'

In response to this lacuna, the 1990s witnessed a rise in studies about 'the body's own experience of its embodiment' which viewed the opportunities and constraints of action as given by the 'problems of bodies themselves' (Frank, 1991: 43). Drew Leder's (1990) focus on the lived experience of instrumentally rational action and Iris Marion Young's (1990) feminist phenomenology are important examples of this genre, as we have seen, while Arthur Frank (1995) has drawn creatively on experiential accounts of the prominence of the body during illness in analysing how a 'pedagogy of suffering' can result in a lasting new ethics of relating to others. These and other accounts of their kind drew on phenomenology, on existentialist and on interactionist resources. It is the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, however, that has been most influential in shaping these calls for a 'carnal sociology', the founding assumption of which was that "'self", "society" and "symbolic order" are constituted through the work of the body' (Crossley, 1995: 43). Crossley's call was timely as it coincided with a growing feeling that while theories of the body illuminated the *Körper* (the structural, objectified aspects of physical being), they had yet to come to grips fully with the *Lieb* (the living, feeling, sensing, and emotional aspects of bodily experience) (Csordas, 1994; Stoller, 1997). For Merleau-Ponty (1962: 136), embodied subjects develop direction and purpose on the basis of the *practical* engagements they have with their surroundings and through the *intentionality* they develop as a result of the situatedness of embodied existence.

This emphasis on the determining rather than determined nature of our embodiment, and on the universal bodily basis of meaning and knowledge, constitutes a major challenge to structuralist and post-structuralist theories. Part of the legacy of action-oriented and phenomenological approaches, indeed, can be seen in the growing number of empirically discrete explorations of 'bodies in a social context' which variously express a dissatisfaction with the abstract character of body theory and a desire to listen to people talking about their bodies (e.g. Evans and Lee, 2002; Gimlin, 2002; Nettleton and Watson, 1998). Despite its ostensible focus on the 'lived body', however, there is a paradox within phenomenology. Having been interpreted as analysing how people experience their bodies, this tradition is actually concerned with the bodily *basis* of experience. As Leder's (1990) study illustrates, it is quite possible for the body to fade away within a phenomenological account of people's practical experiences of the world, to neglect the importance of physical differences, and to overlook how structures sometimes shape our physical dispositions.

Structuration theories of the body

These analyses of the ordered and 'lived' bodies provided the field with alternative lines of development, but replicated what many saw as a debilitating division between theories of structure and agency that had long characterized sociology (Dawe, 1979). Structuration theories developed as a means of overcoming this opposition. Based on assumptions about the mutually constituting nature of social structures and actions, the body was central to structuration theory's vision of society. Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens are the most influential proponents of this theory of social life, while Elizabeth Grosz provides us with a quite different, feminist analysis of the mutual constitution of the body and dominant norms of sexuality. Despite their differences, each theorist claimed that the body was a recipient of social practices *and* an active creator of its milieu.

In Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction, the body is shaped by yet also reproduces class inequalities. The embodied dispositions that people acquire during their upbringing 'continuously transform necessities into strategies, [and] constraints into preferences' (Bourdieu, 1984: 190). Giddens's (1991) conception of 'high modernity' provides us with a different version of how the body and the major social principles characteristic of a society are mutually determining. The contingency of the contemporary social world is incorporated into and reinforced by the contingency of the body. Modernity's capacity for controlling the body provides individuals with the potential to change their bodily appearances and capacities, while modernity's demolition of certainties is associated with a 'chronic reflexivity' in individuals that stimulates the search for new biographical narratives, new relationships, and new answers to major existential issues (Shilling and Mellor, 1996). Grosz's (1994) view of how the sexual body is both constituting and constituted is again quite different. Using the Lacanian appropriation of the topographical image of the mobius strip (the inverted three-dimensional figure eight), she explores how the body provides a morphological basis for sexual difference, yet is also structured (both internally and externally) by the inscriptive powers of sexual norms.

These structuration theories provide us with a 'middle way' between social constructionist accounts of governmentality and phenomenological accounts of 'lived experience' and, in the cases of Bourdieu and Giddens, are designed to inform empirical research. Whether they provide us with *viable* alternatives, however, is another question. While Bourdieu asserts the facts of changing bodily dispositions, his argument that the *habitus* operates at the level of the subconscious (Bourdieu, 1984: 466) makes it difficult to see how individuals can escape from the dispositional trajectory assigned them. The emphasis Giddens's later writings place on changeability and reflexivity, in contrast, invests the body with an unlikely 'lightness of being'; it is a highly malleable resource rather than a frail, inescapable part of existence, and can be reinvented by individuals alongside their reflexively constituted narratives of self. Finally, despite her

concern to identify possibilities for change, Grosz's focus on the body's sexual specificity and the additional 'investments of difference' made by society into the interiors and exteriors of bodies seems to ensure the continuation of opposing male and female identities.

Mediating theories, mediating bodies

These three approaches may have demonstrated the ubiquity of the body as a subject, and imparted to the field a theoretical identity, while each of them adds something of enduring significance to the analysis of embodiment and society. Social constructionist theories of the ordered body draw our attention to how power is exercised on and through bodies, and have made a valuable epistemological break by distancing sociological thinking about embodiment from naturalistic, biologically reductionist analyses. The body, in short, is an important *location* on which society imprints itself and through which it is able to exercise influence and power. Action-oriented and phenomenological approaches have demonstrated the importance of the body as the basis for human agency and the lived experience of social actors. Sociology will not capture the complexity of the body by viewing it simply as a physical object, they suggest, but needs to recognise how the organism is our vehicle of being in, experiencing, and creating the world in which we live. If we combine this with an appreciation of how certain evolutionary developments and bodily capacities may be out of reach of phenomenological introspection, we can appreciate the body as a vital *source* for the creation of society. Conceptions of the body in structuration theory seek to position human physicality as a central part of a circuit connecting the individual to society. Social actors both create their social milieu, through the capacities and facilities of their bodies, and are simultaneously shaped by the impact their social location exerts on their bodies. The body, in short, is a *means* through which individuals are attached to, or ruptured from, society.

These are very real insights and it would perhaps be rash to dismiss one in favour of another of these theories, or to jettison every aspect of them. Nevertheless, we need to recognize that they are actually talking about very different dimensions of embodiment. In terms of the language I am using here, they are focused on distinctive issues concerned with the body as a source of, or a location for, or a means of attaching (or repelling) the embodied subject to society, but *none of them* recognizes adequately the body's implication in *all* of these processes. Thus, theories of the ordered body let the individual's active and experienced body fade from view. Phenomenologically-informed theories tend to occlude the effect of structures on the experiences of individuals and, ironically, sometimes converge with structuralist approaches when suggesting that the body disappears during purposeful action. Structuration theories condemn the body to a state of oscillation between the dead weight of structure and the lightness of reflexive choice.

There are several ways of responding to this situation. Firstly, it is possible to simply endorse one of these approaches as essentially 'correct', and reject the others as false, misguided attempts to apprehend the reality of social life. This would be the easiest option and there is something to be said for it. It would enable us to pursue and refine a single agenda, perhaps extending it here and there to cope with some of its residual categories, and to advance that particular theoretical paradigm. This is Crossley's (1995, 2001) strategy in representing Merleau-Ponty as a flexible theorist who can reconcile the dualisms apparent in sociological theories of the body through his treatment of the body as subject and object if only we add to his thought appropriate doses of such disparate theorists such as Habermas, Foucault and Bourdieu. Second, one could start afresh by rejecting each of these approaches and pursuing a quite separate programme based upon a different philosophical starting point, defining the body and its social consequences anew (e.g. Turner, 1999). The problem with both these responses, however, is that they would almost certainly overlook some of the advances that the major existing theories of the body have made in this area, and undermine the identity that body studies has developed.

A third way of responding to the current diversity in the field of body studies is to accept the body's elusiveness in social thought and recognise that its enigmatic character is most usefully tied to the development of diverse theoretical traditions. These traditions can be seen as providing different resources for the pursuit of different analytical tasks. Again, there is something to be said for this option. Focusing on the body has led to advances within diverse areas of study and has provided historically marginalized modes of thought, such as 'queer studies' and 'lesbian studies', with a substantive vehicle through which the importance of their endeavours has been more widely recognized. This proliferation of theories on the body also provides apparently tailor-made perspectives that can be used to interrogate a wide range of subjects. However, if we have reached a point where theoretical consolidation is needed, as I have suggested, the time for simply endorsing the sheer growth and scope of body studies has passed.

A fourth way of proceeding is to seek to incorporate the most useful features of the approaches we have examined into a more comprehensive framework which avoids their debilitating limitations. This cannot be accomplished by 'taking together' incommensurate paradigms (a problem with Turner's [1996: 33] suggestion that he incorporate a focus on the 'phenomenology of experience' as a corrective to 'the underlying structuralism' of his *The Body and Society*). It must also avoid the associated problems of conflating distinct capacities of the body, a step which loses the theoretical means to account for the interaction that occurs between these capacities and for historical change (Archer, 2000). Finally, it needs to refuse the theoretical excesses of dominant approaches by placing at its centre a view of the body as a socio-natural phenomenon which is an ongoing source of society as well as being a location for the structures and contours of the social environment (see Chapter 9 and Burkitt, 1999).

This fourth option is the one I favour and I believe it can be accomplished by developing a view of the body as a multi-dimensional medium for the constitution of society (a source of, a location for, and a means of positioning individuals within, society). This framework is designed to establish the fundamentals of any comprehensive theory while also providing guidelines for empirical studies of the body in society. The body's status as a source, a location for, and a means of attachment/repulsion is viewed as three key dimensions in its relationship with the social environment. While we may have to start by focusing on one or other of these elements, it is important to leave space for examining the effects over time of each of them.

This approach has not been developed in the field of body studies, but neither does it require us to start anew.⁴ It is possible, indeed, to explicate its outlines through a creative engagement with the writings of Marx, Durkheim, Simmel and Elias (see Shilling, 2004). Their work derives from very different and incompatible theoretical traditions, yet it is possible to identify in their writings a *convergence* of interest in the body as a multi-dimensional medium for the constitution of society. Thus, while Durkheim is distinctive in beginning with the theoretical and moral primacy of the collectivity, and looked to the possible rise of a moral individualism that could provide a suitable framework for an advanced capitalism (Durkheim, 1984 [1893]), he also viewed the body as a source and recipient of a collective symbolism that possessed the capacity to incorporate individuals into the moral life of the group. Similarly, while Simmel is distinctive in attributing primacy in theoretical and moral matters to the (interacting) individual, he analysed the increasingly pervasive impact on embodied identity of the money economy, while also identifying the body as a source of dispositions conducive to the formation of embryonic social forms which could stimulate in individuals socially-binding emotions. Marx combines elements from different theoretical traditions in focusing on the relationship between social class, the market-place of competitive individualism, and the possibilities of collective emancipation, but he viewed the body as a source of economic relations and developed a deep concern with the destructive bodily effects of capitalism. These effects could 'fit' workers to restrictive jobs within the market-place, but could also form the basis for class struggle and social change. Finally, while Elias rejected philosophy and turned his back on much of the sociological tradition, his processual approach recognized the body as a productive hinge between nature and society, and a location for the figurations that have historically effected major alterations to people's bodily identities. He was also centrally concerned with how the successful *attachment* of individuals to peaceful social figurations in the contemporary West is dependent on an internalization of controls previously maintained by external authorities. Furthermore, Elias's suggestion that there are increasing costs associated with the body being a location for capitalist society advances a number of questions raised by Marx, Durkheim and Simmel that can usefully be explored further. In

particular, it asks us to consider the possibility that the products of embodied individuals have come to dominate us and restrict the manner in which our bodies are presently shaping the social world in which we live.

The enormous theoretical differences that exist between these figures means that this convergence thesis will have to be drawn very carefully. To reiterate, the point is *not* that their general social theories are compatible, but that they share certain elements in their analysis of the body in constructing their distinctive visions of social life. In recognizing that the body constitutes a source of society, Marx, Durkheim, Simmel and Elias each invest it with *transcendent* properties that enable our physical selves to be temporarily freed from the constraints of individual existence and natural life and placed in a productive relationship vis-a-vis the formation of social relationships. In viewing the body as a location for society, they each recognise that these relations can develop in such a way as to condemn the body to a period of *immanence* in which it is confined to and shaped by the structural forces of society. In addressing the body as a means of attaching people to, or distancing them from, social milieu, each of these figures also shares a concern with social outcomes as embodied phenomena. Social outcomes cannot be conceptualized adequately as exclusively cognitive processes, but need to take into account how people's orientation to their social environment have been shaped by bodily dispositions, desires, habits and preferences.

This broad approach to the body as a multi-dimensional medium for the constitution of society remains to be explicated fully, but it seems to me that it has the advantage of identifying essential elements in any specific body theory while leaving flexible the specific political, cultural and economic directions of analysis. The limited convergence that exists in the writings of classical theorists is not a political convergence and does not prescribe how we should judge society. It does insist that we view the body as foregrounded in the constitution and maintenance of social relations and in the positioning of agentically-capable individuals within these relationships. I also see this theoretical approach as building directly upon, rather than constituting a radical departure from, the route mapped out in the first edition of this text. There, I was concerned to rescue analysis of the body from the forms of biological reductionism that characterized naturalistic approaches and the forms of discursive reductionism that characterized many sociological approaches to the subject, while also highlighting the importance of conceptualizing the body as a material phenomena that both shaped and was shaped by its social environment. The notion of the body as a multi-dimensional medium for the constitution of society takes this as its basic assumption and builds towards a theory of society as a thoroughly embodied phenomena. At the same time, it retains the very real advances made by the dominant theoretical approaches that have developed within body studies.

In conceptualizing the body as a *source* of society, it builds on the action-oriented and phenomenological insight that society is constituted through

the work of the body, while adding to this other sociological analyses of the body as a socio-natural entity which shapes the contours and content of the social milieu (Benton, 1991; Burkitt, 1999; Hirst and Woolley, 1981). It does this by recognizing that the body is possessed of potentialities that enable it to transcend the natural world and individual existence. In conceptualizing the body as a *location* for the effects of society, it recognizes that once social norms and institutions are established they set the parameters in which subsequent social action occurs and have a real impact on the bodily being of those subject to them. These effects can alter people's physical dispositions and capacities for action. Placed in this context, with an ontological view of the body as a physical productive phenomena which is irreducible to discourse, it is possible to employ to good effect the useful insights from structuralist and post-structuralist theories of governance. Each of them is possessed of a view of the body as socially immanent; it can at times become tightly constrained, shaped and limited by its social surroundings. In conceptualizing the body as a *means* of positioning individuals within their social milieu, it builds on the insight from structuration theories that the processes of social reproduction and change are mediated by bodies. Social change does not happen automatically and nor does it occur simply as a result of purely intellectually-motivated actions. Instead, people's experiences of, and responses to, social structures are shaped significantly by their sensory and sensual selves. These variables are important as they can exert an important impact on whether people feel at ease with, and tend to reproduce the 'rules', 'resources' or 'social fields' they are most familiar with, or emotionally experience these structures as unpleasant, undesirable and worthy of transformation. This recognizes a thoroughly embodied view of social outcomes which rejects the philosophical view that it is the mind, separated from any bodily tastes or dispositions, that determines how people relate to their social environment.

Conclusion

This new Afterword has been concerned to revisit and develop three themes in my original text that resonate most strongly with current debates in the area and with the ongoing endeavour to construct a fully embodied sociology. The 'absent presence' of the body in social thought, the relationship between the body and self-identity, and the question of how to advance theoretically the study of the body in society are linked issues. It seems to me that we will only be able to make substantial theoretical progress in the latter two if we reverse the current tendency of effectively absenting the material body from our considerations. Bodies constitute an irreducible source of society: it is the properties and capacities of embodied humans that provide the corporeal basis on which identities and social relations are consolidated and changed. Without ceasing to be an ongoing source of their social milieu, they are also marked and contoured by the structural effects of

society. Finally, our embodied being is also implicated centrally in our positioning within the social and cultural worlds we inhabit. People's attraction to or repulsion from different elements of their environment is often a deeply sensual, visceral matter and it is these responses, and not just apparently 'disembodied' intellectual evaluations, which provide an essential motor force for the maintenance, development and transformation of social systems.

The body has served as an enormously productive focus for theoretical and, increasingly, empirical work over the last two decades, but this has resulted in not only a diverse but an increasingly fragmented field of studies. If we are to turn this explosion of creativity into something more enduring, then now is the time for theoretical consolidation. The challenge for sociological research is to demonstrate how the thoroughly bodily dimensions of societal constitution operate generally and in particular circumstances.

Notes

1. Expressed in physiological terms, our *proprioception* (the sense of balance, position, and muscular tension provided by the receptors in our muscles, joints, tendons, and the inner ear) provides us with crucial information about the world and options to utilize different modalities of engaging with the world, but fades from our phenomenological experience of living. Such absence is even more marked with regards to the information provided to us by our interoception (the sensations of our internal organs) which provide us with only general, delayed, or inaccurate pictures of our body and external world (Leder, 1990: 41–3). It may take years for an unhealthy diet to result in heart disease, for example, or for smoking to cause a blood clot or cancer which hinders our ability to engage in productive labour.
2. There is a related problem with accounts of chronic illness which employ Leder's analysis to examine the biographical narrative work involved in returning the body from a state of dys-appearance to one of re-embodiment. Sufferers often talk of reclaiming or rediscovering their bodies, yet Leder's notion of the lived body does not fully support this as it conceives of the normal lived body as a disappearing rather than a reappearing body.
3. This research originated with neurophysiology at the beginning of the twentieth century. Neurophysiology suggested that the ability of the body to coordinate its actions was dependent on a non-conscious three-dimensional postural model of the body: a model which registers past and present sensory information experienced by an individual's body and its relation to other objects (Grosz, 1994; Head, 1920). Physiological and psychological research into body schema developed by examining such issues as phantom limbs, hypochondria, hysteria, and other disturbances in how and where particular stimuli are felt in the body.
4. Arthur Frank (1991) presents his theory of the body as a medium for distinctive forms of action, but actually develops a core problems approach to embodiment which is pitched at the level of the individual instead of at the level of the social system.