Sociology and the body: classical traditions and new agendas

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Abstract

Reflecting developments in consumer culture, the politics of social movements, public health policy, and medical technologies, the body has since the early 1980s become one of the most popular and contested areas of academic study. The following discussion introduces this monograph by positioning the body as a subject within contemporary sociology, accounting for the discipline's historical ambivalence towards embodiment in terms of sociology's foundations, and tracing the factors behind the 'rise of the body' across the social sciences and humanities. Having examined the background to the subject, I then explore how this volume makes three main contributions towards the ongoing embodiment of the discipline. The chapters that follow explicate and build *sociologically* upon the legacy of sociological, feminist and anthropological approaches towards embodiment. They also apply these approaches to issues such as conflict, health, cultural differences and technology that have become increasingly important in contemporary society. Finally, they demonstrate the empirical utility of taking embodiment seriously via a series of case-studies that focus on *body pedagogics*. In so doing, they outline a new approach towards the body, able to combine a concern with social power, cultural (re)production, lived experience and physical change.

Key words: The rise of the body, classical sociology, unstable bodies, body pedagogics.

Introduction

Throughout the history of sociology, particular subjects and issues have risen and fallen as matters of disciplinary interest in line with developments in industrial and 'post-industrial' societies, the varying strengths of national traditions of thought, the rise of social movements representing groups previously marginalized within society, and the vagaries of intellectual fashion. Over the last few decades, however, there has also been a widely acknowledged fragmentation of the discipline, and an increasing amnesia with respect to the sociological tradition (Shilling & Mellor, 2001). In this context, the contemporary preoccupation with all things bodily might appear to represent the latest fad among sociologists more interested in the transient features of consumer

culture than in the problems of social and moral order that traditionally preoccupied the most influential figures within the discipline. There are several reasons, though, why such an interpretation of the rise of the body within sociology would be mistaken.

To begin with, the explosion of publications on the body that occurred from the early 1980s was not confined to sociology but spread across much of the social sciences and humanities. It seemed that this focus was not only a manifestation of academics coming to grips with a 'new' subject, but reflected issues that were fundamental to a variety of disciplines (e.g. Featherstone, 1982; Hirst & Woolley, 1982; Turner, 1984; Suleiman, 1986; Bynum, 1987; Lakoff, 1987; Feder, Naddaff & Tazi, 1989). Second, instead of simply becoming another subdisciplinary area of sociology, 'embodiment' was used to interrogate some of the longstanding nature/culture, action/structure, and subject/object dualisms that the discipline had wrestled with since its beginnings. 'The body' was also increasingly addressed as an essential issue in general theoretical works stretching across such areas as feminism, pragmatism, and realism (eg, Butler, 1990; Young, 1990; Joas, 1996; Archer, 2000). Third, while the body had not necessarily featured as a major subject in the writings of the founding figures of the discipline, there were a number of attempts to excavate the 'hidden heritage' or 'absent-presence' of classical writings on the subject which revealed how the organic foundations of our human being, social identities and relationships had an important, if sometimes implicit, place in the discipline's foundations (eg, Turner, 1991; Shilling, 1993). Finally, the rise of the body in sociology should be seen in the context of those scientific advances in *in vitro* fertilization, transplant surgery, genetic engineering and stem cell research that have the potential to alter our view of the 'species being' of the discipline's human subject matter. In dealing with these issues, sociological analyses of embodiment were exploring developments which might necessitate revisions in some of the fundamental presuppositions and parameters of the discipline.

Thus, far from residing on the outer fringes of the sociological imagination, or seeking merely to add yet another exotic subject to sociology's taste for cultural novelty and diversity, recent sociological concern with embodiment manifests a continuity with certain aspects of the discipline's roots and is part of far wider academic trends. Contemporary writings on the subject were not, however, in a position simply to recover neglected but comprehensive sociological perspectives on embodiment. There was a reason why existing sociological work could be described as having treated the organic nature of human beings as an absent-presence.

Flesh on the sociological terrain

Issues involving embodiment were not missing from the theories, narratives and methodological concerns associated with the foundations of the discipline, but sociology's major subject matter focused on the development of, and the

structures and processes pertaining to, *industrial society*. As such it did not have as its central focus the anthropological concern with the relationship between nature and culture in which the ritual enculturation and classification of the body imparted boundaries, identities and sacred meanings to the tribal collectivity and the individual. Furthermore, in addressing itself to the longstanding and hugely influential Hobbesian 'problem of order' (of how social life could exist without degenerating into a constant 'war of all against all') sociology sought to carve out for itself a disciplinary identity that was clearly distinct from that of its competitors.

Comte's concern to establish sociology as 'social physics', for example, sought to build on yet also be more advanced than 'the simpler departments of science' (concerned with chemical, physical and biological phenomenon) in its aim of disclosing the natural laws of human progress (Levine, 1995). Durkheim's efforts to establish sociology as a reputable science established the discipline's proper subject matter as 'social facts' that were radically different from the subject matter of psychology or biology (Durkheim, 1982 [1895]). Simmel also identified the distinctive subject matter of sociology as existing above the level of the individual, and focused on the form and content of *social interaction*. Simmel's work was characterized by an enduring concern with 'the problem of personality', but for him it was the geometry, solidity and durability of sociations or interactions that imparted to society its complexity and consistency (Simmel, 1971 [1908a,b]). Even when the discipline focused unambiguously on individuals, it made a central distinction between action that was voluntaristic and socially meaningful, and action that was driven by habit or the affects and was more animalistic in its nature, and claimed for itself an interest in the former (for example, Weber, 1968). Again, this enabled sociology to be differentiated from existing disciplines that excluded social phenomena from their core conceptual apparatus and explanatory frameworks.

Sociology's determination to carve out its foundations from the bedrock of society, rather than from the materials that furnished other sciences, steered the subject away from attributing too much explicit attention to embodiment. Nevertheless this emphasis on social phenomena did not rule out a concern with the bodily being of social actors or with the corporeal consequences of social structures. Thus, Comte emphasized that humans are both intelligent and inherently emotional and active, and suggested that the impulse to act comes from the heart (Aron, 1965: 88). It is when embodied emotion and intellect support each other in promoting social feelings and acts that we can witness the emergence of society and a moral culture (Comte, 1853). Furthermore, for all his concern to establish sociology as a distinctive discipline and a subject that rested at the pinnacle of human knowledge, Comte was regarded as one of the leading theorists of biology in nineteenth century France and this was reflected in the biological analogies that pervaded his sociology (Heilbron, 1995: 246). His key concepts of crisis, organization, consensus and organic system all came from biological and medical models, while he viewed civilization as being like the human body, capable of spontaneously repairing itself (Pickering, 1993: 208).

Durkheim also addressed explicitly the embodied character of social actors in his writings on religion and the *homo duplex* nature of human beings. For Durkheim, society is built upon the basis of an enduring tension between our individual and social existence, and our nature as both egoistic and moral beings. Humans possess an individual body being, constituted by drives, appetites and sensory impressions which are 'necessarily egoistic', yet also possess the capacity to transcend themselves and develop on the basis of *social* categories and emotions (Durkheim, 1995 [1912]: 151). The body also provides the means to bridge these individual and social dimensions as it is possessed of 'a sacred principle that erupts onto the surface in particular circumstances' (manifest via forms of marking, decoration and dress), producing a bodily symbolism that helps create a shared moral whole by enabling individuals to recognize others as participants in a common culture (ibid.: 125). When combined with social occasions in which people meet together in the presence of phenomenon they regard as sacred – and experience a collective, transcending effervescence – this results during 'normal' periods of societal maturation in the individual egoistic pole of *homo duplex* becoming subordinated increasingly to its social and moral characteristics (Shilling, 2004).

Simmel's primary focus was on social interaction rather than social and moral collectivities, but he also developed a *homo duplex* model of the individual. Embodied subjects are characterized for Simmel by a distinction between individualized mental forms and pre-social contents and impulses, on the one hand, and social emotions and reciprocated mental forms, on the other, yet the body is once more possessed of socially generative properties that make it a basis for society. Bodily drives, dispositions and purposes involving erotic, religious and aggressive impulses, and motives of gain, attack, defence and instruction *propel* individuals towards others, into being with others, for others, or against others, and constitute an essential stage in the initial assembly of social forms (Simmel, 1971 [1908b]). Furthermore, the evolution of our physical, psychological and cognitive structures has equipped humans with an energy and creativity that acts as a source of social change; the 'flux', 'stream' and drive characteristic of embodied life ensures there is a constant 'reaching beyond' of the current boundaries and limits to its expression (Simmel, 1971 [1908c,d], 1971 [1918a]).

Weber might at first glance seem to be the sociologist least interested in the embodiment of social actors, given his comments about the animalistic character of action driven by affect or habit, but his 1904–05 *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* provides us with a sophisticated sociological analysis of how a religious ethic of discipline towards the body constitutes a foundation for a rational, modern work ethic. Similarly, his writings on politics as a vocation seek to demonstrate how morally informed actions are based upon a fusion of rational and emotional commitments involving the very core of the embodied actor as a whole (Weber, 1991 [1919a]).

If classical sociology did not bequeath to us ready-made theories of the body, and constructed foundations that sought at least formally to separate 'the social' from the subject matter of other disciplines, we can see from these few exam-

ples that its concerns did extend to a consideration of the bodily bases of the 'positive polity', and of moral orders, social forms and social actions. These considerations also informed critical sociological appraisals of how rapid economic growth, the advance of rationalization and the intensification of the money economy, and the disenchantment of the world, posed major threats (as well as offering opportunities) to the bodily well-being of present and future generations. In elaborating on these critiques, it is worth starting here with the writings of Karl Marx. Despite his ambivalent relationship to sociology, Marx was influential in shaping the concerns of the discipline and is the best known critic of the effects of capitalism on our bodily 'species-being'.[1]

For Marx, humans are natural beings possessed of fixed needs, which must be met if they are to survive, but also have the capacity to add to and partly transcend this natural state. Humans do this by becoming social beings who fulfill their natural needs in a variety of culturally specific ways and who also develop new needs unrestricted to the bare maintenance of life. As Marx (1973 [1939]: 92) argues, 'Hunger is hunger, but the hunger gratified by cooked meat eaten with a knife and fork is a different hunger from that which bolts down raw meat with the aid of hand, nail and tooth'. Even 'the senses of social man are different from those of non-social man' as they are available for cultivation and become thoroughly historical phenomena (Marx, 1975 [1844]: 353). This socialization of need and nature does not, however, make irrelevant relatively fixed needs forged by long-term processes of human evolution, and Marx uses these needs as one basis on which to evaluate socio-economic systems (Creaven, 2000). An individual deprived of, or condemned to struggle for, life's necessities is thrown back upon their natural, essentially animal existence. Indeed, it is precisely because capitalism is characterized by a division of labour that robs work of creativity, generates hunger and disease, and warps the sensory development of even the most privileged (for whom to experience is to *possess*) that Marx condemns it as a system that alienates embodied subjects from their own species capacities and their fellow embodied beings.

Durkheim (1970 [1897]) was explicit in his rejection of Marxism, but his studies of suicide and the division of labour deal critically with the bodily and emotional consequences of people's dislocation from appropriately integrative collectives, ritualized belief systems and moral frameworks (Durkheim, 1952 [1897] 1984 [1893]). Simmel's writings on culture, the metropolis and the money economy trace the transformation of the affect structure brought about by the modern world, and examine the difficulty faced by individuals seeking to channel their creative energies and personal values into activities that will result in the development of a coherent and morally satisfying embodied self (eg, Simmel, 1971 [1903]; 1971 [1918a]; 1990 [1907]). Weber was also deeply pessimistic about the onward march of rationality in the modern world, suggesting that the Puritan ethic of body discipline had become something of a cultural template for the West which had contributed to the disenchantment of experience, the spread of a morally corrosive relativism, and the shrinkage of enobling relationships to the spheres of friendship and eroticism (eg, Weber,

1991 [1904/1905]; 1991 [1919b]; 1991 [1915]). Thus, while Marx and Engels may have conveyed to us a more directly visceral sense of bodily exhaustion, depletion, breakdown and disability in their analyses of waged labour and surveys of the Factory Acts and the conditions of the working class, there is no doubting the bodily dimensions and significance of more conventional classical sociological criticisms of modernity. More generally, analyses of such issues as the effervescent binding together of communities, the occasionally all-consuming power of egoistic appetites, the regimes of body discipline employed by Puritans seeking to avoid the sins of sensual pleasure, and the devitalizing impact of a rationalized society in which people's bodily energies have become constricted and restrained by ossified social and cultural forms, demonstrate that sociology identified the body as *multi-dimensional* factor in the creation, reproduction and transformation of social phenomenon (Shilling, 2005a).

Despite this concern with the body, general interpretations of sociology tended to marginalize the significance of embodiment to social life. Talcott Parsons, for example, did more than any other figure in the history of the discipline to identify a 'sociological tradition' and to frame the major problems that shaped sociology during the twentieth century. Despite his enormously useful and bodily relevant writings on such issues as sickness, health, and the continuing influence of the Protestant ethic on the worldly instrumental individualism that pervaded American life, Parsons's influence as an interpretor of the sociological tradition meant that embodiment faded as an issue of sociological importance. In analysing the writings of Durkheim, Weber and others, for example, Parsons (1968 [1937]: 319, 449) downplayed the significance of such notions as collective effervescence. In his general theory of action, moreover, Parsons is concerned predominantly with the subjective understandings of the actor and the extent to which norms enter into that understanding, while action no longer occurs as a result of bodily passions or dispositions but as choices motivated by social norms (Parsons, 1968 [1937]: 47, 1991 [1951]: 541–2, 547–8). Parsons's work is by no means irrelevant to the project of embodying sociology (Shilling, 2002; Levine, this volume), but the waning of his influence from the 1960s helped prepare the ground for the reemergence of alternative and more bodily informed readings of the sociological tradition. This was also the context in which Goffman's focus on the physical dimensions of interaction and self-identity, C. Wright Mills's concern with emotion work, Marcuse's concern with the manipulation of emotions, and a host of other body-relevant writings attracted increasing attention. More directly, a number of other factors paved the way for the recent academic fascination with the subject.

The contemporary 'rise of the body'

Several of these factors have been well rehearsed, but it is worth mentioning them here in order to provide a fuller sense of the terrain on which the body became such a popular issue within contemporary sociology. They also help

explain why it is that 'the body' has become such a contested concept in recent years, with its meaning, ontology and significance becoming hotly disputed issues. First, *analysts of consumer culture* identified appearance, body shape and physical control as having become increasingly central to people's sense of self-identity. This was associated with a shift in the culture of advanced capitalist societies during the second half of the twentieth century, in which conspicuous consumption replaced ascetic denial as the normative counterpart of hard work in the sphere of production (Featherstone, 1982). This topographical approach to the body as appearance and performance was associated with a decline in the traditional Christian approach to the flesh as a container of sin and a rise in the treatment of embodiment as both a project and a form of physical capital (Bourdieu, 1978; Shilling, 1993).

Second, and emerging partly as a reaction against this emphasis on consumption and external appearance, there emerged from the 1960s onwards a heterogeneous collection of groups and movements concerned with the cultivation of *meaningful bodily experience*, on the one hand, and a more *ecologically balanced* mode of living in relation to the external environment on the other. Elements of this may have appeared ephemeral, such as the counter-cultural experimentation with drugs. Nevertheless, this concern with living a life that was not dominated by the 'one-dimensionality' of white-collar or factory work and mass culture (Marcuse, 1964) also came to draw on methods of somatic improvement involving diet, yoga and a whole host of bodily practices and disciplines often associated with elements of Oriental spirituality such as Zen, Taoism or Tantra (and designed to heighten body awareness, interrupt damaging habits and improve well-being) which can be traced back hundreds of years (Eichberg, 1998; Shusterman, 1997: 43; Levine, 2006). This heightened concern with the 'internal environment' of bodily experience was complemented by the growth of ecological and green movements that focused on the damage advanced industrial society was doing to our external environment.

Third, the rise of 'second wave' *feminism* emphasized via a critical interrogation of the sex/gender divide that there was nothing natural about women's corporeality which justified their public subordination. The body uncovered by feminists was a biologically sexed body which should have few social consequences but which had been categorized and treated within patriarchal society in a manner that limited women's life chances. Because of the 'male stream' history of writing on the subject, feminists did not initially seek to place the body at the centre of social thought. As Grosz (1994: 4) points out, philosophers had traditionally associated men with freedom and the mind and women with 'unreason associated with the body' and this was hardly an incentive to return full-scale to this analytical terrain. Despite such ambivalence, however, feminists contributed much towards the popularity of body studies. Studies of the female body in law, of the construction of 'compulsory heterosexuality', and the erasure of female sexuality in male culture provided rich lines of empirical and theoretical inquiry (eg, Irigary, 1986 [1977]; Kristeva, 1986; Eisenstein, 1988; Mackinnon, 1989). Feminists placed on the agenda the project of

'reexploring, reexamining, notions of female corporeality' (Grosz, 1994: 14), have interrogated the body within ethics and standpoint epistemologies, and have constructed imaginative metaphysical conceptions of the female body as 'fluidity'. In a related vein, issues and controversies related to transgenderism and transsexuality (focused on sociologically by Garfinkel's ethnomethodological study of 'Agnes') provided an added dimension to the contingent and variable relationships that exist between the body and sexual identity (Stryker & Whittle, 2006).

A growing awareness of changing modes of governmentality constituted the fourth factor behind the rising popularity of the body as an object of study. Instrumental here were Foucault's analyses of how the creation of the modern subject was accompanied by a shift in the target, object and scope of governmental disciplinary regimes during which the fleshy body gave way to the mindful body as a focus of concern, preoccupation with matters of death was replaced by an interest in controlling details of life, and the control of anonymous individuals was replaced by attempts to manage differentiated populations (eg, Foucault, 1979a, 1979b, 1981). The eighteenth century witnessed a large increase in discourses on sexuality, for example, which linked the sex of individual bodies to the management of national populations, while the twentieth century was characterized by a continued shift away from negative forms of bodily repression towards positive forms of exhortation in which embodied subjects were encouraged to structure their lives in particular ways. This particular concern cast its spotlight on the problems governments faced in dealing with large (if uneven) growths in world population, in managing the spread of HIV/AIDS, and in policing flows of migrants and refugees.

Technological advances which contributed to a growing uncertainty about the 'reality' of the body and a radical doubt as to whether there was anything 'natural' about human embodiment constitute the fifth concern that raised the profile of this subject. Advances in such areas as transplant surgery (including face transplants), *in vitro* fertilization and stem-cell research increased the extent to which bodies could be controlled, but also instituted a weakening of the boundaries between science, technology and bodies that prompted some to reconceptualize humans as cyborgs. These same developments appear to have thrown into radical doubt our knowledge of what the embodied subject is. The principle of individuality accepted by Enlightenment thought depended on identifying what was unique to a person across the variables of date and location, yet the potential malleability of the body threatens such constancies. The Human Genome Project, for example, heralded the start of an era in which all aspects of embodiment are theoretically open to alteration. In this context, it is hardly surprising that post-modernist writings have abandoned the modernist project of knowing what the body is, analysing it instead in terms of a 'blank screen', a 'sign receiving system' or even, in the work of Deleuze and Guattari, an elusive 'body without organs' (Kroker & Kroker, 1988; Goodchild, 1996). Alternatively, these same developments have an affinity with the insistence that actor network theory places on relationality and connectivity when it comes to

analysing the body: embodiment is recognized as significant but analysed only in terms of its ties to and interdependence with other phenomena.

The sixth major analytic concern, that continues both to increase the popularity of the subject and tie the growing interest in the body to other intellectual agendas, involves those academics who treat embodiment as a conceptual resource which can assist them in advancing their particular subject. In the case of sociology, theorists used the body to avoid the over-socialized conception of the individual associated with Parsons's (1991 [1951]: 541–2, 547–8) focus on values (which portrayed the body as merely a sub-system of the action system), and the unrealistic assumptions of rational choice theory (which holds that actors cognitively establish goals before acting, and views the body as a permanently available instrument of action immune to frailty, chance and epiphany). Analyses of 'creativity' (Joas, 1996) and 'human being' (Archer, 1995), for example, sought to provide concepts of the body which are resistant to it being analytically collapsed into any unidimensional view of social action or structurally determinist analysis of society. In these cases, the body constitutes an overlooked element of reality whose capacities have important implications for disciplinary analysis.

These social and cultural developments and analytic concerns have done much to stimulate and maintain the rise of interest in the body since the 1980s but they approached and defined the subject in very different ways. The body was a surface phenomenon which had become a malleable marker of identity and status subject to the vagaries of fashion for theorists of consumer culture. It was a vehicle for the cultivation of particular types of lived experience and a more balanced and sustainable relationship with the external environment for 'body therapists' and ecologists. It was a sexed object used to justify and reproduce women's subjugation for feminists. It was an object rendered passive by changing modes of control for Foucauldian analysts of governmentality. The body was changed into an uncertain and even rapidly disappearing remnant of pre-technological culture for those interested in the suturing of meat and machines that occurred with the development of cyborgs. Finally, it became a positive conceptual category for those concerned with addressing theoretical problems in their own discipline. Within each of these analyses, the spotlight rests on certain aspects of the body, leaving others obscured.

These disparate concerns are reflected in the enormous number of studies to have appeared on the subject since the 1980s. The sheer quantity of this work has been regarded as evidence of the healthy establishment of a new field of study. Writings on the body have challenged the assumption that 'society operates on us intellectually and consensually rather than directly upon our bodies' (O'Neill, 1985: 48), have established new sub-disciplinary areas of study, and have made general contributions to social and cultural theory. Nevertheless, 'the body' remains one of the most contested concepts in the social sciences: its analysis has produced an intellectual battleground over which the respective claims of post-structuralism and post-modernism, phenomenology, feminism, socio-biology, sociology and cultural studies have fought (eg, Howson & Inglis,

2001). Tied to competing agendas and against the huge diversity of body studies, varying aspects of embodiment are foregrounded, allowing others to fade into the background. This has the effect of making the body recede and slide from view, while undergoing a series of metamorphoses that render it unrecognizable from one incarnation to the next. Furthermore, the body seems for many to have become a mere metaphor through which particular concerns can be pursued. In this context, it is increasingly difficult to define the body or even say what is being examined within the field. In two of the best known studies on the subject, for example, Turner (1984: 8) concludes that the body may appear to be solid, yet is 'the most elusive, illusory . . . metaphorical . . . and ever distant thing', while Butler (1993: ix) is nothing if not candid when admitting that in 'trying to consider the materiality of the body', she 'kept losing track of the subject.'

Sociology has of course long thrived on the debate and contestation that arises from different perspectives and paradigms on the same subject, but there is a major problem with this degree of uncertainty about the embodied character of social actors. As we have seen, while classical sociologists such as Durkheim and Simmel may have worked within different traditions of thought, their writings on the body not only provided us with a sense of how people helped *generate* social phenomena, as well as being *shaped by* society, but also served as a basis on which they made judgements about the impact of particular developments, societies and even eras on the capacities, health, personalities and well-being of social actors. This concern to reinstate a clearer sense of what the body is and what it can do, so that it becomes possible to see how it is being changed by social and technological developments and to scrutinize the impact of these changes on those subject to them, has begun to inform recent writings on the subject that link embodiment to prominent traditions in sociology and social thought and to ethical issues relevant to the contemporary era. That brings us to the contents of this volume.

Moving forward

In providing a background and context for the contributions to this volume, I have organized my discussion around three themes: the ambivalent relationship that has existed historically between sociology and the body, the considerable if often implicit body-relevant writings that exist within the sociological tradition, and how the major factors informing the contemporary rise of 'body studies' contributed not only to a huge variety of theories and perspectives but also to a concept that was so thoroughly contested that it faded from view behind the competing agendas that had informed its popularity in the first place. The chapters that follow make important contributions to the analysis of each of these areas.

In terms of addressing the uncertainty around and apparent elusiveness of the body, the discussions that follow share a sensitivity to the capacity of embod-

ied subjects to be shaped by their social environment, while also recognizing the social consequentiality of the body's materiality. The uses to which such insights are put vary considerably but they provide each of the contributors here with a basis on which they are able to examine how embodiment mediates the interplay between such issues as structure and agency, nature and culture, conflict and consensus, experience and knowledge, and practice and performance. Even speculations about a possible future characterized by massively enhanced life-expectancies (see Turner's chapter) are peopled by embodied subjects confronting issues such as alienation, anomie and the development of a coherent character, that have long preoccupied sociological discussion. Similarly, analyses of professional cultures and the processes involved in acquiring new skills, techniques and capacities (see the chapters by Aalten, O'Connor, Lande, Okely and also Crossley) illustrate how embodied subjects are not simply 'hailed' to assume subject positions, or controlled robotically by some 'discursive matrix' which compels them to conduct pre-determined performances, but undergo complicated apprenticeships in which 'success' or 'failure' is resultant upon the capacities and limitations of each embodied subject.

In terms of excavating and supplementing body-relevant work in the sociological tradition, and applying it to issues of contemporary importance, the first few chapters in this collection come from scholars whose work has done much to place the body on the agenda of sociology. Bryan Turner situates his discussion within fundamental debates about the animal/human, nature/culture, and culture/technology distinctions that lie at the intersection of sociology and anthropology. At the heart of both these disciplines lies the assumption that the bodily subject's capacity to be enculturated demonstrates that human actions are not determined by animal instincts but can be intentional, meaningful and ethical, and are intimately related to the agentic creation of ritual orders and social systems underpinned by moral orders. Turner then scrutinizes these assumptions on the basis of current genetic explanations and the potentially revolutionary technological changes to the body brought about by the promise of such advances as stem-cell research and therapeutic cloning, and suggests that the body threatens in the current era to be turned into a fleshy equivalent of Weber's 'iron cage'. A language of determinism increasingly pervades scientific suggestions that we are genetically predisposed to behave and think in certain ways, while medical advances hold out the promise of a life that is so prolonged that it threatens those religious and ethical cultures that are based upon the finitude of mortal life. In these circumstances, the body would not become irrelevant to social life or to people's capacities to act, but it would change the material basis on which humans experienced existential dilemmas in general and the problem of developing a coherent personality and a meaningful relationship with the world.

Donald Levine's chapter explores the marginality of embodiment in traditional conflict theory, examines how conflict involves complex links between the body and the external environment, and displays a keen concern for lived experience in identifying those factors that generate or dampen conflictual

dispositions, actions and interactions. Levine also explicates the significance of these insights for a general theory of conflict and a Parsonian theory of action. In so doing, he not only provides a means of improving our understanding of conflict but also demonstrates the significance of the body for theories that have long been central to the sociological tradition. Parsons' writings have too often been dismissed as anachronistic, but Levine provides us with compelling reasons for appreciating the contemporary relevance of his work.

Drawing our attention to the importance of feminist work in this area, Kathy Davis revisits the ambivalent relationship that feminist *theory* has had with the body. In this context, she then seeks to bring theory and embodied practice together by focusing on women's self-help and health movements and engaging with Haraway's critique of the medical gaze adopted by health activists. Davis is sensitive to the balancing act faced by feminist scholars who write about the body as a basis for agency, experience and knowledge in a culture permeated by scientific discourses that have historically been associated with negative, controlling and oppressive practices directed towards women's corporeality. Nevertheless, through a balanced appraisal of this work she insists that feminist theory can learn from feminist health activists in terms of its ontological view of what the body is, in reconceptualizing embodied experience as something that is irreducible to dominant discourses, and in reconceptualizing women's epistemic agency by acknowledging that there exists some space in which women are able to undertake intentional action informed by what it means to inhabit a particular body with its own needs and capacities.

If sociology has had an affinity with anthropology in its view of the embodied subject's capacity for enculturation, so too has it at times shared with anthropology a recognition of the importance of fieldwork. This is especially evident in that work carried out by the Chicago School of Sociology in America which includes what I think can be referred to as one of the classics of embodied sociology, Nels Anderson's (1961 [1923]) *The Hobo*. It is anthropology, though, that has conducted the most sustained and detailed investigations into the bodily practices and identities of those groups that have tended to escape the sociological gaze. As Judith Okely's chapter notes, the sociology of the body has tended to adopt a Western focus, yet it is sometimes through a consideration of non-Western bodily forms and practices that the utility of analysing embodiment is most clearly apparent. The main focus of Okely's chapter, though, derives from her observation that the body of the anthropologist is often missing from published accounts, despite being so vital to the knowledge gained from fieldwork. Based on interviews with a number of prominent anthropologists, this discussion provides us with a fascinating analysis of how the bodily appearances, actions and interactions of anthropologists affect the reactions of the host group, are integral to the risks and dangers of fieldwork, and shape experiences of grappling with new work skills, body language and ritual practices involving such activities as dance. In providing us with a detailed illustration and more corporeally informed development of what Ottenberg (1990) refers to as 'headnotes' (insights that are not written down but which come from remembered observa-

tions, mnemonic triggers of total bodily experience, and puzzles felt in the bones and flesh of the fieldworker), this is an important contribution to the issue of what properly developed embodied sociological research might look like.

Okely provides a bridge between theoretical and empirical issues that have become of increasing concern to sociological work on the body in recent years. The common complaint has been that the number of sophisticated theoretical works on embodiment has yet to be matched by sufficient substantive investigations of the significance of the body to people's daily lives (eg, Nettleton & Watson, 1998). Nick Crossley's chapter takes this debate forward and offers some solutions to it by identifying Marcel Mauss's programmatic analysis of body techniques as a key means whereby embodiment can be opened up to empirical sociological research. Originally trained as a philosopher, Mauss was one of the key figures in the establishment of the journal *Anne' Sociologique* in which many of the fundamental ideas of social anthropology were first explored. Mauss's analysis of body techniques can be seen as an exploration of the corporeal foundations of his highly influential analysis of gift relationships – which revealed the principles of reciprocity underpinning exchanges between groups and individuals – and reveals both the social variability and the social, psychological and biological components that constitute particular bodily capacities and skills. In seeking to develop Mauss's analysis, by discussing in more detail the 'mindful' elements of body techniques and the inter-corporeal contexts in which they are deployed and developed, Crossley argues that a focus on body techniques can allow sociologists to explore how purpose, normativity and physicality are combined within the structure of the embodied subject. Such a focus on body techniques allows us, he suggests, to undertake historical research into their diffusion within and between cultures, as well as combining quantitative and qualitative research in exploring how they are distributed within and between groups and in ascertaining how such techniques are acquired.

The idea that social norms and social actions inhere within the deepest fibres of our bodily being says much about the importance of embodiment for sociology, and the other chapters in this volume can also be seen as engaging with issues raised by Mauss. While Mauss describes different body techniques and writes about the social, psychological and biological components of these techniques, however, he has little to say about the details of how they are actually *taught* or the *experiences* that people go through when acquiring (or failing to acquire) new skills and capacities. It is in this context that this monograph contributes towards the study not just of body techniques but of body pedagogies or *body pedagogics*. Body pedagogics may be defined as referring to the central pedagogic *means* through which a culture seeks to transmit its main corporeal techniques, skills and dispositions, the embodied *experiences* associated with acquiring or failing to acquire these attributes, and the actual embodied *changes* resulting from this process. This notion of body pedagogics inevitably simplifies the myriad processes, complexities and variabilities involved in the transmission and development of cultures, but it nevertheless provides us with an extremely useful ideal-typical and corporeally sensitive way of accessing some of the

central elements involved in cultural reproduction and change. By exploring the power relations and normative content that inform institutionalized and non-institutionalized body pedagogics, and the relationship that these have with both the experiences of those embodied subjects seeking to learn new body techniques and the outcomes of these processes, it is possible to combine a concern with social control, lived experience and the corporeal foundations associated with social reproduction and social change (Shilling, 2005b; Shilling and Mellor, forthcoming).

Brian Lande's empirical investigation of body pedagogics is based on eighteen months he spent in the US Army Reserved Officer Training Corp. Following Levine, Lande's analysis demonstrates the partiality of sociological accounts of conflict that have overlooked the importance of the body. Lande's focus is specifically on the military and on the pedagogic methods employed to cultivate the capacities recruits require for becoming a soldier. By exploring the place of voice, demonstration, touch and forceful manipulation, this fascinating example of what Wacquant (2004) refers to as 'observant participation' provides us with a rich account of how the army stimulate in cadets a corporeal understanding of the breathing techniques that it considers necessary to run long distances, fire a rifle and project authority on the drill ground. For states to engage in armed conflict requires not just a disciplined military personnel but also one schooled in specific body skills suited to the conduct of such conflict and Lande's work is a valuable contribution to our understanding of what is involved in this training.

Anna Aalten's account of ballet culture may appear at first glance to have little in common with Lande's chapter on the army but both demonstrate how apparently dissimilar professionals are subjected to a body pedagogy which teaches them to distinguish pain from injury and to disassociate themselves (at least in part) from their bodily feelings. Aalten's research involved ethnographic study and extensive interviews stretching over seven years, and she traces how the culture of ballet revolves around techniques that 'defy the principles of human design' in seeking to create the 'disembodied sylph that is the ideal in ballet.' The bodies of ballerinas frequently 'speak up' and protest against the demands they face, but the identities of these professionals are so tied up with their chosen vocation that they readily absorb the implicit pedagogy of harsh physical discipline that pervades ballet. Bodies are not infinitely malleable, however, and the consequences of this culture have resulted in recurrent injuries and the spread of eating disorders.

Modes of pedagogic transmission such as those found in ballet and the military may constitute a disciplinary regime for those subject to them, but they achieve results in terms of bodily transformations that equip their members with a vastly heightened performative capacity compared with most individuals not involved in such disciplines. As well as involving the experience of discomfort and pain, moreover, it is important to recognize the sense of accomplishment, empowerment and even partial transcendence experienced by those who survive and prosper within such pedagogic regimes. Both Aalten and Lande provide a sense of this, but it is Erin O'Connor who focuses most directly on the lived

experience of actually seeking to acquire a new set of skills. Based upon her time spent learning glassblowing in New York, O'Connor's chapter seeks to convey through its content and style what it is like to acquire practical knowledge. In so doing, she conveys a textured and layered sense of the importance of practical mimesis for corporeal comprehension, and of some of the key distinctions that exist between the attempted execution of skilled tasks by a novice and an expert. While the former tend to proceed in distinct, successive steps, the latter has a corporeal comprehension of the place of the part in relation to the whole and, as Polanyi (1962) notes, is more able to 'dwell' in tools that become extensions of the body. The flow of a bodily conscious style of writing employed by O'Connor conveys a vivid sense of the frustrations, crises and small victories experienced by someone becoming apprenticed in a skill who has understood that the acquisition of techniques depends not only on watching and mimicking but also on having understood enough with one's body to enable one to *see* what is actually occurring.

I emphasized at the start of this introduction that for all the body-relevant writings and resources that exist in the sociological tradition, there remains work to be done in developing a comprehensive sociological approach towards the body and society. If sociology has much to bring to bear on 'body studies', in other words, focusing on embodiment can in turn help to broaden the scope and depth of the discipline. This is evident in Simon Williams' chapter on sleep, a topic that has traditionally remained outside of the sociological imagination. In focusing on this issue, Williams provides us with a sense of the techniques, rituals and customs we employ in preparing for sleep (highlighting in the tradition of Goffman things that we take for granted in our daily lives but are not discursively aware of), but also demonstrates, though a focus on the vulnerabilities, risks and dangers associated with sleep, the importance of this subject for an embodied sociology. The increasing spread of work and leisure into times traditionally reserved for sleep, the scientific and medical intervention in the management of sleep, and the inequalities dividing those able to sleep in comfort and safety from those who sleep in doorways or under bridges and/or in danger of assault from others are just a few of the issues Williams explores that justify this conclusion.

Sociological studies of embodiment have been one of the most vibrant areas of interest in the discipline over the last few decades. Connecting the concerns of classical sociologists to new advances in social theory, anthropology, feminism, social research and the study of body pedagogics, this volume takes the sociological study of the body in exciting new directions and opens up new horizons for the sociological imagination.

Note

1 Given that Marx sought to anchor a vision of transcendent freedom (based on his view of future communist society) in this-wordly, capitalist realities, it is not surprising that his view of human

nature has been the subject of debate and criticism for its apparent inconsistencies (Levine, 1995: 221–2; see also, for example, Coser, 1971; Geras, 1983; McLellen, 1985).

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