

## 2

SUSAN JAMES

# Feminism in philosophy of mind The question of personal identity

### 1 Introduction

A great deal of recent feminist work on philosophy of mind has been grounded on a central claim: that the key oppositions between body and mind, and between emotion and reason, are gendered. While the mind and its capacity to reason are associated with masculinity, the body, together with our emotional sensibilities, are associated with the feminine. Evidence for this view comes from at least two sources. First, overtly sexist philosophers have in the past claimed that women are by nature less capable reasoners than men and are more prone to ground their judgements on their emotional responses. These authors have been repeatedly opposed by defenders of women, whether male or female. Secondly, feminists have explored ways in which gendered oppositions are at work even in the writings of philosophers who do not explicitly differentiate the mental capacities of men and women or connect women with the bodily work of reproduction and domestic labour. By studying the metaphorical structures of philosophical texts, looking at what may appear to be digressions from the main line of argument, and paying attention to examples, they have identified persistent patterns of association running through the history of philosophy. These patterns can fluctuate from century to century, from author to author, from work to work, and even from paragraph to paragraph, but they keep cropping up. They indicate that the terms associated with the feminine are persistently marginalized by comparison with those associated with masculinity, as when the rational powers of human beings are habitually regarded as more valuable than their emotional skills.<sup>1</sup>

In the light of this analysis, many feminists have worked to develop philosophical positions which do not devalue the symbolically feminine. They have done so by unsettling the hierarchical relations between mind and body, and between reason and emotion, approaching their task in

various overlapping ways. Sometimes they have criticized existing, influential theories of body and mind; sometimes they have reconceptualized particular topics within the philosophy of mind; and sometimes they have drawn on the work of authors who have written ‘against the grain’.

A prominent example of the first approach has been the engagement of feminist philosophers with the phenomenological tradition, and particularly with the work of Merleau-Ponty.<sup>2</sup> However, by far the most striking case of this type of constructive criticism is to be found in the troubled relationship between feminism and psychoanalysis. In the anglophone world, this originated in a sequence of critical readings of Freud,<sup>3</sup> and subsequently developed into a debate which both takes issue with the psychoanalytic tradition, and deploys its resources. Diverse contributors to the discussion have drawn not only on the ideas of Freud himself, but also on those of Klein, Winnicott and Lacan to explain aspects of sexual difference and to reconsider the oppositions mentioned above.<sup>4</sup> Interest in Lacan, and indeed in other strands of psychoanalytic thought, has been stimulated by the work of some extremely influential French authors, notably Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva.<sup>5</sup>

Turning to the second approach, feminist writers have directly addressed the opposition between body and mind, in an effort to reveal how the body is tacitly marginalized in philosophy and to find ways of reinstating it. Much of this work aims to question the distinction between the mental and the physical by showing how mind and body interrelate, and how the body contributes to, and is implicated in, thought.<sup>6</sup> A number of influential contributors to this project have focused on the distinction between sex and gender. Originally coined to mark a division between the biological and social characteristics differentiating men and women, this distinction has been repeatedly questioned, to the point where there is now widespread doubt as to whether it is fruitful to try to keep these two groups of properties apart. Querying the idea of the purely bodily casts doubt on the existence of a clear division between the mental and the physical, while emphasizing the social challenges the sufficiency of an opposition between body and mind.<sup>7</sup>

Directing their attention to the relation between reason and emotion, feminist philosophers have argued that emotion is integral to reasoning, and have brought out some of the ways in which emotion traverses the divide between mind and body.<sup>8</sup> In addition, they have taken a step which characterizes a good deal of feminist work in philosophy of mind, and is one of its claims to originality. By charting the ways in which particular emotions are held to be appropriate in men and inappropriate in women, or appropriate in women and inappropriate in men, they have linked

together issues which have generally been held apart, and shown how political philosophy and philosophy of mind are connected.<sup>9</sup>

## 2 Personal identity

Several of these themes can be traced in contemporary feminist writing about personal identity, which has tended to draw on the insights of psychoanalysis and postmodernism to explore the ways in which selves are embodied, discontinuous, malleable and socially constructed.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, anglophone theorists of personal identity have continued to develop a conception of the self which revolves around a distinction between the psychological and the bodily, and a related notion of psychological continuity.<sup>11</sup> It is tempting to suppose that these two groups are addressing different questions: that feminists are for the most part interested in the variety of ways in which identity can be moulded, lived, or transformed; and that theorists of personal identity are concerned with the prior question of what it is to have an identity at all. But this suggested division of labour is too simple. Feminist explorations of the self are, among other things, attempts to depart from the symbolically masculine character of much of philosophy, and their concern with embodiment, discontinuity and social construction is driven by a desire to avoid reiterating the hierarchical oppositions outlined in the preceding section. By embodying the self, they aim to undo the deeply rooted association between the self and the masculine mind; by emphasizing discontinuity, they aim to put pressure on the cultural alliance between unity and masculinity. From a feminist perspective, therefore, the continued dependence of personal identity theorists on various oppositions that feminist philosophy aims to dismantle is at least suspicious. In this chapter I shall explore some of the grounds for this suspicion, and suggest ways in which it is well-founded.

Within the analytic tradition, discussion of persons focuses largely on the question: what criteria have to be satisfied in order for it to be true that a person at  $t_1$  survives at  $t_2$ ? Or: what criteria have to be met for a person at  $t_1$  to be the same person at  $t_2$ ?<sup>12</sup> Until recently, these were generally taken to be questions about personal identity, and it was widely assumed that any relation specifying continuing personhood would have to share some key features of the identity relation, such as transitivity and being one-one. Feminists who have argued that philosophy places too much emphasis on identity, and uses it to maintain the system of binary oppositions which exclude the feminine, might have found this objectionable. But in any case, Derek Parfit's work has prompted a reconsideration of this claim. What

matters, he has suggested, is survival.<sup>13</sup> And if persons can survive without being identical, the way is open to allow that survival may be a matter of degree. We reach the possibility of a more flexible conception of selfhood which is consonant with at least some feminist arguments.

At the same time, contributors to the debate have found it helpful to distinguish two criteria for continuing personal identity – bodily continuity and psychological continuity – and in this way to separate body and mind. Among feminists, this sort of approach is widely regarded as worthy of scrutiny, as it is sometimes the prelude to an attempt to marginalize the body, and with it the symbolically feminine. In this particular case it is undoubtedly the prelude to a manoeuvre which reinforces the mind/body divide, namely the construction of thought experiments which press these two apart. In the last few years, a good deal of weight has been placed on imaginary examples which suggest that psychological as opposed to bodily continuity is what constitutes a person's survival. One kind of example, in particular, has been crucial in securing this view: the much-cited cases in which, by some means or other, one person's character and memories are transplanted into a second person's body.<sup>14</sup> Although other scenarios such as fission and fusion are also appealed to,<sup>15</sup> transplant cases are a crucial resource on which theorists of various persuasions rely, and are used to create a framework within which different accounts of survival can be discussed.

To make a case for the view that the debate about personal identity marginalizes the feminine, and is one of the ways in which philosophy privileges the symbolically masculine over its feminine counterpart, I shall concentrate on these examples. I shall not discuss the relative merits of psychological and bodily continuity as conditions of survival, nor shall I consider the relation between survival and identity. Instead, I shall try to show how imaginary examples of character transplant are used to sustain a symbolically masculine conception of personhood. I shall take up four points: one about the delineation of character; a narrower one about memory; a third about the role of the social world in sustaining identity; and a fourth about identity and male sexual power.

### 3 Delineation of character

Imaginary cases in which one person's character is transplanted into another person's body generally assume that character has to be lodged in a material body of some sort. It may be a whole human body, a brain, or half a brain. The body in question may be inorganic, as when an imaginary machine stores the information from one brain and prints it off in

another.<sup>16</sup> But in all these versions the body is thought of as a container or receptacle for character. The brain figures as a container in which a person's psychological states can be preserved, and the body figures as a more elaborate receptacle for the brain. Equally, a machine which copies the information from one brain and prints it into another is a receptacle for storing psychological states.

Several contributors to the literature on personal identity acknowledge that thinking of the body as a receptacle may be an excessive oversimplification, but brush this thought aside. In 'The Self and the Future', for example, Bernard Williams notes that body swapping between people of different sexes may be hard to imagine, but comments 'Let us forget this',<sup>17</sup> so turning his back on a point he makes elsewhere, that it may be impossible for an emperor to express his personality when his body is that of a peasant.<sup>18</sup> Other writers, such as Noonan, note the problem, but bypass it by specifying that the bodies in question are either only numerically distinct, or extremely similar.<sup>19</sup> Any characteristics that might enable the body to disrupt the psychological continuity of the character transplanted into it are removed, with the result that bodies are regarded, for the purposes of the experiment, as uniform. They do of course differ in various ways, but these differences are held to be irrelevant.

Making the body anonymous in this way simultaneously affirms a particular view of what character is. The things that really matter about a person's character, the traits which constitute their psychological continuity, do not depend on their having a particular body, or a body with any particular properties. Anthony Quinton makes this point explicitly. 'As things are', he writes, 'characters can survive large and even emotionally disastrous alterations to the physical type of a person's body . . . Courage, for example, can perfectly well persist even though the bodily conditions for its obvious manifestation do not.'<sup>20</sup> Courage, perhaps, but what about dexterity? Patience, perhaps, but what about delight in one's sexuality? (It would be interesting to consider whether all the traditional virtues can be construed as independent of the body in this way.) Quinton's argument exemplifies a tendency which runs through imagined cases of character transplant – a tendency to rely on a conception of character or psychological continuity which serves to emphasize, and even create, a division between the psychological and the bodily. Properties which do not fit neatly into the category of the psychological are held to be marginal or irrelevant to character. Then, if continuity of character is taken to be what matters in survival, merely bodily states become irrelevant to survival.

#### 4 Memory

Partly because the states that contribute to psychological continuity are specified as states that are not bodily, theorists of personal identity are able to be both non-committal and inclusive about what exactly they are. Lewis, for example, regards this as a question of detail,<sup>21</sup> and Noonan claims that ‘in general *any* causal links between past factors and present psychological traits can be subsumed under the notion of psychological connectedness’.<sup>22</sup> However, a central role is often given to memories as states which give us access to our pasts, and secure our sense of temporal continuity. How must memory be conceived if it is to fulfil this function, while leaving intact the division between body and character?

At least, I suggest, as a storehouse of recollections able to survive bodily vicissitudes. Take the case of Adam. Whatever happens to him – even if he has one of his ribs removed, even if his body changes beyond recognition, even if God refuses to recognize him – he will still be able to think of a sequence of things he did and things that happened to him as *his* actions and experiences. More particularly, changes in his body will not interfere with this capacity. For example, even when he is weak and wasted he remembers that he took the apple from Eve as a strong young man. Why, then, should this capacity not endure in the imaginary case where Adam’s character is transplanted into a different body?

There are some obvious exceptions to the view that memory is unaffected by bodily vicissitudes. For instance, brain damage may make Adam amnesiac, and if his character is transplanted into a body with a damaged brain, it is not obvious that his memories will survive. A more interesting example is provided by cases of physical violation such as rape, other forms of torture, or malicious attack, which often have a profound impact on memory. In an illuminating paper, Susan Brison makes the point that experiences like these do not simply add to the victim’s stock of memories, as a camera operator might shoot another few feet of film, nor are they safely lodged in the mind, as the camera operator might store the exposed film in a tin.<sup>23</sup> First, memories of trauma are in many cases closely tied to the body, indeed are *in* the body, and manifest themselves in physical states as much as in psychic ones. Here any neat separation between bodily states and memory as the bearer of psychological continuity seems to break down. To press a tasteless question, would a trauma victim retain her memories if her character were transplanted into a different body? Secondly, trauma destroys or alters existing memories, so that people who have been subjected to extended torture or deprivation lose conscious memories of their own pasts, and lose, too, the easy sense of continuity that

memory is here supposed to provide. Their time scale may shrink so that their memories of their own experiences become mainly short-term ones. And the continuity of memory may be punctured and jumbled by uncontrollable, nightmarish recollections.

Writers on personal identity usually try to take account of the loops, breaks and fade-outs in our memories by emphasizing that psychological continuity does not require a single sequence of memories, but only a sequence of overlapping sequences. Furthermore, it is not constituted by memory alone. Where memory breaks down, other continuities such as those in a person's desires, intentions, or hopes can take over. The fact that trauma victims lose memories therefore need not imply that they lose psychological continuity. However, Brison's discussion identifies one of the limitations of such an approach. This way of thinking about continuity suggests that, when memory fails, other psychological states remain unchanged and serve as the guarantors of personhood. But trauma victims do not just lose their memories of past events or actions. They lose the pattern of memory in which their expectations, emotions, skills, desires, and so on are rooted, so that loss of memory is, in these cases, part of a broader destruction of character. The ability to enjoy dancing, for instance, is grounded on remembered physical skills (how to tango), expectations derived from past experience (that one will be safe), emotional dispositions (taking pleasure in music), the confidence that one can keep one's own memory under control, and so on. When all these are gone, enjoying dancing will be gone also. And so for other character traits.

If, as much discussion of personal identity assumes, memory is to be one of the guarantors of psychological continuity, and if psychological continuity is to be separable from bodily continuity, memory must be interpreted in a particular and selective way. Memories in the body have to be set aside in favour of those which appear to have no bodily aspects; and it has to be assumed that the impact of memory loss on other character traits is sufficiently limited for psychological continuity to survive. It is arguable that these are not very contentious assumptions. But they nevertheless help us to see that the division between body and character, around which imaginary transplant cases are organized, can only be sustained if the traits constituting character are laundered, and all traces of the body washed away. The purified conception of 'the psychological' which emerges then appears as an unsullied self for which the body is simply a convenient receptacle.

## 5 Social circumstances

The two steps we have examined – the expelling of everything bodily from the mind, and the simultaneous devaluation of the bodily – are familiar to



feminists, many of whom have read them as an attempt to demarcate the masculine from the feminine and exclude the latter from philosophy. We can find further traces of this way of proceeding in discussions of personal identity if we focus on another curious feature of the persons around whom debate rages – their complete lack of any history or social context. As we have seen, the key question that concerns philosophers is what it takes for *x* at *t*<sub>1</sub> to survive at *t*<sub>2</sub>. This assumes that we start out with a fully-fledged person, which is why I've called him Adam. And it assumes that in ordinary circumstances (if he doesn't die) he will survive until *t*<sub>2</sub>. Philosophers who regard psychological continuity as what matters in survival thus assume that psychological continuity is a property of normal human beings.

To take it for granted that Adam at his creation is a person is to suppose that at that point he has both a body and a character – a suitably integrated set of memories, emotions, desires and so on. The expectation that in normal circumstances he will survive to be expelled from Paradise has built into it the expectation that he possesses the means to maintain his character in some body or other, to satisfy the demands of psychological continuity. These are large assumptions which exclude a good deal. The first excludes the fact that character, in the sense of the ability to understand oneself as the subject of diverse psychological states, is not a birthright, but the fruit of a child's relations with the people who care for him or her. Theorists of personal identity appear to take a Lockean view of the genesis of character: once Adam is created, or once a baby reaches a certain stage, memory starts to roll and an integrated character develops. In doing so they exclude from consideration some of the ways in which the self is dependent on others, particularly on its mother figure. At the same time they make it unnecessary to consider whether features of the process by which the self is constituted may effect its subsequent continuity. The second assumption has complementary consequences: it brackets the question of whether the maintenance of psychological continuity also depends on social relations.

From Freud onwards, writers in the psychoanalytic tradition have elaborated the view that a child's experiences are not initially integrated or continuous, and are not initially the experiences of an individuated self. Coming to understand itself as separate from its mother figure, and becoming able to claim its experiences as its own, is for a child a process in the course of which it becomes able to locate its experiences in its own body. As a number of feminists have stressed, both Freud and Lacan describe the ego as a psychical mapping of the libidinal intensities of the body, a mental projection not of the actual body, but of the body as a kind of emotional map.<sup>24</sup> Freud's ideas are elaborated in Lacan's argument that, during the mirror stage, the child forms an image of its own body as it is



represented for it by the images of others, and by its own reflection in a mirror. This image, which is of the body as a whole, forms a sort of provisional identity. It is itself a precondition of the more stable symbolic identity the child acquires as the result of the resolution of the Oedipus complex. And it survives the Oedipus complex as the ego ideal, a model of bodily integrity. Work on body images suggests that they make an important contribution to psychological continuity. During the mirror stage the child embarks on the process of coming to understand itself as situated in the space occupied by its body; or, to put the point differently, embarks on the process of acquiring a stable emotional investment in its body. Only once it has a body image can it understand its body as 'mine', and only then can it possess a perspective on the world.<sup>25</sup>

The self for whom psychological continuity is a possibility therefore has to be created through a series of interactions between the child, people around it, and the broader culture in which it lives.<sup>26</sup> Equally, psychological continuity has to be sustained, and social circumstances can either foster or damage it. To return to Susan Brison's argument, trauma victims who describe the selves they were as dead, or beyond recognition, provide searing evidence of the ways that continuity can be shattered. As well as losing the memories and character traits which defined them, they may have lost the ability to inhabit fully the lives they are now living. Brison quotes a poem by Charlotte Delbo about her return from Auschwitz to Paris:

life was returned to me  
and here I am in front of life  
as though facing a dress  
I cannot wear.<sup>27</sup>

To recover the sense of subjectivity that personal identity theorists so often take for granted, such people need to recover the ability to care about themselves and the world, to feel emotions that, as Brison puts it, are more than counterfactual.<sup>28</sup> Others can play a crucial part in this process. By listening to, and recognizing, the victims of trauma, others seem to be able to help them piece together their memories into narratives with which they can identify, and master the troubling bodily manifestations of memory which further disrupt the self. Extreme cases like these suggest that psychological continuity has a social dimension insofar as it depends on recognition by others. When recognition is withdrawn, the emotional investment in our memories and characters that holds the self together may be weakened, so that, to varying degrees, we suffer a kind of depersonalization – an inability to feel that our experiences are our own, and a subsequent inability to integrate and order them.

The view that psychological continuity has to be created and sustained has some impact on the personal identity theorists' assumption that bodily and psychological continuity are conceptually separable. The arguments I have just sketched help us to elaborate an account of what is left out in the imaginary cases where it is assumed that psychological continuity would survive body transplant. Suppose we assume that psychological continuity does depend on the possession of a body image, and on an emotional investment in it. Is it now so obvious that the features of the body into which a character is transplanted are irrelevant to its survival? To dramatize the issue in a manner typical of this philosophical literature, what about a female fashion model whose character is transplanted into the body of a male garage mechanic? Might she not find it impossible to reconcile her body image with the body that had become hers, and suffer such a level of dislocation that she became unable to locate her experiences in that body? At the limit, might she not experience the depersonalization suffered by some psychotics, who lose interest in the whole body and do not invest any narcissistic libido in the body image? Their self-observations seem viewed from the perspective of the outsider and they display no interest in their own bodies.<sup>29</sup> Suppose, by contrast, we imagine a character whose body is transplanted into that of her identical twin. The point is that she remains psychologically continuous (if she does) because the body that is now hers has properties which make it possible for her to live in it as her own. Psychological continuity is not independent of the body. It is a feature of embodied selves.

If recognition makes a difference, the degree of a person's psychological continuity may also depend on social circumstances. To return to the case of the model, will her friends and lovers continue to recognize and affirm her? Will she be able to find anyone able to believe her story and hear her out? Anthony Quinton touches optimistically on the first point. 'In our general relations with other human beings their bodies are for the most part intrinsically unimportant. We use them as convenient recognition devices enabling us to locate the persisting characters and memory complexes . . . which we love or like. It would be upsetting if a complex with which we were emotionally involved came to have a monstrous or repulsive physical appearance . . . But that our concern and affection would follow the character and memory complex . . . is surely clear.'<sup>30</sup> Quinton is aware that this may not quite settle the argument, and addresses the looming objection that some personal relations, such as those 'of a rather unmitigatedly sexual type', might not survive a change of body. But here, too, he resolves the problem confidently. 'It can easily be shown that these objections are without substance. In the first place, even the most tired of

entrepreneurs is going to take some note of the character and memories of the companion of his later nights at work. He will want her to be docile and quiet, perhaps, and to remember that he takes two parts of water to one of scotch, and no ice . . . As a body she is simply an instrument of a particular type . . .'<sup>31</sup> This solution to the problem employs the strategy we have already examined: it resolutely divides psychological properties from bodily ones and insists that the former are what matter in recognition. The wish to be loved for oneself alone and not for one's golden hair is simply granted. What this solution does not countenance, however, is the possibility that a person's ability to sustain psychological continuity may depend on other people recognizing and affirming the properties and potentialities of their embodied selves, and that where this possibility is removed, their psychological continuity may be damaged.

## 6 Marginalizing the symbolically feminine

We can now see more clearly that when personal identity theorists specify that characters are transplanted into bodies identical with the ones they had before, they are not introducing innocent simplifications. Instead, they are covering up and discounting ways in which psychological continuity is woven into the histories of our embodied selves. However, this is not the end of the matter. A theorist of personal identity may concede that psychological continuity has to be created, and that in extreme cases such as psychosis it can be destroyed. But he or she may nevertheless maintain that, in all ordinary cases, once psychological continuity is created, it survives. We see this, for example, in the testimony of the victims of extreme and extended trauma. While they may not remember much about their earlier lives, and may now lack well-defined characters, they identify with their past selves and speak about them in the first person (albeit sometimes rather oddly as when they say things like 'I died there' or 'I shall always miss myself as I was then'). We see it, too, in cases of physical mutilation where, although the body image usually takes some time to adjust, people do not lose all sense of who they are.<sup>32</sup> Only in pathological conditions such as psychosis and multiple personality does the self really fragment. So, putting these last cases aside, are we not right to posit a sense of psychological continuity which is independent of both bodily and social vicissitudes, or to imagine that this sense of continuity could survive if a character were transplanted from one body into another?

The arguments I have offered aim to show that, once we strip this imaginary situation of features which function to make it appear unproblematic, the kind of continuity that can be relied on is comparatively

attenuated. All we are able to assume is that the transplanted character is able to locate its experiences in its new body, and that it remains sufficiently integrated to claim some memories as its own. We need not assume that it has much emotional investment in its memories. Nor need we assume much continuity of other character traits. Psychological continuity features here as a slender lifeline which enables the transplanted person to say to themselves 'I know that such and such happened to me and that I am so and so' and just about to believe it.

The personal identity theorist must be prepared to argue that this minimal level of continuity is sufficient to sustain the claim that we can fruitfully explore the question of what is involved in survival by playing off bodily and psychological continuity against one another. It seems to me, however, that the attractions of psychological continuity as a separable component of survival have been considerably reduced. Let me labour this point. Before, we were imagining that, transplanted into a new body, I would feel pretty much the same as I do now, would be able to continue the projects I have now, would be no less committed to my future than I am now, would have the memories and characteristics I now possess, and would retain the relations with other people that, so it seems to me, make life worth living. Now we imagine a situation in which it is much less clear what transplant will be like, and in which it may give rise to psychic and physical pain comparable, perhaps, to the pain of torture which looms so large in one of the problem cases constructed by Williams.<sup>33</sup> I may lose many memories and character traits, so that my hold on my own past is tenuous and emotionally numbed, and my grasp of who I now am is fractured and confused. I may lose the affection and even recognition of the people who matter to me, and also the capacity to form new relationships. I may be unable to pursue my projects or embark on new ones, and may have very little emotional investment in the life I am living.

Some theorists of personal identity would, I suspect, insist that as long as there remains a thread of continuity between the pre- and post-transplant selves, we have a case for the conclusion that they are the same person. The barest 'I' is enough to hold the self together and to underwrite an approach to the problem that separates psychological and bodily continuity. But in the light of the sorts of difficulties I have discussed it seems reasonable to ask: Why cling to this doctrine? Why deploy such resources of imagination to prisme the bodily and the psychological apart? And why go to such lengths to protect psychological continuity from the effects of the body and the rest of the world?

At this point a reader might object that these questions misrepresent the current debate. Contemporary theorists of personal identity, it might be

claimed, are by no means agreed that psychological continuity is essential, or even important, to personhood, and many of their accounts emphasize the centrality of the body. This is undoubtedly true. However, the approach I have been discussing is extremely influential, and continues to shape our understanding of what the problem of personal identity consists in.<sup>34</sup> As long as this much is conceded, the questions I have posed remain pertinent.

Feminists who have addressed these questions have frequently drawn on a conception of the self which is set over against, though not completely irreconcilable with, the view of personal identity we have been examining, insofar as it holds that there is an important aspect of the psyche, the unconscious, which this view neglects. To accept that the unconscious is at work when we philosophize is to accept that the psychological discontinuities so evident in pathological cases are present to some degree in all of us. Some aspects of the self are simply not picked up by accounts which emphasize psychological continuity, and the decision to discount these may itself have unconscious motivations. Taking the unconscious into account, then, feminist philosophers have explained the prominence of views which regard the body as unimportant to identity in various ways. Some have argued for the view that, in European culture, the mind is associated with masculinity and the body with femininity. One term can stand in for, or symbolize, the other. Philosophers (most of them men) have employed these associations. They have assumed (often unconsciously) that personal identity is male identity, and have developed accounts in which the symbolically masculine mind is given priority over the body.<sup>35</sup> Other writers have provided psychological explanations for this downgrading of the symbolically feminine. When male personal identity theorists construct imaginary examples which separate the bodily from the psychological, they resolve in fantasy the always-unresolved conflicts of the Oedipus complex – the separation of a male child from his mother figure, and his subsequent identification with his father. In establishing and maintaining a firm boundary between the maternal body and the paternal mind, they deny their own unconscious desire to be reunited with the mother figure. And in fixing on psychological continuity as the mark of identity, they construct a picture in which masculinity and selfhood coincide.<sup>36</sup> A further aspect of the transplant fantasy also serves to exclude the feminine. By positing fully-fledged persons whose history is irrelevant to the problem at hand, male philosophers imagine for themselves a condition of self-sufficiency, from which their indebtedness to a mother figure, or indeed to anyone else, is excluded.

These two types of explanation (one cultural, the other psychological) have a good deal in common. Both rest on the claim that philosophers

(male and female) are themselves psychologically discontinuous, in the commonplace sense that their unconscious fears and desires play a part in determining the way they formulate and argue about problems, and the sorts of arguments they find persuasive, although this is not an aspect of their philosophizing over which they have conscious control. Moreover, both assume that particular associations at work in our culture continue to play a significant part in shaping our philosophical beliefs. According to the first kind of view, symbolic associations help to explain the fact that we privilege some terms over others. According to the second, these symbolic associations are themselves embedded in the psychological processes that form sexual identity.

Over the last two decades, feminist philosophers have amassed a range of evidence for both the explanatory hypotheses I have sketched. However, it remains to ask what internal support we can find for the view that theorists who equate personal identity with psychological continuity are upholding (however unconsciously) a masculine conception of identity. I have assumed, uncontentionally I hope, that we sometimes find clues to the unconscious in questions that hover round the margins of a text, so that when Williams or Noonan allow that transplant from one body into a very different one might be difficult, and then immediately put the problem aside, it is probably worth looking further.<sup>37</sup> I have also assumed – and Williams and Quinton make this explicit – that what they are putting aside here is the issue of sexual identity.<sup>38</sup> To return to the fantasy of character transplant, there are in principle a variety of ways of thinking about the case of a male character transplanted into a female body. Maybe it would be the ideal sex-change operation. Maybe it would condemn the resulting person to the unhappy condition of someone who desperately wants a sex-change operation. Maybe it would produce psychological breakdown. As we have seen, most writers block off exploration of lines of thought like these, which require us to think of the people concerned as embodied, in their investigations of personal identity. Why? Perhaps because they take it that the identity of a person is the identity of a male. Perhaps because an unconscious fear of jeopardizing their sexual identity prevents them from doing so, and helps to direct them towards an approach which brackets the body and concentrates on the mind.

It may be helpful to consider what kinds of criticism I have offered of the view that personal identity consists in psychological continuity. In the preceding sections of this essay I have voiced some objections to this analysis which *can* be assessed independently of any claims about gender as arguments to the effect that authors who appeal to a particular kind of thought experiment rely on an inadequate conception of the self. The

limitations of the conception they employ undermine not only the particular conclusions they draw from their thought experiments, but their very approach, which works with an oversimplified conception of memory, neglects the social construction of the self, and is insensitive to the ways in which selves are embodied. At the same time, however, I have claimed that the issue of gender is woven into arguments which rely on fantasies of brain transplant, and to bring this out I have asked what is going on when philosophers advance them. What is being said, explicitly and implicitly, and why? One of the things going on, so I have suggested, is that a symbolically masculine account of identity is being unselfconsciously articulated. A sceptically inclined reader may still wish to ask whether this diagnosis amounts to a criticism beyond those set out in the first part of the chapter. What is wrong with the symbolically masculine account, other than the fact that it suffers from the deficiencies just summarized?

To answer this question, it is helpful to distinguish the type of criticism which pinpoints a particular flaw in a position from the type which indicates the shortcomings of an approach. The diagnosis I have offered is of the latter kind. Its critical force rests on the assumptions that we are in search of philosophical interpretations that answer to our experience and acknowledge the complexity of our lives, and that, in the case of personal identity, part of this complexity lies in sexual identity. Theories which neglect or disavow sexual difference therefore cut themselves off from an important set of issues, and in doing so render themselves philosophically impoverished. To show how this occurs is not, of course, to specify what a feminist analysis of personal identity would be like, or to explore how a focus on sexual difference alters our understanding of the relation between personhood and embodiment, though many of the works cited throughout the chapter undertake these very tasks. My aim has been to articulate some of the features of an analytical approach to personal identity which leave feminist philosophers dissatisfied, and which explain the fact that their work has developed in different directions.

## 7 Identity and social power

The symbolic gendering of the opposition between body and mind, on which I have so far concentrated, has provided an exceptionally fruitful focus for feminist research. Nevertheless, it is important not to assume too readily that the body always figures as feminine and the mind as masculine,<sup>39</sup> or to take it for granted that gender is exclusively associated with these terms. Some theorists, I have been arguing, locate personal identity in a mind which they interpret as masculine; but there is also evidence that a



man's continuing identity is sometimes implicitly understood to depend on his ability to control a woman. Here the issue is not how the 'components' of a person are gendered, but how the relations between people of different sexes bear on the problem of identity. If social relations can secure or destroy continuing identity, as I suggested earlier on, they will provide another area in which identity and gender intertwine.

This motif is central to some works of literature. For example, in Janet Lewis's novella, *The Wife of Martin Guerre*,<sup>40</sup> Martin Guerre leaves his village and family and does not come back. Eight years later he returns – or rather, an impostor arrives, who slips into Guerre's place and takes up the life he had left behind. Some time goes by before Guerre's wife, tortured by the belief that the impostor is not her husband, and that she is an adulteress, confesses her suspicions, and the impostor is brought to trial. Just as judgement is about to be announced, the original Martin Guerre walks into the court room, and the impostor is punished with death. In this narrative, it becomes important to establish the impostor's identity because he is usurping Guerre's sexual rights over his wife, or to put it another way, because Guerre has lost control over her. She is out of his control, and her independence of him is part of what threatens to obliterate Guerre's social identity, insofar as it is one of the conditions that allow the impostor to 'become' him. The trial restores both Guerre's identity and sexual order.

We find the same link between identity and male sexual power in Balzac's story about Colonel Chabert<sup>41</sup> who, when the tale begins, has been listed among the casualties of Napoleon's Russian Campaign. His name has appeared on the list of valiant heroes who sacrificed their lives for France, his wife has remarried, and his house has been sold. But in fact the Colonel has survived, and after several years returns to Paris, determined to reclaim his wife. Once again, loss of identity is linked to loss of control over a woman, and his desire to have his wife back is what drives the Colonel to explain his plight to a young lawyer, who takes up his case and tries to negotiate a settlement. In the course of the negotiations the Colonel comes to see that his wife is a ruthless and avaricious woman who will never return to him, and has never loved him anyway, and renounces his desire to reclaim her. But the recognition that he cannot possess her destroys him, and in the final scene the lawyer comes across him, unkempt and listless, sitting on a log beside the road staring vacantly into space. Here, loss of power over a woman is associated not just with loss of social identity but with psychological discontinuity. To be sure, Colonel Chabert is deprived of his social identity; but he loses more than this, and although the man sitting on the log may know who he is, his discontinuity with his past self prevents him from functioning.

## 8 Conclusion

When theorists of personal identity focus on psychological continuity as the stronghold of the self, and construe psychological continuity as independent of bodily continuity, they secure only a self which would in other circumstances be regarded as pathologically disturbed. This is, to be sure, a self of sorts, and one consonant with the problem ‘What is it to survive?’ which already carries connotations of minimal continuity, of enduring against the odds and in the face of obstacles. Perhaps the question we should be addressing, then, is why the analytical philosophical tradition has been so concerned to explore and defend this minimal notion of survival, and hence personhood. Part of the explanation, I have suggested, lies in cultural constructions of masculinity and femininity which are at work in the unconscious, and consequently in philosophy. At the heart of identity lies the issue of sexual identity, and with it the desire of a male-dominated tradition to secure the masculinity of the subject and the subordination of women. This commonplace drama is played out in various philosophical arenas, but is worked through with particular intensity in the problem of identity itself.<sup>42</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper & Row; London: Wildwood House, 1980); Elizabeth Spelman, ‘Woman as Body: Ancient and Contemporary Views’, *Feminist Studies* 8:1 (1982), 109–31; Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: ‘Male’ and ‘Female’ in Western Philosophy* (London: Methuen, 1984), and ‘Maleness, Metaphor and the “Crisis” of Reason’, in Louise M. Antony and Charlotte Witt, eds., *A Mind of One’s Own. Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), pp. 69–83; Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); Michèle Le Dœuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary* (London: Athlone, 1980); Tina Chanter, *Ethics of Eros: Irigaray’s Rewriting of the Philosophers* (London: Routledge, 1995); Penelope Deutscher, *Yielding Gender: Feminism, Deconstruction and the History of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1997).
- 2 Sharon Sullivan, ‘Domination and Dialogue in Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*’, *Hypatia* 12:1 (1997), 1–19; Judith Butler, ‘Sexual Ideology and Phenomenological Description: A Feminist Critique of Merleau-Ponty’s Phenomenology of Perception’, in Jeffner Allen and Iris Marion Young, eds., *The Thinking Muse: Feminism and Modern French Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), pp. 85–100; Iris Marion Young, ‘Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality’, in *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist*

- Philosophy and Social Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 141–59.
- 3 Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974); Jane Gallop, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (London: Macmillan, 1982).
  - 4 Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur* (New York: Harper and Row), published in the UK under the title *The Rocking of the Cradle and the Ruling of the World* (London: Souvenir Press, 1978); Teresa Brennan, ed., *Between Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1989) and *The Interpretation of the Flesh. Freud and Femininity* (Routledge: London, 1992); Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination* (London: Virago, 1990); Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1990). There is a list of Further Reading in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis* at p. 266.
  - 5 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974); Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray. Philosophy in the Feminine* (London: Routledge, 1991); Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun. Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); Kelly Oliver, ed., *The Portable Kristeva* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).
  - 6 Rosi Braidotti, *Patterns of Dissonance* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991); Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Moira Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies* (London: Routledge, 1996); Christine Battersby, *The Phenomenal Woman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).
  - 7 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. H. M. Parshley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972); Toril Moi, *Simone de Beauvoir: The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); Ann Oakley, *Sex, Gender and Society* (London: Temple Smith, 1972); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990) and *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London: Routledge, 1993); Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies*; Evelyn Fox Keller, 'Gender and Science: An Update', in *Secrets of Life, Secrets of Death: Essays on Language, Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).
  - 8 Alison Jaggar, 'Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology', in A. Garry and M. Pearsall, eds., *Women, Knowledge and Reality: Exploration in Feminist Philosophy*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 166–90.
  - 9 Sandra Lee Bartky, 'Shame and Gender', in *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 83–98; Naomi Scheman, 'Anger and the Politics of Naming', in *Engenderings: Constructions of Knowledge, Authority and Privilege* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 22–35; Elizabeth Spelman, 'Anger and Subordination', in Garry and Pearsall, eds., *Women, Knowledge and Reality* 1st edition, pp. 263–73; Sue Campbell, *Interpreting the Personal: Expression and the Formation of Feelings* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).
  - 10 See for example Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Butler, *Gender Trouble*; Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies*; Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*; Young, *Throwing like a Girl*.

- 11 See for example S. Shoemaker, 'Personal Identity, A Materialist View', in S. Shoemaker and R. Swinburne, *Personal Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984); Bernard Williams, 'The Self and the Future', *Philosophical Review* 79 (1970), 161–80, reprinted in *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 46–63; Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); David Lewis, 'Survival and Identity', in *Philosophical Papers* vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).
- 12 For a recent work which aims to recast this framework, see Marya Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).
- 13 Parfit, 'Personal Identity', *Philosophical Review* 80 (1971), pp. 3–27; see also his *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).
- 14 See for example S. Shoemaker, *Self-Knowledge and Self-Identity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963); Williams, 'The Self and the Future'. For further discussion, see the articles collected in H. Noonan ed., *Personal Identity*, International Research Library of Philosophy (Aldershot: Dartmouth Publishing Company, 1993).
- 15 See for example David Wiggins, 'Locke, Butler and the Stream of Consciousness: and Men as a Natural Kind', *Philosophy* 51 (1976), 131–58; Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*.
- 16 See for example Shoemaker's example in Shoemaker and Swinburne, *Personal Identity*, pp. 108–11.
- 17 Williams, 'The Self and the Future', p. 46.
- 18 B. Williams, 'Personal Identity and Individuation', in *Problems of the Self*, pp. 11–12.
- 19 Harold Noonan, *Personal Identity* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 4.
- 20 A. Quinton, 'The Soul', in J. Perry, ed., *Personal Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), p. 60.
- 21 Lewis, 'Survival and Identity', p. 56.
- 22 Noonan, *Personal Identity*, p. 13. See also Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, p. 205.
- 23 Susan J. Brison, 'Outliving Oneself: Trauma, Memory and Personal Identity', in D. Tietjens Meyers, ed., *Feminists Rethink the Self* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), pp. 12–39. Sections 4 and 5 of this chapter are deeply indebted to this article. For discussion of some closely related issues, see Sue Campbell, 'Women, "False Memory" and Personal Identity', *Hypatia* 12.2 (1997), pp. 51–62.
- 24 See for example Moira Gatens, 'Woman and Her Double(s)', in *Imaginary Bodies*, pp. 29–45; Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, pp. 62–85. For a useful discussion of ways in which the notion of a body image is used, see Brian O'Shaughnessy, 'Proprioception and the Body Image', in J. L. Bermudez, N. Eilan and A. Marcel, eds., *The Body and the Self* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).
- 25 Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits* (London: Tavistock, 1977); Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*; Bice Benvenuto and Roger Kennedy, *The Works of Jacques Lacan: An Introduction* (London: Free Association Books, 1986).
- 26 For a non-psychoanalytic treatment of this theme, see Annette Baier, 'Mixing Memory and Desire', in *Postures of the Mind* (London: Methuen, 1985).
- 27 Charlotte Delbo, *Days and Memory*, trans. Rosette C. Lamont (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). Quoted by Brison, 'Outliving Oneself', p. 19.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

- 29 Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, pp. 76–7.
- 30 Quinton, ‘The Soul’, p. 64.
- 31 *Ibid.*, pp. 65–6.
- 32 See, for example, the discussion of phantom limbs in Paul Schilder, *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body* (New York: International Universities Press, 1978), p. 64.
- 33 Williams, ‘The Self and the Future’, pp. 48ff.
- 34 With some exceptions – see for example the animalist views defended in Eric Olson, *The Human Animal: Personal Identity without Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) and Paul Snowdon, ‘Persons, Animals and Bodies’, in J. L. Bermudez, N. Eilan and A. Marcel, eds., *The Body and the Self* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995) – even philosophers who do not regard psychological continuity as essential to personal identity continue to treat the body as a container for the mind.
- 35 See for example Lloyd, *The Man of Reason*; Spelman, ‘Woman as Body’.
- 36 There are several variants of this view. For discussion of Freud, see Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* and Jane Gallop, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*; on object relations theory, see Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*; and for the view that these patterns of development are to be explained by child-rearing practices, see Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*.
- 37 For discussion of this view, see Le Dœuff, *The Philosophical Imaginary*; Deutscher, *Yielding Gender*.
- 38 At the same time, they are implicitly putting aside other dimensions of identity, for instance racial identity, which may be intimately connected to the body.
- 39 For a particularly helpful discussion of these instabilities, see Deutscher, *Yielding Gender*.
- 40 Janet Lewis, *The Wife of Martin Guerre* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977). Originally published 1941.
- 41 Honoré de Balzac, *Le Colonel Chabert*, ed. M. Didier (Paris: Société des textes français modernes, 1961).
- 42 Many helpful comments were made on an earlier draft of this essay. I am grateful to the contributors to a conference on Feminism and the Philosophy of Mind held at the University of London; to the Philosophy Department seminars at University College Dublin and at the University of York; and to John Dupré, Miranda Fricker, Jennifer Hornsby, Moira Gatens, Kathleen Lennon, Quentin Skinner and Catherine Wilson.