This study explores the oscillation between the ‘real,’ material body, and the social ‘body politic’ in American culture—an oscillation that I will call Body|Politic (I use both single quotation marks and italics for emphasis). My topic is how the materiality of the body [its biological, physical, and other systems] ‘prefigures’ and constitutes models of the social and the political. Thus, this study will necessarily occupy a space between ‘the natural’ and ‘the cultural,’ an interdisciplinary space that ranges across and connects the physical and the social sciences, biology and political theory, life sciences and cultural studies. It aims at opening up the traditional figure of the Body|Politic so as to focus on specific materialities that ground this metaphor, asking not primarily about how the Body|Politic—as a ‘universal metaphor’—incribes actual bodies into a system [the ‘default’ impact of cultural studies], but about what ‘version’ of the material body grounds the image of the Body|Politic. One of the guiding questions of this study can be posed as follows: What is the relation between the material body and the anthropomorphic metaphor, or on what kind of body is this metaphor based? Perhaps, ultimately, the concept of the Body|Politic is not only a figure of speech. Maybe there is a relation between the body and the ‘body politic’ that goes beyond [metaphorical] representation. Since in this book I want to offer a reading of the Body|Politic in Deleuzian terms, I will first attempt to clarify the term Body|Politic, and then ask what a Deleuzian approach has to offer for a revision of that concept.

In his seminal book Imagined Communities, a study on the origins of nationalism, Benedict Anderson sets out to show that the idea of a ‘nation’ and the corresponding personal and cultural feeling of ‘belonging’ are “cultural and historical artifacts of a particular kind” (4). According to Anderson, a nation’s biography—like an individual’s identity—“because it can not be ‘remembered,’ must be narrated” (204). If one accepts Anderson’s proposal that the nation is an imagined community, and that “communities are to be distinguished . . . by the style in which they are imagined” (6), then
one also has to analyze which images—taken, as it were, from the Hegelian unconscious and “nocturnal pit,” that reservoir of images on which consciousness can draw (Hegel 260)—a community, nation, or state uses to ground its metaphors to write its history, to write itself. As Roland Barthes has suggested, history always “maintains a permanent relation to a phantasma”: history builds on “that to the highest degree phantasmatic space: that of the human body” (Leçon/Lektion 65, my translation), which can be considered one of the prime icons/metaphors for a community, a highly suggestive epistemological prism through which social structures and processes can be conceived.

The history of the Body Politic has been the history of an image—of representations of the human body as an analogue for the state, for a political system. An established, integral part of what might be termed the political imaginary, its origins can be traced back to antiquity, to Plato’s and Aristotle’s prescriptions of how a society should function and how it should be ruled.1 In their accounts, in which bodily images and metaphors abound, one can find the origin of the organic conception of politeia, of the way the polis, or city, should be organized. With regard to Plato’s Republic, Ernest Barker has described this ‘organicist conception’ of the state: “An organism is a unity, where each member is an instrument (or organon) in the general plan; where each member has its appointed purpose or function (ergon); where each member can only act, and be understood, and indeed exist, through the end and aim of the whole. But such is the unity of the State and such is the relation of the individual to the State: the State is an organism and its citizens are its members” (Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle 127).

This reciprocity of state and organism sometimes also led to attempts to reverse the direction of the analogy, so that material bodies are seen in terms of a polis:

We should consider the organization of an animal to resemble that of a city well-governed by laws. For once order is established in a city, there is no need of a separate monarch to preside over every activity; each man does his own work as assigned, and one thing follows another because of habit. In animals this same thing happens because of nature: specifically because each part of them, since they are so ordered, is naturally disposed to do its own task. There is, then, no need of soul in each part: it is in some governing origin of the body, and other parts live because they are naturally attached, and do their tasks because of nature. (Aristotle 52).

In these analogies, the tertium comparationis of the state and the organism is their unity, totality, and principle of cooperation, since in the natural as well as the political body there has to be, as Leonard Barkan argues, “an
equal commitment of all the members to the well-being of the whole body” (78). And although Aristotle denies the “need of a separate monarch” in his analogy, what he calls the “habit” of each man—which, by analogy to the animal, is almost a natural disposition—is nothing but the ‘introjection’ of law and order, of the structure of monarchical government into the body. Thus, the concepts of unity and cooperation necessary for the corporeal analogy to function imply order, control, and hierarchy: some members|parts of the body are more important than others. The body proved to be a plausible and useful metaphor for the organization of a social group, since it provided a most ‘natural’ embodiment of unity and order, which was regulated by means of the mind|body dichotomy: the conscious will of the mind [represented by the head] ensured that the actions of the body were ‘rational.’ The metaphor of the natural organism already implied notions of hierarchy and control, which were seen as necessary for a well-functioning Body|Politic.

However, the more immediate origin of what is referred to as a Body|Politic is to be found in the theologico-political matrix of the king’s two bodies, prominent in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. In Elizabethan England, ideas about the body not only represented current thinking on the individual body, or notions and assumptions about what the real physical body actually involved, but were also blueprints of how society should operate. In order to secure the continuity of the country’s unity, in spite of the mortality of the actual monarch, the Body|Politic was conceived in analogy to the ‘mystical body’ of the church, which was ‘one in Christ.’ In addition to concepts of wholeness, unity, autonomy, the structure of the state was compared to the anatomy of the body. Thus, the body model of that period was characterized by a strict hierarchy that corresponded to the monarchical hierarchy, with the king, representing the head, at the top of the social ladder, and the peasants, or the extremities, at the bottom. Ernst Kantorowicz, in his seminal study *The King’s Two Bodies*, has analyzed that “curious legal fiction of the ‘King’s Two Bodies’ as developed in Elizabethan England” (11) and its contribution to grounding in what Ernst Cassirer has termed the “myth of the state.” According to the conflation of theology and politics in that concept, Edmund Plowden, an Elizabethan lawyer, states that the monarch consisted of two bodies:

*the one whereof is a Body natural, consisting of natural Members as every other Man has, and in this he is subject to Passions and Death as other Men are; the other is a Body politic, and the Members thereof are his Subjects, and he and his Subjects together compose the Corporation, as Southcote said, and he is incorporated with them, and they with him, and he is the Head, and they*
are the Members, and he has the sole Government of them; and this Body is not subject to Passions as the other is, nor to Death, for as to this Body the King never dies, and his natural Death is not called in our Law (as Harper said), the Death of the King, but the Demise of the King, not signifying by the Word (Demise) that the Body politic of the King is dead, but that there is a Separation of the two Bodies. (quoted in Kantorowicz 13)

In addition to his mortal body, then, the king had a second body—that of the totality of his subjects—of which he was the head. In this way, the king—by analogy the ‘cognitive center’ of the body—was seen as the natural embodiment of this totality. The monarch as an individual person may die, but in his death, “the Body politic is transferred and conveyed over from the Body natural now dead, or now removed from the Dignity royal, to another Body natural. So that it signifies a Removal of the Body politic of the King of this Realm from one Body natural to another” (ibid.). This heuristic fiction ensured continuity in the monarch’s government by introducing a split between the symbolic function of king and the human being placed in that position.

Renaissance England saw itself represented by its Virgin Queen: the body of the immaculate Elizabeth I served as a politicized metaphor for the ‘untouchability’ of England’s autonomy. This was also the age of the explorers—of Richard Hakluyt, Sir Walter Raleigh, and John Smith, and their expeditions to the New World. The tradition of this anthropomorphic trope was transferred to that New World, as proved by the name of the first English settlement, Virginia—after the Virgin Queen. Throughout the seventeenth century, the corporeal metaphor was still widely employed. James I, in a speech to Parliament in 1603, stated the corporeal metaphor in clearly gendered terms, declaring: “I am the Husband, and all the whole Isle is my lawfull Wife; I am the Head, and it is my Body” (James 272). Like a faithful wife, England was to give natural and unconditional loyalty to the monarch as its rightful husband. Stressing the divine rights of the monarchy against Parliament, James clearly made his point: “The king to his people is rightly compared to . . . the head of a body composed of diuers members” (64).

One of the most prominent examples of the Body|Politic—in fact, I argue, the icon most often referred to as a Body|Politic—is the image of the sovereign in the frontispiece of the first edition of Thomas Hobbes’s Leviathan. While it still retains the interplay of head and body, unity and diversity, Hobbes’s idea [and the corresponding image] show a new, more human-centered line of thought that pays greater attention to the abilities—and the needs—of the people. Whereas the traditional fiction of the king’s two bodies had justified the king’s power as God-given and had supported the hierarchical structure
Frontispiece of Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* [1651].
of state and society as unalterable, in *Leviathan*, Hobbes argued that government was not divine or natural at all, but an invention of mankind for mankind. With its shift from the embodiment of the nation in the king as instituted by [and with] God’s authority, Hobbes’s book can be regarded as the beginning of modern political theory: it attempts to logically and reasonably explain the need for a sovereign who is appointed by the people and who represents them. Godlike power and divine filiation, the traditional markers of the head of the Body Politic, are reduced to a man-made and necessary *representational structure*. The visual image of the Leviathan suggests a solution to the problem of the one and the many, of individual and collective identity—one of the basic problems of politics in general. A gigantic male figure, the Leviathan—adorned with crown, sword, and scepter as insignias of power—watches over a city. In this figure of the sovereign, the crowned head is of particular prominence, since it faces and addresses the reader. The sovereign’s body seems to be protected by armor but in fact consists of an almost infinite number of small human figures—faceless beings who all direct their gaze toward the head of the sovereign [the only ‘organ’ that is not a ‘composite member,’ and the place where a privileged metonymical part represents a complex body, where a potential many is resolved and channeled into a one, into a hierarchical fixation of authority and wholeness].

Hobbes’s solution provides a model of a ‘monarchical contract,’ a contract entered into not because of moral obligations, but because of self-interest and social agreement alone; not because of any inherent human striving for goodness and peace, but because if it were not for this contract, people would kill each other. In Hobbes’s view, a coercive government was more than necessary, since its absence would have lethal consequences—otherwise life would be a constant civil war. In the natural state of things, he argues, before any governments existed at all, life was a war of one against all. As long as this “naturall condition” (*Leviathan* 183) prevailed, “as long as this naturall Right of every man to every thing endureth, there can be no security to any man, (how strong or wise soever he be)” (190). The only way out of such misery, Hobbes claimed, was for people to protect themselves by forming societies, with each person agreeing not to harm others in exchange for not being harmed by anyone else. The natural state would be a state of pure anarchy, and, according to Hobbes, for the above reason, despotism is preferable to anarchy. Since people could not, in his view, be trusted to avoid harming others for their own gain, a strong, centralized government was necessary. The government Hobbes envisioned as necessary for this task was enormous and powerful—so powerful that he named his *Leviathan* after a biblical sea monster.
Once people surrendered power to the government, Hobbes said, they could not take it back. Only something ‘artificial,’ a symbolic contract, could counter the natural state of war and anarchy. Hence, for Hobbes, this government, this mechanical Body|Politic, is an “artificial man.” Critics such as Wolfgang Kersting have wondered why Hobbes used the image of the Leviathan as the model for his state. A tentative answer might point out that first of all, Hobbes is thus able to emphasize one of the most beneficial, though potentially oppressive, attributes of this Body|Politic: its immense power. The political community will function as a unified whole only if this power is concentrated in the sovereign. The value and benefit of such a unified community emerges from the description of the Leviathan and his scales in the book of Job: “His rows of scales are his pride, shut up tightly as with a seal; One is so near another that no air can come between them; They are joined one to another, they stick together and cannot be parted” (41:15–17). The frontispiece of Hobbes’s Leviathan visualizes this strengthening armor of scales as the united multiplicity of the consenting individuals, which creates the person of the state, the identity of the Body|Politic, the unity of which is achieved only in|by representation: “A Multitude of Men, are made One Person, when they are by one man, or one Person, Represented . . . For it is the Unity of the Representer, not the Unity of the Represented, that maketh the Person One” (Leviathan 220).

Hobbes’s model of the commonwealth had taken its name and image from a gigantic coiling serpent. A hundred years later, in 1754, at a time when the ‘representational Body|Politic’ had already become part and parcel of the political rhetoric, another serpent, one that was native to the English colonies in North America—a rattlesnake—made its appearance in what is considered to be the first American political cartoon, created by Benjamin Franklin. France, England’s long-time enemy and rival for control of North America, had, with the assistance of Native American allies, won a series of victories over English colonial troops from Virginia through New England. These widespread attacks led to a call for the unity of America’s colonies. Following Major George Washington’s surrender to the French, Franklin, in his Pennsylvania Gazette, depicted the British colonies as a dismembered snake. The snake’s body was cut into eight pieces, representing the colonies, the curves of its body suggesting the shape of the Atlantic coastline, and the labels on its segments in geographical order, from “N.E.”—New England—at the head to “S.C.”—South Carolina—at the tail. The motto underneath reads “JOIN, or DIE.” Franklin presumably chose the image of the rattlesnake because of the popular myth that a snake that had been cut in two would come to life again if the pieces were recombined before sunset. Franklin, as a representative in the Albany Congress, published this image
and an article called “Reasons and Motives” a few weeks before the congress convened in order to promote his Albany Plan of Union, in which he put forward the idea that a “union of the colonies is absolutely necessary for their preservation” (383). Ultimately, the plan was not ratified, as none of the colonies was willing to transfer authority to a central government. In Franklin’s attempt at unification, one can already see at work the ideas that later led to the first motto of the United States of America: *e pluribus unum*—out of many, one.

The interrelation of individuality and collectivity, the multitude of members and the unity of a ‘legal person,’ that had been at the heart of Hobbes’s *Leviathan* also defined the problematics of American politics in Franklin’s time. Hobbes starts with the *pluribus* and resolves it in a representational *unum* [only to discard the *pluribus* later, as I will show], making unity and wholeness not so much a cause, but an effect to be achieved. Franklin adopted this ‘directionality’ in images such as his 1787 designs for the American currency, the so-called Fugio coins with a circle of thirteen interlocking rings surrounding the central motto, “WE ARE ONE.” The motif of the ‘fugue’ also provides a bridge between the visual arts and music in early America. The same motif can be found in Paul Revere’s frontispiece to William Billings’s *The New England Psalm Singer* (1770), where the singers are singing
a ‘fuging-tune,’ or canon, and each taps on his neighbor’s sheet to tell him when it is his turn to start singing. The canon itself, it should be noted, is shaped like a circle, so that the complete round of the canon can be said to form interlocking circles, a perfect interrelation between individual and community, yet presided over by the singing master in the right corner of the engraving. Franklin’s snake woodcut, however, confronts us with a different scenario, which in its political rhetoric is all the more powerful: here, not only are the colonies not seen as artificial [as in Hobbes’s “Artificial man”], but as a ‘natural body,’ an organism. In contrast to Hobbes, who showed the Body Politic as a composite body, finding its unity in the act of representation [in ‘artifice’], Franklin also reverses the temporality: the image of the snake points to a unity that was there at the beginning, has been dismembered, and has to be subsequently reunited. Rather than reaching unity as an effect, Franklin’s drawing shows unity as a phantasmatic starting point to be reestablished—wholeness and unity are here regarded as the natural state of
being, envisioned as a mythical origin to which America must return, if it wants to survive.

This temporality becomes even clearer in the most explicit predecessor of Franklin’s woodcut—Nicholas Verrien’s emblem book of 1685, in which there is an image of a snake divided into two parts, with the motto “se rejoindre ou mourir.” Franklin’s image is on the one hand a wrong or misleading one, insofar as there was no such thing as previous unity. On the other hand, of course, the ideological impact of his reterritorialization of a previous wholeness was much stronger in that it claimed cohesion before it actually existed, urging a return to a former wholeness and making an ‘outside enemy’ ultimately responsible for the “present disunited State” (Franklin 376) of the colonies. Franklin’s woodcut presents history encoded in visual shorthand. His drawing came to be known as “the snake device.” A device differs from another pictorial representation—the emblem—in that it does not use the human figure in its representation. Both a good device and a good emblem are necessarily composed of two parts: the image itself, which is called ‘the body,’ and the motto—‘the soul.’ As with Kant’s insistence that “thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind” (93), an image without a motto rendered the device ‘dumb,’ and a motto by itself made a ‘blind’ emblem (Sommer 57). In Franklin’s device, the motto addresses the fragmented image with an imperative to a wholeness that had already existed. In his vision of a Body|Politic under a centralist power, Franklin was already arguing from the position of a national subject, which, in its representational unity, translates the materiality of a multitude of members into the power relations of ‘a people’ [or nation or state]. As in Hobbes, the principle of organicity that governs the Body|Politic, although conceived in terms of a ‘real body,’ takes its corporeal workings as institutionalized into a corporate mode of functioning—the divine body of the king is superseded by the represented unity of the people, the symbolic identity of the nation. From such a symbolic perspective, nonorganization—nonrepresentation—necessarily equals dismemberment.

A temporality similar to the one operative in Franklin’s snake device is also at work in the Declaration of Independence. This ‘founding document’—seemingly simple and straightforward—presents a whole chain of interrelated and retroactive representations. Thomas Jefferson drafted the declaration on behalf of a committee appointed by the Continental Congress—thus, Jefferson speaks for a committee that represents Congress, which in turn represents ‘one people’ that at the very moment of declaration is neither ‘one’ nor ‘a people.’ In a lecture to mark the bicentennial of the Declaration of Independence in 1976, Derrida attempted a reading of the document in terms of the performative act of founding an institution. In asking “who
signs, and with what so-called proper name, the declarative act” (“Declarations” 10), Derrida links his critique of the concept of the author to a particular temporality. With regard to the “we” of the declaration, he writes: “But this people does not exist. They do not exist as an entity, it does not exist, before this declaration, not as such. If it gives birth to itself, as free and independent subject, as possible signer, this can hold only in the act of the signature. The signature invents the signer” (ibid., emphasis in the original).

In a comment on this text, Christopher Norris states that the frequent use of performative [speech] acts in the declaration opens the question as to “how the change is effected from a given [preconstitutional] state of affairs to a new political order which would then provide the legitimizing terms of its own constitution” (196). A possible answer is given by Derrida in the following remark: “This signer can only authorize him- or herself to sign once he or she has come to the end . . ., if one can say this, of his or her own signature, in a sort of fabulous retroactivity” (“Declarations” 10). This logic of belatedness—the logic of representation—the signature—parallels Hobbes’s contention that it is ultimately representation, the “Unity of the Representer,” that creates identity [individual and political] in the first place, a unity that is paradoxically fixed in the performative act of the declaration’s “we, the people.”

The American Body|Politic and its unity in representation was not only symbolically performed in the Declaration of Independence, but also ‘icon-ized’ in one of the suggestions for the U.S. Great Seal, commissioned by Congress on July 4, 1776, in John Adams’s proposal of the figure of Hercules. Although this suggestion was ultimately rejected in favor of the bald eagle and the motto e pluribus unum, the figure of Hercules resurfaced in the Marquis de Barbi-Marbois’s 1784 painting Allegory of the American Union. The monolithic figure of Hercules takes Hobbes’s Leviathan to its extreme: the multitude of members has been completely unified into a Body|Politic without fissure, with the unum an invincible solidity.

Today, it seems, the image|metaphor of the Body|Politic in its traditional sense has lost its appeal; it has become a dead metaphor. On the level of political theory, this can be attributed to the fact that in the era of modern democracies, a return to a premodern conception seems antiquated. As Claude Lefort has argued, the development of Western democracies and the overthrow of monarchies, which sometimes even resulted in the decapitation of the head of state, instituted “a society without a body, . . . a society which undermines the representation of an organic totality” (Democracy 18). While in the theologico-political framework, the Body|Politic was the king, who gave society its body, in democracy, “the locus of power becomes an empty place . . . it cannot be occupied—it is such that no individual and
no group can be consubstantial with it—and it cannot be represented” (17). Lefort and other political thinkers of democracy, such as Laclau and Mouffe,7 are following a Lacanian approach to politics here, viewing politics ultimately as a shift from the aggressivity of the imaginary to the pacifying strategy of the symbolic—a move from Hobbes’s prepolitical ‘state of nature’ to the Oedipal register of culture and society. Thus, the “empty place” of democracy that Lefort hints at precisely marks the structural place of the Lacanian real—the impossible and unspeakable materiality that representation cannot access directly. Because of its inaccessibility, then, the real becomes an effect of representation, but since the systems of representation can never fully represent, they are marked by a constitutive gap. The retroactive logics of representation—the logic of the signifier—rules out the notion of a ‘grounding totality’ and also of a metalanguage. The unmasking

Marquis de Barbi-Marbois, Allegory of the American Union [1784]. Courtesy of the American Philosophical Society.
of that “empty place” reveals how every symbolic Body|Politic mystifies its own lack of origin [or, rather, the origin of its ‘authority’] in a violent assumption of that place. However, this does not yet change the nature of the relation between representation and matter. Theorists in the wake of Lacan who have commented on the formation of political identity are mostly concerned with the logic of representation, and not with the question of the materiality of the body that representation misses. Homi Bhabha has analyzed the “idea of a nation as a continuous narrative of national progress” and the “narcissism of self-generation” involved in the process (1). Such a concept of the Body|Politic is ultimately indebted to the narrative culture of the autobiography and the realist novel; it is a ‘discursive formation’ in the Foucauldian sense. Bhabha points out that “to encounter the nation as it is written displays a temporality of culture and social consciousness . . . in tune with the partial, overdetermined process by which textual meaning is produced” (2). The temporality that Bhabha alludes to is once more the temporality of belatedness that underlies the logic of representation. Such a logic produces the fiction of a bodiless Body|Politic, since representation functions as the presence of a fundamental absence—and democracy seems to most fundamentally [dis]embbody this fiction: “In democracy, power is not occupied by a king, a party leader, an egocrat or a Führer, rather it is ultimately empty; no one holds the place of power. Democracy entails a disincorporation of the body politic, which begins with a literal or metaphorical act of decapitation” (Critchley 80).

The absence of a unifying representative is equated with the lack of a body, and it is here that I see an almost uncanny structural similarity between premodern politics and postmodern theory. The shift from the theologico-political concept of the godlike king to the Hobbesian unity in representation parallels the shift from essentialism to cultural|linguistic constructivism of Lacan, Derrida, Butler, and others. The connection between those two series is also shown by the fact that the metaphor of the Body|Politic in recent academic discourse rather refers to ‘body politics,’ which is not so much concerned with the ‘body of the state’ anymore, but with how the state—the system of representation—infiltrates, controls, and in fact produces the bodies [in terms of races, classes, and genders] of its members.

It is in this shift from materiality to the representation of materiality and the almost ‘foundational gesture’ of representation that questions of identity formation and political theory become prevalent in much of today’s cultural studies. To introduce Body|Theory, the theoretical framework of this book, I will first outline the basic tenets of cultural studies, which I will take as an umbrella term for cultural|linguistic constructivism. Cultural studies has been instrumental in instigating the necessary shift away from essentialism,
in critiquing an ideology based on the notion of ‘naturality’ [which serves to justify as an unchanging status quo certain historical concepts, such as patriarchy and heteronormativity]. However, cultural studies had to pay a price for its political agenda. With its insistence on the social and cultural constructedness of the world, cultural studies has created and moves within a hermetically sealed universe of discourse—Derrida’s well-known claim that there is nothing outside the text might serve as a paradigmatic example here. The notion of the “always already” referred to with regard to Lacan—by which the “outside of the text,” or the referent, is seen as a retro-effect of the text—by default eliminates any access to that outside. By seeing everything from the viewpoint of representation, cultural studies has created and cultivated a kind of blind spot in its field: materiality and the body, which in cultural studies are approached almost exclusively in terms of the materiality of language, or cultural body-images. While this is a significant step away from essentialist determinism, cultural studies is in danger of creating its own brand of cultural or discursive essentialism. Furthermore, the logic of belatedness, the conviction that everything is only in [or mediated by] language, has created a one-way directionality between the terms culture and nature, representation and materiality. Activity is always on the side of culture and representation; since materiality and the body are linguistically and socially constructed, change can be effected only via discursive operations. What is conspicuously absent in cultural studies is the possibility of an activity on the side of materiality, of feedback loops between nature and culture, which use different registers of ‘information’ than that used by human systems of communication. This absence is also reflected in the lack of interest on the part of cultural studies in contemporary scientific fields such as complexity theory, a discipline that focuses on isomorphic dynamic patterns in physical, biological, and social systems. Opening up cultural studies to the materiality of the body would be a fruitful endeavor and would ultimately result in a revision of that closed-off field, making it more inclusive. The aim is not to replace ‘cultural laws’ with ‘natural laws,’ not to leave the important notions of cultural linguistic constructivism behind for a thinly disguised ‘essentialism,’ but to describe and analyze the continuum of nature and culture through systemic operations and routines underlying both.

If much of today’s theory is arrested in this deadlock between too much representation and the impossibility of falling back into essentialism, the thesis of an isomorphism between the premodern Body|Politic and postmodern thought might point a way out of this impasse. If the outdatedness of the analogy of body and state owes much to the fact that its conception as a unity in representation seems no longer tenable, then maybe a change
in the conception of the body might offer ways that lead out of the dead-end street that is the closed-off field of representation. At approximately the same time that Hobbes published *Leviathan*, with its axiom of the Body|Politic as the ‘unity of the representer,’ a logic that results in the ultimate overcoding of the represented by the representer [the logic of representation], Spinoza was developing a Body|Politic that focused on the interior workings of the represented body, workings that created a kind of order and sovereignty without adding an additional instance of regulation and control. Spinoza achieves a way of imagining the Body|Politic that neither returns to the older conception of essentialism, nor throws out the baby [the body] with the bath water. It does not return to a theologico-political concept of identity [of body and state], nor does it see the logics of representation as the only force at work. Again, if my proposed analogy holds, what is needed to find a way out of the deadlock of cultural|linguistic constructivism is an approach that is to Lacan, Derrida, Butler, and others what Spinoza is to Hobbes. This study proposes that the ‘intelligent materialism’ of Gilles Deleuze [and Félix Guattari and Michel Serres] provides exactly this approach, and the fact that Deleuze aligns himself with a ‘repressed tradition’ within the history of philosophy—basically, the tradition of materialism, in which Spinoza figures prominently—will, I hope, substantiate my point. I will conclude this introduction with a juxtaposition of the Hobbesian and the Spinozian Body|Politic from a Deleuzian perspective.

In what follows, I will analyze both canonical and lesser known texts of American culture with regard to the various models of the Body|Politic they propose. The traditional Body|Politic, composed as it is of mind and body, cognition and materiality, privileges a certain organ—the head that thinks and that controls the body, the rational mind that imposes form onto an otherwise passive materiality. One logic—the logic of thinking and representation, a *psychic* logic—overcodes the second logic, that of materiality and production, a *physical* logic. Regulation comes to the body from an outside agency—be it sovereign, state, or reason. The body, it seems, is stretched between two poles—either/or. It is either reason, control, order, or materiality, anarchy, chaos. This study is interested in the field in between, and although there are always tendencies toward one of these poles, I will put the focus on Bodies|Politic that are nearer the pole of materiality, that try to escape the forces of rigid organization and striation—Bodies|Politic that are not shaped by external and transcendental causes and forms, but that follow the dynamics of material self-ordering, of self-organization.
Any study that attempts to cover a field as large as the one outlined by the following chapters necessarily makes omissions, leaves many roads not taken. My study is more defined by taking cuts out of the continuum than by presenting the continuum as such. These cuts—chapters—proceed by what I personally feel as the ultimate Deleuzian gesture: affirmative readings that do not primarily focus on logical inconsistencies within texts but that take whatever valuable positions and insights—whatever ‘concepts’—a given text offers. In his preface to *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze proposes that “the history of philosophy should play a role roughly analogous to that of *collage* in painting” (xxi). In analogy to Duchamp’s mustached Mona Lisa, Deleuze considers his history of philosophy to “act as a veritable double and bear the maximal modification appropriate to a double. (One imagines a *philosophically* bearded Hegel, a *philosophically* clean-shaven Marx” (ibid.). In a similar vein, my readings will sometimes present a philosophically dewigged Cotton Mather, a philosophically cleanshaven Walt Whitman, and so on.

Before outlining my theoretical toolbox, the concept of a Deleuzian materialism and its implications for a revision/redefinition of the Body|Politic, I want to point out Deleuze’s relation to the field of American studies. So far, the affinity between Deleuze and American studies has been a largely one-sided affair. While Deleuze has frequently published essays on American literature and refers to American history as well as to American popular culture, American studies has largely ignored Deleuze’s writings. As Simon Schleusener has pointed out, in an essay on the unlikely alliance of Deleuze|Guattari’s seeming romanticization of America. In a 1985 interview with Félix Guattari, Charles Stivale voices his amazement about Guattari’s “impression of a kind of romanticism about America” most clearly, pointing out the “references to the American nomadism, the country of continuous displacement, deterritorialization” (206). Stivale, who considers himself “too close to daily life in the States, and [who] see[s] so much stupidity in all . . . areas” there (209), cannot seem to agree with Deleuze|Guattari’s image of America. To Stivale, it is more “a utopic dream without any future” that began long ago: “America reterritorializes what the English do, and they lose everything. That began with the Colonies and continues today” (ibid.). Guattari’s reply—“A dream is necessarily utopic, in any case” (210)—focuses not so much on the content, or meaning, of that “special America” (206), but on the more fundamental question: “Has it been useful for you that we had that dream?” (210). Yet, even on the level of what Deleuze|Guattari actually say about America, this is far from any easy sentimentalization or romanticization. In their introductory chapter to *A Thousand*
Plateaus, they strategically posit a mode of thought that they call tree-like, or “arborescent” — hierarchical, ordered, centrifugal, based on binary logic— as opposed to a “rhizomatic” way of thinking— heterogeneous, not centralized, nomadic, working not by means of dialectics and subsumption but through expansion and connection. They claim:

America is a special case. Of course it is not immune from domination by trees or the search for roots. This is evident even in the literature, in the quest for a national identity and even for a European ancestry or genealogy . . . Nevertheless, everything important that has happened or is happening takes the route of the American rhizome: the beatniks, the underground, bands and gangs, successive lateral offshoots in immediate connection with an outside. (19)

And not only is America not located unambiguously, the seemingly clear-cut binarism of tree and rhizome is not unequivocal either:

We are on the wrong track with all these geographical distributions . . . for there is no dualism, no ontological dualism between here and there, no axiological dualism between good or bad, no blend or American synthesis. There are knots of arborescence in rhizomes, and rhizomatic offshoots in roots . . . The important point is that the root-tree and canal-rhizome are not two opposed models: the first operates as a transcendent model and tracing, even if it engenders its own escapes; the second operates as an immanent process that overturns the model and outlines a map, even if it constitutes its own hierarchies, even if it gives rise to a despotic channel. (20)

For Deleuze|Guattari, dialectics and binarisms give way to a continuum, a perpetually constructing and constructed fold in between the two extremes of tree and rhizome. And although there is a tendency toward the side of the rhizome and toward deterritorialization, de- and reterritorialization always work together. There are always systems with a transcendent dimension [(n + 1)] and “system[s] without a General” (21) [(n − 1)] intermingled: what is important is the system’s overriding operational logic, whether it be arborescent or rhizomatic. As it is, “in America everything comes together, tree and channel, root and rhizome” (20). Thus, given that the reproach of romanticization holds for only a very superficial reading of Deleuze|Guattari’s concept of America, there must be another reason.

The last major strand of a revision of American studies took place in the 1980s, with the movement that came to be known as the new Americanism. In a move comparable to the major change brought to cultural studies by the advent of new historicism, the new Americanists drew on theoretical
approaches such as deconstruction, “neo-Marxist, poststructuralist, and other literary practices” in order to reflect on, as well as shift, the prevailing “organizing principles and the self-understanding of American studies.” Ultimately, the new Americanists sought to provide an ideological critique of what they saw as a liberal consensus within the field of American studies, a consensus that attempted to place itself in a field outside of politics and ideology. In contrast, the new Americanists aimed at constructing a counter-hegemonic reading of ‘the canon’ by realigning aesthetics and politics in a more theoretically and politically informed manner. Deleuze and Guattari are conspicuously absent from the illustrious group of theoreticians and thinkers whose work provides the background for the new Americanists’ interventions into the canon—Foucault, Lacan, Derrida, Laclau, and others. Why is that so?

Simon Schleusener and Theo D’haen—whose approach to Deleuzian ‘applications’ to American literature Schleusener follows—rightly propose a Deleuzian intervention into the new Americanists’ project of exposing the ideological tenets of what Donald Pease calls the old Americanists’ essentialist and exceptionalist “field-Imaginary [and] the field’s fundamental syntax—its tacit assumptions, convictions, primal words, and the charged relations binding them together” (“New Americanists” 11). As D’Haen suggests, Deleuze|Guattari’s conception of a minor literature would fit snugly in this project while simultaneously bypassing the ‘new’ essentialism inherent to the new Americanists’ approach: “Old and New Americanists . . . take the same ‘essentialist’ attitude toward their object of study, the Old Americanists seeking a unitary sensibility expressive of the essence of ‘Americanness,’ the New Americanists positing a minority essence as essential to being American multicultural-style” (“Deleuze, Guattari, Glissant” 399).

For D’haen and Schleusener, then, Deleuze|Guattari’s concept of minor literature significantly contributes to and enhances the new Americanists’ project—it “might at least, if only provisionally or temporarily, or as a horizon of possibilities, provide a useful ground from which to start to rethink ‘American’ literature” (D’Haen, “‘America’ and ‘Deleuze’” 52). While this is undoubtedly true and important, in particular for a postcolonial and/or multicultural approach to America, I would propose another approach, an altogether different use of Deleuze for yet another revision of American studies [and ultimately of the larger field of cultural studies in general]. According to the new Americanists, the old Americanists held one particular truth to be self-evident: “that American literary imagination transcends the realm of political ideology” (Pease, “New Americanists” 5). The new Americanists, in contrast, challenge this belief by “insist[ing] on literature as an agency within the political world and . . . returning a historical context to
American studies” (16). Their crucial contribution, their “changes in the materials in the field-Imaginary of American studies [is] the recovery of the relationship between the cultural and the political sphere . . . and the New Historicist return of the repressed context” (32). The result of such an “imaginary separation between the cultural and the public sphere” (8) was a naturalized and retroactive construction of a homogeneous American essence, of a timeless American experience. However, both spheres—the literary and the political—remain within the hermetically sealed realm of culture. The change in the “field-Imaginary,” the recovery of the lost relationship, ultimately remains a question of textuality and representation, a recovery of ‘the repressed context.’ The ‘identity-machine’ of the old Americanists’ “field-Imaginary”—a national narrative producing national identities—is as closely “related to the field-Symbolic as paradigm is to syntagm” (Pease, “National Identities” 8), and this “field-Symbolic” consists of a “national symbolic order and matters (of race, gender, class) external to it” (3). The terms imaginary and symbolic evoke the Lacanian distinction between reality [which is defined by the suture of the imaginary and symbolic register] and the real [which is exactly what is sutured off by reality]. What such a perspective fails to consider is this ‘real,’ the ‘other’ of culture—materiality and the body, or what Deleuze and Guattari call the rhizomatic and “immediate connection with an outside” (Thousand Plateaus 19). This is a general problem with much of today’s cultural studies [as I will outline in a moment], and Deleuzian thought enfolds its innovative and revisionist potential in opening up the cultural field to materiality—neither a field-Imaginary nor a field-Symbolic, but rather a field of [physical and cultural] forces. It is in this in between culture and nature, representation and production, physical body and body politic that the object of my study—the Body|Politic—is situated.