

CARNAL KNOWLEDGE OF AESTHETIC STATES: THE INFANTILE BODY, THE SIGN, AND THE POSTMORTEMIST CONDITION¹

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PART 1: The "fading" of the body in postmodern thought

I want to speak to the despisers of the body. I would not have them learn and teach differently, but merely say farewell to their own bodies — and thus become silent.

"Body am I, and soul" — thus speaks the child. And why should one not speak like children.

But the awakened and knowing say: body am I entirely, and nothing else; and soul is only a word for something about the body.

Neitzsche²

The Psychology of the Afterimage

We tend to think of images in terms of memory; that is, when we talk about images, more often than not we are talking about afterimages: the image as the memory, the trace, the aftereffect, of an experience. This is the domain of the semiotic. The word, the dream, the picture, the thing — all these can be thought as if they were decomposable into signifying elements, or signifiers, which function in systems of representation.

This conception of the image as afterimage was powerfully reinforced as one of the forms of social theory by psychoanalysis, in particular

BODY THEORY

through Freud's model of the psychoanalytical process as *reconstruction*, the retrieval and retelling of events in childhood, the recovery of childhood experience. This orientation in psychoanalytic thought is reflected in the metaphor of the unconscious as a junkheap, a repository of repressions that resurface as signs, a wastebin of images which fester and ferment and finally foment, in the 'return of the repressed.' As Deleuze and Guattari have tried to show in the *Anti-Oedipus*, this vision turns the unconscious into a field for the application of power, and psychoanalysis becomes a problematic of control, of neutralization or "reterritorialization."³ Desire is theorized as the retrospective functioning of a lack, whilst the activity of desire — creative energy or "desiring-production" — is defused, dematerialized. The affirmative desire *for* something gets transposed into the negative desire *of* something, and desire becomes desire of desire itself, or "will to will," a rearguard action against *aphanisis*, the extinction of desire, the exhaustion of the signifying field. It is as if the warmth and light of the mind were nothing but the fading ember of the mind's refuse, signifying both the mind's consumption of psychosocial debris as fuel, and its rejection of life itself.

As Deleuze and Guattari show, it is to Lacan that one must turn to find a theory of passive desire, a completely denatured psychoanalysis. For Lacan, the body exists in biological fragments, it is a shattered *tabula rasa* which must be "granted an image."⁴ On this body of absence, Lacan superimposes a quasi-linguistic model of the adapted personality. It is a void (desire) waiting to be filled, a body-without-organs attending the phallic punctuations of signification, a gap subtending the marking operations of power. This discursively positioned subject is the perfect material for a neodisciplinary exterminist society. It is precisely the "volume in perpetual disintegration" which Foucault so gingerly describes, that "inscribed surface of events... traced by language...," a docile receptacle to be "totally imprinted by history."⁵

Lacanian psychoanalytic theory describes the schizoid strategy of the body, in which the body distills itself into the feeling tone of an afterimage, the *déjà vu*. The psyche is theorized as representation, a kind of generalized sign economy which only touches on the physical body at points where it is socially coded, certain primarily general "points de capiton" relating mainly to the late phases of psychosexual development in classical psychoanalytic theory.⁶

Lacanian thought holds the greatest interest for those who think about culture today precisely because it is a psychology of the afterimage, a hermeneutics of life as lack, castration, and death. The Lacanian "law of the father" is like a second law of psychodynamics, in which the flesh is entropically vapourized by metonymical concatenations of deferral and

"infinite referral" — what Derrida once called *différance*. In a way, Baudrillard's "generalized political economy of the sign" (that system of third order abstraction he calls the simulacrum) is a logical extension of Lacan's externalized and sociologized unconscious (the "discourse of the Other") in which the subject is defined as a "signifier for another signifier." For Lacan, binarism and disembodiment have ontological status. Culture is primordially so: it is a pure system, an unadulterated code. As Baudrillard shows in his critique of the production category in contemporary social thought, even the "material infrastructure" of society is caught up in the process of metonymy, of mirroring and misrecognition, which constitutes the Imaginary.

All of this amounts to saying that there is no cultural "base," or in other words, that there is no foundation of thought in the realm of the living: "Power is dead." In the classical, and more recently, the structuralist opposition between nature and culture, nothing substantial can be placed on the side of culture, or of the human, because sociality is conceived as a superimposition of pure form, code, convention, law. All of culture, including the "forces and relations of production," is thought of as superstructure, an afterimage at play in the field of effects. It is always already a memory, a mistremembering, or what acidheads used to call a "flashback."

The Ontology of Postmodernity

The essence of the theory of postmodernism is to interpret Lacanian psycholinguistics as a cultural condition, as a collective way of life. Unfortunately, when Lacanian thought is explicated at the level of the postmodern socius, its presuppositions still function to achieve an epistemological closure. These presuppositions have been developed into their purest form in the contemporary theory of textuality. Lacanian feminism, for example, always reproduces the "phallus" as an occult principle, because in its attempt to erase the phallus, it not only furthers the Lacanian project of translating the body into an algorithmic language, but deepens the phallic logic of inscription itself. As for the politics of desire, its deep-seated epistemology of the signifier usually evades the question of desire by starting from the play of formal differences at the level of "effects," and then deriving from this a formal model of desire as a generalized principle of direct investment, of "plugging in."⁸ Even deconstruction, in all the purity of its self-effacing operations, gets caught up in the Lacanian circle: an endless oscillation of phallus and hole, presence and absence, trace and space, mark and blank, form and (non) substance, signification and "force" — in short, the epistemological circle of inscription and "writing:" the logic of the separation of the

BODY THEORY

symbolic and the physical, the metaphorical split between “culture and nature.”

The structuralism latent in postmodernist theory — the vision of culture as an autotelic system of signs — compels the intellect to think the *Anti-System*. But the Anti-System is a conception as ideal as the signifying *System* it opposes. The Anti-System usually appears as an alloy of classical substance and modern force: an unmediated desire, an absolute unconscious, a pristine nonmeaning, a pure power, a negative being, a non-entity. The Anti-System thinks the body as a completely closed and dimensionless, unruptured surface “without organs.” This nonpresence is not so much “nature in the raw” as nature in fine filigree. The concept of matter and energy without extension or sensible qualities becomes the new infrastructure (in the politics of desire) and the new referent (in deconstructive philosophy). Everything is defined as a manifestation — an *effect* — of power, desire, *différance*. Thus, the post-structuralist negation (e.g., the critique of Levi-Strauss and Lacan: the subversion of the “system of signs” and the “symbolic order”) emerges as a paradoxical revival of nineteenth century models of base and superstructure, ranging from Marx’s “forces of production” to Freud’s “libidinal economy” and various “secondary drive” theories of “socialization.” As in the behaviourist paradigm, nature functions as a kind of nonspecific base, while human behaviour counts only as a reflex. According to Deleuze, for example, Nietzsche was concerned “with forces [on the one hand], and [with] forms of general semiology [on the other]. Phenomena, things, organisms, societies, consciousness and spirits are signs, or rather symptoms, and themselves reflect states of forces.”⁹ In Deleuze’s *Logique du sens*, the relation between the Anti-System and the System is one of pure cause and effect.¹⁰ Everything in the alleged System is conceived as an effect of the Anti-System, or the Will-to-Power (which is also necessarily the purest expression of the System). But the Anti-System is just chaos (in the sense of disembodied formlessness): it is nothing more than the abstract negation of Plato’s Doctrine of Ideas — its mirror image. The “logic” of sense of which Deleuze writes exists only within the cut-off and castrated realm of effects, so that when the System is deconstructed, nothing is left over but the unsullied negativity of the Anti-System: a world without sensible being, a desire without objects, a force without energy.

The Body and the Sign

There is an intimate connection between our ability to conceive what we call postmodernity and the deconstruction of the sign. The latter plays on the appearance of logical regression set up by the temporalization of the sign’s metaphysical constituents (signifier, signified, and

referent). The diachronic relation between sign and sign destroys the trinitarian unity of signification, so that the constituents of a completed meaning are volatilized in the protensional void of an infinite referral process. The conception of society as sign and simulacrum, which is ideologically contemporaneous with Plato's Idea and Pythagoras' *ratio* of discrete harmonic relations, is revived in the crisis of the sign's dissolution. And this deconstructive moment of history imposes upon the mind a heightened consciousness both of history and of the futility of remembrance, such as Nietzsche explored in *The Use and Abuse of History*. If meaning is composed by a sign, and if it exists by virtue of a system, as our rationalist and schizoid ego impulse would lead us to believe, and even to wish, then the temporalization of the sign, and consequent failure of the ideal, traps the meaning of being-alive-now in the tempered scrutiny of the screen memory of the signifier. We become fascinated by the mystery of the signifier's presence, the enigma of the forces and sequences which must have carried the signifier hither. The signifier, or screen memory, condenses an absence that compels us, and we are hypnotized by the prospect of a personal significance in the apparently random constellations of effects before us. Life becomes a kind of obsession with fate which Freud would have linked to the subterfuges of a perverse superego, and which Nietzsche would have read as the nihilism of *ressentiment* itself.

The theory of postmodernity translates deconstruction — as exemplified in the thought of Lacan and Derrida — back into the field of the "referential illusion" which deconstruction has systematically evaded. An example of this is provided by Baudrillard, who simply takes Derrida or Kristeva or the early Deleuze and reads them directly into social experience. In effect, Baudrillard says: "Let us take these exalted theorists of language at their word: there is no such thing as metatheory, metaphysics, or epistemology — everything they appear to be saying about the philosophy of meaning is nothing more than a mediated description of what they feel like being alive in the world today." In other words, we live in a world of afterimages, of ghosts, signifiers, and simulacra.

Reflecting on this relationship between philosophical deconstruction and postmodern social theory, one cannot fail to be impressed by the fact that no attempt to deconstruct the signifier itself has ever been carried off successfully in this era of the linguistic turn, and that both philosophy and cultural science are themselves caught up in the mesmerism of the signifier. This is because the strategy of temporalizing the sign, though it may dissolve the scientific pretensions of structuralism, is itself implicated in the metaphysics of Rationalism. Deconstruction depends on the technical procedure of reduction to the discrete which constitutes the

BODY THEORY

metaphysical problem of the sign in the first place.¹¹ The regression released by the deconstructive technique cannot begin without taking the constituted and historically constructed existence of the signifier as a given. The signifier is the formal starting point of rationalist thought: it is the discrete manipulable segment which makes analysis, abstraction, and substitution possible, and thus enables the construction of models for the independent organization of thought. Deconstruction merely plays with such potentialities, without really questioning the concealment of the signifier's origin in an operational reduction. Once the signifier has been granted this ontological status, it takes only a slight shift in perspective from traditional (i.e., realistic) rationalism, to arrive at a skeptical version of rationalism in which the entire and unfathomable state of irretrievability and regression to which it gives rise, ceases to look like the consequence of formal segmentation. Instead, it presents itself as a kind of negative causality which leads inexorably to the signifier itself, producing the signifier's discrete and closed effect as a necessity, an already totalized and inescapable world of screen memories and sourceless effects, the timeless aftermath of the postmodern condition.

Deconstruction finds that we must begin with "writing," and that we are properly directed toward the formal and formalizable status of the word, and not toward the body which speaks and writes it. Of course, the deconstruction of the sign engages us in a discourse of the body. But this is the Lacanian body of *points de capiton*, discrete markers, and decoupage. Deconstruction invokes the death of the body against the living word, the furrowed "ground" against the dancing figure (the phallus, the signifier). But it can only accomplish this corporeal referentiality as an inversion, a moment of extinction, the exhaustion of a formal regression which cannot begin without its privileged moment within the sign, the formal or phallic moment, which is already a reductive cancellation of the body. Deconstruction theorizes the body, to be sure, but only as a kind of negative theology or temporal mystery. The body becomes the unlocalizable antecedent of the sign — an absence lurking behind the dense significance of the signifier: merely the site of a future depletion.

Postmortemism and Ultramodernism

The argument of this paper links together the classical conception of psychoanalysis as reconstruction (of a forgotten or obscure past), the deconstructive paradox of the temporalized sign, and "postmodern experience" itself. The connection implies that contemporary social experience and the dominant academic theories about it are overdetermined by the rationalist wish for historical recovery and completion, the revealed impossibility of such recovery, and the paradoxical nature of any

attempt to think meaning and the image as the traces of a determinate reality. Since the rationalist effort at reconstruction always fails, and always for perfectly rationalist reasons, the rumour has started to go round that perhaps there is no body to be reckoned with; that there are only the abstractions, the shifters, and codings that mark out the spaces where the body might have been.

The theory of postmodernism may therefore best be described as a social theory of the afterimage, a theory of collective life as an aftermath. In short, postmodernism is really a kind of "*postmortemism*." There is an ontogenetic analogy here with the way a person may grow up into a being organized around the introjected core of the parents' unconscious grief or sense of failure. This is something like the situation of the most radical contemporary social theory. Yet, in a way, postmortemism is a healthy maladaptation — an Adornoesque refusal of the potential terrorism of all instrumentalizable thought. Postmortemism sees contemporary history largely as it is: a juggernaut of operationalized rationalism (the celebrated "unity of theory and practice," from dialectical materialism to the semio-cybernetics of urban space). Contestation becomes inconceivable, except as living on the fringe and testing the limits of contradictory experience. Postmodernists think and write about aesthetics, artworks, art practices, textuality, indexicality, and death. As witness of intellectual history, the postmodern mind is paralysed by the devastations wrought by modern social and technological science.

But postmortemism has the unfortunate result of reducing everything that is happening now to a mnemonic effect of what went before. It forces us into the mode of reconstruction and the logic of bases and superstructures. In fact, postmortemism posits a chain of such mnemonic effects, reaching back indefinitely in historical time. One only has to read such dystopic reconstructions as *Dialectic of Enlightenment* to realize that the seed of Fascism, if it is to be conceived as the culmination of an historical process, is irretrievable in time.

Freud talked about screen memories, those condensed and highly-charged doubles that mask the prehistories of the psyche. What was the pre-history of the social body that is masked and condensed in the "runes" of the postmodern aftermath? Was it modernism? Or was modernism itself just the sliding signifier of the classical world, the play of afterimages in the wake of sinking civilizations — what Marx called the "childhood" of humanity? Derrida has shown that, in principle, the logic of the afterimage, the logic of the signifier, is an infinite regress.

And yet, perhaps the problematic of the sign can be pinned down to certain historical determinations. As Arthur Kroker has argued, there is reason to believe that the theory of institutionalized Christianity, particularly as preserved in the work of Augustine, may be pivotal for

BODY THEORY

comprehension of the deep structures of modern experience.¹² The church father worked with a concept of the signifier, its imaginary double, and the mediation of a vanishing point in experience (signifier, signified, referent?). There are a variety of such trinities in Western thought, all of which revolve around the paradox of mentality and its relation to earth. What is new about such an interpretation is that it depends on the Freudian concept of idealization (and its underlying Nietzschean conception of *ressentiment*). And it is significant for our understanding of both postmodernism and poststructuralism that all of this psychology of idealizing defence finds perfect expression in Lacan's theory of the phallus as the structural principle of signification.

Popular intellectual historians like Bertrand Russell and Kenneth Clark have depicted Jean-Jacques Rousseau as the first modern thinker, with good reason; but Augustine wrote a much earlier "Confessions;" and it was perhaps Augustine who fully grasped the reflections of the ego, the selfless recounting of deeply-felt compromise, as an emblem of the human condition and as a model for a new theory of socialization. For the thoroughly modern individual, to tell a story, to recount, is actually to recant: to confess, as Foucault has argued.¹³

Kroker has also proposed that the theory of postmodernism be abandoned in favour of a new kind of critical radicalism coalescing around the concept of the "ultramodern." This term should suggest neither the tortured aftermath of modernism nor a primitivistic short-circuiting of cultural history, but rather the dissolution of modernist consciousness itself, as it lives on in the postmodern taste for linguistic and collective models of being.

Modernism contemplated the history of Spirit, Idea, Mind, Convention, and Sign, and defined progress as faith in a kind of thickening skin of such idealizations. By returning to Nietzsche and Freud, postmodernism as critical theory notes the absurdity of such an encrusted barrier against the real — not by returning us to 'reality,' but by trying to demonstrate the nullity of the real itself through the paradox of the temporality of the sign. Thus, postmodern skepticism does not so much defeat modernist idealism, as take over its duties. Postmodernist theory tends simply to reverse the meaning of the rationalist equation of idealization with knowledge. The failure of the Ideal becomes the failure of all activity. It is as if, having condemned the hypocrisy of pure Reason, we then throw ourselves into the abyss with it, in order to retain one last link with it, and thus remain pure ourselves.

Nietzsche was prone, like Freud, to interpret psychological defences like projection and splitting as cognitive barriers; he anticipated Freud's discovery that the Ideal can serve as a defence against fantasies of (good and) evil. An intelligent reading of Nietzsche might reveal that the

cognitive problem of reference (or lack of reference — the “transcendental signified”), and in particular, the existential problem of the difference between human constructions on the one hand and natural formations on the other (the great epistemological and sociological issues of modernity), are emotional in origin: universal predicaments, but not constitutive of thought in themselves. Of course, as a young professor, Nietzsche made an influential (and unfortunately somewhat moral) distinction between the pretensions of human knowledge (“wretched... shadowy and flighty... aimless and arbitrary”), and the vast realms of real nature beyond human cognition and control.¹⁴ But this kind of ironic distinction, typical of poststructuralist thought, in which the sheer poverty and impertinence of human Reason and Language have become a kind of status symbol setting history and society apart from the nonhuman ‘eternities’ of nature, is no longer possible once Creationism has been forfeited. There are no grounds for believing that anything that humans might ever do (however linguistic, rational, or ridiculous) is any *less* a significant part of “nature” than other phenomena. The relativity of culture and the “arbitrariness of the sign” are no substitutes for divine favour. If God is dead, his *absence* must also cease to be significant for our interpretation of the world. This, Freud grasped better than Nietzsche. We no longer have the theological luxury of trying to demarcate the desirable from the undesirable by demonstrating that our own thought unaided leads nowhere. We cannot return to something else, or produce it later. Neither fusion nor transcendence is either past or future, neither nature nor spirit is merely lost or pending. We are already as much “it” as anything else, because the past and the future exist only as potential intensities of the present. Real nature bumbles along, and our bodies with it.

A farewell to the rationalism of modernism and its sequel in postmortemism requires, in addition to the usual Nietzschean reading of Freud, a Freudian reading of Nietzsche. The referential aporias of the temporalized sign nearly always turn out to be questions of the physical body in relation to other physical bodies, informed only secondarily and uninterestingly by the celebrated “arbitrariness” of the linguistic “construction of reality” which we have a tendency to read back into the outlooks of Nietzsche and Freud.

The “reality” of the body will have to be explored much more deeply if ‘ultramodernism’ is to be more than another version of postmodernism, i.e., another face of modernism itself. The idea of the ultramodern would then no longer participate so blindly in the Lacanian cosmos of ontological lack, the ascetic suction of a protensional void, of which the theory of textual deconstruction, of displacement as a kind of romanticized death instinct, has lately served as such a fine example. The prefix

BODY THEORY

'ultra' implies a kind of concentrated and cohesive madness, perhaps even the implosion of the signifier itself into the fulness of an immediate physical relationship — an extremism which will be presented in this paper as the perfectly ordinary, but thoroughly underrated and unlikely psychosomatic reality of the infantile body.

Part II: The Aesthetic Substance of the Infantile Body

The mind does not know itself, except in so far as it perceives the ideas of the modifications of the body.

Spinoza¹⁵

Psychoanalysis has rarely concerned itself with the problem of reference or the normativity of theories of reality because the reconstruction of the past is in a way merely a tangent of the psychoanalytic process. The process itself has more to do with the adumbration of psychosomatic states through dreams, talk, and the negotiation of a peculiar but highly specific relationship. Remembrance takes place, of course; but the fact that every narrativization recedes eventually into temporal oblivion worries few who have been impressed by the intensity, immediacy, and increasing explicitness of bodily states. In dreams, every variety of sophistication is expressed as a situation of the body, its relations, states, and parts.

The fact of being a body is inescapable, it cannot be deferred, lost in a chain of reference, or divided into signifier and signified. Neither *différance*, nor indeterminacy, nor the ideological constitution of the subject, nor the social or linguistic construction of reality, can succeed in disguising the biological status of our existence.

One does not have to be a body without organs in order to undo the order of representation (Deleuze), any more than one has to build up sensorimotor schemas in order to be able to match the gestures of others (Piaget).¹⁶ Psychoanalysis discovers that the body is not just an obscure relation to its afterimages, but a being which is an immediate image of itself; and that the transference is not only repetition, but the physical difference of bodies in the present. The body *is* the symbol; and while the relationship between what constitutes meaning and the functioning of the body can be separated out and arranged in the discrete markers of temporal sequence, its actuality is never exhausted by this or any other variation of linguistic modelling.

When psychoanalysis breaks out of the logic of reconstruction and the conundrum of the afterimage (signifier), it encounters the fact that the infantile body knows nothing of political systems or family systems, nothing about signs and machines. Theodor Adorno defined the whole as the untrue; psychoanalysis would add that the body is the truth of the

unwhole — that it cannot be synthesized with its totalizations and investments.

The popular image, in *Anti-Oedipus* and other poststructuralist works, of a prodigious infrastructure of instinctual nature (“desiring-production”) is in many ways an evasion of the question of the body. One of the great psychoanalytic contributions to general knowledge was to show that nobody really knows where the “inside” of the body ends and the “outside” begins. The body inevitably generates a kind of “hermeneutic circle,” but it hardly follows from this that the inside and the outside may simply be translated into one another, or that the “internal world” can be evacuated, through the plugs and ducts of some libidinal machinery of discharge, directly into the socio-political field. The insight that desire is never merely a “lack,” or a sort of ineffable excess of fixed structures (as Deleuze and Guattari correctly point out), does not turn desire into a virile apparatus of production. The ideology of structuralism is not overcome simply by adding the concept of flows and currents to the paratactic chains and metonymical networks of the linguistic model. The desiring substance of energy is just as much an abstraction of the body as the formalism of a linguistically-structured concept of the symbolic.

The infantile body is saturated with fantastic meaning, which can never be entirely discharged through “linkages” of “production” or “investment” (cathexis). But this does not mean that the infant is “blind,” a “narcissistic” bundle of nerves, or a “blooming, buzzing confusion.” The infantile body already knows that it is in a predicament, dependent on an ecology which evades complete understanding and fantasies of control. The infantile body knows that there are holes in itself, that you can put things in and force things out, that it is a body in a physical world of bodies with ambiguous boundaries, entrances and exits; that bodies fold in on themselves and unravel, that they may contain each other and things, or be contained, that there are emotions, that these are powerful, ecstatic, annihilating, unmanageable without help. This is one of the things that a very small body already knows: that it cannot go it alone or, at least, that going it alone is only a hypothesis, depending on whether those other bodies that *seem* to be able to go it alone really can. This is what psychoanalysis is about: not the paradoxes of linguistic communication or the aporias of reconstruction, but the question of how people live through the situation of being a neotenous body, the strategies of being in a world of bodies and things, and their various consequences.

In 1913, Sandor Ferenczi wrote of how the child’s “attention is arrested above all by those objects and processes of the outer world that

BODY THEORY

on the ground of ever so distant a resemblance, remind him of his dearest experiences." (One might add, of course, the child's least dear experiences as well.) Ferenczi had in mind

those intimate connections, which remain throughout life, between the human body and the objective world that we call *symbolic*. On the one hand the child in this stage sees in the world nothing but images of his own corporeality, on the other he learns to represent by means of his body the whole multifariousness of the outer world.¹⁷

Here, Ferenczi emphasizes the basic psychoanalytic intuition that the bodily imagination is the substratum of all our "models." But there are some problems with the way he thinks this through. In Ferenczi's days, for the most part, psychoanalysts tended to think of the baby as proceeding by analogy, animistically, identifying everything with its own pleasurable functioning. Freud's "hungry baby" in *The Interpretation of Dreams* cannot tell the difference between its hallucinatory afterimage of the mother's breast and an actual feeding. Freud's baby will only achieve this distinction between the internal production of imagery and the external object by means of the reality principle, which will gradually evolve out of the frustrating experience of the image.

The philosophical behaviourist and empiricist assumption that the neonate is a narcissistic and autoerotic isolate has led to an overemphasis in psychoanalytic theory, particularly in North America and France, on the problem of psychological differentiation, what Freud called the "reality principle" and Lacan called "language," or "le nom (non) du pere." The father is supposed to be the one who is responsible for rupturing the "narcissistic" closure of nature (mother-child dyad) by introducing language, culture, deferral, displacement, the signifier, and the Law. But the foregoing is largely a social scientific and culturalist myth.

We privilege the ego-function of abstraction and decoupage, and thus set up a hierarchy in which the signifier or "word-presentation" has authority and priority over the symbolic process or "thing-presentation." But there is a further degree of abstraction involved: the immediacy of the internal world (what the Romantics called Imagination) is reduced, in theory, to the status of hallucination, which will eventually be trained through frustration to become the ego function of memory. The symbolic activities of the infantile body are viewed as a kind of mnemonic anarchy, a play of afterimages yet to be subjected to the governance of a temporal order and the order of rationality. The pleasure of imagining is reduced to the pressure of need, which has no object, but only an aim of gratification — or in other words, abeyance, blankness. (This aspect of

Freud's early instinctual theorizing has been spun out into a vast generalization of Thanatos by Lacan and his followers: the imagination is toward death, the symbolic is the dead father, living is castration, etc.). In this way, the infantile body is fitted into the temporal logic of the signifier, psychic life and even dreaming are comprehended one-sidedly as a play of afterimages, and the body without language is condemned to the status of false consciousness (the Imaginary), and replaced with the false empiricism of the body without organs.

This whole approach hinges on the half-truth that the difference between the inner and the outer, the dream and the object, is alien to the organism, a secondary acquisition imposed by the harsh lesson of necessity. The infant is supposed to know no outside of itself, only so that it can eventually learn that in principle, there is no inside either, except by virtue of blind instinct and ideological delusion. But the clinical and experimental evidence no longer supports this generalization. The difference between the imagination and the external object is always relative, never either wholly absent or complete. The cognitive distinction between the self and other is not actually learned from scratch; it is built in to the organismic structures of perception at birth, gradually refined, lost in affective retreat, exaggerated in self-defence, practiced according to a cultural code. But it is always there. Difference is a very difficult experience, but its existence rests on more than the reality principle, or the therapeutic discoveries of linguistic philosophy. The problem for the infantile body is not to cognize difference as a first principle under the reign of necessity, but what to make of difference emotionally. And what one *makes* of this cognition is always symbolic — always a state of the body. It cannot be reduced to a series of discoveries about "external reality" (ego psychology) or "language" (Lacan, deconstruction). It is an active creation of new images, a way of being; and not just a progressive differentiation between memory and perception, signifier and signified.

Long before language and Oedipal sophistication, the infantile body has discovered that its own subjectivity shifts with each displacement of the object. If the symbolic substitution of the object creates a third term, the body becomes a fourth term in relation to a fifth, producing a sixth, and so the baby discovers that it can lose itself. Triangulation and displacement are, along with splitting, incorporation, and projection, the basic forms of symbolization, they are inherent to the human body. Melanie Klein theorized all these goings on as the deferral of object anxiety. In her view, symbolization is "the foundation of all fantasy and sublimation but, more than that, it is the basis of the subject's relation to the outside world and to reality."¹⁸ This, in 1930, still sounds like Ferenczi, but there is a subtle shift. The infant is still narcissistic and

BODY THEORY

autoerotic, but no longer an isolate ignorant of the existential fact of otherness, as Lacanians and ego psychologists claim. Babies differentiate their bodies from others', and people from things, and they do all this without benefit of language. The neonate quickly discovers that it can get outside of itself and into other bodies, and that it can destroy other bodies and their organs or take them inside itself. Klein already understood deeply through the analytic process what the most recent experimental psychology of neonate cognition is only just beginning to discern.¹⁹

There is another way of looking at symbolization which might be described as epiphanic, because it involves a joyful dissolution of boundaries, and is less driven by object-anxiety. There are times for lucky people when desire is in a manically omnipotent and playful phase, and just then another person will come along and present this manic fantasy back to the infantile body in the form of a real external object. This kind of experience has several consequences, one of which might be called aesthetic experience.²⁰ Such coincidences increase the capacity of the infantile body to acknowledge and contain its own pain without recourse to defensive splitting and projection. (The body is, after all, both "a pleasure palace and a torture chamber.") But this kind of experience also inclines one to feel eternally grateful for the existence of other bodies. One acquires a certain faith that bodies and fantasies can intermingle without destroying each other's internal worlds, that bodies can get in and out of each other and intensify each other's pleasure without too great a risk of destruction.

Considerations such as these eventually lead to the idea of the "mental image" of the body, or in other words, the *body image*, which has just been taken up as a special theme in the most recent issue of *Psychology Today*.²¹ Apparently, the body image is something that people have and can learn to manipulate. The body image appears, in other words, as an afterimage, something to do with Oedipal codings and adolescence. This is true so far as it goes, but it does not take us very far. In fact, the body's image of itself is not an afterimage (or in other words, a signifier): the body *is* its image of itself. As Nietzsche wrote: "In the tremendous multiplicity of events within an organism, the part which becomes conscious to us is a mere means: and the little bit of "virtue," "selflessness," and similar fictions are refuted radically by the total balance of events." And Nietzsche added: "We should study our organism in all its immorality."²²

In his classic psychoanalytic study of the image and appearance of the body, Paul Schilder argued that we must dispose of "the idea that there are [sense] impressions which are independent from actions. Seeing with an unmoved eye when inner and outer eye muscles are out of function

would not be real seeing, and would not be seeing at all, if the body were completely immobilized at the same time." He continues: "The perception is always our own mode of seeing... we are emotional beings... Our knowledge will be dependent on the erotic currents flowing through our body and will also influence them... The postural model of the body is in perpetual inner self-construction and self-destruction."²³ In other words, perception of other bodies is immediately proprioception, and self-perception is immediately perception of other bodies. The activity of sensory experience cannot be analytically extracted from the basic levels of fantasy. Signifiers are not necessarily involved. The infantile body is like an Alladin's lamp containing the genie of the whole world — its skin is already psyche, for the epiderm is saturated with nervous fibre — and all you have to do is rub it.

The body image, or body schema, as some call it,²⁴ is profoundly unconscious, but it is not closed onto itself, as we consciously think of it; like Rabelais' grotesque, which is so beautifully described by Bakhtin,²⁵ the unconscious body is inside out and upside down, full of orifices, studded with protrusions, great big bellies and pointy heads, ears like vortexes, spilling out organs, exploding into pieces, drowning the world in urine, piling up turds and making them into space invaders or babies, swallowing the whole cosmos, constantly in the throes of death and rebirth.

The body is its own postural, kinesic, proxemic, temporal model. The body in relation to other bodies is the substratum of the imagination, the psyche is nothing if not the body's own image of itself, and its elaborations of this.

The psyche-soma can think of itself as split between body-machine as extension and mind-spirit as time, or as desiring-production versus coding and signs; but this is only another way the body imagines itself, this split image is then the body. It is not a signifier and signified, running away in time from a referent. Bodies interact directly. Pure mind is a particular kind of physiological state; the schizoid who feels that he exists hundreds of feet up in the air, above his body, attached to it only by an umbilical string, is living entirely within his body, this is the way that the schizoid body is actually functioning, it *is* this image of itself in the world.

For a long time, Freud thought that repression was the central structuring agency of the psychesoma. Dreams could be explained by the way the ego ideal performed a few clever manoeuvres across a horizontal threshold called the repression barrier. The explanatory power of this elegant model made it possible to think of all the complicated actions of

BODY THEORY

the bodily imagination in terms of the two broad and very general categories of fusion and division — or “condensation” and “displacement.”

Freud's explorations of repression revealed the psychosomatic origins of the ontotheological split between “mind” and “body.” Yet the tendency to interpret the concept of defence as an essentially horizontal split suggests that traditional spiritualist dualism has retained its influence. The persistence of the ‘above’ and ‘below’ model of psychic organization has severely limited our conception of what primary symbolization may be like. In fact, the body can divide itself up in numerous ways, as Freud was well aware. The early work with Breuer on hysteria was concerned also with *vertical* splits, and other forms of “defense.” But it was not until later in Freud's career that attention returned to problems of splitting, projection, and identification.

Unfortunately, the dominant image of what Freud left behind remains an oversimplification: there is consciousness (an afterimage which only appears to exist in the “here and now”), and then there is that “andere Schauplatz” (the “other scene”). In this version of Freud, the unconscious is also divided from the body: it straddles the region *between* the body (as a kind of given), and the blandishments of the external world. In practice, this model usually corresponds to the traditional commonsense division between a natural core of needs, drives, and schedules on the one hand, and a complex of externally imposed psychic contents on the other. In short, it tends to be assumed, even in psychoanalytically informed cultural theory, that the body is a kind of biological given which can be cancelled out of the equation or simply held constant; whereas the matter to be studied and understood is rather what society pumps into the body (or “writes” onto it). In this light, it appears as if Freud was really concerned with the (semiotic?) *rules* (metaphor and metonymy?) according to which “what society (the Creator?) pumps in” (i.e., a Soul or a Culture) is further sorted into what is conscious and what is repressed. In this way, even the psychoanalytic conception of the psyche can be held theoretically apart from the empirical body, and the old division between meaning and its husk of matter can, in spite of impressive anti-Cartesian rhetoric to the contrary, be effectively maintained.

Theoretical aesthetics and socio-cultural thought can no longer get by with a simplified model of the psyche in the body as a process of mediation between drives and codes. The theory of culture cannot rely solely on the linguistically-oriented study of mnemonic images and signifiers, while leaving the rest to a sociology of conventions and structures. The view of the body as a kind of libidinal *tabula rasa* just waiting for entire systems of culture and politics to impose their

repressions and taboos was liberating and useful in its time, and led to some interesting developments in social theory; but as a way of understanding the potentialities and activities of the body (or as a way of grasping what psychoanalysis is about), it is anachronistic and inadequate.

The question remains: what kinds of experiences do those who are only *potential* members of society have, and how significant are they? Social thought needs to develop a clearer appreciation of the difference between the social intuitions of the infantile body and the process of "socialization" (which really ought to be called "societalization"). If babies are already social before they are socialized (i.e., societalized), and continue to be so as they grow up, then our whole concept of what it means to talk about 'society' and 'culture' needs to be revised.

There is today a growing realization that the body has already undergone several revolutions before it reaches the Oedipal or phallic phase of development, and that the social orientation of the body at the age of less than two (which may already be blown apart) is going to be decisive for the way the body, as potential member of society, will react to the societal codes, and the gender issue, which will be introduced to it and generally imposed upon it with increasing assiduity in the ensuing years. Moreover, as Freud was perhaps beginning to recognize, the infantile body is not only pleasure-seeking (or pain-avoiding); it is something more like an organismic intensity, oscillating at times wildly between ecstatic totalizations (the "oceanic feeling") and abject annihilation (the "death instinct"). The infant is not only functionally dependent on its caretaker, and otherwise blissfully ignorant (the pleasure-pain axis); but threatened with psychic death in the prolonged absence of an object, and groping for the internal worlds, the life experience, of others (the self-object axis). This is not just a matter of pleasure through gratification, followed by discharge or repression, all of which will be secretly revived in the adult social world of signs and rituals (the consumer society hypothesis); it also has to do with identifications, projections, splits, incorporations, destructions, massive creations, tragic atonements, an ideal love matched only by moments of abyssal hatred — all of this well before there is any question of repression and socialization in the classical sense. The issue is that not just instinctual — but also emotional life — is pre-societal. In other words, the infantile body has already constructed a whole cosmos entirely out of the corporeal aesthetics of a few interpersonal relationships well before its surface is even tickled, let alone "traced" (as Foucault would say) by language. The body will survive a multiplicity of extinctions before it becomes that socio-cultural or epistemic "volume in disintegration" which Foucault describes.

BODY THEORY

It may seem simpler, but in the long run it is misleading, to make hard and fast distinctions between states of the body and processes of symbolization, however susceptible to semiotic formalization symbolization (the Symbolic!) may appear to be.

The great literary student of symbolic process Kenneth Burke was one of the first to explore the implications of the fact that meaning is not just a matter of *systems* of signs, but of inchoate bodily states and fluxes of interaction. Burke developed a theory of *substance* which is based on the ambiguity of the word 'substance' itself.²⁶ The substance of a thing is taken to mean what a thing *is*, in its most essential "inner being." Yet, in a sense, the "essence" of a thing is really what stands *under* the thing and holds it in its being: the *sub-stance* of the thing. Thus, the substance of something is, in a curious kind of way, precisely something other than the thing — something under, or behind, or perhaps even *after* it. And if the substance comes "after," this might be because it is a kind of "symbolic exchange," or in other words, an emergent property or "equifinality," which cannot be derived from a "ground" or initial condition of the "system." (The concept of the "simulacrum" would be appropriate here, if it were not for the word's Christian connotations of diabolism.)

At any rate, Burke's point is not that substance is a linguistic category mistake to be banished for its metaphysical or theological overtones — although he would admit that it is hardly anything solid. Substance is indeed a kind of illusion, like the relation of the infantile body to its objects: it is both inside and outside, subjective and objective, as in the chance coincidence of a fantasy and the external world. Like the infantile body, substance is a fundamentally contradictory and paradoxical process, slipping and sliding, refusing to remain still. Its world is an elaboration, without an original or final point of reference which can be codified. Yet it has a certain kind of inevitability about it. No society can completely abstract this "substance" without destroying itself, no historical process can supercede the infantile body and determine it in its essential being, or reduce it completely to a signifier or an afterimage.

All of this amounts to saying that the body is not reducible to the structures and conventions of its "invaders," that there is something about the body, which I have tried to define in terms of its infantile dynamics, which is indestructible so long as it remains biologically viable. In other words, there *is* a kind of "animal substance." In the age of sophisticated theory and the linguistic turn, such a claim will seem outlandishly naive and absurd, but that is precisely the effect it should have. If the infantile body were not absurd, it would have no critical or

aesthetic value whatsoever — it would just be a subject for various “materialisms” and “idealisms.”

The issue for the theory of postmodernism is not that the body has been evacuated and absorbed by the cultural system, but that the body, the unconscious, the infantile, the grotesque, the aesthetic — or whatever we choose to call it — seems to have become *irrelevant*, especially for theory. There are two likely reasons for this. On the one hand, there is the supervention of a certain kind of techno-logic, or instrumental reason, with its problematic of *simulation*; and on the other hand, there is the academic hegemony of rationalism in cultural thought, which is epitomized by the rise of the language paradigm in critical philosophy and social science. The latter has an uncanny tendency to recapitulate the epistemological assumptions of the former, as Baudrillard has demonstrated in various books.²⁷ So the carnal knowledge of aesthetic states (the infantile body) seems to have become now virtually meaningless and irrelevant on both counts. Yet, it is probably when the aesthetic dimension becomes sociologically irrelevant that it is most radical and interesting, which is not irrelevant at all.

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Notes

1. A shorter version of this paper was presented to the graduate seminar on “Postmodernism and Aesthetics” at Concordia University, Montreal, April, 1986. I would like to thank the members of that seminar for their engaging response; also Marty Allor, Loretta Czernis, Michael Dorland, Bruce Ferguson, Arthur Kroker, Elspeth Probyn, and Beth Seaton for their conversation, comments and encouragement in connection with this particular piece of work; and A.T.
2. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1954), p. 146.
3. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, et. al. (New York: Viking, 1977).
4. Jacqueline Rose, “Introduction-II,” in *Feminine Sexuality*, eds. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (New York: Norton, 1982), p. 30.
5. Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, trans. Donald Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 148.
6. For a discussion of Lacan’s “points de capitons,” see Anthony Wilden’s commentary in Jacques Lacan, *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis* (New York: Delta, 1968).
7. Jean Baudrillard, *Oublier Foucault* (Paris: Editions Galilee, 1977).
8. See Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 1ff; p. 29: “... libido has no need of any mediation... in order to invade and invest... *there is only desire and the social, and nothing else;*” p. 166: “... the individual in the family, however young, directly

BODY THEORY

invests a social, historical, economic, and political field that is not reducible to any mental structure or affective constellation."

9. Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p.x.
10. Gilles Deleuze, *Logique du sens* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1969).
11. For further discussion of these points, see my "La Greffe du Zele: Derrida and the Cupidity of the Text," in *The Structural Allegory: Reconstructive Encounters with the New French Thought*, ed. John Fekete (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 201-227.
12. See Arthur Kroker's reflections on the psychohistory of the sign in "Augustine as the Founder of Modern Experience: The Legacy of Charles Norris Cochrane," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Fall, 1982), 79-119. See also Arthur Kroker and David Cook, *The Postmodern Scene: Excremental Culture and Hyper-Aesthetics* (Montreal: Oxford/New World Perspectives, 1986).
Kroker's hypothesis of the "fictitious unity of the Western episteme" is based, in part, on his discovery of an internal pattern of experiential inversions and structural reversals, reaction formations and denials, which links early Christian thought symbolically (as a condensation of the historical impasse in classical culture) with the central themes of the philosophical and aesthetic canon of modernity and its aftermath.
In *Symbols That Stand for Themselves* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), the anthropologist Roy Wagner has worked out an interesting formal model of the internal dynamic connecting medieval Christian culture with modernity. Wagner traces a "process of figurative expansion" and "obviation" (reversal), in which symbolic strategies for organizing experience, beginning with Augustine's theory of the sacrament, exhaust and recapitulate themselves in a succession of permutational registers. According to Wagner (p. 121), "the medieval and modern core symbols have developed in relation to each other through a holographic process of figure-ground reversal." In his view, "our contemporary epoch realizes the third and final cancellation of the modern cycle."
Kroker's work is focussed intensively on the details of contemporary experience, at the James Joycean level of the hermeneutics of quotidian epiphany; yet the framework of his analysis implies a theoretical supervention in the whole discussion of postmodernity. Where Foucault, as the major representative of the "new French thought," suggests an "epistemological break," Kroker discovers the lineaments of a significant continuity, which itself must be overcome.
13. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1978).
14. "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1954), pp. 42-47.
15. Benedict de Spinoza, *The Ethics*, trans. R.H.M. Elwes (New York: Dover, 1955), Part 2, Prop XXIII.
16. See A.N. Metzliff and M.K. Moore, "Imitation of facial and manual gestures by human neonates," *Science*. 198, 75-8.
17. Sandor Ferenczi, "Stages in the Development of the Sense of Reality," in *Sex in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Ernest Jones (New York: Brunner, 1950), p.228.
18. Melanie Klein, "The Importance of Symbol-Formation in the Development of the Ego," in *Love, Guilt and Reparation & Other Works, 1921-1945* (New York: Delta, 1975), p.221.

CHARLES LEVIN

19. For some standard neonatological references, see Margaret Bullowa, ed., *Before Speech: The Beginnings of Human Communication* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); George Butterworth, ed., *Infancy and Epistemology: An Evaluation of Piaget's Theory* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982); and Edward Tronick, ed., *Social Interchange in Infancy: Affect, Cognition, and Communication* (Baltimore: University Park, 1982). For the most recent attempt at synthesis, see Daniel Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant: A View from Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

From the point of view of any cultural reality principle, the problem may be less whether the baby will learn to perceive the distinction between bodily fantasy and external objects, than whether it can be persuaded to continue doing so. In fact, there is some clinical evidence that the only basis upon which such a distinction (between self and object) can be securely maintained by the ego is, paradoxically, an unconscious *identification* of self and object. Melanie Klein called this the "internalization of the good object." To put the whole matter in a different set of terms, one might say that the schizoid is consciously and manifestly narcissistic because he is, in a sense, unconsciously *too* realistic, i.e., *too deeply* detached for existential comfort.
20. See W.R.D. Fairbairn, "The Ultimate Basis of Aesthetics," in *The British Journal of Psychology*, 29, Pt. 2 (1938), 167-181. See also D.W. Winnicott's discussions of the transitional object, in *Playing and Reality* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Pelican, 1971), and his discussion of Schechegaye's concept of "symbolic realization" in *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment* (New York: International Universities Press, 1965), p. 60.
21. *Psychology Today*, April, 1986.
22. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (New York: Vintage, 1967), p. 355, #674.
23. Paul Schilder, *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body: Studies in the Constructive Energies of the Psyche* (New York: International Universities Press, 1950), pp. 15-16.
24. W.C.M. Scott, "The Body-Scheme in Psycho-Therapy," *Brit. J. of Med. Psychol.*, Vol. XXII, 1949.
25. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Helen Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1968), pp. 303-367.
26. Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 21-58.
27. See Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. Charles Levin (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981); and *L'echange symbolique et la mort* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976).