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(eds.)

**Methodologies of Embodiment.
Inscribing Bodies in Qualitative
Research**

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Books on methodological issues concerning research into the social, cultural, political and economic dimensions of the human body are extremely rare. To be honest, I cannot remember a single book entirely dedicated to this matter in the past. Only occasionally was I able to find some traces of thoughts and practical methodological advice in literature on the body (including embodiment), but that was pretty much all. This is why I, as a sociologist of the body, am especially grateful to have discovered a book on the methodologies of embodiment edited by Mia Perry (ecl foundation) and Carmen Liliana Medina (Indiana University). Although the book is not very big – it has 157 pages and eight chapters – it is a fair and honest attempt to fill the wide gap between the proper (epistemological) and methodological framework for researching different social and pedagogical aspects of the human body, and researchers' desperate search to have one within their reach.

Due to the book's modest dimensions, the reader should not expect

all branches of methodology related to embodiment to be presented and explained, only the qualitative ones. In some sense, the editor's decision distances the book's contents from various social sciences with its largely 'traditional' methodological approaches (for instance sociology), where quantitative methodologies are very widely used (economics) or are not exactly welcomed, like in the arts (practice as research) and the humanities (literature studies). But one cannot please everybody, and certain restrictions on the topic are nevertheless useful. The main reason for the restricted content reflects the fact that almost all the participants are in some way involved in the educational process in theatre, art and literature.

By definition, embodiment is a complex, multi-layered process during which the individual's body is, on one hand, subject to various social, cultural, political and economic influences by which it is changed, transformed, annihilated, reshaped, controlled and so on in many different ways and, on the other hand, a subject which is lived and experienced as a unique entity by an individual. Hence the body, which affords different ways of embodiment, is thus somehow always somewhere 'in between'. However, it is still deeply and silently embedded in the tradition of researching the social phenomenon of bodily character, that the real body is somehow exempt from the picture. Too many times the body is understood simply as a material vehicle for different social, cultural and political

processes without having any other particular influence on them. Whether, and if so to what degree, the body can affect those processes is a matter of debate, but this is something the reader cannot find here. The reviewed book is thus far from being immune to the effect of the 'missing body'; only rarely do the authors speak about the corporeal body in the cases they investigate, although it is obviously present all the time.

It is important to note that another element common to all eight of the book's chapters is the educational character of human embodiment. While neither different outer (social, economic, political and so on) nor inner elements (the individual's mental state) of embodiment are directly controllable in a small environment/community, for instance in a classroom, the body is. The body can be disciplined in order to achieve specific aims and altered in many different ways to fulfil many different purposes. The body is thus inevitably a suitable target of embodiment of various educational methods, whether in the form of a devised theatre (Mia Perry), creative play and embodied critical literacy (Candance Doerr-Stevens, Cynthia Lewis, Debra Ingram and Maria Asp), attunement (James Asch and Lesley Anne Gallacher), embodied multimodality (Burcu Yaman Nteloglou) or feminist embodiment (Carol Brochin and Carmen Liliana Medina) whose goal is to shape and direct the individual's embodied behaviour towards a critical engagement with the world.

Two basic understandings of methodology are presented in the book. The first one is a goal-oriented practical methodology that directs the individual's agency in a group or small community for gaining distinct personal embodiment usually with higher, educational aims. For instance, acquiring a certain revelation about the situation in which an individual is dwelling, and as a consequence perhaps some level of individual liberation from unjust social, economic and political constraints will be secured. I have already partly addressed this type of methodology in the previous paragraph and it is this type of methodology that the reader immediately notices while moving through the book. The other type of methodology is less 'recognisable' to the reader, possibly because the volume is far from being a list of procedures one needs in order to study human embodiment in education in art and performance. The book is not a researcher's manual. It is more a collection of thoughts about various educational practices delivered to the reader via non-structured articles and essays. It is up to the reader to husk elements of this methodology and pick out whatever is needed. Obviously, the more knowledge about epistemology and qualitative methodology a reader has, the easier their task will be. In addition, the aim of this type of methodology is to produce fairly objective knowledge.

Despite expressing and sharing certain enthusiasm for the book

regarding the methodological issues about researching human embodiment, I still find several peculiarities. The main puzzle for me is the book's title which, in my modest opinion, promises far too much compared to what the reader can actually find inside the book. Not only is the entire diapason of methodology which could be applied in researching human embodiment not exhaustively covered, but the book's cover does not reveal that the methodological issues of embodiment chiefly focus on examples taken from education in theatre and performance. Now, I am not saying I was not pleased upon discovering this. On the contrary, since I believe the theatre and the performance are some of the finest ways for social, political and aesthetic use of the human body. This makes me, I admit, highly biased. Yet, on the other hand, I stress the editors should give readers 'fair warning' by using a more appropriate subtitle to better indicate what the book is all about.

Another critical moment of the book is its use of the concept 'embodiment' throughout the book in analyses and interpretations of several social phenomena related to the pedagogical process. However, I shall address this issue only briefly here for two reasons. First, the book certainly has a somewhat surprising, maybe even intriguing, end. The last chapter, which is actually an afterword, is written by Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre and has a suggestive and at the same time a revealing subtitle: *Troubles with Embodiment*. In fact,

this short 'chapter' contains a pedantically critical approach to the book's contents or, more accurately, its uncritical use of, according to Adams St. Pierre, the obsolete term 'embodiment'. She does not deal separately with each contribution in the book. Instead, she points to the very origin of the problem with the concept of embodiment. It was Rene Descartes and his infamous philosophical split between the body and the mind, later on so eagerly and widely adopted by the positivists, that not only allows, but also forces us to use the concept of the embodiment on a daily basis, and to which the author of the afterword, who is considered one of the most radical advocates of post-qualitative inquiry, so strongly opposes. As a consequence, the book already includes its own fundamental critical opposition and, for that reason, there is hardly any need to 'drop by to spoil the party'. Second, while the book's editors and authors may have not learned that an epistemological 'war' is raging against understanding of the body as merely a subject of the mind in terms of Bryan S. Turner's 'one has body' in order to reach and complement 'one is body', we can only hope that they will learn about this sooner rather than later. After all, the editors confess at the end of the introductory part that when they finish their *'work in curating and editing the chapters and ideas brought together in this volume, we depart with more questions than when we began'* (p. 11).