

accompanied him on this holiday. There are no expressions of negative feeling towards people, such as anger or jealousy, in *Germes*. There are, however, many glimpses of an intense super-sensibility towards things and events in life: 'I was sure that God would understand the terrors of the night, or the pleasures of food, or the love of books, or the lasciviousness of pictures, or the shame of bedwetting' (p. 66). Trips to the cinema were reserved for winter, and rainy afternoons. The latter evoked a special dread, that the sun might have come out while RW and his mother were watching the film. The wet surfaces glinting in the sun 'a natural cause of joy to many ... stirred in me the deepest darkest melancholy' (p. 45).

One of the strangest of these extreme reactions to ordinary things, and something mentioned several times, is utter disgust at the smell of newspaper. This was not merely a childish revulsion, as 'the smell of newspaper nauseated me then [i.e. as a child] as much as it does now' (p. 89). RW has a memory of his two and a half year old self connected with this nausea. The memory links his nanny reading, with fixed attention, of the death of Queen Alexandra with his brother making spitballs out of bits of newspaper and aiming them at the paper the nanny was reading so that the face of the Queen in the photograph became 'desecrated by spit, and the smell' (p. 250). This is a rare example of a hint at explanation in the memoir. For the most part the experiences of the child Wollheim are simply recounted. Yet *Germes* is far from a naive memoir, unsurprisingly given the author's deep interest, as a philosopher, in psychoanalysis. A 'Dr S.', presumably RW's analyst, is sometimes referred to. But there is nothing here of the boredom or embarrassment a reader might fear of confessions from an analyst's couch. It is a psychoanalysed life in that the reader feels that RW has understood much of the process through which his super-sensibility, fears and shame have come about, and any anguish from the past has been muted (and one detects too a certain masochistic pleasure in these sensibilities). But the reader is not called on to go through this process. In any account of *Germes* (such as this review) it is hard to convey the sustained elegance of its elaboration of the texture of a life.

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ASSERTIONS OF PRACTICAL EMBODIED CONSCIOUSNESS

The body in culture, technology and society. Chris Shilling, 2005. London: Sage; ISBN 0761971246, 247 pp., £19.99, paper.

Chris Shilling's book is much more than a map or summary of the field of body studies over the last 20 years; it demonstrates that the embodied

preconditions of agency and the physical effects of social structures must now be taken into account in any study. He identifies ‘the enigmatic nature of embodiment in social theory’ as the legacy of classical sociology, then consolidates the insights yielded by this re-examination in developing what he calls *corporeal realism*: starting with the idea that in dealing with the body–society relationship we are dealing with an emergent, causally consequential phenomenon, that ‘the body is a multi-dimensional medium for the constitution of society’.

The body cannot be conceptualized adequately as an entirely passive location for social or cultural inscriptions. Not only do embodied subjects often possess the capacity to resist the effects of external structures, but the properties of the body serve actively to dispose them favourably or unfavourably towards these conditions.

(p. 90)

For Shilling, interaction and emergence are vital theoretical concepts, living practices and values, and ‘the generation of, and participation in, sociable relations constitute a realization of what it means to be a human being’. He cites ‘the meal, as a prime facilitator of [these] non-rational relationships’ and notes ‘the demise of eating communities’. The idea of ‘eating for productivity’/refuelling (the instrumental relationship with food/meals) as opposed to ‘feasting for sociality’ (the non-instrumental relationship with food/meals) is suggestive of a contemporary shift in habits and values; but it also risks glossing over historical relations with food and meals as they have been marked by privilege and poverty.

In chapters on (in order) working bodies, sporting bodies, musical bodies, sociable bodies and technological bodies, Shilling shows that the consequences of rationalization for sustainability and creativity (as entwined projects) are already stark enough to justify putting the body at the centre of social theory. Sustaining sociable relations looks ambitious in the context of intensified instrumentalism and commodification. What it is to be/have a body in turn raises concerns about a life beyond utility: that from being a means for the attachment of individuals to capitalism, bodily experience can become a vehicle for *social transformation*. Shilling holds firmly to that aspiration throughout.

He is critical of theoretical accounts within which the body disappears; or where the body is seen as a productive source of society, but only instrumentally: where ‘the expressive and creative capacities fade from view’. Similarly, accounts where the body’s significance seems dependent on breakdown or dysfunction rather than more routine, ‘non-pathological dispositions and tastes’ surely signal the lurking binary divide between the ‘thinking mind’ (elite, masculine) and the ‘feeling body’ (‘feminine and

essentially disruptive). Gendered codes and gender issues are noted and discussed throughout the book.

For example, Shilling acknowledges that the archetypal sporting body was/is male, and that the white, western, middle-class 'cult of manliness' was colonial, and sport was initially perceived as 'unladylike', 'equated with the conquering of nature'. He does not mention that, as a consequence, the elite male athlete provides not only the benchmark for performance (in terms of speed, strength, style), but that this models the *paradigmatic* athletic body. To achieve this through training and diet, women athletes decrease the size of breasts and hips and fat deposits generally, and increase arm and leg musculature, to improve power (speed, strength, stamina): they shape their bodies to become more masculine (and below a certain weight they will cease menstruating). I am as yet unconvinced that the pervasiveness of gendered norms has ceded or will cede in 'the move away from traditional conceptions of masculinity, femininity, class or race, and towards the cellular and molecular factors that sports scientists associate with sporting capacity' (p. 207, citing Gilroy).

The question of the subjugation of bodily diversity and creativity in the contemporary era drives Shilling's thesis. Turning the body into a location of pure productivity is a target with considerable consequences for the individual and for society, at times amounting to (self-)abuse. Likewise the internalization of the disciplinary mechanisms required to continue as a credible member of society, where appearance and employability are increasingly entwined *projects*, and where emotion work (both surface acting and deep acting) is intensified and spills across the previous public/private divide.

Sporting bodies and musical bodies provide alarming evidence of the drive towards instrumentality and commodification. The overtrained bodies of elite athletes operate on the borders of physical breakdown and, almost certainly, mental as well. Musical bodies also have training and performance schedules designed for 'profit' where action and values are subordinated to the imperatives of performance. The Fordist assembly line was the precursor for these changes that have reached beyond the industrial workplace: 'The long working day taxed people's stamina to its limit and made it increasingly difficult to undertake other forms of body work necessary for social well-being and physical health' (pp. 80–81). Changing conditions of waged work have also eroded the boundaries between paid work and body work.

The chapter on technological bodies provides more examples of people exerting the will to transform, as well as participate in, (new) communities. While reminding us that these technologies are not politically neutral and that they can present us with problems of overload and emotional disconnection, as well as confidentiality and control, Shilling suggests that rather than thinking about cyberspace and physical space as

opposites, we should pay more attention to ‘how they interact and constitute extensions of each other’.

Throughout, Shilling counters pessimism and the sense of wreckage, suggesting a more variable picture for researchers to work to illuminate. This is a suggestive and stimulating text, which I believe will prove to be a treasure trove for students. It reminds me why I studied sociology in the first place: as a social being, I wanted to understand; as an activist I wanted to make a difference; and as a young woman I believed that both were possible. Part of the attraction of this text is that motivating Shilling’s arguments are questions about equality/oppression, community and individuality.

The 20-year period of the emergence of body studies coincides with the introduction of new managerialism within academia: pedagogy and knowledge production as business projects. Academics may find reading Shilling on the status and function of the body in the workplace unnerving. Increasingly instrumental even coercive working environments, casualization, deskilling, the increase in emotion work are being functionally deployed by and for the economic/political system itself. There is much here for the academic reader to identify with, *as a body under duress*, who has hitherto failed to admit the problem. Experiencing the body as a ‘multi-dimensional medium for the constitution of society’ could lead to some creative alliances/communities across the gulf between academia and society.

As historical defenders of the body/mind split and the gendered ‘rationality’ project, academics have been slow to include their own bodies in the equation. Intellectuality/elite masculinity has been defined in opposition to the body/femininity and as a denial of the body’s exertions and limits and of its vulnerability, fragility and contingency. And just as social theorists were moving towards a less hesitant take on embodiment, along came new managerialism and its body-defying, spirit-crushing, heart-breaking business practices. Nourished by Shilling’s work, academics variously involved in pedagogy and curriculum development; administration and organization; research and writing, may now wish to step up to the table, as simultaneously theorists *and bodies*, asserting their ‘practical embodied consciousness’.

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THE TEXTURES OF PERSONAL AND SOCIAL LIFE

Untold stories. Alan Bennett, 2005. London: Faber & Faber and Profile Books; ISBN 0571228305, xiii + 628 pp., £20, cloth.

Untold Stories is a treasure trove of wit, social commentary and astute observation of the literary and theatrical world and an intimate portrait of