

Chapter 1

Introduction: The Body in Symbolic Interaction

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The body social is many things: the prime symbol of the self, but also of the society; it is something we have, yet also what we are; it is both subject and object at the same time; it is individual and personal, as unique as a fingerprint or odourplume, yet it is also common to all humanity.... The body is both an individual creation, physically and phenomenologically, and a cultural product; it is personal, and also state property.

Anthony Synnott, *The Body Social* (1993)

The body and experiences of embodiment have always been prominent in sociology. As Synnott (1993:4) suggests, we can “usefully reconsider the body at the heart of sociology, rather than peripheral to the discipline, and more importantly at the heart of our social lives and our sense of self.” From this standpoint, even a cursory review reveals the body and embodiment as fundamental to numerous esteemed sociological interests including gender, race and ethnicity, sexuality, health and medicine, disability, sport, aging, death and dying. Sociologists have long articulated strong and provocative statements about the body and experiences of embodiment. Nevertheless, as Shilling (2003:17) rightly suggests, “the body has historically been something of an ‘absent presence’ in sociology” – an object and subject of analysis that is both “at the very heart of the sociological imagination” and “absent in the sense that sociology has rarely focused in a sustained manner on the embodied human as an object of importance in its own right.”

However, since the early 1990s the body has come to bear a veritable bonanza of contemporary sociological interest. On the heels of significant social, cultural, political, and technological change, the body and experiences of embodiment appear substantially more visible than ever before – conditions that have stimulated sociological interests in a manner that is decidedly more direct, focused, and sustained compared to previous and legacy sociology. From the diffusion of plastic surgery to the mainstreaming of tattooing, from fashion to fitness, from shifting health practices to profound changes in the experience and treatment of illness, from continued preoccupations with youthfulness to the changing definitions of the aging body, from sexual to athletic performance, contemporary scholarly literatures reveal a steady flow of provocative new sociological investigations, speculations, and research inquiries on the body and experiences of embodiment.

The sheer volume and diversity of contemporary scholarly work that now characterize “the sociology of the body” is itself impressive. Simply considering a relatively small sample of published books, it is apparent that bodies are socially constructed (Crossley 2001; Featherstone, Hepworth, and Turner 1991; Shilling 2003; Synnott 1993; Turner 1984), gendered (Backett-Milburn and McKie 2001), sexed and sexualized (Fausto-Sterling 2000; Grosz, Probyn, and Grosz 1995; Laqueur 1992), customized (Demello 2000; Featherstone 2000; Gay and Whittington 2002; Hewitt 1997; Mifflin 2001; Pitts 2003; Sanders 1989) as well as fashioned (Calefato 2004; Entwistle 2000; Guy, Green, and Banim 2003; Virgili and Hodkinson 2002), electrified and digitized (Springer 1996), posthuman (Halberstam and Livingston 1995), objectified (Foster 1995; Tebbel 2003), overtaken by panic (Kroker and Kroker 1987), ascended to the heights of the mystical and sacred (Moore 1998; Newell 2002) as well as descended to the depths of the stigmatized and the freakish (Covino 2004; Elson 2004; Goffman 1963; Lebesco 2004; Thomson 1996), commodified (Falk 1994; Scheper-Hughes and Wacquant 2003), subject to the discipline of fitness, training, and diet (Moore 1997; Pronger 2002), fetishized (Stratton 2001) and, of course, subject to the politics of gender and sexual orientation (Atkins 1998; Birke 1999; Bordo 2000; Brook 1999; Burt 1995; Weitz 2002), and race and ethnicity (Mohanram 2004). Indeed, “there are many bodies social, and they are hard to count. Equally evident, the meanings imputed to the body are various: definitions are legion and there is little consensus” (Synnott 1993:228–229).

The “sociology of the body” is increasingly living up to its implicit promise: a specialized object and subject of analysis that reflects all the diversity one would expect of sociology. Thus, the bewildering array of sociologies of the body is, in fact, an encouraging sign: just as there is not a singular sociology, neither is there a singular sociology of the body. Various sociological traditions emphasize sundry dynamics and processes, a fact that is neither surprising nor alarming. After all, just as there is not a singular sociology of the body, nor is the body itself a singular object or subject of analysis. The body and experiences of embodiment *are* layered, nuanced, complex, and multifaceted – at the level of human subjective experience, interaction, social organization, institutional arrangements, cultural processes, society, and history.

While recognizing that the sociology of the body is, essentially, a dialogue among many diverse interests and points of view, this book concisely articulates and illustrates one major approach. Drawing exclusively from symbolic interactionism – an increasingly prevalent theoretical base of contemporary sociology (see Maines 2001) – we identify major interactionist frameworks for conceiving bodies and experiences of embodiment, exemplify the utility of those insights in empirically grounded contexts, and speculate about broader issues.

The Bodies of Symbolic Interaction

Symbolic interactionists utilize a constellation of related theoretical frameworks that are loosely bound by the pragmatist tradition. Owing primarily to the works

of William James, John Dewey, Charles Sanders Peirce, Charles Horton Cooley, and George Herbert Mead the core assumptions of American pragmatism represent a nucleus of ideas that generally characterize the unique contributions of symbolic interaction. Although somewhat elusive, it is possible to identify several organizing assumptions of American pragmatism. Among the most important, pragmatism emphasizes human beings as active and creative agents; a human world that both shapes the doings of people and is fashioned by the doings of people; a determined emphasis on how subjectivity, meaning, and consciousness do not exist prior to experience, but are emergent in action and interaction; a grounded examination of practical problems; an approach that situates action as a primary conceptual and analytical focus (Reynolds 2003:45–46).

Pragmatism is not “a single unified body of philosophic ideas” (Martindale 1960:297), and it is even described “as a pseudo-philosophic formulation” (Mead 1936:97). Consequently, pragmatism has often shifted its fundamental formulations, direction, and form (Reynolds 2003). Thus, it is all the more understandable that, while bound by a generally shared pragmatic foundation, there remains ample diversity in the ways interactionists envisage, employ, and articulate those core assumptions. This diversity is often associated with familiar theoretical models that are commonly allied with and collectively comprise the interactionist tradition – symbolic interaction, social semiotics, dramaturgy, phenomenology, and narrative/life history.

For these reasons, we suggest that contemporary interactionism presents both a clear articulation of body/embodiment and a variety of approaches that uniquely emphasize particular characteristics. Thus, on one hand, we can identify a relatively coherent interactionist conceptual orientation to the body and embodiment. On the other hand, we can also identify nuances and particularities that are variously emphasized, largely in association with the assorted theoretical traditions of interactionism.

From a general interactionist perspective, the body is always more than a tangible, physical, corporeal object – infinitely more than “a mere skeleton wrapped in muscles and stuffed with organs” (Moore 1998:3) – the body is also an enormous vessel of meaning of utmost significance to both personhood and society. The body is a *social* object, which is to say that “the body as an object cannot be separated from the body as a subject; they are emergent from one another” (Waskul and van der Riet 2002:510). From this perspective, the term “embodiment” refers quite precisely to the process by which the object-body is actively experienced, produced, sustained, and/or transformed as a subject-body. As explained by Waskul and van der Riet (2002:488): “a person does not ‘inhabit’ a static object body but is subjectively embodied in a fluid, emergent, and negotiated process of being. In this process, body, self, and social interaction are interrelated to such an extent that distinctions between them are not only permeable and shifting but also actively manipulated and configured.”

In this way, interactionists generally emphasize that “the body (noun) is embodied (verb)” (Waskul and van der Riet 2002:488) – the question is *how* and

by *what means*? Various answers to these latter questions reveal the diversity of interactionism. Furthermore, the various traditions that comprise interactionism have related but slightly different orientations that emphasize related but slightly different dimensions of the body and embodiment. Thus, we can identify and detail the “bodies of symbolic interaction” with relative precision: the looking-glass body, the dramaturgical body, the phenomenological body, the socio-semiotic body, and the narrative body.

Before specifying these bodies of interactionism, it is essential that we make one point clear: while, conceptually, it may be useful to recognize the difference between various interactionist theoretical traditions, in practice interactionists rarely adhere to rigid distinctions between them. Interactionists are pragmatic and borrow freely from numerous conceptual frameworks to craft provocative analytical insights. For these reasons, the bodies of interactionism are not real in any inflexible empirical or conceptual sense. In fact, at one level there is no such thing as a “looking-glass body” or a “dramaturgical body” or any of the other bodies we shall detail. These words are abstractions – ways of thinking about, seeing, and understanding the body and experiences of embodiment. They are heuristic devices and, consequently, more or less useful depending on purposes and applications. Furthermore, there is considerable overlapping between these various bodies of interactionism and, as the chapters of this book illustrate, it is unusual for an interactionist to exclusively champion one or another. An interactionist is much more likely to borrow key ideas from many of these “bodies of interactionism” to fashion a more complete understanding. However, for our intents and purposes, it is helpful to begin by thinking about the bodies of interactionism independently.

The Looking-Glass Body: Reflexivity as Embodiment

What we call “me,” “mine,” or “myself” is, then, not something separate from the general life, but the most interesting part of it, a part whose interest arises from the very fact that it is both general and individual.... To think of it as apart from society is a palpable absurdity.... There is no sense of “I” ... without its correlative sense of you, or he, or they.... A social self of this sort might be called the reflected or looking-glass self.

Charles Horton Cooley, *Human Nature and Social Order* (1902)

German sociologist Georg Simmel (1921:358) once wrote that “the eye has a uniquely sociological function. The union and interaction of individuals is based upon mutual glances.” Simmel describes this union as “the most direct and purest reciprocity which exists anywhere.... By the glance which reveals the other, one discloses himself. By the same act in which the observer seeks to know the observed, he surrenders himself to be understood by the observer. The eye cannot take unless at the same time it gives. The eye of a person discloses his own soul when he seeks to uncover that of another.” Simmel understood that the union of a glance is no mere action, but a nuanced form of *interaction*. Or, more tersely stated, “the eye *creates* the I” (Synnott 1993:225, emphasis in original) – an insight most commonly

associated with Charles Horton Cooley, an early pioneer of what would come to be symbolic interaction.

The “looking-glass body” obviously and intentionally resonates with Cooley’s familiar “looking-glass self” (1902:151–152). As Cooley explains, one can only reflect and form images of one’s self from the imaginary perspective of others. In this basic process, Cooley identifies “three principal elements: the imagination of our appearance to the other person; the imagination of his judgment of that appearance; and some sort of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification.” For these reasons, Cooley (1902:87) argued, “the imaginations which people have of one another are the solid facts of society,” self and, as we suggest, the body.

Bodies are seen and the act of seeing is reflexive in precisely the same way that Cooley identifies. When we gaze upon bodies of others we necessarily interpret what we observe. Similarly, others imagine what we may be seeing and feeling, thus completing the reflections of the looking-glass. Obviously, this looking-glass body is not a direct reflection of other’s judgments – it is an *imagined* reflection built of cues gleaned from others. Reflexivity is then to be understood as a necessary condition of embodiment, and embodiment must be understood as a form of reflexivity. For Mead (1934) it is precisely this tendency towards reflexivity that characterizes embodiment as a temporal process (see Crossley 2001, and Chapter Two): “the I and the me manifest two distinct forms of temporality: the I embodies and repeats its history in the form of the habit; the me, by contrast, is constructed in the web of narrative discourse and imaginative re-presentation which the I spins in its various reflexive activities and projects” (2001:148).

It is precisely to reflexive embodiment that Nick Crossley turns to in the opening chapter of Part One. Crossley argues that symbolic interactionism’s pragmatist tradition – and in particular the Cooley-Mead heritage – offers sociologists of the body a rich and nuanced understanding of embodiment; one that puts a premium on the role of social networks in constituting the meanings of the human body. Social networks and their place in the formation of the looking-glass body are also the focus of Chapter Three. In that chapter, Kathy Charmaz and Dana Rosenfeld explore how from the perspective of chronically ill and disabled people, images of self and the body in space and time become twisted, blurred, or magnified. As new, discomfiting images of self arise from a changed bodily appearance, tensions between bodily feelings and views of its appearance to self and others emerge, prompting individuals to strategically manage the preservation of their self-concepts in spite of bodily decay. Finally, in Chapter Four, Douglas Schrock and Emily M. Boyd draw upon ethnographic data in order to understand how reflexivity shapes the lived experiences and instrumental strategies of transsexuals undergoing status passage. Reflexivity here is manifested in complex articulations of concealment and revelation – intrapersonal and interpersonal communication processes by way of which transsexuals retrain, reshape, and redefine their newly gendered bodies in manners that are perceived as authentic by themselves and others.

As these examples illustrate Cooley’s “looking-glass” reflects unto the body in an interpretive process that is, perhaps, the most elemental form by which

bodies are interactively embodied. Even so, while the looking-glass body details an important basic process, it leaves many questions open and unanswered. How, exactly, are these reflections constructed? By what means? To what extent are those reflections manipulated? How is this looking-glass body related to broader interaction-, institutional-, social-, cultural-, and moral-order? The remaining bodies of interactionism, although generally sharing this basic looking-glass insight, provide a framework for more precisely handling these latter questions.

The Dramaturgical Body: Body as Performance

Critics sometimes fault Erving Goffman (1959:253) for boldly regarding the body as a “peg” on which a person’s self is “hung for a time.” Critics have a valid point – the body is seldom so inert; we are mistaken when we so casually dismiss the body as a mere “peg.” These criticisms, however, generally miss the point. Considering key works, especially *Stigma* (1963) and “Territories of the Self” (1971), it is apparent that Goffman was quite aware of the significance of the body to identity, social order, and emotional order – and in a manner that is personal and communal, private and political, confidential and public all at once. More than a mere “peg,” Goffman and the dramaturgical tradition supply a highly sophisticated framework for understanding the body and experiences of embodiment.

Stated simply, the dramaturgical body is embedded in social practices – a basic insight that dramaturgists share with the anthropological tradition: “the human body has to be constantly and systematically produced, sustained, and presented in everyday life and therefore the body is best regarded as a potentiality which is realized and actualized through a variety of social regulated activities or practices” (Turner 1984:24). This is a significant emphasis that clearly intersects with the pragmatic tradition of symbolic interaction: people do not merely “have” a body – people actively *do* a body. The body is fashioned, crafted, negotiated, manipulated and largely in ritualized social and cultural conventions. Hijacking a few often cited words from Goffman (1959:252–253, emphasis in original) magnifies this emphasis:

In our society the character one performs and one’s self are somewhat equated and this self-as-character is usually seen as something housed within the body of its possessor.... I suggest that this view is ... a bad analysis.... While this image is entertained *concerning* the individual ... this [body] itself does not derive from its possessor, but from the whole scene of his action, being generated by that attribute of local events which renders them interpretable by witnesses. A correctly staged and preformed scene leads the audience to impute a [body] to a preformed character, but this imputation – this [body] – is a *product* of a scene that comes off, and is not a *cause* of it. The [body], then as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited. In analyzing the [body] then we are drawn from its possessor, from the person who will profit or lose most by it, for he and his [flesh] merely provide a peg on which something of collaborative manufacture will be hung for a time. And the means for

producing and maintaining [bodies] do not reside inside the peg; in fact these means are often bolted down in social establishments.

Our commandeering of Goffman's words is somewhat unfair but, even so, it does effectively magnify the essential wisdom of dramaturgy: if the body is something that people do then it is in the doings of people – not their flesh – that the body is embodied; an *active* process by which the body is literally real(ized) and made meaningful. The body is wrought of action and interaction in situated social encounters and often by means of institutionalized ritual. In communicative action the body comes to be.

The dramaturgical body posits two major analytical emphases. First, the dramaturgical body is emergent from a process by which people necessarily express themselves and unavoidably impress themselves upon others. Or, stated slightly differently, people embody the body “in the manner in which they express themselves in interaction with similarly expressive others” (Brissett and Edgley 1990:3). Although somewhat oversimplified, it is fair to suggest that this expressive and impressive emphasis is akin to the looking-glass body – it is a more precisely framed approach to how the body is established in the ongoing process of association with other people as “a behavioral, socially emergent, problematic, variable, and in fact arbitrary, concoction of human interaction” (Brissett and Edgley 1990:3). Second, dramaturgy details one framework for understanding of how social and emotional order is sustained in dramatic body-rituals that are bound by and constituents of moral order. It is in this latter emphasis that dramaturgy most strongly asserts its most powerful insight: the body and experiences of embodiment are *produced* in the doings of people by social and cultural rituals that are personal *and* communal.

The dramaturgical body reveals an equally broad range of applications. For example, in Chapter Five, Spencer E. Cahill argues that we do not have one body, but rather we have one body that is (at least) divided in two: a public body for all to see and a private body that is concealed from civic view and shared only with intimates. Cahill magnifies the essential dramaturgical point: the public body is *made* public and the private body is *kept* private, and both processes are accomplished through ritual social conventions that are deeply connected to the social-, emotional-, and moral-order. In Chapter Six, Carol Brooks Gardner and William P. Gronfein explore Erving Goffman's analysis of the bodily “territories of the self” (Goffman 1971). Gardner and Gronfein expand the eight territories that Goffman originally proposed. They consider bodies that are fragile or troublesome for owners, in particular, the bodies of some people with disabilities. Instead of viewing people with disabilities as at a continual disadvantage in public, Gardner and Gronfein emphasize the ways in which the self can selectively be armoured using Goffman's primarily spatial and verbal interactive preserves. In Chapter Seven, Paul Atkinson turns his attention to the theatre as a site of everyday life interaction, rather than as a metaphorical resource for interpreting other social domains. Atkinson examines how through the rehearsal process opera directors and performers negotiate the creation of roles and relations through the physical accomplishment of gesture, orientation, gaze, and movement

within the space defined by the stage set. Finally, in Chapter Eight, Neil Stephens and Sara Delamont focus their attention on the performance of *Capoeira*, the Brazilian dance/martial art whose growing popularity throughout Europe and North America has meant that many novice bodies engage in the emulation and admiration of expert performers. It is precisely out of these dynamics of ritual and performance that the bodies as sign-vehicles emerge.

As these chapters illustrate, the dramaturgical body emphasizes human agency within a conceptual and analytical framework that fully contextualizes. The dramaturgical body is a helpful corrective to the widespread assumption that bodies “just are” – an assumption that, as Goffman (1959:252) suggests, is “a bad analysis.” Although sometimes intentional and manipulated – but often times not – the body is always performed, staged, and presented: the theatre of the body are the raw materials by which the drama of our everyday embodied life are produced.

The Phenomenological Body: Body as Province of Meaning

All of these worlds – the world of dreams, of imageries, and phantasms, especially the world of art, the world of religious experience, the world of scientific contemplation, the play world of the child, and the world of the insane – are finite provinces of meaning.

Alfred Shutz, *Collected Papers I* (1973)

Edmund Husserl (1893/1917:315) identified the body as a “zero-point of orientation” – a centre for all knowledge and experience; a primordial point of reference: the body inhabits and moves – not in the abstract, but in the concrete, necessarily embodied, and privileged ontological, spatial, and temporal presence of the here and now. As Alfred Shutz (1973:232) further suggests, this world of the here and now is composed of multiple realities that represent “finite provinces of meaning.” In this way, phenomenologists firmly establish a focused emphasis on embodied subjects who encounter practical problems in discrete and situated circumstances and thus accentuate an approach akin to the traditions of interactionism: embodied people mindfully resolve pragmatic problems with intention and purpose in social encounters that are situated in broader social, cultural, and institutional milieus.

Phenomenological approaches to the body and embodiment concern thick descriptions of lived experience that reveal meaning in the life-worlds of individuals and groups. Meaning is embedded in our experiences within the world; meaning is not apart from either those embodied experiences or that world – an approach evocative of classic interactionist arguments. In fact, this phenomenological approach sometimes often shares a nearly identical “looking-glass” understanding of the body and experiences of embodiment. For example, in pondering the enigma of the body, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1974:283, 284–285) suggests:

The enigma is that my body simultaneously sees and is seen. That which looks at all things can also look at itself and recognize, in what it sees, the “other side” of its power of looking. It sees itself seeing; it touches itself touching; it is visible and sensitive for

itself... There is a human body when, between seeing and the seen, between touching and the touched, between one eye and the other, between hand and hand, a blending of some sort takes place – when the spark is lit between sensing and the sensible...

However, phenomenological approaches to the body and experiences of embodiment are unique. Phenomenological perspectives uniquely frame the relationship between body and world in at least two major and somewhat contradictory ways. On one hand, owing primarily to Merleau-Ponty, the phenomenological body is marked by somatic *presence*; the chief contribution and founding assumption is that self, society, and symbolic order are constituted through the work of the body (Crossley 1995). On the other hand, following Drew Leder (1990:62), the phenomenological body of the modern world is often marked by corporeal *absence*. The modern world is characterized by work and leisure activities that are organized by outcome-oriented and rational actions that immerse people in goals that are external to the body. Thus, as Shilling (2003:185) suggests, phenomenological approaches may magnify the practical, somatic, and corporeal body; they may also “suggest that the body is relatively unimportant to people’s sense of self in the contemporary era.” In short, from a phenomenological perspective, we have a body that serves as a fundamental corporeal anchor in the world; we also experience ourselves through numerous “bodies of meaning.” These “bodies of meaning” are both literal and metaphorical: meaning is comprised *in* embodied action and the body is interpreted *by* frameworks of meaning.

The importance of phenomenology for our interactionist understanding of the body is well summarized by Lee F. Monaghan in the opening chapter to this part of the book. Monaghan’s eclectic approach combines the tools of ethnography, pragmatism, and social phenomenology and effectively argues for the importance of an interpretive sociology in its inevitable corporeality. For Monaghan (2002:507) “the body’s primary relationship to the world is practical” and the body of the researcher as well as those of research participants cannot but constitute the primary body of meaning-making. Along these lines in Chapter Ten, Keri Brandt examines the processes of meaning-making occurring between female horse riders – such as Brandt herself – and their equine companions. Brandt argues that the signifying system used by women and horses in interaction is a complex structure of bodily clues, movement, and touch, as well as human bodily sensations – hence making a cogent point for the constitution of intersubjectivity in embodiment and for the body’s non-discursive intelligence at the level of habit and somatic sensation.

In Chapter Eleven, Joseph Kotarba and Matt Held examine how women’s professional American football reflects in part traditional gender expectations on the behaviour of the female body and how in part it constitutes an alternative to those hegemonic discourses, thus providing these women with an oppositional symbolic zone for the redefinition of their bodies and selves. Through fieldwork and phenomenological interviews Kotarba and Held reflects on how gender body norms inform their behaviour on the field and skill display. The rapport between discursive constructions of the body and bodily experiences is further examined in

Chapter Twelve, in which Richard Huggins focuses on the body of the heroin addict as a discursive construction in British and American popular media and on how the discursive themes of such representations are central to the phenomenological construction of addiction and the addict. In hermeneutic fashion for Huggins representations of the body of the addict act as a conceptual horizon for the perceived social significance of drug use and addiction, while at the same time public discourses inform the production of new representations and discursive constructions, and back again, magnifying the centrality of the symbolic and representational form.

The Socio-Semiotic Body: Body as Trace of Culture

Michel Foucault (1977:154) once remarked that “knowledge is not made for understanding: it is made for cutting.” Indeed, much “cutting” characterizes contemporary embodied selves: from the cutting of calories, carbohydrates, sugar, or fatty foods from our diet, to the cutting of hair in a style consistent with the latest fashion, and from the cutting of excessive cellulite or unsightly features with a surgeon’s knife, to the cutting of shirt sleeves and skirt lengths. For Foucault such “cutting” is a practice by which power/knowledge leaves traces on the surface and depths of our bodies; technologies of the self, in his words, that operate on the political anatomy of the body. Herein lies the fundamental premise of a socio-semiotic understanding of the body consistent with the interactionist tradition: despite its essential biological nature, as soon as the body becomes an object of discourse it is invested with symbolic meanings and symbolic value – use-value, sign-value, exchange value, and sign-exchange value – through the functioning of a discursive and material order.

Semiological (e.g. Saussurean, structuralist, and post-structuralist) conceptualizations of the body abound in contemporary cultural studies. For most of these, however, actual lived and experienced human bodies disappear from analytical sight – wiped out by conceptual emphasis on the omnipotent forces of culture and discourse (Howson 2005). The structural-semiological body thus yields to the weight of linguistic and cultural determinism, either falling into oblivion (often by the sleight of hand of a post-human, cyborgian textual world), or existing as an experienceless mirroring representation of various dynamics of intertextuality. In contrast, a *social* semiotic and interactionist understanding of the body avoids these pitfalls. For socio-semiotic interactionism there is no body without a reflexive and agentic self and there is no self without a reflexive and agentic body. Embodied interaction is therefore an active process of practical meaning-making (semiosis) occurring in an exo-semiotic field inevitably informed by power relations.

Through the body we perform, express, and present subjectivity to others. Yet, through the same activities, others also judge our body as object by means of appearance and performance. Therefore, like in other interactionist approaches, body is both a subject and object of action. More precisely, however, a socio-semiotic interactionist approach allows us to make sense of the body as source of

signification and communication, while understanding how such communication occurs through social interaction with other bodies and selves. Therefore, from a semiotic interactionist perspective bodies' meanings are constituted in relation to the positioning of the body in a system of signification, but the constitution of such meaning fully remains a product of human interaction, rather than a mere result of structural relations (see Vannini 2004).

Socio-semiotic interactionism differs sharply from structural semiology as it builds upon the pragmatist semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce and the crypto-deconstruction of John Dewey, rather than the idealist and formalist heritage of Saussure (Vannini 2004; also see Halton 1986, 1995; Wiley 1994). From the pragmatic and socio-semiotic perspective of Peirce we can make sense of bodies from three different but *inextricably inter-related* positions. The first position is that of the body as sign-vehicle (or representamen in Peircean terminology). The body as sign-vehicle is an actual lived and experienced body whose signifying and communicating practices *represent* hierarchies of meaning and value existent in the discursive order of our society. Similar to Stone (1962), Goffman (1959), Glassner (1988, 1989) and interactionists associated with other traditions, a socio-semiotic approach magnifies the importance of managing bodily appearance and impressions through careful manipulations, and thus the body as sign vehicle bears the representational traces of culture and power. For example, in Chapter Fourteen, Erica Owens and Bronwyn Beistle critically interpret the sexual meanings of the Black body – as portrayed in some racist personal ads – as both seductive and polluting. Seduction and pollution, working as opposed semiotic frames, mutually inform the meanings of the (hyper)sexualized power of the black body.

From the second position we may view the body as object. From this view we gaze at others' bodies and objectify them through our multi-sensory interaction with them. In other words, through interaction the body-material *becomes* a symbol, but it always remains a special type of symbol, being both a subject (through its relation with a self and others) and an object (to the self and to others). Following Strauss (1993) we can therefore say that there is “action *on* the body, *toward* the body, or *with respect* to the body” (Strauss 1993:120, italics in the original). As such, bodies become intertwined in a political economy of symbolic objects (Baudrillard 1968) with some objects clearly having more value than others. Bodies reside, therefore, at the centre of a social structure built around embodied inequalities. The body, subjected to various processes of commodification, becomes a commodity itself by assuming physical capital (Bourdieu 1984; also see Featherstone 1991). Bodies with high physical capital then reflect out their power onto other bodies which then attempt to emulate the performances and appearances of the former. In part, these are the dynamics by which the construct of “body image” is constituted.

Yet, such process is not as simple as the one referred to in the psychological and social psychological literature on body image, as we argue in Chapter Thirteen. The formation of what we name “body ekstasis” is in actuality dependent on a conceptualization of the body as sense, or interpretant – the third position of a socio-semiotic analytics of the body. In Peirce's (1960) triadic model of the sign

the relation between object and sign vehicle (or representamen) is mediated by an emergent interpretive process which gives rise to a unique relation between the two. A socio-semiotic interactionist approach to the body is then cognizant of the active negotiation occurring between embodied selves as objects and embodied selves as subjects. As semiotic interactionists then we see the body as the medium through which embodied selves take in and give out negotiated knowledge about their world, themselves, others, and material objects (Strauss 1993:108), a body process which “serve[s] to enhance, promote, denigrate, destroy, maintain or alter performances, appearances, or presentations” (Strauss 1993:121). And, additionally, we can see embodied interaction as a form of both signification and agentic communication occurring through the body and entailing “cooperative activity with others and [being] the basis of shared significant symbols (Mead 1934), giving meaning to what one feels, sees, hears, smells and touches” (Corbin and Strauss 1988:54). The body as sense or interpretant points to the innovative, intentional, interpretive, reflexive, existentially unique, and innovative powers of the embodied self. Along these lines in Chapter Fifteen, Carol Rambo, Sara Renée Presley and Don Mynatt examine how exotic dancers “talk back,” that is, how they are engaged in symbolic resistance (also see Ronai and Cross 1998) against the discourses of social researchers who have framed stripping within the restrictive categories of deviance/exploitation/liberation.

The Narrative Body: Body as Story

Recent literatures have gainfully synthesized classic and legacy interactionist theory within a narrative framework. From this point of view, personhood is a narrative accomplishment (Denzin 1989; Holstein and Gubrium 2000). Personhood “is more than the sum of its parts, and narrative is what allows it to *be* more” (Irvine 1999:9, emphasis in original). As Douglas Mason-Schrock (1996:176) contends, “stories are like containers that hold us together; they give us a sense of coherence and continuity. By telling what happened to us once upon a time, we make sense of who we are today.” Yet, narratives “are not free-floating. Neither are they whimsical. Of course, some people *do* invent elaborate lies about themselves, but we call them confidence men or bullshit artists, or we medicate them and avoid them.... I am referring to an enduring and convincing (or at least plausible) story about who one is” (Irvine 1999:9, emphasis in original). In this way, the narratives that bestow coherence and continuity to personhood are structured by the language, grammar, and syntax of social, cultural, subcultural, and institutional discourse.

From this framework, the narrative body is situated in the stories we tell *to* ourselves and stories others tell *about* their own bodies and the bodies of others. As Holstein and Gubrium (2000) suggest narrative is a form of working subjectivity and a site of discursive struggle between narratives of the self and institutional discourses which frame our (embodied) subjectivity. The symbolic interactionist and narrative study of the body, therefore, conceptualizes the embodied self as “a particular set of

sited language games whose rules discursively construct the semblance of a more or less unified subjectivity centered in experience” (Holstein and Gubrium 2000:70), or more simply as a set of stories about bodies we negotiate, struggle against, create, and of which live the consequences.

Chapters Sixteen and Seventeen open this section with two in-depth analyses of the culture of beauty. Chapter Sixteen is an effervescent commentary and critique on hegemonic discourses on health and fitness found in popular media. In that chapter, Charles Edgley scrutinizes in rich detail a vast array of narratives and discursive resources available to individuals keen on shaping up their bodies and the stories they live by, in order to better “fit” in. Michael Atkinson’s focus in Chapter Seventeen is on men’s narratives of their experiences with plastic surgery. These men’s “before and after” stories reveal a complex set of strategies of positioning and re-positioning and of writing and re-writing the meanings of the physical appearance of their bodies in a symbolic and material universe informed by traditional and novel discourses on masculinity.

In addition to viewing the body as a site of struggle between institutional discourses and counter-narratives, symbolic interactionists conceptualize the body as a site of struggle between the realm of the symbolic (i.e. the self) and the physiological (i.e. the corporeal). Such an approach is especially typical of those symbolic interactionists interested in understanding the consequences of illness for the self-concept and identity. For Kathy Charmaz (e.g. 1991, 1995, 2002), for example, the experience of illness is not only an intrusive interruption to the rhythm of healthy life, but more significantly a threat to the organization of the embodied self over time. Selves need contend with the continuing illness of their bodies by living one day at a time – thus losing the power to story their own futures – or constructing their existence day by day in an attempt to maintain control over the present (Charmaz 1991). For this reason illness disrupts the continuity of biography, at times turning the self literally at the mercy of the body (see Frank 1991, 1995).

The intersection between the socio-linguistic (i.e. narrative) and the physiological is thus representative of symbolic interactionist emphasis on narrative practice as a way of coping with traumatic experience and also a terrain for the socio-political emancipation of those whose “abnormal” bodies have been silenced by the cultural side-effects of illness, deviance, and diversity. Stories of the body and the self in this sense are told to gain empowerment through the acceptance of self and others (Denzin 1987a, 1987b, 1987c; Irvine 1999; Ronai 1995) and in this sense become techniques of care of the self (Frank 1998). Among such stories of empowerment figure the counter-narratives examined by Rachel Westfall in Chapter Eighteen. Westfall focuses her attention on the experiences of one woman whose trials and tribulations during her pregnancy demonstrate the degree to which the institutionalization of birth and the medicalization of women’s bodies leave little (but ever so meaningful) space for agentic and oppositional storytelling.

In Chapter Nineteen, Clinton R. Sanders concludes the book by first identifying a loose but useful typology in which all of the chapters of this book (as well as broader body-oriented sociological discussions) can be located and understood.

Next, Sanders insightfully highlights the central themes that are woven through the narratives and analysis of this book – identity, self, and emotion; themes central not only to this text, but to the interactionist tradition as a whole. Drawing from insights gleaned from this book as they intersect with his own published works and personal experiences, Sanders reflects on the role of the body in interaction, as a vehicle of communication, as an aesthetic object, as a site of and for social control, and concludes by observing “It is a rare issue, phenomenon, or object that relates to so many matters of central interest to symbolic interactionists as does the body.” We hope readers agree and also appreciate the utility of symbolic interaction to both understanding and investigating the dynamics of the body/embodiment.

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