

## ANALYTIC PERSPECTIVES: BODIES

Read: Gordon, Linda. "Social purity and eugenics." in *Woman's Body, Woman's Right: A Social History of Birth Control in America*. New York, NY: Penguin, 1990. ISBN: 9780140131277.

Gould, Stephen J. "Measuring bodies." in *The Mismeasure of Man*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 1996. ISBN: 978-0393314250.

Schmidt, Matthew, and Lisa Jean Moore. "Constructing a 'good catch', picking a winner: the development of technosemen and the deconstruction of the monolithic male." in Lock, Margaret, and Judith Farquhar. *Beyond the Body Proper: Reading the Anthropology of Material Life*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007. ISBN: 978-0822338451.

Kondo, Dorinne. "On being a conceptual anomaly." In *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1990. ISBN: 978-0226450445.

Pascoe, Peggy. "Miscegenation law, court cases, and ideologies of 'race' in 20<sup>th</sup>-century America." In Ruiz, Vicki, and Ellen Carol DuBois. *Unequal Sisters: An Inclusive Reader in US Women's History*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2007. ISBN: 978-0415958417.

- I. The Body is "good to think" anthropologically, especially with respect to identity
  - A. The body simultaneously produces and is produced by culture<sup>1</sup>
    1. The body is the main source of metaphors of order and disorder<sup>2</sup>
    2. Identity and difference are constructed through reference to the body
    3. Readings for today reveal some of the many ways bodies are classified, illustrate the various kinds of cultural work bodies do
      - a. Classified as to race, gender, marriageability, permission to reproduce, sexuality
      - b. Kondo finds herself to be a "conceptual anomaly"
        - 1) She is increasingly being fitted into the Japanese classification system
        - 2) In part because of the signals her body sends

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<sup>1</sup> Schmidt and Moore p. 556.

<sup>2</sup> See Bryan Turner, Recent developments in the theory of the body, pp. 1-35 in Mike Featherstone, Mike Hepworth, and Bryan S. Turner, eds., *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory* London: Sage, 1991.

- c. Semen in semen banks is simultaneously a part of the body, a potential body, and, as represented in a donor catalogue, a series of codes.
  - 4. **DISCUSS:** how many body labels do we apply to non-body objects?
  - 5. We give personality to biological objects, including bodies, thereby naturalizing features that are in fact socially and culturally constructed
    - a. “Sperm may be disembodied, but they are vividly personified.”<sup>3</sup>
- B. In pre-modern societies the body is an important surface on which identity can be displayed
  - 1. The marks of social status, family position, tribal affiliation, age, gender and religious condition can easily and publicly be displayed
    - a. Foot-binding in China: what did it signal?
  - 2. Ritual transformations of the body
    - a. Circumcision, scarification
    - b. Create kinship—become “blood brothers”
  - 3. **DISCUSS:** other examples you know about?
- C. Modern societies
  - 1. Also use the body in rituals
    - a. Slapping a girl who’s discovered her first menstrual period
    - b. **DISCUSS:** circumcision
    - c. Degradation ceremonies
      - 1) **DISCUSS**
  - 2. Use the body to display membership
    - a. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu: class is marked by taste, and taste uses the body

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<sup>3</sup> Schmidt and Moore p. 560.

“Everything that the body ingests and digests and assimilates, physiologically and psychologically. It follows that the body is the most indisputable materialization of class taste”<sup>4</sup>

- b. **DISCUSS:** what do tattooing and piercing signal today?
- 3. To maintain the status quo, discursively rather than visibly
  - a. Miscegenation cases: legal and scientific discourses needed
  - b. Only elite semen samples are allowed to undergo the disciplining processes that turn them into cyborgs
    - 1) As explained in donor catalogues

## II. The *human* body

### A. Last time I mentioned how we in the West construct humanness

- 1. We have a notion of *homo sapiens sapiens* as an animal that fits into a zoological taxonomy called a Kingdom
  - a. Part of the rationale for classification is anatomical—we are recognizably different from closest relatives, bonobo chimps
    - 1) **DISCUSS:** how we differ from chimpanzees
  - b. The *behavioral* definition of human has been hotly debated and quite dynamic
    - 1) Examples: tool-using; language; deliberate teaching
    - 2) Friedrich Engels: *labor* was what distinguished humans from apes<sup>5</sup>
- 2. The idea that we all belong to the “human race” is a relatively new idea in the West
  - a. Famous debate following discovery of the New World between Fray Bartolomé de las Casas and Sepúlveda (a Spanish priest) as to whether indigenous Americans were humans or animals

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<sup>4</sup> Bourdieu, 1984. *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, p. 190, quoted in Featherstone, Hepworth and Turner, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Friedrich Engels, 1940 (1882). On the part played by labor in the transition from ape to man. In *The Dialectics of Nature*, 279-285; 288-289. New York: International Publishers

- B. Traditional societies' notion of "real people" is likely to be much more circumscribed
1. In some societies' classificatory schemes, "true" humans are those who have been initiated
    - a. The main division is between initiated men, and women and children
    - b. Initiation rituals produce a new body
    - c. Oftentimes the divide is seen to be between a mere body and a truly spiritual being
- C. There is a great deal of variety in notions about how much the body can be transformed
1. In the West, a constant debate about transforming one's body into the "best" body
    - a. Alterations produced by physical acts
    - b. **DISCUSS:** examples?
  2. Symbolic acts that transform?
    - a. Performatives: symbolic action that effects change, sometimes very comprehensive change
      - 1) Upon ordination, a Catholic priest is transformed
    - b. Catholic theology holds that a wafer and wine can be changed into the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ—his actual body
      - a. Transubstantiation
      - b. Which should be ingested
- D. The readings illustrate some of the ways in which studying ideas about bodies
1. Can help us understand notions about human diversity
    - a. Understand what this diversity is seen to consist of, why it exists

### III. History of changing ideas about the body in the West

- A. Empirically-based academic disciplines were developing, religion's role as organizer of knowledge was declining
1. Science, continuing development of scientific method
    - a. Example: hidden traits that can be discovered through scientific observation, measurement
    - b. Paleontology, anthropology, sociology
  2. Many examples of science acting as the firm ally of existing institutions
    - a. In the Gordon, Gould, Schmidt & Moore, Pascoe essays
- B. Evolution: progress or devolution (degeneracy) over time
1. 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment notions of progress
    - a. Humanist tradition that measured human achievement in terms of learned culture
  2. 19<sup>th</sup> century: some interpretations of the theory of evolution
    - a. Held that the superior human race is emerging, the result of evolutionary mechanisms
    - b. Internally stratified biologically (races, stock, all kinds of notions)
  3. But other interpretations saw the human "race" to be in genetic *decline*
- C. Eugenics
1. Motivated by nativism that arose in response to huge numbers of immigrants
  2. Reformist: "race progress"
  3. Used by feminists, used by anti-feminists
  4. **DISCUSS:** IQ test
- D. The notion not only of developing correct classification schemes, but also of reading history into them
1. Familiar criteria: ape-like, childish, emotional

- a. **DISCUSS**
- 2. Notion of recapitulation
  - a. Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny
  - b. It's good to give Longfellow's *Song of Hiawatha* to children; as they're passing through the "savage" state, will identify with it
  - c. Cope (American paleontologist): All adult nonwhite persons, all adult women, all southern as opposed to northern peoples, and the lower classes
    - 1) Compare with children of white males
    - 2) "Perhaps all men can recall a period of youth..." when they were like women (p. 117)
  - d. Notice some geographical, geological, meteorological determinism in several versions
- 3. The opposite classification scheme: measure degree of neoteny to show relative, ranked degree of development:
  - a. Neoteny: birth at a relatively early degree of development
  - b. Homo sapiens is a good example of neoteny, compared with other mammals
- E. Ranking human groups and categories according to biological criteria can support the status quo:
  - 1. Support hegemonic forms of social and physical power
    - a. May justify imperialism
    - b. Examples from Gould
      - 1) Our duty to the Philippines, Teddy Roosevelt
      - 2) "White man's burden"
      - 3) "Manifest Destiny"
    - c. Or may explain and justify gendered division of labor and power differentials between men and women

F. Or challenge the status quo:

1. Notion that men's excessive sexual demands were not biological instinct but a social product

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