

The Haunted Flesh: Corporeal Feminism and the Politics of (Dis)Embodiment

We have not finished chanting the litany of the ignorances of the unconscious; it knows nothing of castration or Oedipus, just as it knows nothing of parents, gods, the law, lack. The Women's Liberation movements are correct in saying: We are not castrated, so you get fucked.
—Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 1984, 61.

Consider the central problem involved in examining eating disorders from an ethical or political perspective: On the one hand, as feminists, we want to recognize that the personal is political and that eating disorders cannot be explained at the level of individual pathology. An adequate account needs to address the social or ideological domain of representation that in some way helps produce such disorders. This recognition has led to the critique of a representational domain variously described as phallogocentric, phallogocentric, or patriarchal. On the other hand, there is a reluctance to locate women as passive victims in some point of innocence outside representation. Thus, the task for feminists has been conceived of as constructing autonomous women's representations, and this task has appealed to an articulation of the female body. The body is, then, considered as that which has been belied, distorted, and imagined by a masculine representational logic. At the same time, the body has been targeted as the redemptive opening for a specifically feminine site of representation. In terms of eating disorders, this ambivalence surrounding representation might be cashed out as follows: the anorexic is the victim of representation, trapped in embodiment through stereotypical and alienating images — but at the same time only representation can cure this malaise; only a realistic, nonrepressive and less regulative form of representation will allow women to see themselves as autonomous subjects. We argue that this tension surrounding representation actually sustains the Cartesian mind/body dualism that it ostensibly criticizes. In what follows, we draw on the work of Gilles Deleuze, a philosopher who has challenged the notion that reason or thought is the negation, repression, or ordering of some

prerepresentational matter or presence.¹ Deleuze's work offers feminism the possibility of a positive, active, and affirmative ethics. For Deleuze, ethics is not the imposition of norms, nor the negation of law; ethics is the way in which bodies become, intersect, and affirm their existence. It is perhaps this more enabling or positive approach to thought that has made Deleuze so appealing for recent feminist theory.

In the case of eating disorders, Deleuze provides a way of thinking beyond this representational antinomy. If the body is not a prediscursive matter that is then organized by representation, one might see the body as the event of expression. This would mean that ethics could not appeal to a "normal" body that might be authentically represented. Rather, the body would be understood in terms of what Deleuze calls its becomings, connections, events, and activities. In the case of an anorexic body, one would need to ask about a whole series of events and connections that surround that body—including the specific diagnostic and moral discourses and practices of eating disorders. Thus, Deleuze provides a way of thinking beyond the highly Cartesian problem of the relation between a body and some imposed order of representation; and Deleuze also provides feminist ethics with a position that need not be located at some limit point beyond patriarchal or phallogocentric thought.

A new emphasis on positivity in feminist theory has been evidenced most clearly in the "turn" to Deleuze and Felix Guattari's antipsychoanalytic account of bodily becoming. This article pursues the possibility of an active feminist ethics by following through the problems encountered by the now overwhelming corpus of feminist body theory, or corporeal feminism. The issue of the body, inspired by Luce Irigaray's (1985) critique of Western metaphysics, has been explored by feminists such as Elizabeth Grosz, Moira Gatens, Judith Butler, and Rosi Braidotti to argue for the ways in which bodies are formed as imaginary bodies.² Rather than a simple Cartesian mind/body split, these feminists contend that the body is a crucial site of gender constitution. Reacting against a history that had devalued the body *as* feminine, these feminists argue that sexual difference has been produced through the negation of the body. They therefore attempt to rethink the body as other than the negation of thought. Traditionally, the body had represented that which was excluded, disavowed, or

¹ In the conclusion to this article we look both at Deleuze's own work (*Difference and Repetition* [1994], *Negotiations* [1995]) as well as the coauthored works with Felix Guattari (*Anti-Oedipus* [1984], *What Is Philosophy?* [1994]). In so doing, we set aside the difficult question of the distinction between Deleuze and Deleuze and Guattari.

² Grosz 1987, 1990, 1993, 1994a, 1994b, 1995; Gatens 1988, 1996; Braidotti 1989a, 1989b, 1991, 1994; Butler 1993, 1995.

devalued by a masculine logic. Only an articulation of the body, they argue, would provide feminism with an autonomous liberation from a primarily repressive and negative masculine reason. Irigaray's critique of philosophy's phallic economy was crucial in offering feminist thought the project of sexual difference: here, the feminine might articulate itself and not be subjected to a masculine representational economy. Subsequent attempts to *rethink* the body have done so in the face of a reason that is diagnosed as repressive of both the body and the feminine. Thus Grosz (1994b) argues that Western thought in general exhibits a profound somatophobia, while the readings of Spinoza by Gatens (1988) and Genevieve Lloyd (1989) attempt to react against a Cartesian tradition by thinking mind as an "idea of the body." But these highly sophisticated interventions directed against Western philosophy bear a striking similarity to the antirepresentationalism in some feminist readings of popular culture in which the domain of representation—from pornography, fashion, and beauty to the mass media in general—is deemed to be primarily repressive and negating.

The idea that representation intervenes to objectify, alienate, and dehumanize the body has been most clearly articulated in accounts of eating disorders. Here, as in the accounts of Western phallocentrism, women's bodies are positioned as prerepresentational, silent, negated, and violently objectified by an active male reason. It is this assumption of an all-pervasive, repressive, and dichotomous phallic logic that precludes feminist ethics from becoming a form of active critique. In opposition to the assumption of this binary—an assumption that would leave feminism with the task of *retrieving* the prerepresentational female body—in this article we argue for a positive feminist ethics. This ethics does not appeal to a repressed, silent, innocent, or negated feminine but approaches sexual difference as a site of practices, comportments, and contested articulations. Here, feminism is not the other of thought, and this is so precisely because thought does not have an overarching identity, logic, or character (and therefore no privileged outside in general).

Our argument turns around four main points: the current appeal to the body in opposition to a phallic logic is still crippling Cartesian; to locate the feminine (body) as some limit point beyond representation precludes an examination of the specific, practical, and historical techniques that regulate bodies; there is no mind/body relation in general that need characterize Western thought, but there is a series of practices and regimes in which bodies become; and, finally, an ethics that examines thought, discourse, and reason as themselves bodily events allows an understanding of eating disorders in terms of bodily activity rather than in terms of a repressed or negated "normal" body.

Is thought phallogentric? Overcoming Cartesian dualism

In this section, we explore the assumptions that have provided the conceptual base of the postpsychoanalytic discourse of what we discuss here as “corporeal feminism” — a discourse offering a radical anti-Cartesian revaluation of the material conditions that undermine the articulation of the cogito, representation, and the sexed body. We base our analysis of the problem of “writing the body” on the vast amount of feminist literature that has followed from Irigaray’s major work *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985). The theorists discussed here, including Butler, Grosz, Braidotti, and Gatens, have all responded to Irigaray differently. Furthermore, their ways of thinking through the implications of Irigaray’s theory of sexually different bodies have also varied. While recognizing the significant strategic achievements gained through the project of embodied sexual difference, we aim to raise the possibility of another problem. As long as corporeality, materiality, and authentic sexual difference are understood as radically anterior to thought, or negated by representation, feminist critique will only be a reaction against dualism. By questioning the idea that representation is a “break” with the fullness of reality, or that the body is, to use Butler’s terminology, a “constitutive outside” (1993), we suggest that feminism rethink its antirepresentationalism. The body is not, we argue, a necessary outside produced by the limiting violence of representation. We therefore contest one of the widely held claims of current feminist theory: the idea that identification, representation, or body image is a negation, exclusion, or repression of a prior and full real and that the maternal feminine is the figure of this excluded “outside” (Braidotti 1991, 268; Butler 1993, 39; Brennan 1996, 98). But we also contest the concomitant claim in “popular” feminism that images, stereotypes, and representations of women’s bodies have imposed inauthentic forms of gender identity and thus robbed women of their autonomy (Koval 1986; Wolf 1990).

One of the most contentious and widespread examples of the problem of representation has been the debate over eating disorders and body image. Our intervention in this debate, rather than offering another explanation of the relation between representation and the pathological body, seeks to think the body beyond the problem of representation. That is, the body is not a prior fullness, anteriority, or plenitude that is subsequently identified and organized through restricting representations. Representations are not negations imposed on otherwise fluid bodies. Body images are not stereotypes that produce human beings as complicit subjects. On the contrary, images, representations, and significations (as well as bodies) are aspects of ongoing practices of negotiation, reformation, and encounter. Neither the body nor the feminine can be located as the innocent other

of (patriarchal) representation. From this argument it follows that there cannot be a single theory of the body's relation to signification, nor a subsequent schema for explaining specific body compartments (such as eating disorders), for the idea of a theory of the body (or the pathological body) presupposes a body in general. The work of Deleuze and Guattari, we argue, offers the possibility of a nonreactive feminist ethics. Such an ethics would not be defined in opposition to the masculinism of representation but would create another concept of what it means to think (and in so doing might look to the body). A positive ethics of the body, we argue, would see the body as more than the limit, negation, or other of representation.

How to redefine the parameters of what counts as thought is the expressed goal of many of the postpsychoanalytic theorists of corporeality who also understand their task as the positive reinscription of a gynocentric body image — an image that would remain uncontaminated by the repressive impulses of a phallogocentric representational economy. Overcoming the phallic symbolic order is described in a number of ways. Grosz calls for “new forms of representational practice outside of the patriarchal frameworks which have thus far ensured the impossibility of women's autonomous self-representations” (1994b, 188). For some feminists the appeal is made to the signifier of “woman” in order to think its limit (Cornell 1991). Robyn Ferrell and Vicki Kirby, in different ways, also suggest that the task for feminism is thinking the difference between the signifier “woman” and the lived experience of women (Ferrell 1991, 181; Kirby 1991, 17). According to Butler, who argues against identifying this outside as exclusively feminine, “The task is to refigure this necessary ‘outside’ as a future horizon, one in which the violence of exclusion is perpetually in the process of being overcome” (1993, 53). Following Irigaray, these forms of corporeal feminism argue that feminists must avow the unacknowledged debt to matter that the specular phallogocentric representational system has systematically disavowed (Braidotti 1991). In these views, matter is that which exceeds and yet nourishes the very possibility of conceptualization (Irigaray 1985, 21).

Postmodern culture, it is argued, is undergoing an ambivalent process of grief in which the deaths of Man, Reason, History, and the Subject are variously celebrated, mourned, or simply denied as premature and irresponsible lies. According to Braidotti, psychoanalysis is not only the discourse of this crisis; it also provides a way of recreating new forms of subjectivity and knowledge (1991, 17, 20). Despite the redemptive tone of Braidotti's diagnosis of Cartesianism's decline, in crowning psychoanalysis as the saving grace she runs the risk, we argue, of pathologizing thought

in general. Following Jacques Lacan, Braidotti argues that the Cartesian cogito is paranoid and narcissistic and, further, that representationalism is driven by pathological impulses (24–25). The repression of the cogito's debt to a maternal body is seen as the hallmark of a phallogocentric economy of the Same in which the sexual specificities of the female body are translated as absence. For Braidotti, to think is to disavow a debt to the creative difference of a maternal body (31).³ Or, as Rosalyn Diprose puts it, “sexed bodies are constituted within an economy of representation of sexual difference which limits possibilities for women” (1994, xi).

Butler has also argued that the subject is an effect of “the primary repression of its dependency on the maternal” (1995, 42). Indeed, postpsychoanalytic corporeal feminist theory in general has argued that the Cartesian cogito constitutes a phallogocentric, disembodied denial of the fecund and creative differences of female corporeality (Grosz 1994b, 7). Modern rationality is diagnosed as a pathological and phallogocentric rejection of the materiality of embodied existence (Brennan 1993, 11). It is this notion of, in Butler's terms, “primary repression” that this article in part sets out to challenge.

Set against this focus on thought as an effect of repression, lack, or negation is the idea of the positive difference of specific bodies. That is, bodies are not the posited effects of representation, not an “outside” to discourse that is assumed only after the event of discourse itself. The idea of positive difference suggests that identity is not an effect of the imposition of a differentiating structure or language, but that existence itself is a field of singularities: differing relations and effects. Gatens, in *Imaginary Bodies* (1996), emphasizes the importance of Deleuze's reading of Spinoza in this regard. Thought would no longer be seen as contingently contained within a body but would be the realization of a specific body and its various capacities. Gatens sees the Deleuzian/Spinozist emphasis on thought as the *realization of the body* as enabling the reformulation of society's predominantly masculine body image. For Gatens, however, and for many of the feminist theorists of eating disorders considered below, the self is constituted through body image: an image that is irreducibly gendered. Gatens's focus on body image sets itself against the idea that gender is merely an effect of cultural construction or representation (1988, 41). However, while stressing the value of positive difference, she still sees the sexual subject as an

³ Braidotti's work extends and radicalizes Lacan's theory of the unrepresentable, or non-menal, character of the maternal body. Lacan explicitly refers to the mother as the thing in itself (Lacan 1992, 106). And, for Lacan, “Das Ding is that which I will call the beyond-of-the-signified” (54).

effect of doubling whereby the subject occurs as a relation to its image. Positive difference, in contrast, suggests that the body itself might have effects and modes of being *not reducible to its status as image*.

As part of a general critique of rationality or Western thought, recent feminist accounts of the history of philosophy have challenged traditional feminism's sex/gender distinction by arguing that the idea of the cultural "construction" of gender fails to think the body as anything other than an effect of noncorporeal factors. And, it is argued, to see the body as constructed by cultural norms of gender is to adopt an implicitly masculinist and Cartesian idea of a general human subjectivity for which embodiment is a secondary accompaniment (Gatens 1988, 23; Lloyd 1989, 20). Reacting even more passionately against the supposed idealism or "mentalism" of gender as a cultural norm, there have been arguments that sexual difference is ontological and constitutive of the subject (Braidotti 1989b, 102) and that the body should be thought in its sexual specificity (Grosz 1994b, 19). Not only, then, would the body be something more than an effect of discursive construction, but the determining character and specificity of corporeality would be primarily sexual. Sexuality would not be one issue among others, precisely because sexual difference is fundamental to the production of subjectivity in general. The subject, as in the case of thought in general, would be a negation of material specificity. Corporeal difference would be the irreducible difference against which the generality of representation would occur. It is not surprising, then, that so much feminist criticism has concerned itself with the point at which the body is "subjected to" a certain image of thought. Representation, as the subjection of the body to a certain body image, becomes the domain of contestation: feminist theory concerns itself with issues such as eating disorders precisely because these issues demonstrate the typical repression or negation of the body according to a limited, reified, or dominant body image. Thinking sexual difference, it is argued, would be a question of thinking the body beyond its (typically) gendered representation. The body is posited as representation's necessarily transgressive "other." Overcoming the image of gender would be achieved by turning to the specificity of the sexed body. According to Diprose, "Insofar as *différance* evokes a material remainder to the economy of representation which confines woman to the position of man's deficient other, then it indicates that the bodies of women are open to other possibilities" (1994, 79).

Against such strongly corporealist arguments (Irigaray, Braidotti, Diprose) there also have been attempts to overcome dualism from a more "discursive" perspective. Butler demands a solicitation of the discursive production of the body as a sexed exteriority: "If the body signified as prior

to signification is an effect of signification, then the mimetic or representational status of language, which claims that signs follow bodies as their necessary mirrors, is not mimetic at all. On the contrary, it is productive, constitutive, one might even argue *performative*, inasmuch as this signifying act delimits and contours the body that it then claims to find prior to any and all signification” (1993, 30).

If the opposition between sex and gender retains an implicit mind/body dualism then this is because it has sustained a naively empiricist or biological notion of sex. Refining the sex/gender distinction, these discursive accounts argue that the body of nature or biology is also thoroughly located within discourse and that the appeal to a prediscursive “sex” is enabled only by discourse. Accordingly, the attempt is made to “free” gender from sex—to see gender not as a cultural overlay of sex but as that which produces “sex” as a discursive given (Butler 1993, 22). Gender is not, then, the social construction of “sex”; “sex” is yet one more discursive effect. Taking their lead from Michel Foucault’s notion of power and discourse as productive, these accounts reject any prediscursive “exteriority” or “given” that is subsequently represented. In Teresa de Lauretis’s words, “Gender is not something to be represented but is always already a representation” (1987, 24).

At the same time, such “discursive” accounts have also taken on board the feminist critique of the disembodied subject. Like the “strong” Irigarayan corporeal arguments, these accounts draw heavily on Lacan. Here, though, the “originary” maternal body is seen as an *ex post facto* effect of signification. The maternal body as the primary ground that is lost in the acquisition of language is always already a fantasized object. Its prelinguistic status is itself an effect of the signifier. The most sophisticated attempt to rethink the body as material while at the same time not accepting either sexual difference or the body as a brute “given” is articulated by Butler in *Bodies That Matter* (1993). She argues that although discourse cannot be said to exhaust materiality, materiality cannot be located as a simple exterior or pure outside to discourse. While Butler asserts the presence of a certain “exteriority,” this materiality or exteriority is only an effect of discourse (53). And although discourse, or the signifier, is material, the very materiality of the signifier is also produced only through signification. Extending this argument to the question of the body, Butler argues that corporeality may not be discursive—its very bodiliness or meaning is presented as prediscursive—but this status as prediscursive is an effect of discourse (30). Butler’s account exemplifies the problem of the body in feminist theory. Any positing of the body as a brute given would lead back to biological determinism. But if the body were entirely a representational

effect it is not clear how one could avoid seeing the subject as an ideal projection or sign. It is precisely this strict division between representation and materiality that, we argue, not only sustains a Cartesian dualism in feminist theory but also has brought debates over specific issues (such as eating disorders) to an impasse. In the concretization of this problem (in feminist debates over body image) there is both an appeal to some body that would be more than a representational type and a sense that the body is inescapably representational. However, if the body is considered not as an "outside" to representation, nor as the site or sign of an excluded feminine, then the practical problems of feminist ethics will not be determined in advance under the rubric of the status of representation. Eating disorders, for example, might not possess a single relation to representation, nor could they be exhaustively accounted for through some general theory of signification and its relation to the signified. Representation is one factor among others in ethical problems of the body; it neither determines nor saturates the field. The body is a negotiation with images, but it is also a negotiation with pleasures, pains, other bodies, space, visibility, and medical practice; no single event in this field can act as a general ground for determining the status of the body.

The value of Butler's account lies in its refusal to subsume the body entirely beneath discourse, signification, or meaning, at the same time as this recognized corporeal "exteriority" is acknowledged as being a discursive effect. Butler's intense discursive critique, in its denial of any prediscursive matter, is clearly and explicitly indebted to Foucault. But by arguing that matter, while not purely prediscursive, is still other than discursive, Butler sustains an opposition between discourse and some "outside" (1993, 35). This is precisely the question she directs to Foucault: "Does Foucault's effort to work the notions of discourse and materiality through one another fail to account for not only what is *excluded* from the economies of discursive intelligibility that he describes, but what *has to be excluded* for those economies to function as self-sustaining systems?" (35). For Butler, discourse cannot include the outside; exteriority may be known or thematized through discourse but is not itself discursive. It is this boundary between signification and the constitutive outside that has produced the feminine *as* a sexed and prerepresentational materiality: "the feminine exceeds its figuration . . . [and] this unthematizability constitutes the feminine as the impossible yet necessary foundation of what can be thematized and figured" (1993, 41).

This opposition between representation and exteriority is enabled by seeing discourse as language and signification (or representation) that always refers to some nondiscursive exterior. To a certain extent, then,

Foucault's radicalization of discourse has been forgotten and the antidualist "immanence" of Foucault's account gives way to a revived, although problematized, opposition between discourse and materiality. Why, we might ask, does Butler sustain the very opposition (representation/matter) that Foucault's work set out to challenge? It may be that the current theorization of sexual difference, as the difference from the original maternal body, will inevitably lead to an oppositional logic. (The persistence of the notion of the body as a privileged anteriority sustains an anxiety regarding representation that is explicitly articulated in the problem of women's body image.) For Butler is not content to stay within the "immanence" of Foucault's critique—an antirepresentationalist critique that would refuse the possibility of any privileged exteriority, such as the body, outside discourse. As Butler herself notes, no discursive formation is ever closed or self-sufficient; it must always effect an exteriority that it purportedly represents. However, the production of "sex" as discourse's exterior is, as Foucault makes clear in *The History of Sexuality* (1981), a specifically modern problem. This is not because corporeality, for Foucault, is "textual" or "linguistic"; rather, discourse is a complex and dynamic configuration of events that includes the material and corporeal. Any "exterior"—whether it be the body, consciousness, or being—is the effect of the particular and specific folding of discursive formations. Deleuze's critique of a general or transcendental exteriority can, we argue, provide ways of thinking beyond both the essentialist/discursive feminist debate and the antirepresentationalism that characterizes much contemporary feminism. The argument that signification is positive, and not the repetition of a repressed depth or absence, expands the idea of discourse beyond representation or signification.

The idea of representation (already challenged by Martin Heidegger) has continually been targeted in the work of Deleuze, Foucault, and Jean-François Lyotard (1993). Against the mind-oriented theories of representation, these writers attempt to think signification as positive or effective—as an active event rather than as the negation of some ground or the representation of some presence. It is this positive critique of representation that we bring to bear on corporeal feminism and that is the primary focus for the conclusion of this article. For even Butler's challenging discursive account of sex still posits a duality between signification and matter, where matter is seen as radically anterior. Representation would always remain, in some sense, a negation of matter—a break with a prior materiality, even where that materiality is an effect of representation. Instead of thinking the body and matter as already coterminous within a general discursive field, Butler's reading posits the body, or matter, as an originary effect of discursive repression. For Butler, "To posit a materiality outside of language is

still to posit that materiality, and that materiality so posited will retain that positing as its constitutive condition" (1993, 67–68).

While matter or corporeality may only ever be produced as a discursive effect, Butler still wants to hold on to an outside to discourse—albeit one that can only be experienced discursively. Butler rejects the “ontological” claim made by feminists like Braidotti—the idea that sexual difference is not discursive but produces certain discursive positions (Butler, 59). And Butler’s account would also be less committed to the constitutive and specific corporeality that Gatens and Lloyd have suggested might produce ways of thinking. But while Butler wants to avoid appeals to a prediscursive sexual difference, she does want to claim that corporeality or the materiality of the body may have an effect in the production of subjectivity: “That referent, that abiding function of the world, is to persist as the horizon and the ‘that which’ which makes its demand in and to language” (1993, 69). In this sense her work might be set alongside Grosz’s *Volatile Bodies* (1994b), a book that sees the body and mind relation as a complex interweaving of both “outside” and “inside.” Like Butler, Grosz rejects any “inside out” approach, where the body would be a projection of mind, at the same time as she problematizes an “outside in” approach, where the body as object would determine a way of thinking. While Butler sees the character of the body as the consequence of performativity (in which its way of being is made meaningful), Grosz sees the body according to the metaphor of the Möbius strip—a dynamically interacting interior and exterior that turn into each other (209). Grosz by no means wants to see the body as a discursive production; her “inside out” argument suggests that bodies are also constitutive of the ways in which experience is constituted. However, what these quite different accounts share is the complication of dualism. For Butler, discourse and materiality cannot simply be opposed but are mutually constitutive. For Grosz, corporeality is explained through an amalgam of “outside in” and “inside out” approaches such that the mind and body are inseparable.⁴ But, we would argue, as long as representation is seen as a negation of corporeality, dualism can only ever be complicated and never overcome.

⁴ Grosz’s recent work on Deleuze and space opens the possibility for a move beyond the problem of the “interior” subject and its constitution in relation to an exteriority. In *Space, Time and Perversion* (1995), Grosz argues that Deleuze’s work suggests that a retracing of the interior/exterior boundary will demonstrate the fluidity, malleability, and dynamism of the boundary (131). If such boundaries are open to reconfiguration it follows that representation’s “other” will be continually refigured, reformed, and renegotiated. It is this direction in Deleuze’s work, signaled by Grosz, that our conclusion explores in order to challenge the idea of representation as constitutive negation.

In arguing for the corporeal character of subjectivity, Butler turns to psychoanalysis, in particular, to Lacan's notion of the Imaginary. It is here that Butler's primarily discursive account (which adopts a rhetoric of "citationality," "signification," "performatives," and "discourse") gains its corporeal edge. And it is here, also, that Butler's work intersects with other accounts of the body—those of Grosz, Braidotti, Jane Gallop, and (to a lesser extent) Gatens and Lloyd. Significantly, what the Lacanian theory of the Imaginary enables is a notion of subjectivity that sees the self or ego as an introjection of the visualized or represented body. The question of representation, then, becomes fundamental to the production of the embodied subject.

Feminist theory and the critique of phallogocentrism

"The most far reaching critique Freud advances of philosophy," suggests Braidotti, "is that it establishes a de facto and de jure identification between human subjectivity and rational consciousness" (1991, 18). While Braidotti is specifically referring to Freud's diagnosis of philosophy as a neurotic structure in "The Future of an Illusion" (1985), her more general point is that Lacanian psychoanalysis must be acknowledged as a critical revolutionary moment in the history of Western metaphysics, as a specific challenge to a Cartesian disavowal of the cognizance of the material body and thus the idea of a rational mind. Indeed, for Braidotti and some other feminists (Diprose, Gatens, Grosz)⁵ the vital necessity of thinking-through-the-body and of establishing the corporeal grounds of intelligence is perhaps the most important epistemological concern of contemporary Western feminist philosophy.

Moreover, this concern is argued to be an urgent task (one of life and death), for representational disavowals of the female body are argued to have calculable effects. The "anorexic" practice of self-starvation is frequently diagnosed as a corporeal response to the incorporation of, and living out of, phallogocentric representations (Grosz 1994b, 40). Women are, it is argued, at risk: phallogocentric representations contaminate women with potentially fatal body images. The very exemplarity of the female anorexic body (set alongside its psychoanalytic diagnosis) reinforces the perception of corporeality as the passive "other" of a violent yet necessary

⁵ Braidotti's *Nomadic Subjects* (1994), Grosz's *Space, Time and Perversion* (1995) and Gatens's *Imaginary Bodies* (1996) have also provided valuable criticisms of the Lacanian theory of the maternal outside and the primacy of body image. Our own work and critique follow from the critical direction opened by these texts: the body as not necessarily negated.

representational negation. By accepting the Lacanian theory of the subject as an effect of representational closure, many theories of the body posit corporeality as an impossible exteriority (Butler 1993, 90; Diprose 1994, 80). Further, only a psychoanalytic interpretation of the repressed, rejected, or negated effects of the body, it is often argued, will cure us of our Cartesian maladies (Brennan 1996).

Indeed the apocalyptic tone of corporeal feminism is frequently matched with the invocation of the liberating potential of psychoanalysis. Braidotti, for example, writes that “decoding the psychopathology of this end of the century may well be one of the most urgent tasks for the critical intellectual in general and the feminist one in particular” (1989b, 147). Similarly, Somer Brodrribb diagnoses postmodernism as a “neurotic symptom,” a form of “paranoid masculine somatophobia” (1992, 15), while Zoe Sofia argues that “rationality is a masculine thing” (1993, 15–17), reason a “fantasy of control” (27), and technology a sadistic epistemophilic plundering of the mother’s body (94). Susan Bordo argues that anorexia is a symptom of a pathological Cartesian separation between mind and body (1992), while Gallop talks of the “systematic mind-body split that is killing our children” (1992, 24). These concrete accounts of anorexia and women’s embodiment rely on a decade or more of corporeal feminism in which the body is seen as philosophy’s repressed (Grosz 1994b, 5), discourse’s outside (Butler 1993), an effect of maternal negation (Irigaray 1985), or the Cartesian subject’s unacknowledged debt (Braidotti 1991).

It is worth calling attention to a central binary operating within corporeal feminism that in turn collects a host of related ethico-political judgments into its fold. The concepts of “disembodiment” and “embodiment” function dichotomously such that “disembodiment” is frequently coded as a phallogocentric fantasy articulated through a dualist and specular representational economy that finds its most perfect expression in the Cartesian cogito. According to Grosz, “Dualism, in short, is responsible for the modern forms of elevation of consciousness positioned outside of the world, outside its body, outside of nature” (1994b, 7). Whereas Grosz’s work, like Braidotti’s, regards feminism as the overcoming of such dichotomies, Butler’s notion of a constitutive outside regards the otherness of matter or sex as a radical opening. In either case, however, the distinction between phallic/symbolic representation and the maternal/corporeal other is assumed as a diagnosis of women’s condition. Mapped onto the embodied/disembodied binary are a series of other oppositions, most notably the pre-Oedipal/Oedipal, precastated/castrated, premodern/modern binaries that in turn collect a host of related dichotomies. Disembodiment is also

strongly aligned with alienation: phallogocentric representations set up an alienating distance between the body and mind (Grosz 1994b, 188). The masculinization of rationality, argues Bordo, has calculable and lethal effects on women and nature; the distance between representation and the body must be closed to enable the transformative and healing qualities of “empathetic connections” (1986). Or, as Philipa Rothfield argues, feminists must “listen to the body” in order to cure mind/body separation (1990, 140–41).

However, the idea that representations alienate the body is not new and may be traced to Jean-Jacques Rousseau ([1761] 1984) who, in *Discourse of Inequality*, argues that the history of reason and modernity is also concurrently a history of illness. Philosophy must return to the natural moral purity of the body, argues Rousseau, in order to escape the illness of reason. Similarly, post-Lacanian (and therefore neo-Romantic) forms of corporeal feminism tend to reject reason as a symptom of a pervasive alienation (Brennan 1993, 11),⁶ as though reason itself somehow prevents the existential authenticity of a poetic corporeal self-invention.

The critique of Descartes’s mind/body split has, then, become a chant of negativity: representations are phallogocentric and thus disembodied; reason is phallogocentric; language is phallogocentric; history is phallogocentric; philosophy is phallogocentric; science and technology are phallogocentric; all cultural productions are phallogocentric; and even “touching is phallic in this culture” (Grosz 1994a, 10).⁷ Feminist theorists who neglect to recognize the fundamental phallogocentrism of knowledge at all levels, argues Grosz, are participating “in the social devaluing of the body that goes hand in hand with the oppression of women” (10). As Meaghan Morris has noted, the reiteration of this fundamental thesis and its application results in a fixing of positions, a loss of rhetorical flexibility, and, ironically, a closing off of so-called feminine fluidity (1988, 101). This delimitation of a proper ethical space for a feminism that must be “corporeal” depends on the exclusion of a question; and by refusing to engage with this question, we would argue, feminism risks losing its democratizing potential. It is therefore

⁶ Brennan adapts the Frankfurt School’s idea that reason is a progressive domination of nature by the ego to a theory regarding the violent fantasy of the excluded female body: “The subject is founded by a hallucinatory fantasy in which it conceives itself as the locus of active agency and the environment as passive; its subjectivity is secured by a projection onto the environment, apparently beginning with the mother, which makes her into an object which the subject in fantasy controls” (1993, 11).

⁷ The pervasiveness of the phallic order is evidenced by the many feminist invocations of the “outside” (Butler 1993), the “limit” (Cornell 1991), the “other” (Irigaray 1985), or even new concepts of time and space (Grosz 1995).

with an awareness that the articulation of this question might be understood as phallogentric that we now ask, Is representation phallogentric? It is important to ask this question again and to keep asking it, because the reiteration of its answer — yes, representations are phallogentric and disembodied — has become a fundamental thesis that closes the opening up of further questions.

One way of opening up this question is to ask what the implications and costs of such a thesis are. What is the status of women's body image when the entire domain of representations is argued to be phallogentric? What are the implications of arguing that women's body images are castrated? Or, we might ask another, simple, pedestrian, rather stubborn, slightly stupid question: If all representations are phallogentric, if thought is disembodied, how do women read and think? At what cost is the entire edifice of representation coded as phallogentric? In asking these questions we must first address the various ways they have been answered within corporeal feminism. In questioning these answers we hope to open up a space in which further questions and further answers might be circulated. To address this question it is necessary to take a detour, to turn to an exemplary instance of (dis)embodiment used throughout corporeal feminism, that of the anorexic. We turn to this example because it occurs with surprising regularity in corporeal feminist arguments about body image and representation, matter and form.

Exemplary body/images: Anorexia

Anorexia nervosa is a powerful example where the external perspectives of an ideal body weight and appearance have a distorting effect on women's phenomenal experience. The tyranny of the thin body as an objective ideal mediates women's phenomenal experience of themselves such that they *feel fat*. Considered objectively, their bodies are skeletal, but the self-representation of an objective ideal works to influence their bodily feeling especially around eating but also their various perceptions and experiences of flesh. (Rothfield 1994, 39)

The problem, as it is frequently articulated, is that representations of the body are phallogentric; and, therefore, women's body images are the product of a phallogentric Imaginary. Worse still, the very morphology of knowledge is seen to be a product of a specular relation to the phallogentric Imaginary. According to Grosz, "all cultural production is phallogentric" (1993, 195). Accordingly, feminist women must "produce new spaces as and for women" and "make knowledges and technologies work for women

rather than simply reproducing them-selves according to men's representation of women" (195, 204). It follows, then, that women need more gynocentric representations if women are to escape a (potentially lethal) phallogocentric body image. At stake is a radical transformation of the phallogocentric morphology of knowledge itself and the establishment of a feminine aesthetics that is capable of adequately and autonomously representing female morphology. The dangers of the phallic Imaginary and the need for a representational revolution are no better exemplified than in the case of the anorexic.

Grosz, for example, argues that anorexia is an attempt to actualize an idealized body image that is incorporated by the subject from phallogocentric representations of thin femininity. Dismissing what she perceives to be two popular etiological explanations of anorexia as an ego or dieting disorder, Grosz argues that "anorexia can, like the phantom limb, be a kind of mourning for a pre-Oedipal (i.e., precastated) body and a corporeal connection to the mother that women in patriarchy are required to abandon" (1994b, 40). Grosz continues by arguing that anorexia should be interpreted as a renunciation of patriarchal ideals of femininity and not as an excessively compliant performance of them. There are several moves occurring here. To begin with, the idea that women's body images are determined by a precastated/castrated matrix and that women in general are coerced into relinquishing a sympathetic connection to a maternal body image reiterates a largely unchallenged Freudianism.⁸ Second, the use of the pathology of anorexia as a synecdoche for female consciousness in general propagates a notion of an ahistorical psyche; this psychic theory presumably accounts not only for all anorexics but also for all women subjected to patriarchy. Finally, to argue that women who practice self-starvation are either compliant with, or revolting against, patriarchal body images is to posit a causal and unproblematic connection between cultural images and corporeality, representation and the body.

For the moment we wish to focus on this last point for, as we shall argue, it informs a popular interpretive trend within corporeal feminism. The understanding that (phallogocentric) representations of women's bodies direct the formation of women's body images is a common but rarely contested assumption within both corporeal feminism and popular culture. The domain of representation — mass culture, the history of literature, science, and so on — is seen to be caused or produced by an unconscious

⁸ The notion of the maternal as a representational outside depends on an assumption of the Oedipal genesis of the subject. It is this Freudianism that, in various ways, sustains the theory of sexual difference in Irigaray, Braidotti, Brennan, and Diprose.

Cartesianism. (Both Braidotti's *Patterns of Dissonance* [1991] and Grosz's *Volatile Bodies* [1994b] argue for the singular importance of the Cartesian separation.) And these representations in turn cause women's self-image. Images are judged as being pernicious insofar as they are effects of a phallic metaphysics and the cause of women's oppression. Butler refers to a "hegemonic" imaginary (1993, 91), while Grosz argues that "women's body images are clearly different from men's and are modelled on lack and castration" (1994b, 73).

Many of the arguments surrounding the issue of body image in popular feminism directly or indirectly locate media representations of thin femininity as the etiology of anorexia and bulimia. Theorists such as Susan Bordo argue that representations of thin femininity reiterate a symptomatic Cartesian rejection of female embodiment. Bordo also argues that "the anorexic's distorted image of her body—her inability to see it as anything but 'too fat'—while more extreme, is not radically discontinuous from fairly common female misconceptions" (1992, 40). In other words, Bordo is suggesting that a distorted body image is something that is common to most women. Bordo (and, before her, Hilde Bruch, Susie Orbach, Kim Chernin, and Marilyn Lawrence)⁹ maintains that representations of thin femininity induce anorexia in their female consumers. Typically, television and fashion advertisements are held responsible for the increase in anorexia in the past two decades. Indeed the popularity of Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* (1990) has transformed this interpretation into a form of common sense that is frequently expressed within the pages of most women's magazines. Such understandings have led Maud Ellmann to comment that anorexia appears to be constructed as "the disease of the McLuhan age, disseminated by telecommunications rather than by contact" (1993, 24). In her analysis of the causal relationship posited between mass media images and anorexia, Elspeth Probyn has offered the following useful insight: "What we can clearly hear from these descriptions is that women are pathologically susceptible to media images" (1987, 203). Why is it, she asks, that only women are argued to suffer from living in a late twentieth-century media-scape? Or, to put it another way, why is it that only women are argued to suffer from representations? It is possible to extend Probyn's point and argue that what we are witnessing—in the assumption that all women's body images are castrated because they incorporate phallogocentric representations—is the pathologization of women's reading practices. And such a pathologization, we will argue, is only possible if the body is already posited according to a semiotic gnoseology whereby the body is seen as a

⁹ See, e.g., Chernin 1981, 1989; Lawrence 1984; Orbach 1986; Bruch 1988.

sign of some interiority or meaning. Furthermore, the acceptance that the body is a body image is articulated within an insistently dichotomous rhetoric. The repressive/general/representational/gendered (phallic) body as image is set against the negated/specific/material/sexed (maternal) body as lived corporeality.

Indeed, what is at stake in theories of women's body image is a description of the way women judge or apprehend phallogocentric representations of the female body. Women's body images, and their subjectivity in general, are seen to be formed through a representational system that is monolithically phallogocentric. Consequently, Butler suggests that the radical transformation of discourse and materiality be achieved through the performance of a "lesbian phallus" (1993, 86). Drucilla Cornell argues that it is only the "beyond" of signification that can overcome the phallic determination of "Woman" (1991). Further, the passive incorporation of representations is, more often than not, figured in terms of introjection, incorporation (Rose 1986), and a series of related gustatory and alimentary metaphors (Orbach 1986). What seems to be an underlying assumption in accounts of anorexia and the female body in general is the idea that the internalization of a body image rests on a particular mode of consumption. A critical approach to ethical problems of the body might question the idea of the body as an effect of image consumption and would do so by looking to the body's various effects and forces, rather than its capacities to be a sign, theater, or image. For as long as the mind/body problem is negotiated via metaphors of consumption, ingestion, and incorporation, feminist theory will be constrained by a particular bodily practice being accepted in advance as an explanation for the body in general.¹⁰

The account of women's general condition is thereby conflated with the introjection models that explain anorexia. Orbach's account of anorexia in *The Hunger Strike* (1986) relies on the British school of object relations and in doing so extends Winnicott's theory of the "false self" into a theory of the "false body." Like the false self, the false body is fashioned as a narcissistic defense against a threatening exteriority; thus women develop a false body image because they internalize a "bad object" that Orbach specifically identifies as an objectified representation of the female body. The development of a corporeal sense of self thus depends on an act of consumption

¹⁰ Here, again, we would like to signal an important suggestion made by Grosz. Despite its dependence on the notion of body image, *Volatile Bodies* argues that "the body must be seen as a series of processes of becoming, rather than as a fixed state of being" (1994b, 12). While we are critical of the suggestion that the body's process is set in opposition to the fixity of body representation, the direction of our own work extends Grosz's insight into the possibility of not reducing the body to a general or "founding principle" (12).

or internalization. For Orbach, the false body does not provide the subject with a stable identity but rather a “malleable,” “fluid,” “manipulable,” “physical plasticity.” In many ways this definition of the “false body” corresponds to recent feminist uses of the Lacanian Imaginary (such as Grosz’s *Volatile Bodies* (1994b) or Teresa Brennan’s “Essence against Identity” (1996), both of which focus on the central importance of body image and identification). Both the idea of the “false body” and the phallic Imaginary suggest that women may have a particular propensity for developing an inauthentic body image because external phallic representations of the female body are internalized to produce inauthentic representations of women’s bodies.

However, this understanding of body image relies on the idea that the subject mindlessly incorporates representations. Janice Radway has argued against the use of derogatory alimentary metaphors to explain the complex act of reading in “Reading Is Not Eating” (1986). Radway’s critique is opposed to the standard psychoanalytic theories of reading such as that of James Strachey who, in “Some Unconscious Factors in Reading,” argues that a “coprophagic tendency lies at the root of all reading” (1930, 329). Strachey’s psychoanalytic interpretation (while ostensibly anti-Cartesian insofar as it foregrounds the subject’s embodied response to representations) nevertheless reduces critical thinking to a mere repression and sublimation of the imagined nightmares of an infant’s corporeal desires. The reduction of the critical abilities of adults to that of infants assumes that consciousness is merely the expression of an elementary (and alimentary) sensuality. Furthermore, not only does the frequent use of the female anorexic as the paradigm case of representational consumption feminize a reading/viewing practice figured as pathologically passive, but the implicit denigration of this passive consumption sustains a Cartesian anxiety about the corruption of mind by an alien matter. Simultaneously, feminism has endorsed a sense of the inadequacy of sensuous apprehension (in its critique of representation) at the same time as it sees a disembodied thought or reason as perniciously masculine. It may well be that the supposed apocalyptic break between a rational Cartesianism and a postmodern materialist feminism remains caught within a theory of consciousness as a negation of the material and representation as a negation of the body.

Consequently, the ludic valorization of thinking-through-the-body, while ostensibly a challenge to what is perceived to be a pervasive all-encompassing Cartesian mind/body duality, runs the risk of advocating a reductive sensuous “embodied” relation to representations. This sensualist theory of representation (where women’s images would no longer be given from outside but generated from within) is based on the very

interior/exterior model of Cartesian dualism that it sought to criticize. There is also a further irony in that an embodied or sensuous consumption of images or representations is diagnosed as the evil etiology of anorexia, bulimia, and hysteria. These “examples” are then extrapolated into a general theory about the formation of women’s body images through the consumption of phallogentric representations. A more authentically “embodied” (feminine) relation to thought is called for at the same time that certain reading practices are seen as pathologically sensualist. In other words, it appears that corporeal feminism is caught within a tautologous relation to Cartesianism and consciousness. While “embodiment” is figured as the overcoming of a pernicious dualism, the “disease” of disembodied representation is figured in a highly Cartesian topography of the subject. What needs to be challenged, we would argue, are the premises of constitutive negation that inform the critique of Cartesian subjectivity and lead to the contradictory celebration of a putatively sensualist or material preconscious.

Lack and negation: Beyond neo-Romantic alienation

The argument that meaning, representation, and subjectivity are organized around lack begins from the assumption that there is an originary maternal/pre-Oedipal/preconscious plenitude that is negated in the movement of difference that produces the subject. Identity is, then, the effect of difference; but this difference is also the negation of an originary identity. Lacanian psychoanalysis theorizes symbolic recognition as an awareness of the self’s radical alienation and lack. For Lacan the subject remains essentially alienated; and this alienation is the effect of the negation of plenitude and presence (even if this plenitude is an effect of an *ex post facto* positing).

Feminist theory has inserted itself in this argument by frequently accepting the metaphor of castration for this originary negation of presence. (Butler’s focus on the “lesbian phallus,” for example, begins with a critical acceptance of the castration matrix.) Furthermore, the prelinguistic plenitude is also accepted as being maternal. While the metaphorical status of this Oedipal triangle of maternal presence, symbolic castration, and the phallus is generally asserted, what are not questioned are (*a*) originary (if idealized) maternal plenitude, (*b*) subjectivity as the difference from this more originary identity, and (*c*) bodily identity as produced through this process of negation and identification. Further, as we have demonstrated in the previous section, even when explicitly Lacanian arguments are not brought into play, there is an insistence on the negating, repressive, and

limiting character of representation set against a putatively more authentic corporeality.

A Deleuzian way of thinking through the body would challenge the privilege of the Oedipal metaphor and would, furthermore, attack the premises of originary identity, lack, and negation on which the Oedipal metaphor is based. If, as feminist theory has so convincingly argued, Western thought has been marked by a series of dualisms that consistently devalue the feminine, why has the “corporealist” challenge to dualism sustained the dichotomies of identity and difference, presence and lack, being and representation, subject and other? While the uptake of Lacan has problematized many of these binaries, the idea that the body is primarily the effect of “body image,” “the Imaginary,” representation, or introjection sustains a dualist and possibly psychologistic approach. To see the body as the introjection or internalization of an external image is to give a highly mind-dependent account of the body. Such an account would remain within a history of consciousness, where mind is conceived as a stage, theater, or screen set over against the full presence of the world. As long as specific problems of corporeality, such as eating disorders, are interpreted as diseases of representation, feminist criticism will only be able to offer a reactive response to its perceived malaise. Refiguring the problem of the body demands that it be seen as more than a semiotic symptom.

Toward an ethical grammar of the body

Deleuze’s task, articulated clearly in *Difference and Repetition* (1994), has been to challenge both the dominance of the traditional definition of the “concept” and the primacy of representation. If we try to think being, or what is, on the basis of how it can be thought or presented to an ego, then concepts of representation will be primary (68). But what representationalism also sustains is the idea of a unified image of thought: as a site of representation the subject is perceived in terms of its relation, negation, recognition, or encounter with an outside world. Thought in general is typified by its capacity to re-present an exteriority from which it is differentiated. Difference here is always thought as *difference from* and is defined in relation to thought’s capacity to identify in terms of the concept. The concept will be the locus of meaning and identity that both “misses” the real difference of the singular thing and is produced through a process of mental differentiation (220). Deleuze’s challenge to the primacy of meaning or the concept as a condition for being, in contrast, is radically corporeal. Concepts, rethought according to Deleuze’s nonreactive

philosophy, are not limitations or formalizations of experience; rather, they are themselves creations, events, and responses. The body is not a conceptualized body image, nor is it a meaning to be interpreted. While concepts are events, responses, and creations, bodies are a different mode of event. The body is no longer a vehicle for consciousness, nor is it a privileged site of meaning or primary materiality. On the contrary, Deleuze's "transcendental empiricism" (143) posits a univocity whereby bodies, consciousness, actions, events, signs, and entities are specific intensities—each with its own modality and difference. They do not need their "difference from" each other in order to be (conceptual difference); in their specific singularity beings are positively different (203). Deleuze's univocal conception of being is also dynamic. Meaning and concepts of consciousness are events within a general field of intensities,¹¹ and no particular event—neither mind nor body—can be posited as the origin or meaning of any other. On this account, difference is not a question of negation. Sexual difference would be one difference among others, but as positive difference it would be due to the specific intensity of bodies and not an originary repression. To think a "body without organs" is to refuse any single signifier, such as the phallus, that would enable an organization or interpretation of the body. The ethics of sexual difference would be part of an entire field of problems of difference. Matter, or the body, would not be thought's "other" if thinking were seen as a desiring production, a comportment, an activity, or an ethos. The body is not essentially anterior or other. And it follows from this that a theory of sexual difference that relies on constitutive negation may be best overcome not by turning to the body or attacking representation but by questioning the primacy of the representation/materiality dichotomy. For it is this dichotomy that organizes many theories of sexual difference and leads to the uncritical celebration of the body as an inherently liberatory site.

The maneuvers that we have identified in many feminist accounts of anorexia adopt a sense of representation as both alien and causal that depends on defining meaning as an act of consciousness in relation to a world. If there is a primary mode of difference (between consciousness and world) then all the consequences of theories of constitutive negation follow: the mind is other than body; meaning is other than matter; female materiality is other than determination. However, if there is not a single

¹¹ "There are images, things are themselves images, because images aren't in our brain. The brain's just one image among others. Images are constantly acting and reacting on each other, producing and consuming. There's no difference at all between *images*, *things*, and motion" (Deleuze 1995, 42).

organizing (negating) difference but a multiplicity of differences, then any theory of constitutive negation, and accordingly, any single or privileged exteriority would no longer be valid. Sexual difference would occur in a field of coterminous differences. In this regard feminism may well have to forgo any sense of itself as the fundamental ethical horizon, the primary site for the crisis of the Western subject, or the redemptive locus for the end of metaphysics. Sexual difference would not be the question of our epoch (contra Irigaray) but would be one of many possible questions.¹²

The body, thought *as a body*, and not a body image or internal representation, would be a positive event alongside other positive events. It would not be the effect of some specular process, nor would its actions be seen as so many signs or negations of a complex interiority. Deleuze and Guattari's critique of psychoanalysis sees the Oedipal subject as one possible staging of desire among others. Against the Oedipal story that sees mind as a theater to be viewed and represented, Deleuze suggests a new "image of thought" (1994, 131) that would aim to think "thought without an image" (276). In *Anti-Oedipus* (1984) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) desire, released from the organizing hermeneutics of traditional psychoanalysis, is capable of infinite connections and variations. As a positive event, rather than a negated origin, desire presents an active multiplicity. Human action, accordingly, is not a sign to be interpreted that would reveal an originary lack. On the contrary, desire works by connections and events that generate further events and connections. Action is productive rather than representational. Accordingly, one should ask what an action does rather than what it means (Foucault 1984, xi–xiv). The question that organizes many feminist ethical debates—Is a practice repressive or liberatory?—relies on the possibility of a free consciousness that could precede, and be revealed beneath, its representations. If, however, signs and actions are seen as positive, then the ethical value of an act is determined by evaluating its force within a network of other acts and practices, and not in reference to a putative origin.

¹² The primacy of the question of sexual difference is echoed approvingly by Braidotti. Braidotti's early criticism of poststructuralism directed itself against the appropriation and liquidation of the notion of "woman" in a general movement of antisubjectivism. It is Braidotti's criticism of Deleuze—that sexual difference becomes part of difference in general—that we see as an ethically enabling direction in Deleuze's work (Braidotti 1994, 146, 117). For Braidotti's attempt to assert sexual difference as ontological difference, the founding difference of the subject, depends on the privileged exclusion of maternal corporeality. We agree with Braidotti's early interpretation of Deleuze: that sexual difference is appropriated into a general field of "becoming" (1991); but we disagree that this is a lamentable outcome for feminist ethics.

The body in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* is, therefore, not the sign of a prior meaning nor an interiorization produced through lack. Rather, the body is productive not because it “expresses” an interior depth but because it *connects* (Deleuze and Guattari 1984). And these connections are not seen as relations produced by an overarching system of differences (in which case the singular body would always be the effect of the totality). The connections made among bodies are not determined in advance but are the result of the play of singularities (60).

Several consequences follow from Deleuze and Guattari’s positing of the body’s positivity. To begin with, actions should not be referred to some unconscious or interior meaning; “desire” should not be seen as some hidden bearer of truth or as some final interpretive horizon (1984, 30). Feminist theorists might dispense, then, with the attempt to offer some general etiological account of certain body practices, such as anorexia. Rather than being the negation of some hidden meaning, they might be seen as productive, as forms of self-formation. This is not to valorize anorexia as some privileged or authentic form of resistant behavior. On the contrary, the point would be to do away with notions of ownness, authenticity, autonomy, and the rhetoric of alienation. Anorexia would be one form of self-formation among others, and—as a series of interconnected practices—would need to be considered in terms of what it creates or invents. Rather than being the effect of specular relations, anorexia, modes of consumption, and the comportment of one’s body could be seen as forms of invention. The very “deviancy” of the anorexic body would represent a certain “failure” or “blockage” of the Cartesian concept (Deleuze 1994, 220). For such a body would be precisely where the classical and regulatory “image of thought” as an ordered “theater” would break down.

In this quite specific sense, certain practices that have been interpreted as signs of some general representational pathology might be more usefully refigured as forms of critique; that is to say, these “deviant,” “abnormal,” or “pathological” forms of bodily comportment might effect a positive difference or create a distance from certain regular or normalized ways of being. An anorexic’s self-production might be better seen less as a failed rebellion or negation of an unquestioned ideal body than as the production of a “being otherwise.” This would not, then, imply a valorization of anorexia or deviancy as a new norm; on the contrary, the positive effects of different practices would lie in the shattering of any general or totalizing account of what constitutes a self or thought. This idea of a positive multiplicity (Deleuze and Guattari 1984, 60) would be critical (in a Kantian sense) in its recognition that different practices cannot ethically be determined beforehand in terms of some pregiven law.

The antirepresentationalism of Deleuze may also be questioned in this regard. If, as we have argued, the practice of anorexia and its disruption of normalized body practices can be seen as creative, it is because anorexia can be examined as a specific mode of being. The ascription of creativity, positivity, or activity to different bodily practices avoids the positing of any primary explanandum (such as representation) of which these practices would be effects. If the attribution of a creative positivity to anorexia implies a valorization of the practice as an aesthetic comportment, it may well be due to antirepresentationalism's opposition between the rigidity of the concept versus the fluidity of poesis. In this sense Deleuze's critique of representation implies a privileged difference. Deleuze not only celebrates certain writers whose work is seen as inherently disruptive of representational thought (such as Kafka, Joyce, Beckett, Woolf), he also posits poetry as an Idea that typifies the dynamic power of language: "Repetition is the power of language, and far from being explicable in negative fashion by some default on the part of nominal concepts, it implies an always excessive Idea of poetry" (1994, 291). The idea that art or literature provides an exemplary ethical liberation accepts representation's own definition of the concept.¹³ If concepts are ideal disembodied negations of the fluidity of sensibility and experience, then it makes sense to seek liberation in a domain such as poesis that defines itself against the reification of the rational concept. But, as Deleuze and Guattari's own work has argued, concepts are already creative acts (1994). The aesthetic, while it may foreground its active constitution, is also thoroughly located within forms of determination and regularity. The aesthetic is not pure active becoming. A concept is never absolutely ideal. To link the ethical as self-constituting and affirmative comportment with the aesthetic in general is, then, to valorize a particular exteriority (art as the general other) and a particular difference (representation vs. the affirmative). We would agree, then, with Dorothea Olkowski's careful reading of Deleuze that shows the clear link between the ethical and the aesthetic in Deleuze's Nietzscheanism (Olkowski 1995, 28). But we would suggest that this link ought to be questioned.

Clearly, certain forms of antinormalizing practices that are creative (such as anorexia) remain as problems. Only a celebration of the aesthetic as necessarily ethical or transgressive would make the creative character of bodily practices valuable as such. To argue that the problem of anorexia is answered by seeing the body as active force is to repeat the same foreclosure

¹³ The opposition between representation and art is made clear in *Difference and Repetition*: "The work of art leaves the domain of representation in order to become 'experience,' transcendental empiricism or science of the sensible" (1994, 56).

that lies in seeing the body as a repressed effect. If the body is a site of production of positive forces and creative differences then this opens a question of the body's ethics. How we evaluate these modes of creating difference cannot be resolved by appealing to a single opposition (ethical/aesthetic vs. moral/representational). If we do accept that difference is positive, that there is no privileged exteriority and that ethics is a continual task, then the question of sexual difference need no longer be seen as primary. We would therefore disagree with Grosz's use of Deleuze to argue for the universality of binary sexual difference: "The bifurcation of sexed bodies . . . is, in my opinion, an irreducible cultural universal" (1994b, 160). The analysis of particular problems, such as anorexia, beneath a general rubric of sexual difference might be opened up in two directions. First, such specific ethical problems ought not to be read as synecdoches for female subjectivity in general. The first part of our article has shown the debilitating consequences of arguments that pathologize femininity and that explain pathologies by referring to a general malaise of sexual difference. Second, practices like anorexia might be best analyzed according to the power relations within which they occur: not as further examples of representational violence but according to the practices of cure, definition, regulation, and contestation that surround them.

Instead of recruiting anorexia as an example of women's alienation in general, it is perhaps more productive to examine the specific archaeology of the discourse of anorexia nervosa in order to ask what prevailing theories of anorexia do and how they intersect with (and also produce) practices of "anorexic behaviour." Ludwig Binswanger's famous "The Case of Ellen West" (1958) demonstrates the need for an engagement with "anorexia" that remains alert to the specific location of bodily practices.

A contemporary of Freud's, Binswanger developed a form of Heideggerian psychiatry that influenced such luminaries as R. D. Laing and Foucault. If Freud's "Dora" has emerged as central to the representation of the sexual politics of hysteria, we would argue that Binswanger's "Ellen" should be acknowledged as a formative investigation into the sexual politics of eating disorders. In brief, Binswanger's case describes the life history, self-starvation, and eventual suicide of a Jewish woman. Drawing on the work of Gaston Bachelard, Binswanger proposes an anthropology of the imaginary in which the elements of air, earth, water, and fire compose the materiality of "Ellen's" imaginary. "Ellen's" fear of being fat is seen to stem from a desire to escape imprisonment in the "tomb-world" (earth) of her body, while her desire to be thin is an attempt to ascend to the "ethereal world" (air) of the intellect. As later interpreted by Bordo (1992), "Ellen's" perceived desire to escape her body is typical of an internalized phallocen-

tric disembodiment; her self-starvation is a self-destructive attempt to transform herself into an image of pure thought. For Bordo this is a “typical fantasy,” articulated from Plato to Descartes.

However, this reading elides the particular discursive formation of Binswanger’s analysis in which the “ethereal” and “tomb” worlds also signify particular racial types. For Binswanger, the “ethereal” signifies the “higher, blond Aryan type” while the “tomb-world” signifies a “fat bourgeois Jewish type.” Why this fact has been silenced in the many readings of the case history is, we would argue, a question of some import. Binswanger’s famous case history was originally published in *Schweizer Archiv für Neurologie und Psychiatrie* in 1944–45 and contains numerous references to the superiority of the Aryan body. Binswanger concludes that for “Ellen,” “being thin was equated with a higher intellectual type and being fat with a bourgeois Jewish type” (1958, 260). He describes a student lover as “the blond beloved who is part of the ethereal world” and as the “blond, soft” representative of the “higher, spiritual and Aryan type” (290–91).

In effect, according to Binswanger’s aestheticization of the tomb and ethereal worlds, “Ellen” is seen as entombed in a Jewish body. Her self-starvation, suggests Binswanger, is a futile attempt to become a particular higher physical and Aryan type. If Binswanger’s case history is, then, not just a repetition of a general phallogocentric malaise but a quite specific (Nazi) articulation of particular body types and relations, a further problem with the subsequent commentaries on the case emerges. In the context of Binswanger’s rhetoric of Nazism, Foucault’s engagement with the case history is worthy of reexamination. Published as an introduction to Binswanger’s “Dream and Existence” (1984–85), Foucault’s “Dream, Imagination and Existence” (1984–85) demonstrates Binswanger’s influence on the early Foucault and the ways in which any general ontology of the body occludes the specific politics of bodily descriptions and practices. According to James Miller, Foucault would refer “with warm sympathy to the work of the great Heideggerian psychiatrist Ludwig Binswanger” (Miller 1993, 50). Miller also argues that Foucault was fascinated by “the psychiatrist’s most famous clinical paper” (73–74). For Foucault, Binswanger’s work “outflanks the problem of ontology and anthropology by going straight to concrete existence, to its development and its historical content” (Miller 1993, 32). But the historical content of Binswanger’s case history is never addressed by Foucault; at no point does he engage with the figuration of Aryan and Jewish bodies in the “case.” Referring to “Ellen’s” Jewish family as “crudely materialistic” (Miller 1993, 62), his use of the case history within a general theory of existence demonstrates, yet again, the ways in which particular historical and political figurations of

bodies are subsumed — even by Foucault — beneath a theory of the subject.

More recently, Chernin's use of the case history argues that "Ellen's" self-starvation is a protofeminist rebellion against the cultural constraints of her Jewish family: "In the family of Ellen West we find a mother and father who bear the typical problems and dilemmas of their culture. And we can imagine that their passionate little daughter will be impelled to protest against the feminine role these people expect her to fill" (1989, 167). The use of this particular case history demonstrates some of the problems associated with ahistorical readings of the anorexic body as well as the need for a more direct intervention into the discursive production of this body.

A cursory glance at the *International Journal of Eating Disorders* illustrates that the "anorexic" is subject to electric shock treatment and lobotomies and also functions as a laboratory body for a host of psychotropic drugs (see, e.g., Hsu, Crisp, and Callender 1992; and Ferguson 1993). Perhaps it is not enough simply to recruit the "anorexic" as an example of women's castrated body image; rather, it is necessary to intervene in the biomedical construction of this discourse and challenge its ethics. This would entail seeing the various "cures" and "theories" of "anorexia nervosa" as positive practices existing alongside the practices of "anorexia" itself. The body of the anorexic would be a site of contestation in which the connections, performances, and creations made by the patient's body are taken over and refigured through biomedical discursive practices. This is not to suggest that the "anorexic" is somehow authentically disempowered and hence innocent. An ethics of this encounter would consider the body of the anorexic as one productive event among others in a network of relations, not as the stage or screen on which some predetermined cultural neurosis plays itself out yet one more time.

A recognition of anorexic practices as involuted in a process of self-creation would also entail a consideration of the specific grammar of those practices. By this we mean an attention to the practices of calorie counting, of weighing and measuring the body, and of various dietetic regimens. These practices or connections form the event of the anorexic as such. But the grammar of these practices or the field within which they are located cannot be contained within an anorexic's "internal" pathology. Anorexia, then, is a series of practices and comportments; there are no anorexics, only activities of dietetics, measuring, regulation, and calculation. Indeed, the importance of measuring the most minute transformations of the body brought about by these practices might indicate that they are involuted in a numerical grammar of the flesh — a grammar that cannot be isolated and pathologized (or demonized) in the anorexic's body alone. For it is this

very numerical self-concern that may be the enabling and productive practice of a certain form of contemporary self-production. The “deviancy” of anorexic production through practices of metabolism, weighing, counting, and mathematization would be a discursive event that occurs within a general discursive network concerned with analysis, regulation, and normalization. The anorexic body could be seen as an intensity occurring within a positive field of production. This field would not be an isolated object for analysis (the anorexic) but an event connected to other events (this practice, with this effect, with this practice, with this connection, with this body, with this sign, etc.).

Accordingly, a Deleuzian model of “anorexia” might approach these practices (such as calorie counting, weighing, measuring) as articulations of a machinic assemblage, as a series of intensities, flows, and speeds.¹⁴ To see dietetic regimen as a form of positive self-production might enable a thinking of the body in terms of the connections it makes, the intensities of its actions, and the dynamism of its practices. Given the metaphoric presence of the thermodynamic model within Deleuzian theory and the intimate connections between the discourse of thermodynamics and metabolism, it might be that such a reading is especially applicable to dietetic regimens and their practices, for there are significant correspondences between these models and the practices of calorie counting and measuring the metabolism of the body. However, such practices are not just specific to contemporary articulations of anorexia but are part of a wider measurement of the body via dietetic regimens in general. An archaeology of this contemporary grammar might “begin” with the discourse of thermodynamics (flows, intensities, equilibrium, atrophy) and its connection to metabolism. To do such an archaeology would not be to discover finally, once and for all, the cause of anorexia (or any other human comportment). If it is the case that the “normalized” contemporary body is organized according to a discourse of metabolics, energy, and measurable force, then the anorexic body *might* operate as a critical short-circuiting of contemporary practices of self-monitoring through quantification. Furthermore, by advocating that contemporary theory rethink life in terms of thermodynamics, Deleuze’s work does more than react against dominant representational forces; it takes hold of those forces and makes the images of machine, intensity, system, and connection operate differently. The model of thermodynamics likens the self neither to a language (where there is some

¹⁴ In *Dialogues*, Deleuze refers to anorexia as a phenomenon that has been subjected to misinterpretation precisely to the degree that it has been organized according to a theory of lack (1987, 90, 111).

overall systemic determination) nor to a theater (where there is some inner performance of a well-rehearsed meaning). As a machinic assemblage, the self is nothing other than the performances it effects or the connections it makes. Such connections may possess a regularity, but regularity is not the effect of some hidden or pre-given law. An ethics of this machinic assemblage would not look within the mind of a subject, nor see its body as a sign. Like all other practices, this ethics would be a positive practice with its own positive effects. Its intervention would be a positive practice set alongside, or connecting with, the practice of the encountered body. To see difference as multiple and positive is to forgo the possibility of deciding ethical questions in advance, according to a rubric of some general difference or negation. Such a recognition implies a continual renegotiation of ethical boundaries and limits.

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