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THE CONSTRUCTED BODY

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It goes without saying, and yet it is necessary to recall, that the body is the prime indicator of sex. One of its social functions is to make visible what is considered the fundamental division of the human race—sex. As Monique Wittig writes, "The category of sex is the political category that founds society as heterosexual. As such it does not concern being but relationship for women and men are the result of relationships). . . . The category of sex is one that rules as 'natural' the relation that is at the base of (heterosexual) society" (1982: 66). "Around the external reproductive apparatus (female or male), a material and symbolic structure is elaborated, destined first to express, then to emphasize, and finally to separate the sexes. This construction duplicates a material social relationship that is not at all symbolic—the sociosexual division of labor and the social distribution of power. Such a construction makes men and women appear to be heterogeneous, that is, essentially different. This material and symbolic structure implies a constant intervention by social institutions throughout the life of the individual, beginning at birth and even before birth, ever since it has been possible to know the sex of an infant in the womb. The intervening social construction is inscribed in the body itself. The body is constructed as a sexed body."

The following remarks concern those social forms associated with industrial societies, but these forms are based on a mechanism of physical differentiation that is much more widespread and applies to the whole group of known societies. In other words, although the body may not be not sexed in the same way in all societies, it is nonetheless *constructed* (and not a "given").

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It is hardly necessary to recall Margaret Mead, who, since the thirties, insisted on the diversity of (and even the contradictions in) the imperatives that societies impose on each sexual group, even as they require a differentiation between women and men (see Mead 1935). More recently, from a different perspective, Erving Goffman has undertaken an analysis of the codification of differential sexual signs (see Goffman 1977). Women and men are not the same in every society, but there are always "women" and "men" and not simply females and males.

Body and Consciousness

The hypothesis that the human body can only be sexed, that it is sexed, seems accepted in every society where this idea functions as the ideological basis of sexual division (whether of labor, of space, of rights and obligations, or of access to the resources of life). Since societies assume that the body cannot *not* be sexed, they find it appropriate to intervene to make it so. Yet this sexualization must not be as evident as societies say, since the work of making the body sexed is a long-term enterprise begun during the first seconds of life and never finished, since every act of existence is involved and every age of life introduces a new chapter in the individual's continual formation. Every trait acquired—reflexes, habits, tastes, and preferences—must be carefully maintained and methodically cultivated as much by the material environment as by the control of other social agents. While this "fabrication" is not limited to anatomical interventions concerning the appearance of the body and its motor reactions, through such pressures and physical inducements a particular form of consciousness is also constructed. Individual consciousness (or, more exactly, the consciousness appropriate to an individual) of personal possibilities, of a perception of the world—in short, consciousness of one's own life—is determined by and dependent upon the physical and mental interventions practiced by one's society. The continuity between material conditions and forms of consciousness is especially marked in the appearances of sex (see Mathieu 1985).²

The effects of these practices on the ideology of a society, on its mode of thinking and its system of perceiving the world, are of capital importance. If women are objects in this mode of thought and ideology, it is because they are first objects in social relationships, in a daily reality in which interventions on the body are some of the key elements.³ These same interventions act upon men in the sense that they enable men to construct themselves as

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subjects who make decisions and act upon the world and who are subjects in the perception of their society.

Direct Interventions with the Body

In this essay I will speak of both direct and indirect interventions in the fabrication of the sexed body. Overemphasis on direct interventions can obscure the less visible (one could even say *invisible* in their everydayness) practices in the formation of a woman's or a man's body—correctly inserted into its society. While it is the latter, indirect, forms of intervention which hold the most interest for me and on which I will concentrate, I must first review the more direct forms of intervention upon the body, which cause (1) an irreversible modification through mechanical intervention, (2) a variation in its presentation or appearance, or (3) inequalities in its material maintenance or upkeep.

MECHANICAL (MATERIAL, PHYSICAL) INTERVENTIONS

Physical interventions upon the body, most often mutilations, are generally aimed at the female body, or at least affect it most profoundly, and include modifying the body with surgery, or with the use of tools or objects that induce and maintain certain corporal transformations. There is the case of sexual mutilation, but also of opening orifices (ears, nose, lips), reducing members (feet) or rupturing them (hands, legs, ankles), or transforming parts of the body (elongating the neck, constricting the waist, compressing the head). For the most part such practices are final and permanent. They are the spectacular and heartrending revelations of manipulation and social control of the body. The major form is the manipulation of reproduction itself, as Paola Taber (1985) has shown.⁴ However, these physical manipulations are more diversified in their modes of action, since they can include removable, external objects such as shoes, constraints, and corsets, which hinder mobility or liberty of the body. In one form or another, such practices are found in most human groups.

FASHION, PRESENTATION OF THE SELF, AND MORPHOLOGY

It is not necessary to linger over the phenomenon of fashion, which, by contrast with the above mutilations, is superficial in its manipulation of the body and which affects the two sexes about equally, requiring differentiated

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presentations of the body depending on whether one is female or male. Nor is it necessary to focus on the manipulations or restrictions of the body through makeup, modifying hairstyle, or body hair (depilation, shaving, wigs, dyes, curling and straightening) or through privileging certain parts of the body (the torso, the buttocks, the eye, the hand). The human body is extremely varied in its appearance, its degree of corpulence, its anatomical aspects, its color, skin texture, hair, and so forth. But the preferences of an era, or of a certain social group at a particular moment in history, either efface or select a certain appearance, muscular type, eye color, skin shade, or weight as the ideal of beauty and desirability for both the female and the male types, between whom societies always carefully distinguish.

These two forms of bodily intervention, destined to actualize and highlight sex (the one, fashion, is superficial, modifiable, and intended to be so, while the other, bodily mutilation, is profound and irreversible, modifying the body forever), are indeed part of the social construction of the sexed body. Both forms should always be kept in mind, for their brutality (in the case of mutilations) and their banality (in the case of fashion) are the expression and emblem of the social sexualization of the body. But these forms are only the generally recognized, unquestioned part of a much more profound social reality whose workings are continuous and infinitely broader than these two forms of actualization.

FOOD

The quantity and quality of food available or used are obvious determinants of the bodily construction and the state of health of an individual. Yet quantity and quality are not identically distributed between the two sexes. Even if these factors are dependent on the resources at the society's disposal, and if they are also variable according to social class within a single society, they are nonetheless unevenly distributed between the sexes.

A number of studies have aimed to describe how newborns are nourished according to sex and what type of food is consumed by adults according to their sex. For example, it has been known for a long time that when children are breast-fed, boys are fed longer than girls by a ratio of two to one, that is, six months for boys, three months for girls (Lezine 1965; Mathieu 1985). For infants as well as for adults the consumption of meat is higher for men than women. Anyone can see that the butcher cuts steaks "for men" thicker than those for women and children, that "housewives" will explicitly ask for that if the butcher does not propose it first.

With a little attention you can observe (in France) in most restaurants

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where portions are prepared in advance, that if the group is mixed and there is a larger portion of anything (meat, cheese, dessert), it will be served to a man. In the traditional rural societies of Europe the women (standing) served the (seated) men the best morsels.⁵ When meat is scarce, it goes first to the men, as all children from impoverished families (whatever their social class or society) know very well.

In certain hunting societies, including many in Europe, the women eat the organ meats (the viscera) while the men eat the meat of the prey. The less desirable portions are almost always considered a food reserved for subalterns: slaves, domestics, women. Such foods are generally despised or even feared as unhealthy outside the social groups that consume them. Generally, not eating—or no longer eating—such foods is considered a sign of social ascension or of delicacy in taste.

Another form of sexed usage of food is the consumption of excess or of the least healthy foods. This practice is without doubt one of the effects of male domination of women, even more so than the previous example suggests, because here we are talking about force rather than privation or preference. This sexed usage of food affects the construction of the body. To cite an extreme example, in certain herding cultures in desert zones women consume the entire seasonal excess of milk, far surpassing their needs or their hunger. Thus they regularly endure a seasonal obesity, with considerable variations in weight, which is repeated over regular periods of time.⁶

SIZE AND WEIGHT

The higher the standard of living in a country, the greater the size difference between men and women. Conversely, the less food a group has, the less differentiated women and men are and the closer in size and weight. Equality, in a way, comes from scarcity, and, contrary to expectations, it is in countries where there is no scarcity of food that women are less well nourished than men, not in countries of relative poverty. In the abundant societies, male individuals have a higher share of protein, which assures them greater growth. Of course, all the individuals in such societies are bigger and heavier than those in poor societies, but the gap between the sexes is equally much clearer. Social class already influences size: during the first half of the twentieth century, for example, in Paris *intra muros*, the difference in size between drafters who came from the working-class districts of the east and those born in the bourgeois neighborhoods of the west was several centimeters. The gap between the sexes is even greater.

In rich societies, more than in others, women are smaller than men, and

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their weight—like their muscular development—is less great. Height and weight norms are variable, and sometimes you have only to cross a border to see this. In some Mediterranean countries, for instance, the drugstore scales available to customers have signs on them indicating the ideal weight according to height and, of course, sex. These tables are not the same in France and in Portugal. According to the tables, the ideal weight of a Portuguese woman is the same as that of a French man, but the French woman should weigh ten kilos less than a French man (as one might expect), and she should also weigh ten kilos less than a Portuguese woman, which is more surprising. (Taking everything into account, however, the fact that the average income is higher in France than in Portugal means that women there should be markedly lighter than men.) No matter what the factual variations, this gap is considered at once natural, normal, and desirable.

In addition, there is generally an age gap at marriage, the woman being required to be from two to four years younger, if one can believe the statistics. Thus, in a couple the woman is supposed to be smaller, lighter, and younger than the man. This fact indicates something important: the physical characteristics required of a man and of a woman tend by definition toward differentiation. The heterogeneity of *each* individual couple, also required, reiterates the statistically demonstrable social imperatives which impose different bodies for men and women.

Indirect Interventions on the Body Itself: Personal Motor Skills

The construction of the body results from diverse techniques. Verbal injunctions, although only one component, are an important one. During childhood and adolescence, orders (for example, "Do this") are given constantly to make one behave in a manner determined to be appropriate to one's sex. But vigorous and repeated interdictions (such as "Don't do that") equally punctuate the conduct of children and adolescents. Expressions of disapproval (more veiled or nuanced) last throughout adult life and are especially marked with respect to women.

CHILDREN'S GAMES, USE OF SPACE, USE OF TIME

Injunctions or interdictions concern first of all the way one holds the body, regulated by a code of good or bad posture. This regulation has not so much to do with politeness as with a more diffuse and profound imperative to construct (and control) the individual's very being, focusing on

the "manner" appropriate to each sex for how to hold the body and how to use it, how to move it while walking or keep it still, how to put it in relation to others. There are specific ways of walking for men and women, just as there are specific ways of sitting, of positioning legs once seated, of holding objects while in repose or of catching them on the fly (Zeig 1985; Wex 1979).⁷ How to catch and seize things is the object of an apprenticeship through childhood games (including ball games): boys' games make more use of feet and legs than hands, while girls almost never use their feet as a means of propulsion in their games.

Games are probably one of the first, and primary, means of transmitting and imposing a certain body posture particular to each sex. The games specific to each sex (to the exclusion of the other) contribute to this imposition. (Although some games are common to both sexes, such cases are more often in the mental than in the physical domain.) The result is that a girl does not kick or punch as boys do. Since it is equally forbidden to both sexes to bite or pull hair, girls find themselves without a coherent defense in children's fights, in which they are not supposed to participate anyway. Yet, even more than specific games, *games in themselves*—their circumstances, their conditions—are determinant in this formation of the body.

From infancy on, playing is not an activity shared equally between the sexes. While girls and boys each have their own games, boys play more than girls. For example, the time available to boys for play is greater than that for girls. On top of this, the space open to boys, and which they use freely, is considerably greater and subject to fewer borders or limitations. Such factors affect the use of the body, its ease and audacity, and the amplitude of its spontaneous movements. These differential characteristics are striking when adult men and women are observed side by side, and one sees how they use the space in which they move. Women occupy less space than men, less freely. They have a propensity to be self-effacing and to restrain the movements of their legs and arms. Men, on the other hand, tend to enlarge the space they occupy, with their knees far apart, their arms draped on the backs of surrounding chairs, and their rapid movements—all when they are being still! It is the same in walking, when men occupy the center of the available space, pushing women to the periphery, where, in any case, they go automatically (if not entirely voluntarily).

Of course, such distinctions are even more marked in men of the lower classes and in women of the higher classes. Upper-class men are a little closer to women in their reserve and their introversion, just as women of the lower classes are a little closer to men in their relative freedom of movement.

Variations exist also as a function of the material type of civilization; these traits are more visible and more strongly symbolized in less rich societies.

The differences in the use of the body which each sex practices do not come from the will or from conscious awareness, yet they are not without influence on consciousness. Restricting one's body or extending it and amplifying it are acts of rapport with the world, a felt vision of things.

On two occasions a few weeks apart, as I was walking through the streets of residential neighborhoods, once in Montreal at five in the afternoon and then in a Paris suburb in late morning, I noticed two very ordinary, familiar, and finally identical scenes. Each time the scene involved an adolescent male, playing alone with a skateboard, which has (after a long hiatus) come back into fashion among young males. The two boys' way of playing was at once nonchalant and assiduous, and their common goal was to go up some steps on their skateboard. They met with constant and repeated failure but attempted the task again and again without any sign of discouragement. Sometimes their effort achieved some success, causing me to think that the time devoted to this activity—obviously unlimited, obviously habitually renewed—would permit them finally to master this feat satisfactorily. In my own neighborhood in the center of Paris, I frequently see young boys playing with skateboards or at other games. Just recently I saw some young men between the ages of seventeen and nineteen on roller skates trying to jump over rather high barriers made of three to five vegetable crates by using an improvised trampoline constructed of a door set on props on the ground. They kept practicing—with more failures than successes, since this action required difficult techniques—but freedom of space and time was the *sine qua non* of their exercise, and corporal ease the result.

Only once in several years have I seen a female child participate in similar games (and this girl child only happened to be playing *with* the adolescents rather than belonging to their group). I have not seen for many years in busy urban streets any female children playing any sort of games. Games of jump rope or of balls thrown against a wall, common a few decades ago, have disappeared from city streets though they may still be played in villages, small towns, or in very quiet neighborhoods. Those girls' games—jumping rope in one spot with a vigorous but fixed movement which keeps the body in the same precise space, or throwing a ball the size of an orange against a wall and catching it in diverse ways, or playing hopscotch on a grid two meters square—were also limited in time by the activities normally required of young girls, such as running errands to the grocery store or taking care of younger children. The latter task, like the games, is implicitly considered

to be a mark of femininity; when I was about ten years old, one of my friends, who played with girls while watching his newborn sister, was thought to be doing something so incongruous that he was considered, in the diffuse manner characteristic of young children, a future "queer."

Limitation of space further restricts the games of female children because girls play in their home neighborhoods, often under the very windows of their families and friends, and are thus exposed to unspoken but perfectly exercised control. Their games are therefore characterized not only by limited space and time but also by limited mental freedom, a freedom which is nullified by the watchful eyes of others. Moreover, the reduced physical space determines the use of the body. Doubtless the games that girls play do help to develop manual dexterity and a sense of balance, but at the same time the possible extension of the bodies and their movements are restricted by their being required to return incessantly to a limited space.

The availability of time and space, tools for building corporal mastery, is specific to male children and adolescents and will continue to be their property in later life. Once I saw a young man (twenty-four or twenty-five years old), lost in his own thoughts, practicing a balancing act on the edge of a public bench next to the bus stop where I was waiting. Women do not indulge in activities like that because, whether through dissuasion or injunction, society systematically discourages or forbids such behavior for women while at the same time constantly inviting and assisting men to engage in it. From practicing soccer kicks on the casually encountered empty can to balancing on courtyard walls or chasing buses, trams, and trucks, activities involving mastery of the self and of the surrounding environment, as well as broad occupation of public space, are the privilege of boys. Girls are visibly absent. Their absence signifies that they are deprived of this apprenticeship and, no doubt, excluded from it.

IMMOBILIZATION OF WOMEN

One constantly hears essentialist interpretations of situations (as described above), implicitly or explicitly considering them as self-evident, the very expression of common sense. The abstention of girls is supposed to derive from an "instinctive" avoidance of such activities. But people do not take into consideration two important factors that make this type of exercise impossible for girls. First, there is the channeling of their *very bodies* into the reserved containment and the ideal immobility toward which they must strive. By itself this would not guarantee their lack of mastery of both space

and their own bodies. Second, and at the same time, there is the extreme limitation of their *movement* in space and of their *use of time*. The two factors, acting together, ensure restrictive results.

The way female individuals use time is much more strictly watched over than the way males do is. But, more important, the surveillance of females lasts throughout their lives, as husbands take over the task from parents. In addition, although it is scarcely ever noticed, children are efficient controllers of their mothers. They are always on the alert, sometimes involuntarily—we know the reactions of children to the comings and goings of their mother, their jealous attention to her presence—and sometimes involuntarily, since their care rests entirely with the mother whenever they are not under the care of various institutions (school, sporting groups, youth groups, and religious groups, homes of friends where another mother is at hand). The bond to children—this chain which cannot be broken by the mother without the risk of ostracism and disdain of community and society—is one of the best-enforced and least-questioned social imperatives. The effect of this double control (both voluntary and involuntary) on the woman's possible command of space and time is formidable.

Such command is at least correlated with, and possibly constructive of, autonomy and mastery of one's own body. This, in turn, conditions independence of mind and intellectual audacity. Indeed, it is with the aim of imposing mental limitations, of enforcing an apprenticeship of submission and an acceptance of "the way things are," that these social arrangements are instituted and maintained. Numerous documents through the ages and within many cultures testify to the limitations imposed on women's use of their bodies. Whether they concern children of the European upper classes of the eighteenth century, or contemporary societies founded on women's submission, or women today who have come to seek salaried work in a city in an industrial nation, these limitations are pervasive. They are obvious, for example, in the following citations:

All the childhood of these girls is used to repress in them the idea of action against nature, to moderate and constrain their activity and often even to stifle it.

Always seated under the eyes of her mother, in a tightly-closed room, [she] does not dare get up, walk, talk, or breathe, and doesn't have a minute of freedom to play, jump, run, shout, or indulge in the petulance natural to her age. (Cited in Perrot 1984)⁸

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All [women's] activities and actions must be programmed according to this principle. "Don't go far from the house and don't separate yourself from it." (Cited in Moallem 1989: 160)

From the very first days of the republic, it was the body of women that was the object of the first attempts to take power. . . . The wearing of the veil, obligatory for women in the name of "the struggle against prostitution" constitutes the most striking image of this domination. . . . let us mention here a slogan that was very significant in these circumstances: "Ya rusasri ya tusari," which means "either the veil or blows on the head." People openly resorted to violence. . . . reinstating the code of "modesty" which determines how one looks about, laughs, speaks, and moves in public. (Moallem 1989: 160, 162)?

The territorial displacement of the waitress is not only the sign that males dominate and, consequently, that these women don't have the right to control the space of the bar, but it further complicates the waitress's work. . . . While there exists a strong taboo which prevents women customers from invading the most important masculine territories, neither taboo nor the very restricted power of the waitress prevents men from invading her post. . . . She has learned to respond calmly to insults, to invitations, and to physical violations of her intimate space. She smiles, laughs, patiently pushes away hands, ignores questions, and gets herself out of reach without making a big deal out of it. (Spradley and Mann 1975)¹⁰

Under the conditions described above, the physical relationship between men and women is factually a relation of unsymmetrical confrontation. They act out what they have so methodically learned and constantly practiced since childhood. In common spaces, whether public (especially the street) or private, women ceaselessly restrict their use of space, men maximize it. Look at the arms and legs of the latter, which extend widely on seats, chair backs, and their open—even brusque—gestures while moving about. By contrast, look at the joined legs, the parallel feet, the elbows held close to the body, the measured movements of women, even when they are in a hurry. The arrangement should function very well, and most often does: the minimal space of the one corresponds to the maximum space of the other. This is what some call "complementarity" or consider a "harmonious" use of resources. More simply, we see here the concrete effect of a fabrication of the body which has taught men the mastery of space and the

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extension of the body toward the exterior and women the retreat into their own corporal space, avoidance of physical confrontation, and attentiveness to others. }

MANIFESTATIONS OF IMPATIENCE AND OCCUPATION OF SPACE

If you are in a cafe, a bar, or any public space with tables, counters, or bare flat surfaces, you will often hear drumming on these surfaces. Someone is marking rhythms with the tips of the fingers, generally rapid rhythms that are either regular or syncopated, musical or simply rhythmic. If you look to see who is tapping fingers, usually shaking the whole countertop, table, or chair where others are sitting, you will notice that always, or nearly always, it is a man (a young man or adolescent) who is drumming in this dreamy or semi-attentive way, absorbed in his own motor movements without any thought for the effects of his gestures on the physical environment.

Similarly, in the street, at cafe counters or bus stops, the same young men (but not young women, except in unusual and extremely rare circumstances) move their lower leg in cadence with a very rapid, regular motion that indicates frank impatience. There is an impatience that is purely physical; it does not seem to affect them mentally.

These gestures are part of the silent sociability of men, communicating to those around them their presence and at the same time their disinterest in the current situation. Sometimes these finger tapings accompany a conversation with a woman, which seems a dark omen for the relationship that is unfolding under such auspices. Men manifest the weight of their person in a sort of staging of their own importance that women do not do, at least not in this muscular, immediately corporal form.

The street, cafes, and public spaces are noisy because of the activities that take place there. But they are also noisy because they are the spaces of the voluntary display of sound made by male individuals. The use of professional sirens, for instance, on police, emergency, or government cars, is not always absolutely necessary. But the visible pleasure their users take in noise that manifests not only their priority rights to space but also their presence is part of daily urban life. Interchanges in loud voices, whistles with diverse meanings (friendly whistles, wolf whistles, or simple signals) fill the auditory space of open-air places. In enclosed places—according to modulations imposed by class habits—masculine conversations most often, with their volume, make neighboring conversations impossible, whether the offenders are groups of older men at business meals, friends getting together, or adoles-

cents gathered around pinball or other (themselves noisy) games they play in public places.¹¹

Control of voice volume is imposed strongly, and early, on girls. Thus public speaking is difficult for the majority of women, whose voices, habituated since childhood to both a weak volume in public and a precipitous delivery, do not carry and are often not heard. Similarly, in public spaces outdoors, women's voices become loud and impose themselves only in a situation involving danger or an emergency. In contrast to men's voices, women's are neither easily nor constantly present.

BODILY USE OF TOOLS

Contrary to female human beings, whose construction of physical strength is oriented toward the support of other human beings and to the maintenance of their existence, male human beings construct their strength in and on a world of objects. By the use of tools and instruments exterior to the body, they then aim at the transformation of the material world.¹²

A playful use of the body by men, which has such an important impact on their formation and their lives, distinguishes their activities from those of women. In a large number of cases, men use a material prolongation of their body, an added object into which the movement of the bodily machine projects itself and through which motor movements and muscles realize their potential. Physical exercise literally "joins hands" with a sort of material supplement that increases the possibilities of the body. From the skateboard to the can pushed with the end of a foot, from the powerfully and ably thrown ball to the pocketknife, the scope of these masculine prostheses is vast.

WEAPONS

With the pocketknife we enter into a specific domain of bodily extension, one that has the notable characteristic of being nearly totally exclusive to men and of being additionally practically forbidden to women (see Taber 1979). For, although balls and skateboards are not used much by women, they are not explicitly and formally prevented from using those playthings. The case of weapons is more complex in that their interdiction to women, although unspoken, is nonetheless rigorously applied through (1) various sanctions imposed on women who do touch and manipulate weapons and (2) a network of precautions which reserve the possession, manipulation, and use of weapons to male agents in our societies.

In the rural societies of the Mediterranean and southern Europe, hunting is a normal activity, integrated into daily life. And in urban societies, while

not a daily activity, it remains a reality, with rifles always at hand. A large fraction of the male population is familiar with the reality of hunting, even if they do not hunt themselves. In addition, hunting is often replaced by arms practice in shooting galleries or on sports fields, and skeet shooting is a pastime practiced by both rural and urban men. In these countries, weapons are a concrete fact of life.¹³

Weapons are a particularly effective corporal extension—they transform the world at a distance. (We are not alluding here to supposedly "natural" aggressiveness.) Weapons create a rapport between the body of the one using them and the space that they encompass. They mediate between motor skills and the material environment.

More important than the possession of weapons is the question of their ability to modify the world from a distance, of the extension of corporal action far beyond the boundaries of the body. Men often experience their bodies at a distance, projecting or extending them with the aid of diverse objects or weapons, while from the time of childhood games, women experience the limitation of their own corporal space.

VEHICLES

The use of the automobile by both sexes confirms sexual differentiation in the appropriation of space. Women nearly always use the automobile for utilitarian purposes and limit their trips to short or medium distances not far from home, with chauffeuring children or shopping accounting for most of their driving. Men also use cars in a utilitarian manner, most often professionally, but though they do drive short or medium distances, they also travel long distances, which, in practice, women do not. For long trips and big distances between cities, the "open road" is occupied by male drivers by an overwhelming majority. In contrast, the number of women drivers on roads at the edges of towns and the entrances to suburbs approaches that of men. In another vein, the use of cars for sports comprises a masculine field, with the exception of a particular type of competition—the rally or long road race—which is parsimoniously practiced by women. Finally, certain men (usually young and amateur in status) employ cars playfully, an infrequent if not exceptional use among women.

The Body for Others: Physical Proximity

Both sexes undergo the apprenticeship of physical proximity. Both sexes learn it equally in body-to-body contact. But women and men do not have

the same experience with close bodily contact. The variation in experience is without doubt one of the key points in the formation of the sexed body, in making the body a woman's body or a man's body and in conditioning the person's immediate reaction to the surrounding world and to other human beings. It is here that social attitude and ways of relating to others are constructed.

LEARNING COOPERATION BETWEEN PEERS: MEN

As children, boys learn to fight. Some accept it badly, others do it without fear, most throw themselves into it with delight. But no matter what their attitude, nearly all boys must undergo it. From the scuffles of little boys to the rugby brawl, from adolescent confrontations to contact sports, from battles to boxing, men learn to confront other bodies up close. They learn not to fear the contact, in fact to experience it as spontaneous and natural.

In the public sphere the bodies of men are close to the bodies of other men, from a simple crowding together, which is relaxed and more or less intimate depending on social class and culture, to the physical contact of grappling in certain activities (wrestling, rugby, soccer, boxing).¹⁴ Places of relaxation (brothels, saunas, sports clubs) contribute to this proximity.

But, more significantly, the masculine body is constructed to be spontaneously in solidarity with the bodies of other men. The playful cooperation of the street as practiced by children and adolescents continues in a more utilitarian form into adulthood. The street and all public places are the exercise yard of men's spontaneous and immediate cooperation. Without previous arrangements or verbal exchanges, men who do not know each other together lift a car to move it, transfer heavy material from one place to another, coordinate their movements to deal with an unexpected event in which they spontaneously intervene. In short, men put into action a common, and coordinated, response to unforeseen events in the thousand difficulties of daily public life.

Thus, close bodily contact among men is a confrontation with peers. However antagonistic they may be in childhood, adolescence, or in the sports of adulthood, those combats (because we are indeed talking about combats) introduce solidarity and cooperation. Material coordination between individuals is thus learned. Men have an experiential knowledge of parity, which they put to work constantly in public places. For, in effect, the bodily contact of men is an affair of public space, a space which is theirs and from which they exclude women.

LEARNING DISSYMMETRY: WOMEN

In this public space (which is not women's) the fabrication of women's bodies rests on avoidance, not on confrontation. Girl children have learned to avoid the combat and the physical struggles that adults vigilantly forbade to them from infancy. As adults, women are conditioned to avoid contact or even simple proximity. There is no rugby for women, but also there is no semi-attentive strolling in a free space, among potential peers. Rather, there is only a watchful walk amid potential predators. The female body is constructed to be cut off from other peer bodies, isolated and enclosed in a restrictive space. The upbringing of women aims at depriving them of their physical potential, or at least severely limiting it.

It is in private space that the body-for-others of women is constructed. It is there that their experience of close bodily contact differs from that of men. Physical proximity will become just as "spontaneous" and "natural" for them. But it will be one of aid and support, not of antagonism. Their very games are an apprenticeship in care given and in attention devoted to others. Holding newborns in their arms, comforting them and feeding them, are tasks demanded very early of women, either in fact or simply in games. They will have to support other human beings, ill or weakened or old. They will have to wash them, feed them, surround them with material care.

All these things are part of a long process. Men may stop playful or sportive combat more or less early in their adulthood, but women never stop, even in old age, taking care of and supporting the bodies of others: men, women, and children. Furthermore, the proximity that they learn must never, never be antagonistic. Even if they are reticent, even if they refuse these contacts, they cannot transform them into combat. But they cannot transform them into cooperation either, because their bodily contact is not egalitarian.

For female humans, a "close" body has been fabricated: close to children, to ill people, to invalids, to old people, to the sexuality of men.¹⁵ The frequency of incest is perhaps best explained by this required availability of women, required but even more significantly learned by the unquestioned, internalized submission to persons in the family and the entourage. The upbringing of women additionally fabricates a body resistant to nauseating burdens, to illness, to cleaning other human beings regardless of their condition, to excrement (and not just children's), to death. The preparation of food, which is not as "clean" an activity as those who do not do it may think, is also part of the burden.¹⁶

In this so-called private sphere (in contrast to the public sphere), men have learned to avoid being available. They learn this, ironically, at the side of women who practice extreme bodily proximity. As mentioned above, children have practically total access to the body of their mother, and it is equally accessible to the husband or male companion. In the closed space of the private sphere the man's body is not accessible except when he demands or invites access.

The close bodily contact of women is based on inequities. They are confronted with physical weakness, with emotional blackmail, with psychological pressure. Or, by contrast, they are subjected to force or to constraint when faced with humans physically or socially stronger than they. Women do not have free access to others, but they themselves are freely accessible to any and all others. Their physical confrontations are not contacts with peers (or between peers). Women are physically distanced from their potential equals by the lack of a common public space. They are deprived of the experiential knowledge of parity, of belonging to a peer group.

It is indeed a question of *peers*, and not of solidarity. The exercise of solidarity among women, real and constant, is a personal and particularized experience. Her friends, sisters, neighbors, in short, the people close to her, give her a hand, and she does the same. Moreover, the help she gives will be with personalized tasks, concerning human beings not only known but familiar. If women have solidarity—and they do, to a very high degree—they are nonetheless peers with no one. They will not meet in a public space in a regular and indeterminate manner, strangers who might be partners and accomplices in unforeseeable events, neither dependent nor dominant. For women are physically constructed in a web of dependence, at once violently implicated and radically cut off.

Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to make an observation that at first seems paradoxical. The enterprise of fabricating for women a body at once closed in on itself and freely accessible (which is actually not contradictory but complementary), of distancing it from contact with peers and breaking its audacity (or at least not constructing any) has mental consequences, as I have underlined at several points in this text. But it is an enterprise which is not finished all at once and which, in any case, takes a long time to achieve fully. For example, it is not until the end of adolescence that the sports perfor-

mance of girls takes a downturn. To say this in another way, the integration of the gender imperatives of "woman" and of her corporal ideal is not realized in childhood or adolescence.

Not long ago, an eleven-year-old girl who had been held captive succeeded in escaping from the sixth floor of a building by descending the exterior facade from balcony to balcony, with an audacity, a coolheadedness, and a courage that would have won for any adult human of the male sex and a courage that would have won for any adult human of the male sex the most lively expressions of admiration. Curiously, it did not seem to make a big impression on public opinion. Angelique, to top it all off, accomplished this exploit after a day and a night during which she had faced fear and sexual abuse, was deprived of her clothes, and had even been tied up.¹⁷

The indomitable will and moral courage of this child, which are particular to her as an individual because they are astounding and rare, lead me to speculate that achieving a society in which women can choose when to be reserved and when to be physically accessible is a long-term project. Societies are based on preventing potentialities and on channeling the energy of an individual female into a specific body, but they are also based on the repression of this energy and, as a final resort, on the censoring of the self. This situation is what makes the stability of this constructed body uncertain and explains the long duration, the never-finished nature, of its construction.

NOTES

1. This citation also appears in Writing 1989: 10.
2. Mathieu's study (1985), titled in English "When Yielding Is Not Consenting: The Material and Psychological Determinants of the Dominated Consciousness of Women and Some Ethnological Interpretations Made of Them," deals with the correlations between these determinants.
3. For an analysis of the correlation between material social relations and ideology in relationships of domination (and especially in relations of the sexes), see Guillaumin (1978).
4. As for interventions in sexual anatomy itself from the perspective of unequal social relations, see Fainzang (1985).
5. Recently in an interview, a top-ranking French politician expressed his regret for the passing of this society where women were as they should be.
6. The women consume the surplus milk production whenever milk is in excess, that is, at the time of reproduction. The people live off herds of mammals, which reproduce at set times of the year. The production of milk is directly dependent upon reproduction. Thus, milk is overproduced at regular intervals from season to season. Therefore the women are obese for part of the year and get thinner at other times of

the year, get fat again, lose weight again, et cetera, in a rhythm tied to the herd's production of milk. See, for example, Elam (1973). I thank Paola Tabet for calling my attention to this fact.

7. Zeig describes and analyzes the imposition of gestural differentiation and shows the possible reconstruction (and reconquering) of it.

8. These quotations are the remarks of pedagogues of the eighteenth century.

9. The first of these citations was excerpted by Moallem from "Les points de vue d'ayatollah Besheti sur les femmes," *Zan-e-rouze* 137 (in Iranian).

10. These quotations are translated by Crowder from the French, and not taken from the original English. They appear on page 203 of the French edition.

11. Nicole-Claude Mathieu called to my attention the occupation of sound space by men, the various actualizations of this fact, and the importance of this free disposition of public spaces in the mastery of one's self and of the surrounding world. The essence of my remarks here in fact is composed of her ideas on this subject.

12. On the different usage, according to sex, of tools and weapons, and on the technological gap between implements used by women and by men, see the pioneering work of Paola Tabet (1979).

13. This section was written before the attack in Montreal (December 1989) in which fourteen women were slaughtered by a man armed with a .22 caliber semi-automatic rifle. The seriousness and political importance of these murders (explicitly proclaimed as antifeminist) have caused me neither to change nor add to these remarks, which aim to show the importance of the use of weapons in the bodily differentiation of sex.

14. Men's resistance to women's entering the world of sports, especially popular and collective sports, is more than intense. Soccer and cycling are difficult sports, and women are openly or surreptitiously prevented from practicing them (women have only recently conquered competitive cycling). Rugby remains the domain of sacred virility, and its practitioners state openly that they intend it to remain so. Competitive boxing is forbidden to women, and in French boxing, where there are two distinct types—"assault" and "combat"—the latter is forbidden to women and is also the type in which one is permitted to kick another. These observations concerning boxing were given me by Brigitte Lhomond. For more on the implications of sport and competition concerning women, see Lenskyj (1986).

15. The reader has surely noted that this text does not deal with sexuality. It is, however, the first thing to come to mind when speaking of the sexed body. Perhaps it comes too easily to mind, and is the only thing one thinks of, occupying all one's attention. Sexuality is without doubt dependent upon and subordinate to the fabrication of the body as "woman's body" or "man's body," but the sexed body is something other than a tool for pleasure and reproduction, much more than the exercise of sexuality. This issue, certainly, is of prime importance especially because socially imposed forms of sexuality construct the body in their turn, and because sexuality occupies a central place in social relations. However, the perspective adopted here is that of social work upon the human body, of its daliness, of the

discrete, quasi-invisible nature of societies' interventions. The question of sexuality—a powerful construct strongly invested with meaning, at once the extreme of constraint and the extreme of liberty—could be the object of another article.

16. In France food preparation is comparable to that which takes place in the United States (with variations between cities and farming regions). But globally, food preparation generally involves activities such as the following: eviscerating fish, fowl, small mammals; butchering meat; sorting rotted or spotted fruits and vegetables; cleaning earth or mud from vegetables and roots; plucking fowl and game birds; skinning mammals; scaling fish; removing parasites and worms from both vegetable and meat foods; peeling; pressing; burning the pinfeathers from fowl; cleaning the viscera of hogs, cattle, and large mammals to make them fit to eat; cooking blood for sausages; skimming bouillons, fermenting drinks; macerating vegetables; allowing meat to decompose slightly preparatory to eating, and so on. These activities remain the daily work of the vast majority of women in the world, who, in most—perhaps all—known societies, assume responsibility for the overwhelming proportion of food preparation. Male food professionals (and male practitioners in those religions or sects that consider women unfit to touch food) are statistically extremely rare.

17. This occurred in August 1989, at La Rochelle, France, as reported in *Libération*, August 3, 1989.

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4

LESBIANS AND THE (RE/DE)CONSTRUCTION OF THE FEMALE BODY Diane Griffin Crowder

I cannot pretend to explore the mysteries of desire, of how one comes to define one's emotional and sexual attractions. Whether an individual desires members of her own or the other sex, she is subject to social pressures which define acceptable uses of her body. Many cultures impose upon the female body practices intended to orient behavior (if not desire) toward heterosexuality. When a woman becomes aware of her lesbianism, she must choose whether to conform to or revolt against such practices. The forms of imposed heterosexuality and of lesbian revolt against it are the subject of this study.

Formal studies of what lesbians do with our bodies,¹ whether and when we use our bodies to make deliberate statements, how we conceive of our bodies as subjects and objects, are extremely rare.² Broaching the topic risks overgeneralization and an analysis limited by culture, race, class, and historical moment (see Spelman 1988). There is the danger of blurring the distinction between the body as a material condition and the social meaning attached to the body. If I take these risks, it is to begin a discussion of how sexualities intersect with the body in social discourse.