

## 11, 12. THE HUMAN BODY

Move today to new domain of symbolism, human body. As before, approaching from two directions, how body used to talk about other things, and how meanings imposed on the body.

Very trendy topic in recent years. Some elements of faddism, but is genuinely important topic. We have of course already seen with Sontag.

Much of work in recent years concerned with way things, esp. power relations, are imposed or “inscribed” on body. Grows out of work of Michel Foucault and others. But this only part of huge subject. We will cover several different aspects of body.

As with animals, space, colors, and other things, bodies seem to be unambiguously real and natural. Part of the strength of all these things. Does not seem to be constructed or imposed or in any way artificial. But of course we have already seen with animals that in fact cultures shape how we perceive, react to, feel about the natural world.

All this true of body as well. What could be more physical, just *there*, than the body? Nature at its closest to us---the part of nature we have to live inside. But in fact our experience and understanding of bodies is culturally shaped in any number of ways.

### **Body image**

One of the most given aspects of our bodies would seem to be their size and shape, their displacement in the world: there it is. In fact, many studies suggesting that our image of our bodies is constructed, put together out of different sensory inputs, concepts, etc. Also fragile.

Cases of trauma or assault on body image esp. revealing.

Phantom limbs well known phenomenon. Because nerves still there, they can be stimulated even though the arm or leg they led to has gone. Feels like it is still there, can itch like crazy; some patients even see it.

Opposite also revealing. Oliver Sack, well known writer and all sorts of medical, cognitive issues. Movie from one of his books, opera based on another. Wonderful, fascinating. He has book, *A Leg to Stand on*. Tells how was chased down a mountain by bull, terrible fall and damage to leg. During long hospitalization, convinced that leg was not there, only very gradually learned to perceive it and feel it again.

Similar phenomena with more “normal”, everyday changes, e.g. as fall asleep. Sense of one’s size, shape, extension can change.

In experiments, people have trouble specifying color of own skin. Skin in fact is esp. indistinct. We conceptualize it as a distinct envelope, but our perception of own skin is much mushier

Becomes clear that our image of own bodies constructed out of several elements together: sight as well as touch, other people's perceptions.

### **Gesture**

This is one area where many people are aware of cultural differences, though sometimes striking just how radically different can be: thumbs up gesture highly obscene or other wise negative in a number of cultures. Q. Do you have examples from your own experience?

### **Movement**

This less often recognized. How people move, how they hold their bodies, strikingly variable.

There are of course basic human constants: we all walk upright. Studies using film have shown pan-human constants in expressions: smiling, weeping, eyebrow flash.

Fundamental importance of eye contact.

But cultural variation also important. Marcel Mauss, Durkheim's colleague, struck by variation in how European soldiers marched. How swung legs etc. Wrote essay on use of body, variation. One example: British regiment that adopted French marching band, some historical reason, but British found it impossible to march to French military music, had to go back to British band. (Marcel Mauss, "Les Techniques du Corps" in: 1966, *Marcel Mauss, Sociologie et Anthropologie* (Presses Universitaires), pp. 365-386; also translated by Ben Brewster, *Economy & Society* 2 (1973).

Another place where variation obvious, or used to be, is with martial arts from different parts of world. (With wide western adoption of eastern arts, differences blurred.)

Differences in where center of body is, where action begins in body. N. American culture emphasizes chest, arms, shoulders, some Asian societies more from abdomen.

V striking differences in how run, e.g. in movie "Seven Samurai". Even more in punching. We say someone "swings" or "throws" punch; in martial arts, more contained, from inside.

### **Conceptions of the body**

Wide variation in how invisible interior of body understood, issue raised by Sontag. Jonathan Miller, in book, *The Body in Question* (1978), shows how understanding of body and its parts changed over centuries. Things we assume are obvious may not be. Chapter on the heart (pp. 176-212), Miller argues that Harvey grasped how heart circulated blood in part because of recent invention of mechanical pumps. Needed industrial objects as analogy before could be understood.

All sorts of interesting questions: when my son was in hospital for back operation, surgeon complained that the condition of his disk was clearer in the MRI than when he actually cut.

One important question is how things are mapped onto the body. We put emotions in heart. Everyone aware that not really seat of emotions, is a pump of blood, but we use the idea so consistently that it is more or less as if we did literally believe. Other cultures, wouldn't occur to map emotion onto heart.

Buddhism, statues, emphasis on abdomen.

Some years ago idea from neurological research that certain functions localized on right or left side of brain. became widespread metaphor for all sorts of oppositions, esp. creativity, intuition vs. cold rationality. In letter of recommendation from famous anthro years ago, he went into rant against left-brain people.

French localize many conditions in liver. Every disease has something to do with liver. We seldom think about it. Recent work shows surprising cultural variation in medicine just within Europe. Famous study of witchcraft, Azande of Sudan, showed that localized in liver. Maybe they are French.

Doubt that there is free variation in how body is experienced. Certain bodily experiences physiologically controlled, constants. But how they are interpreted in different cultures wide variation. The Japanese posit two states called ki and kokoro, culturally salient in all sorts of areas, incl. martial arts.

Extreme in systematic mapping of things onto body, 19<sup>th</sup> century pseudo-science, phrenology. Head divided up into regions, each with cognitive and emotional functions (discussed below and in later class, see diagram on cover page for this OCW listing).

So, there are many answers possible to question: What's going on in there?

### **The body linked to other things**

As always, we are less concerned than any things or things by itself than how linked to other things: hearts as pumps; dogs, rabies, and class; invasion metaphors for the body

Often whole domains, great elaboration of bodily tropes. In effect, understanding thru body, though not purely natural body, cultural body

Religions offer great example. Consider the pervasiveness of body tropes in Christianity: Jesus' bodily suffering (recently in notorious movie by Mel Gibson). Each feature becomes elaborated: nail holes (stigmata), blood, spear wound, etc.

Skull as embodiment of death, in many religious paintings.

Saints' suffering, in art, some horrible. Hundreds of depictions of St. Sebastian as pin cushion, full of arrows. Again, tremendous elaboration in stories, art. Often close attention to pain, wounds.

Pieces of saints' bones etc. as relics.

Thinness of female saints.

Renunciation of body by religious: hair shirts, self-flagellation. Carried to extreme by medieval flagellants, penitentes of American SW

Importance of physical reconstitution of bodies at last judgment.

Miracle cures: Lourdes, Fatima.  
Heart of Jesus; heart of virgin.  
Body and blood of Christ in host.  
Virgin birth.  
etc. etc.  
Same true for Buddhism, Hinduism.

In previous classes we talked about “the body politic”, body metaphors of society, social metaphors of body. Question of whether is inevitable political slant or message to such tropes.

Sontag, in 2d essay in book (optional reading), asserts that body metaphors for society always repressive or authoritarian (p.94)

Whether not is inevitable, no doubt that body metaphors for society can be elaborated to make point.

It has been argued by Steven Shapin that when phrenology adopted by some in 19<sup>th</sup> century Edinburgh, was at least in part a social statement about nature of society and their place in it. (Shapin, S., 'Homo Phrenologicus: Anthropological Perspectives on an Historical Problem,' in Barnes, B.S., & Shapin, S., eds., *Natural order: Historical Studies of Scientific Culture*. London, 1979, pp. 41-71. Shapin, S., 'Phrenological Knowledge and the Social Structure of Early Nineteenth-Century Edinburgh', *Annals of Science*, 32, 1975, pp. 219-243.)

According to S., by pushing phrenology, members of rising commercial class were suggesting a strong connection between innate abilities and one's place in society. Were arguing against hereditary aristocracy, for a meritocracy. Relevant to MIT.

Reading by Emily Martin on “scientific” images of body, esp. of women's bodies

Q. What is basic metaphor? What derived from? factory, modern capitalism.

Q. What implications, according to M, for view of menstruation? Seen as failed production, failure in general, very negative image.

Q. Do you think this characterization of menstruation follows inevitably from the root metaphor? Not necessarily. Factories have many waste processes that are normal parts of industrial production, routine, not failure. Don't see why couldn't have metaphORIZED menstruation as normal, expectable, harmless, if bias ran that way. (Wonder whether we might find it in texts if we looked further.)

Q. is the loss metaphor inevitably completely negative? Might there be some hint of the positive in the idea that menstruation is not just random but devoted to a valued purpose?

Q. Does analogy between producing babies and producing goods mean that reproduction has become mechanized or capitalized? arguable.

Q. If metaphor as failure and loss really is dominant and really is negative, does the negative judgment follow the metaphor or the other way around? Given that males in many many societies have hang-ups, taboos about menstruation (in some societies isolate

women until done), isn't it just as plausible that the prejudice came first, and the negative trope was devised to express it?

Q. What is M's argument about social class? That middle class women more indoctrinated, have bought metaphors, ideology more.

Q. What is the difference between the way working and middle class women talk about the subject? Middle class all purposive models, production. Working class resist, talk in terms of immediate experience.

M has developed all of this more fully in other works, this very quick article, but there is a lot to discuss, lots of questions: Q. If the difference in discourse is real, is this a matter of differences specific to reproduction etc., or is it a matter of styles of discourse by social class? M doesn't seem to recognize that there are social penalties for working class people who talk in fancy ways, who seem over-fancy and pretentious, who seem to others to be above themselves. Their listeners are sensitive to the slightest whiff of pretension.

There is also a tendency among Left-leaning social scientists to sometimes romanticize or prefer working class people. May or may not be relevant here.

Q. Could you say the two classes lean towards different tropes? Could say middle class metaphorical, working class metonymical and synecdochal. Again, there are dangers here. Rhetoric of valuing experience over theory. Also, hang-ups about tropes and rhetoric generally. (Remember Sontag's ambivalence). Idea that reality should not be mediated (and inevitably distorted) by tropes. Also one variety of feminist theory some years ago, said women spoke and wrote literally, men through tropes. An "essentialist" theory, attributing eternal, essential characteristics to genders. Martin not an essentialist at all, but there is danger in attributing directness and experience to working class, theory and ideology to middle class. For one thing, fits enduring cultural stereotypes.

In all sorts of areas, claims about illness and health can also be hidden social claims. Doesn't have to be just ideology by ruling powers. Those who resisting domination often elaborate own theories, claims about body.

Rejection of doctors as experts, claims one can cure oneself. Is a political statement. Many fears and political claims now expressed in do-it-yourself epidemiology, find out why "everyone" on your street is getting cancer.

Book, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France*, by noted historian Robert Darnton (1968), famous quack Mesmer, was great sensation in pre-revolutionary France. Shows how mesmerism had implicit social and political critique, grew stronger over time. We see with many varieties of alternative medicine today. I don't need those bastards and their fancy training. I can do it myself.

Doctors and professors are two classes of experts who push one around, where expertise is turned into immediately experienced control: Pull your pants down and cough! No,

that paper is not worth an A. Done with professors in 4 years but lifelong with doctors. So reaction against authority etc., doctors apt target.

### **Reading variation and difference**

Subject of variation in bodily form often symbolically important.

Variation in external bodily between populations, what we call race.

Typically the ones that considered are color and form of skin & hair, then form of body, e.g. so-called cephalic index, ratio of two dimensions of head.

The measures used to assign people to races are biologically pretty trivial on whole, the biological importance of skin color certainly trivial.

Moreover, though there are statistical biological differences from one population to next, they do not sort themselves into neat groups called races

Some of the characteristics used to sort races and assign individuals to races trivial, some even imaginary. Look around room: are Asian Americans here really yellow?--- imaginary characteristic.

Nonetheless, in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century tremendous political and social importance of race: an obsession.

We have reading on reading of physical form, fascinating book by Sander Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (1991), chapter on foot. Jews are physically highly heterogeneous, but anti-Semites insist on not just typical nose but typical voice, in effect, social differences are mapped onto the body.

Q. Why are feet so important, according to Gilman? What social implications were read out of feet?

In 19th century, anti-Semitic notion that Jews had flat feet, if not invariably, much more often than other Europeans.

Associations between feet and either what a category does (used to call cops flat-foot; now shoes and feet preoccupation of professional chefs) or what capable of doing, here idea that couldn't serve in army. In this era universal armed service tied to growth of modern nationalist state. citizenship and service in army connected. Thus flat feet signaled supposed inability of Jews to be citizens, justified their exclusion

Q. What were implications of different explanations for alleged flat feet? Some said that it was not a genetically controlled trait. Rather, product of city living, lack of sports, athletics. But this was hardly better, because city symbol of decadence, athletics symbol of vigor, manliness. Said Jews decadent, effete, weak.

Q. How to counter this claim? Jewish doctors, according to Gilman, didn't challenge bogus, pseudoscientific studies. Instead, argued either that answer was athletics for Jews, reinvigorate, or else that not true of western European Jews, was eastern Polish and Russian Jews. So body symbolism was tied to spatial, and all sorts of social issues in consideration of something as seemingly neutral as fallen arches.

Q. What kind of supposed differences between races prominent today, concerning e.g. sports, music, dancing?

Another kind of variation, between the sexes rather than between populations. All sorts of male/female differences, real/imaginary, halfway in between; specific to one society or allegedly universal, are explained by and mapped onto the body.

Q. What do we explain in terms of chemistry of male or female body?---hormones. Said that women can't be president because of raging hormonal storms. True, women do go thru hormonal cycles, affects their moods. But why don't ever say men can't be president because too much testosterone? Is there no danger that 3d world war could be started by macho men? Look at 1989 invasion of Panama: only happened after Noriega started attacking Bush's manhood.

Victorian notion that women tended to madness. Madness was a bodily condition, thought to be disease or physically caused condition. Organic cause, in womb. Illness of hysteria goes back to classical root for womb, caused by womb. Doctors thus had right to treat hysterical women, in extreme cases pack them off to asylums. In some instances these women not mentally unbalanced at all, merely rebellious, unwilling to submit. Medical, bodily diagnosis was a form of control. Interesting literature on subject. See Elaine Showalter, *Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (1985) and other works since.

Even theorized that women not knowing place, not submitting, either was symptom of specific disease, or else that such misbehavior could provoke organic illness

### **Modification of bodies and reading of modifications**

Body of course not just there, we do things to it, then react to what have done

Reading by Firth on hair.

Functionally trivial to organism, but v apparent and safely modified

Symbolically salient in many societies

Firth writing early 1970s, chapter marked by era, much ado about long hair, even musical "Hair"

Evoked powerful reaction: friend of mine dragged out of car on Commonwealth Ave in 1960s, beaten, hauled off to jail, just because cop didn't like his long hair.

F shows how both social norms, and then individuals and groupings working against

Close attention to hair, reading

May have biological basis

Kuna, contrary to what F shows for Europe, cut women's hair short; conflict with police in 1920s because forbidden to cut short

Often great intensity of concern with mere symbols: currently in France whether girls can wear headscarf to school

Can be crucial to control: Manchus imposing topknots on Chinese male population

Almost every part of body modified: hair, skin, feet, nose, ears, lips, genitals

Almost anything you can think of, someone somewhere has done it.  
Also impossible to avoid: in 1970s and 1980s some feminists insisted that obsession with appearance was a defect of corrupt capitalist society. Refused to play game, esp. not shaving legs. Only result was that unshaved legs became a symbol. Ditto not wearing bras.

Changes in body often mark crucial changes in life.

Question of modification of genitals esp. tricky.

Whether circumcised or not very salient re Jewish identity, anti-Semitism, anti-Semitic jokes.

But also nationalism: many non-Jewish American males circumcised. British find appalling, claim unnecessary suffering for child. remarkable vehemence of attack.

More recently, great international controversy about cutting female genitals in Africa and Arab world. Is it an outrage or matter for local decisions? Raging controversies. Even in episode of "Law and Order". One of most balanced and thoughtful takes by Chris Walley in our program (1997, "Searching for 'Voices': Feminism, Anthropology, and the Global Debates over Female Genital Operations." *Cultural Anthropology* 12(3):405-438. Also *Genital Cutting and Transnational Sisterhood : Disputing U.S. Polemics*, edited by Stanley M. James and Claire C. Robertson, University of Illinois Press.)

Q. What does article by Turner show? Complexity and systematic nature of system in one "simple" society.

Similar complexity and cultural variability in how body is to be covered, modesty, immodesty, etc. (but we will not discuss today).

### **Inscription and Power**

Another perspective on body is how things are imposed on it, how power is imposed thru restrictions or "inscriptions" on body.

There is an element of coercion in almost everything that happens to body. If have long hair or green hair or whatever hair when everyone else is different, at most extreme, may drag you in and cut it off. If not, may ostracize you. If not, may tease and criticize. If not, will probably stare in rude way.

Hertz big on how right/left hand polarity is obligatory, imposed. Ask any Leftie.

And of course impositions not equal for everyone:

Slaves had to walk certain way.

In Islamic countries, women have to cover everything.

In US, at church when I was young, women expected to wear hat, keep it on during service, men to take hat off



Difference doesn't even have to be visible mark. Concerning monarch:

-Don't turn back on her.

-Don't touch in familiar way. Australian leader caused huge scandal by putting arm around queen.

Highly arbitrary:" in some societies, must always stay lower than social superior, in others must stay standing when superior sits

May be elaborate graded code. One anthro, Goodenough showed scaled in clear way in a Pacific society: for those slightly above, had to do X; for those more above, X and Y; all the way to people at top, had to do XYZABC. (1965, "Rethinking Status and Role" in *The Relevance of Models for Social Anthropology*).

The excerpts from *Discipline and Punish* by Foucault are a small taste of a much larger body of work that has been extremely influential. Looking at the body as the site on which power does its thing.

Q. Why does F want us to see the "exemplary" and horrible punishments of the pre-modern era as a contrast with the modern era? F looking at non-coercive, non-obvious ways the body is controlled and "disciplined". Later works on all sorts of other areas, clinics, madness, sexuality. F turning upside down our assumptions about freedom and control. Absolutely correct in that there are many ways we are subtly or not so subtly disciplined. e.g. with industrial revolution, millions of people had to learn to run lives by the clock.

Q. How is F's attitude towards theory and ideas and ideology like Martin's? F seeing forms of knowledge and theories as intimately tied up with power. Not objective, not standing apart, but inevitably tied to power. However, in much of his work, he spends more time looking at theories than at concrete actions. Also, in French tradition, his idea of knowledge and theory greatly influenced by French grand theories, which explain everything.

With, e.g. works on penology, theories about how to administer prisons effectively and humanely, one can see a close connection between knowledge and power; ditto works on public health; but ways in which and extent to which *all* forms of knowledge and theory can be reduced to power remains to be seen.

This is the rhetorical device of the exemplary synecdoche, the example that makes your point about the whole; danger is that carefully chosen parts may be only partly representative of the whole.

Q. Why is the panopticon crucial to F's argument? Because the embodiment of theorizing, and because it was supposed to be more humane. Because, F argues, it is matter of arranging space, of ability to see rather than hurt. F very big on the importance of the gaze, who can see who, when and how. The panopticon works by making it possible for those in center to control rest by observing them.

Q. Is this the way modern prisons really work? There can be no doubt that authorities try to maximize their ability to observe prisoners. But all prisons also continue to depend on force and violence. Prison is ultimately brutally violent coercive institution.

More generally, most countries in world use more violence to control than we care to admit. Torture much more widespread than we believe. It's just that we don't do it so much in public. The fact that they used "exemplary" horrible punishments in past is just as likely to have been a function of the fact that premodern states were terribly inefficient. In making example, couldn't demonstrate consistency and catching majority of criminals (still can't today) so made punishments did inflict horrifying.

Back to prisons, do they work as designed? of course not. Inmates regularly escape gaze. In many prisons, except that they can't get out, inmates control as much as guards. The panopticon has never been more than an ideal. The super-max prisons that have complete control over inmates do it by radically confining them individually, severely restricting time out of cells, and tremendous violent power.

Foucault has raised all sorts of interesting ideas, extremely provocative and fruitful. Has extraordinary run of success, even after death. Some question, argue, but has not suffered kind of reaction Lévi-Strauss and other past figures have.