

# THE MISSING BODY: FOUCAULT, HABERMAS AND PSYCHOANALYSIS\*

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## 1. Therapeutic prelude

In *The Barefoot Psychoanalyst* (a co-counselling manual written by John Southgate and Rosemary Randall) a number of simple techniques are described, together with their theoretical rationales, by which two people, taking in turn the part of ‘therapist’ and ‘patient’, may help one another to identify and explore various problematic features of their lives. Let us imagine how this, or other similar manuals, might be used by two men who, already friends and accustomed to talking together with some intimacy about their private hopes, disappointments, pleasures and anxieties, have come to sense the need for some more formal and structured means of self-reflection. What follows is, I hope, both fictional and real in appropriate ways.

In one session, they play a game in which each is blindfolded and led by the hand around the house they are in by the other. They then compare notes on how they felt as leader and led. One of them had great difficulty in the latter role: he found himself holding back and hesitant, and began to panic as they walked down the stairs. His leader, perceiving this, began to feel resentful at the lack of trust displayed towards him. He, when led, attempted all the time to monitor and estimate precisely where he was going; he resisted certain changes of direction, and eventually began to initiate movements himself; and his partner, noticing this, found his own steps becoming increasingly indecisive.

Reflecting on these experiences during the weeks that followed, they arrive at a later session with a number of thoughts and memories. The first man begins talking of his tendency to withdraw from

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\* [2013] This paper was given at a conference on Interpretation and Understanding at the Humanities Research Centre, Australian National University, in July 1982; it then had the title ‘The Meanings of the Body’. Apart from changing the title, removing one section, and some copy-editing, I have left the original text largely unchanged. Citations should be as follows: Keat, R. (1982) ‘The Missing Body: Foucault, Habermas and Psychoanalysis’, unpublished manuscript, University of Edinburgh; <<http://www.russellkeat.net>> [date of download]. Parts of the paper were used in a later article, ‘The Human Body in Social Theory: Reich, Foucault and the Repressive Hypothesis’, *Radical Philosophy* 42, 1986; reprinted in S. Sayers and P. Osborne (eds) *Socialism, Feminism and Philosophy*, London: Routledge 1990, 275-303, and available at [www.russellkeat.net](http://www.russellkeat.net). Two other papers with closely related themes were written while I was a visiting fellow at the HRC: ‘Reich, Psychoanalysis and the Body’ and ‘Merleau-Ponty and the Phenomenology of the Body’ (also available at [www.russellkeat.net](http://www.russellkeat.net)).

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situations where he perceived some risk of being let down or betrayed. His partner suggests that he stand up and, keeping his body in a straight line, lean forwards until, losing his balance, he is safely caught. Attempting this, he finds it hard to avoid pulling back with the centre of his body just before he tips over, and he is reminded by this of a similar, apparently involuntary bodily movement in his sexual life.

Changing roles, the second man recalls how much he had enjoyed taking the lead in sports and games at high school. When a young child, his older brother had always regarded him as a ‘pushover’; and his father had joked about his mother’s protectiveness towards him. Now he felt at least physically in control of things. But his lover had begun to dislike this characteristic in their sexual relationship, and some considerable conflict between them was developing. His friend suggests that he lie down on the floor; tense and relax each set of muscles in turn; and then allow his limbs to be moved around without any resistance or anticipation. In doing this, he remembers how it was when he was carried to bed half-asleep as a child.

In a somewhat grandiose manner, I could use this example to pose the following question: what conception of the human body is required for such episodes to be possible? But I shall not try to answer this question directly. Instead, I shall first draw attention to various ways in which the human body has been effectively excluded from the domain of social theory and philosophy, and then present certain features of Foucault’s work as indicating one (though by no means the only) basis for rectifying this situation.

## **2. The exclusion of the body from social theory and philosophy**

I suggest that this exclusion of the human body can be seen as the result of a twin strategy of *materialization* and *etherealization*. By sketching how this strategy operates in various anti-positivist accounts of social theory, I can perhaps also give some clearer sense of what I mean by ‘exclusion’ here.

In these accounts, the object-domain for social theory is defined in terms of the supposedly distinctive features of the human species: in the bad old Cartesian days, consciousness; with modern-day sophistication, language, itself conceptualized by the diverse hermeneutic, Wittgensteinian and semiotic schools as respectively a corpus of sacred texts, a set of social rules, or a system of signs. Can the human body be included in the social domain, thus defined? Not, it would seem, if regarded as a material thing: in this form, it is therefore relegated to the status of an object for the natural sciences, for biochemistry, neurophysiology, medical anatomy, and so on. It is thereby materialized and excluded, save for an occasional appearance in the guise of diet or disease. But the body can avoid this fate, be re-instated within social theory, by assuming instead an etherealized form, as the

bearer of linguistic or quasi-linguistic meanings. For instance, its elements can perform as the arbitrary signifiers of a Saussurian sign, analogues of the acoustic image; as kines and kinemorphs in Ray Birdwhistell's linguistics-based kinesics (*Kinesics and Context*, University of Pennsylvania Press 1970); or, within a linguistically reconstructed psychoanalysis, as hysterical symptoms to be decoded as hieroglyphic inscriptions.

Both old and new versions of the dualism that underlies these definitions of the domain of social theory (material bodies v. consciousness or language) are implicit also in a standard distinction between two kinds of psychopathological theory and practice. On the one hand, we are told, there are the so-called 'somatic' approaches, such as neurosurgery, chemotherapy, electric shock treatment, or behaviour modification. Here the patient's body exists as the material object for natural scientific investigation and control. On the other hand — and often supported through criticism of the supposedly positivist, reductionist character of the former — there are the 'non-somatic' approaches of orthodox psychoanalysis, existential analysis, humanistic counselling, or the theoretical and technical eclecticism typical of much actual psychotherapy. Here the emphasis is upon achieving some form of self-understanding, through methods that focus on the patient's capacity for reflective consciousness, and on the communicative, dialogic relationship with the therapist.

Jürgen Habermas, in his quasi-hermeneutic interpretation of psychoanalysis (in *Knowledge and Human Interests* and related writings), provides a good example of this latter conception of the therapeutic process, and of the more general strategies for the exclusion of the body from social theory and philosophy. (The following account is based on my discussion of Habermas in *The Politics of Social Theory*). He regards psychoanalytic theory as paradigmatic of the distinctive, *critical* kind of social theory which, governed by an emancipatory interest in freeing human activity from various forms of domination, does so by entering into the self-reflective processes of those to whom the theory is addressed, and about whom its claims are made.

For Habermas, critical social theory differs from a positivist, empirical science, whose object-domain consists of "moving bodies": of "things, events and conditions which are, in principle, capable of being manipulated" (*Theory and Practice*, p. 8), and which is logically tied to a specific form of practice, the instrumental control of natural or social processes, governed by a technical, constitutive, interest. But it differs also from the various 'interpretive' alternatives to positivism. For although, like these, its object-domain consists of "speaking and acting subjects": of "persons, utterances and conditions which in principle are structured and to be understood symbolically" (*ibid*, p. 8), critical social theory is concerned with a particular sub-class of this domain, one whose understanding defies ordinary interpretive procedures. This sub-domain consists of "distorted communications": of actions, utterances, or beliefs whose meanings are unintelligible, and which require decipherment by a

depth-hermeneutics such as that of psychoanalysis.

The neurosis, then, is conceptualized as distorted communication which, according to psychoanalytic theory, results from the repressed, painful episodes of the patient's life-history, from the numerous possible failures to negotiate successfully the central stages of the child's relationship with its parents as portrayed in the theory of psychosexual development. Habermas (partly) follows Freud in likening the formation of the neurosis to that of the dream, a distorted text whose manifest content is to be interpreted by uncovering the various mechanisms of disguise and misrepresentation employed by the unconscious to conceal the latent content, the repressed dream-wish. The interpretation of dreams involves the conscious reversal of these processes of the dream-work, and hence the recovery by the patient of lost, banished meanings. Likewise, the interpretation of neuroses rescues the repressed past of the patient's life, and restores this to consciousness. And by achieving this, the patient overcomes the dead weight of those unconscious forces, eliminates the previous patterns of distorted communication, and moves thereby from the realm of necessity to that of freedom.

This therapeutic process, then, is emancipatory and self-reflective: indeed, the former just 'because' the latter; and Habermas claims that its character as such is logically related to its guiding theory, psychoanalysis, in two major respects. First, the central concepts of this theory (such as the ego and id) gain their meanings from, and can only be understood by reference to, the self-reflective features of psychoanalytic practice. Second, the criteria of validity for psychoanalytic theory, unlike those of a positivist science, include as necessary conditions for the truth of its propositions both the acceptance by the patient of the particular interpretive hypotheses derived from those propositions by the analyst and offered to the patient, and a successful emancipatory outcome stemming from these interpretations and their eventual acceptance by the patient, despite initial resistance.

Psychoanalysis, thus conceived, provides a model for the general nature of critical social theory, and for the relationship between such theory and social or political practice. Its emancipatory goal of overcoming systematically distorted communication is more positively articulated as the practical realization of an "ideal speech situation", whose defining characteristics are the absence of all forms and sources of internal and external coercion within and between its participants. There are to be no repressed, unrecognized or unexpressible motives; and no a-symmetries of power resulting from, for example, the unequal distribution of social, economic, or political goods and resources. Guided by this overall goal, the critical social theorist attempts to identify the bases of distortion and imperfection in existing social structures, and to engage in a relationship of enlightenment with those who suffer from these, aiding them in their self-reflective movement towards this ideal, and accepting their practical acceptance of the theories' particular hypotheses as a necessary condition of its

adequacy.

Both the participants in the ideal speech situation, and the patient in psychoanalysis, lead notably disembodied lives. That the latter's life-history might also be 'deposited' in the form of postural and muscular structures, modes of body-use, and the patterns of emotional experience linked to these, is a possibility effectively denied in Habermas's account. Indeed, he is eager to ensure that the patient's body as a material object is kept strictly excluded from psychoanalysis as an emancipatory theory and practice, and hence takes issue with Freud himself on two crucial points: the biological theory of the instincts, and the neurological model of psychic energy. He argues that Freud's endorsement of these represents a scientific distortion of an otherwise self-reflective theory, and proceeds therefore to purge psychoanalysis of these unwelcome elements. In this way, the body as a material object can be put back where it belongs, in the domain of the natural sciences of biology and neurophysiology, to which the human communicative subject cannot be reduced. What remains of the body, from the standpoint of social theory and philosophy, consists only in its etherealised role as the bearer of quasi-linguistic meanings such as expressive gestures or hysterical symptoms, which are 'structured and to be understood symbolically'.

Likewise, the participants in an ideal speech situation lead a markedly ethereal existence, and when they turn their attention, in what Habermas calls 'practical discourse', to reaching consensual decisions on political and ethical questions, their bodies do not figure greatly. In this respect — and despite the significance of Habermas's theory of the presuppositions of communicative practices as a foundation for normative principles — his position displays the traditional, non-bodily concerns of moral and political philosophy. For example, the central concerns of most ethical theories have been either with the propriety of motives and intentions, or with the soundness and virtues of character, or with the felicitic consequences of actions. Bodies have, of course, been considered in the last category, but only as the simple physiological sources of pains and pleasures, or as the biological foundations of certain basic and universal human needs: for food, warmth, shelter, and suchlike. And the more exalted ethics of freedom and autonomy have typically conceived of liberation as *from*, rather than *of*, the human body.

In a similar manner, or at least with similar consequences, the various traditions of political philosophy have been addressed to the values and practices of justice, equality, obligation, and liberty; to the proper distribution of social goods and opportunities; to the organization and limits of government, and to the scope and nature of legitimate power. Bodies have been no more prominent here than in ethics. Even that most bodily of practices, punishment, has been debated primarily in terms of its justifying aims and purposes, with scant regard for its practical forms, which are conceived of either as deprivation of liberty, or as death or simple suffering: bodies in this view are

locked up, chopped up, or inflicted with pain, but otherwise escape unnoticed and unscathed.\*

An important exception to these disembodied tendencies of political philosophy has come from the theories and practices of contemporary feminism. Their increasing focus upon the normative significance of human, gendered bodies has been made possible by criticizing the ways in which various distinctions between the public and private spheres have excluded from analysis the political dimensions of personal life, the domestic arenas in which, amongst other things, masculine bodies exert their sometimes violent, but always also subtle powers. Michel Foucault, too, in his studies both of punishment and disciplinary practices, and of sexuality and its theoretical discourses, is an exception to these mistreatments of the body in social theory and philosophy. It is to his work that I now turn.

### **3. Foucault's disciplined body**

In the course of the eighteenth century, claims Foucault, a major transformation took place in the nature of the military body. In earlier times, the physical characteristics already acquired by a man marked him out as suited to this profession — the breadth of his shoulders, the strength of his hands, the thickness of his thighs. But by the end of that century,

... the soldier has become something that can be made; out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the machine required can be constructed; posture is gradually corrected; a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable, ready at all times, turning silently into the automatism of habit; in short, one has 'got rid of the peasant', and given him 'the air of a soldier' (*Discipline and Punish*, p.135)

Military training, that is, came to involve the construction of military bodies, the meticulous and detailed production of disciplined subjects, of bodies which are controlled not so much by external threat or violent coercion, as by their internal modes of automatized operation.

For Foucault, this particular example illustrates a more general historical transformation in the nature of political power, one whose proper recognition requires us to pay close attention to the processes involved in the social formation of human bodies. Political philosophers and social theorists, he claims, have continued to conceive of power in essentially 'negative' terms, as involving for example the prohibition of actions or the removal of goods. But since the eighteenth century, the exercise of

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\* [2013] In 'Autonomous Bodies or Bodily Automata?' (1990; available at [www.russelkeat.net](http://www.russelkeat.net)) I consider some aspects of what might be involved in 'bringing the body back in' to political philosophy.

power has become increasingly ‘positive’ or productive, involving the careful generation of capacities rather than their inhibition or repression. ‘Power over life’ consists now not so much in the threat of death as in the management of life itself, and this management takes as one of its central concerns,

“... the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase in its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls, all this was ensured by the procedures of power that characterized the disciplines: an anatomo-politics of the human (*History of Sexuality* vol 1, p.139).

In order to produce useful and docile individuals — those who have acquired, for example, the very labour-power that is purchased and exploited in capitalism —

“... a real and effective ‘incorporation’ of power was necessary, in the sense that power had to gain access to the bodies of individuals, to their acts, attitudes, and modes of everyday behaviour. Hence the significance of methods like school discipline, which succeeded in making children’s bodies the object of highly complex systems of manipulation and conditioning” (‘Truth and Power’, p.125).

To understand such forms of power, we must lower our sight from the lofty apparatuses of the State, and re-focus it upon the disciplinary practices of such lowly institutions as the school, the workshop, the hospital, the asylum, or the army barracks. We need, that is, to investigate the “micro-physics of power” (*Discipline and Punish*, p.26): power that operates at a micro-level, and upon physical bodies.

Pupils, a pedagogic manual declares, must

“... hold their bodies erect, somewhat turned and free on the left side, slightly inclined, so that, with the elbow placed on the table, the chin can be rested on the hand, unless this were to interfere with the view; the left leg must be somewhat more forward under the table than the right; the part of the left arm from the elbow to the hand must be placed on the table. The right arm must be at a distance from the body of about three fingers and be about five fingers from the table, on which it must rest lightly” (quoted in *Discipline and Punish*, p.152).

What is the purpose of this gymnastic performance? Merely the necessary preliminaries for proper handwriting: “a whole routine whose rigorous code invests the body ... from the points of the feet to the tip of the index finger”, comments Foucault (*ibid.*, p.152).

The ordinary marching step will be two feet long, “measured from one heel to the next”, with a duration of precisely one second. It will be

“... executed forwards, holding the head up high and the body erect, holding oneself in balance successively on a single leg, and bringing the other forwards, the harm taut, the point of the foot a little outwards and low, so that one may without affectation brush the ground on which one must walk and place one’s foot, in such a way that each part may come to rest there at the same time without striking the ground” (quoted in *ibid.*, p.135)

Recruits, it is commanded, shall become accustomed to

“... holding their heads high and erect; to standing upright, without bending the back, to sticking out the belly, throwing out the chest and throwing back the shoulders .... Likewise, they will be taught never to fix their eyes on the ground, but to look straight at those they pass ... to remain motionless until the order is given, without moving the head, the hands or the feet ...” (quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 135-6).

These detailed constructions of particular bodily performances were typically engineered in conditions of relative institutional isolation, and functioned as one aspect of a more general and systematic regulation of activities, for which the rigorous schedules of a daily timetable were an important instrument, and which were enforced and monitored by a variety of techniques of surveillance. In its most literal and visual form, Bentham’s design for the Panopticon expressed the basic principle here: a building of two concentric circles, in which with a minimum of effort and personnel, the observer in the central tower could observe the inmates in the outer circle without being observed, hence achieving the desired effects through the inmates’ mere knowledge that they might at any time be being seen. Similar principles operate in the various practices of record-keeping, personal files and individual case-histories.

The prisoner, the school child, the soldier, the patient, the worker: all were subjected to these disciplinary practices, aimed primarily (though not exclusively) at their bodily habits. For instance, in the new system of punishment of the nineteenth century prison:

“The point of application of the penalty is ... the body, time, everyday gestures and activities; the soul too, but in so far as it is the seat of the habits Exercises .... timetables, compulsory movements, regular activities, solitary meditation, work in common, silence, application, respect, good habits ... What one is trying to restore in this technique of correction is not so much the judicial subject .... but the obedient subject, the individual subjected to habits, rules,



orders, an authority that is exercised continually around him, and which he must allow to function automatically in him” (*ibid.*, pp.178-9).

However, the claim that power is *positive* in the sense of *producing* - in this case, disciplined, docile or obedient subjects - is not original to Foucault, for his self-presentation as offering a radical alternative to *negative* conceptions of power rests partly on no more than verbal play. Many social theorists have implicitly recognized the ‘productive’ exercise of power by exploring, for instance, how ‘obedience’ is achieved by means other than external coercion: hence such ‘positive’ concepts as the authoritarian personality, the superego, the ‘internalization’ of norms or values, and so on. Foucault’s significance, I believe, consists rather in his emphasis here on the body and its constructed modes of operation, as against the ‘mind’ in the form of personality, motivation, ideology, etc. Foucault, that is, is rejecting the common assumption that the human body is relevant to the analysis of power only as a material object that can be restrained, limited, hurt, or destroyed. Instead, he maintains, we must recognize those exercises of power in which

“... the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body. This subjection is not only obtained by the instruments of violence or ideology; it can also be direct, physical, pitting force against force, bearing on material elements, and yet without involving violence; it may be calculated, organized, technically thought out; it may be subtle, make use neither of weapons nor of terror and yet remain of a physical order.” (*ibid.*, p.25)

I shall question later both Foucault’s conception here of the ‘physicality’ of this ‘useful’ body, and his implicit assumption that it is only through calculated and deliberate disciplinary practices that power is located within the body. But I turn next to his view of discourses and power, in the particular case of psychoanalysis.

#### **4. Psychoanalysis as confession**

“Confession frees, but power reduces one to silence; truth does not belong to the order of power, but shares an original affinity with freedom: traditional themes in philosophy, which a ‘political history of truth’ would have to overturn by showing that truth is not by nature free - nor error servile - but that its production is thoroughly imbued with relations of power. The confession is an example of this.” (*History of Sexuality* vol 1, p. 60)

Thus speaks Foucault, scourge of (the) enlightenment: truth does not set us free, but enslaves us through the procedures of its discovery. Theoretical discourses, in which truths are produced, must be understood and judged not in their own terms, but by reference to the specific practices through which

their claims are generated, supported, assessed and applied, practices which essentially involve relations of power.

In *The History of Sexuality* (vol. 1), Foucault examines the discourses of sexuality from this standpoint. He is especially concerned to undermine the supposedly libertarian view of psychoanalysis as a potential weapon against sexual repression, both as a theory that reveals the hidden truth, and as a therapeutic practice in which self-revelation overcomes the pathological consequences of a repressed past. Instead he suggests that this theory - like other discourses of sexuality, however much they differ in the particular truths they proclaim - should be understood as the legitimating rationale for a therapeutic procedure with an 'immanent structure of power' which it shares both with its historical precursor, the religious confessional, and with the multitude of other confessional practices characteristic of modern societies: in medicine, psychiatry, social work, education, the family, and so on.

The religious confessional, says Foucault, is

“... a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile; a ritual in which the truth is corroborated by the obstacles and resistances it has had to surmount in order to be formulated; and finally a ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him and promises him salvation” (*History of Sexuality* vol. 1, p. 62).

Foucault is not, of course, the first person to have suggested parallels between the practices of psychoanalysis and the confessional, nor is he particularly clear in identifying the features of that 'immanent structure of power' they are said to share. But, hopefully in his spirit, I suggest that these features at least centrally include various dimensions of the analyst's privileged status in relation to the patient. The patient is questioned, and must answer, but does not question; the analyst questions, and requires answers, but is not questioned. What is thus revealed is about the patient, and not about the analyst, who has exclusive access to a theoretical knowledge assumed to be necessary to the satisfactory conduct and outcome of the process. This knowledge enables the analyst to understand the patient better than he or she can by themselves, and includes amongst its claims that what is true of the patient is that which the patient refuses most strongly to accept. What the patient knows is only that until this truth is revealed and acknowledged, life will continue on its present, supposedly

pathological, path.

Foucault in effect asks us to consider the following question: what sort of theory would one produce if one were attempting to show that a procedure with this structure of power was necessary and desirable? And he invites us to see psychoanalytic theory as an optimal solution to this problem. For what it tells us is that our lives are governed by something called ‘sexuality’ which, endowed with an “inexhaustible and polymorphous causal power” (p.55), can influence or determine ‘any and everything’, including all kinds of pathology. But this sexuality, which is in this sense ‘our truth’,<sup>1</sup> has the property of resisting discovery, of disguising and hiding itself by indefinitely varied and ingenious unconscious devices; and the obscurity of its effects requires for their decipherment a specialist skill, a professional hermeneutician. But its power is vulnerable in just one crucial respect: it can be overcome by the light of day, by the truth about this truth of our lives being revealed to us and acknowledged by us:

“Spoken in time, to the proper party, and by the person who was both the bearer of it and the one responsible for it, the truth healed” (p.67).

What better solution to this problem of the legitimation of power could there be: a theory which tells us our truth, and according to which the truth about this can be discovered only by these confessional procedures? And what more, for Foucault, is there to be said about this discursive-confessional alliance? Nothing apparently, at the supposedly redundant level of assessing, scientifically, the discursive claims themselves, or the efficacy of these procedures; for here Foucault departs from the excellent standards of Marxian critique, which require one not only to identify the interests or functions served by theoretical discourses, but also to demonstrate their substantive and methodological defects.

Yet what Foucault *does* additionally say is potentially radical in its implications, despite the virtual impossibility of establishing it with his preferred methods of enquiry. This is that the very procedures and practices (including those of psychoanalysis, but also many others) designed to ‘discover’ sexuality - whether to control, describe, or liberate it - in fact contribute to its ‘creation’, to the *production* of what may be termed *sexualised bodies*. That is, to the extent that the theoretical concept

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. the following comment by Shere Hite in the Preface to *The Hite Report on Male Sexuality* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1981): “To discuss sex is to discuss our most basic views of who we are and what we want life to be, what kind of society we believe in” (p. xix).

‘sexuality’ (and its diverse modes) has any referential success, this is due to the *outcomes* of procedures that supposedly reveal something that existed *prior to* their application.

For example, talking of parental procedures for tracking down their children’s problematic sexualities, Foucault says:

“... this had the consequence of sexually exciting the bodies of children while at the same time fixing the parental gaze and vigilance on the peril of infantile sexuality. The result was a sexualizing of the infantile body, a sexualizing of the bodily relationship between parent and child, a sexualizing of the familial domain. ‘Sexuality’ is far more of a positive product of power than power was ever a repression of sexuality.” (p. 120).

Further, Foucault makes it clear that he is talking of sexualized *bodies* and not of sexualized attitudes *towards* bodies:

“... I do not envisage a ‘history of mentalities’ that would take account of bodies only through the manner in which they have been perceived and given meaning and value; but a ‘history of bodies’ and the manner in which what is most material and most vital in them has been invested” (p.152);

and here we have, in effect, an additional dimension to the ‘history of bodies’ to which his earlier study of disciplinary practices (in *Discipline and Punish*) had contributed.

Foucault approves neither of sexualized bodies, nor of the discursive-confessional alliance; and referring to both (though I doubt that he recognizes their distinctness) by the phrase ‘deployment of sexuality’, he declares:

“The rallying point for the counter-attack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire [the error of the ‘sexual radicals’ such as Reich: R.K.] but bodies and pleasures” (*ibid.*, p.157);

Thus:

“... one should aim instead at a de-sexualization, at a general economy of pleasure not based on sexual norms” (‘The History of Sexuality’, p.191).

## **5. Towards a lived body**

Foucault’s claims about the processes involved in the social construction of human bodies contribute

significantly to the task of 'bringing the body back' into social theory and philosophy, and his account of the confessional rightly directs our attention to the normative dimensions of the practices involved in producing and applying theoretical discourses in general, and psychoanalysis in particular. In both respects, his work is a welcome alternative to Habermas's exclusion of the human body, and to his undue optimism about the emancipatory character of psychoanalytic theory and practice.

However, Foucault's approach displays a number of features that make it unsatisfactory as it stands. It misrepresents the nature of the relationship between theories, practices and values; it lacks some of the conceptual equipment required to understand the processes and outcomes of the formation of human bodies; and it evokes an ideal of bodily existence that is curiously naïve about the 'naturalness' of bodies that are not subjected to administered schemes of investigation and control. I shall conclude by trying briefly to justify, or at least to indicate what I mean by, these objections.

The example I presented at the outset of this paper (inspired by *The Barefoot Psychoanalyst*) was designed amongst other things to show how therapeutic techniques, and the theories upon which they are partly based, may be used without the a-symmetries of power that are present in more orthodox and institutionalized therapeutic settings; instead there is reciprocity of self-disclosure, employment of knowledge and skills, and emotional vulnerability. The two kinds of therapeutic practice clearly differ in normatively significant ways. But this does not imply any corresponding divergence between the theoretical discourses that inform them: for instance, both sets of practitioners might broadly agree on various central explanatory claims of psychoanalytic theory. (These issues about the relationship between psychoanalytic theory and practice are discussed in *The Politics of Social theory*, chapter 5).

So we should reject the view, apparently endorsed by Foucault (and arguably shared by Habermas, albeit for different reasons), that there is some kind of direct and necessary connection between specific theoretical discourses and corresponding forms of social practice. We should also reject the closely associated tendency to replace the critical assessment of such discourses in terms of their explanatory adequacy and evidential support by normative judgments about the practices in which they are supposedly implicated: both kinds of judgment are important, but they can and should be made independently of one another. Indeed, without such a conception of 'objective' theoretical knowledge, both generally, and in the case of knowledge of the processes involved in the formation of human bodies, it would be pointlessly self-defeating to carry out the kinds of investigations that Foucault is himself engaged in.

Further, if we are to conduct such investigations fruitfully, we shall have to concern ourselves with aspects of, and questions about, those processes which Foucault appears unwilling or unable to encompass. For instance, while he is happy to quote to us from disciplinary manuals for the training

of soldiers or school children, he seems less happy to consider the broadly ‘phenomenological’ question: what was it like to be subjected to those regimes - how did the people involved experience what was being done to them, how did they respond to it, what sense did they make of it, and so on? And these are not questions which necessarily shift us from a concern with *bodies* to one with *meanings* since, as Merleau-Ponty argued in *Phenomenology of Perception*, there is an important domain of ‘the *lived* body’ in which, as it were, our ‘attitudes’ and ‘values’ and ‘characters’ are located, and through which our social relationships are mediated. One should certainly be wary of the phenomenologists’ tendency to de-historicize the lived body: to ignore, for example, how gender differences, and their historical and class specificities, operate at this level. But without this phenomenological perspective, we risk substituting, for a history of *bodies*, a history of *texts about* the body.

And if this mistake is made, it may also exclude from view those many processes shaping the lived body that do *not* involve the deliberate use of technical procedures and systematic regimes, and for which there will not exist, therefore, the kind of ‘textual evidence’ that Foucault mainly concentrates upon. In my initial example, for instance, the bodies of both men displayed patterns of activity and emotional significance that might well be indicative of their life histories, and the various processes and experiences involved in these were doubtless in many respects typical for those sharing their class, gender and historical situations.

Indeed, this is one reason why that example implicitly raises issues relevant to a *social* theory and philosophy, as distinct from a supposedly ‘individualizing’ psychology or psychopathology. No doubt specifically ‘disciplinary’ procedures played some part here: for instance, the training techniques of high school sports. But there is no reason to believe these were the exclusive or dominant influence; rather, we would need also to consider the largely unconscious, very detailed ways in which, for example, the bodily interactions of parents and children operate in typical familial contexts. Further, even distinctively disciplinary procedures can be expected to have different effects, depending on the already established biographical features of their ‘subjects’.

This has one further implication. A body that is not subjected to such disciplines is not thereby a *natural* (i.e. ‘biologically given’) one, nor one about which questions of power or politics cannot still be addressed. Whether or not the anarchic ‘body and its pleasures’ is what we should aspire to, its virtues cannot be established merely by the absence of particular procedures of subjection in its generation. There is much more to its construction than that, and hence much more to be considered by an adequate social philosophy of the human body.

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