Chris Shilling

Changing Bodies

Habit, Crisis and Creativity

Changing Bodies

Theory, Culture & Society

Theory, Culture & Society caters for the resurgence of interest in culture within contemporary social science and the humanities. Building on the heritage of classical social theory, the book series examines ways in which this tradition has been reshaped by a new generation of theorists. It also publishes theoretically informed analyses of everyday life, popular culture and new intellectual movements.

EDITOR: Mike Featherstone, *Nottingham Trent University*

SERIES EDITORIAL BOARD
Roy Boyne, *University of Durham*
Scott Lash, *Goldsmiths College, University of London*
Roland Robertson, *University of Aberdeen*
Bryan S. Turner, *National University of Singapore*

THE TCS CENTRE
The Theory, Culture & Society book series, the journals *Theory, Culture & Society* and *Body & Society*, and related conference, seminar and postgraduate programmes operate from the TCS Centre at Nottingham Trent University. For further details of the TCS Centre's activities please contact:

The TCS Centre
School of Arts and Humanities
Nottingham Trent University
Clifton Lane, Nottingham NG11 8NS, UK
email: tcs@ntu.ac.uk
web: http://sagepub.net/tcs/

Recent volumes include:

The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory, Third Edition
Bryan Turner

The Media City: Media, Architecture and Urban Space
Scott McQuire

The Dressed Society: Clothing, the Body and Some Meanings of the World
Peter Corrigan

Informalization: Manners and Emotions Since 1890
Cas Wouters

The Culture of Speed: The Coming of Immediacy
John Tomlinson

Consumer Culture and Postmodernism, Second Edition
Mike Featherstone

Changing Bodies

Habit, Crisis and Creativity

Chris Shilling

⑤SAGE

To Debbie, Max and Kate
With Love

Contents

Acknowledgements

1

Introduction

Body modification and transformation have exerted a growing fascination in contemporary consumer culture. This is partly because science and technology continue to weaken the boundaries separating flesh and machines and, in so doing, prompt us to revisit and revise our ideas about what it is to be a human being. It is also because the agents of bodily change – from cosmetic surgeons and tattooists, to personal trainers and style consultants – populate the high street and television schedules in ever greater numbers. People have long decorated and moulded their bodies in various ways, but the growth and variety of businesses designed to exploit the malleability of the flesh and its contents have turned bodywork into a hugely profitable industry.

The popularity of this cultural phenomenon raises a number of questions about the impact that bodily change has on people's identities and capacities for action. It also raises wider issues concerning the morality of social orders in which so much money, time and energy are devoted to the aesthetics of embodiment. These are important matters, but it would, I think, be an error to restrict discussion of them to the most visible or novel ways in which bodily modification occurs. Our bodies change, develop and age from the womb through to our death and decomposition. The institutions that surround us, the relationships we enter into, and the habits we develop, all impact upon the appearances, capacities and meanings associated with our bodies. Bodily change sometimes occurs as a result of consciously formulated actions undertaken in situations of considerable autonomy, but it also happens frequently in circumstances over which individuals have little control. In these and in other situations, the ways in which bodily change occurs are related inextricably to people's social actions as well as to the wider social structures in which they live.

It is this broad and general relationship between bodily change and social action that concerns this book. In what follows, I seek to develop an analytical framework, informed by pragmatism's account of the external and internal environments of human action, that explores how people's embodied appearances, identities and capacities are shaped by various combinations of habit, crisis and creativity. As a way of introducing this study, however, I want to start with a paradox. In coming to terms with the corporeal dimensions of social action, any adequate sociological approach to the subject has to go *beyond* bodily behaviour if it is to demonstrate the

social consequentiality of our physical being. As Karen Fields (1995: lvi) implies, simply recognising bodily impulses and movements has the socio-logical significance of 'so many potatoes in a sack'. This observation helps us understand why Weber (1968: 24–6, 65) defined meaningful social action as action oriented towards the behaviour of *others*, and distinguished action that was rational within a social context from mere affectual and habitual bodily reactions to events. It was the former rather than the latter that most identified us as humans, able to intervene creatively and inten-tionally in the flow of social life. Yet contemporary attempts to harness embodied action to society often travel so far from the biological organism – in their concern with such issues as discourse and image – that the material-ity of their acting subjects disappears altogether (e.g. Butler, 1993). There is a balancing act to perform here. Sociology needs to account for the impact of society and culture on embodied actions, while also acknowl-edging that the embodied constitution of human action (an embodiment forged over the *longue durée* of human evolution that cannot simply be derived from current social orders) is itself consequential for these wider relationships, norms and values.

In seeking to meet this challenge, the rapidly growing and otherwise diverse collection of sociologically informed 'body studies' that emerged since the early 1980s has drawn in the main on two broad theoretical approaches. On the one hand, there are those who identify the governmental management of the body as setting key parameters to the overarching *external environment* in which social action occurs. Bryan Turner (1984), for example, draws on the distinctive concerns of Thomas Hobbes, Talcott Parsons and Michel Foucault with 'the problem of order' and 'disciplinary regimes' as a way of identifying the reproduction and regulation of populations through space and time, the restraint of desire, and the representation of bodies, as key action issues that face all societies. On the other hand, analysts have identified the body as central to the *internal environment* of social action. Arthur Frank (1991a: 43, 1991b), for example, views the opportunities and constraints of action as given by 'the problems of bodies themselves'. Such action-oriented studies develop typically by being attentive to 'the body's own experience of its embodiment' in various social contexts, and by drawing on interactionist, phenomenological and existentialist resources provided by such figures as Georg Simmel and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Leder, 1990; Frank, 1991a: 48; Csordas, 1994).

Given the use of these traditional resources it should come as no surprise that while sociology's focus on embodiment may be relatively new (at least in its present incarnation), contemporary approaches remain indisputably related to, and in certain respects recapitulate, those sociologies of order and of action that have long characterised the discipline (Dawe, 1970). Thus, the focus on bodies as providing the 'core problems' confronted by the external environment in which action occurs conceptualises human phys-icality as an object ordered by society. Bodies, irrespective of how they act, are essentially a structural problem. The interest in the body as central to

the internal environment of social action, in contrast, highlights how human behaviour involves subjects who engage sensorially and emotionally (as well as cognitively) with their social world. The body is here viewed as integral to, and sometimes coterminous with, social action.

These approaches have done much to bring 'body matters' to the centre of academic debate about the nature and contexts of social action, but they face continuing challenges. Studies that begin their inquiries with the external environment confront the difficulty from this analytical ground of grasping embodied action as an active determinant of social systems, while those whose chosen starting point is the internal environment struggle to incorporate into their analyses a comprehensive sense of the wider social and cultural factors affecting embodied action and bodily changes. Theorists who have sought to draw a bridge between these approaches have fared little better. The writings of Pierre Bourdieu, for example, have proven highly influential, but his conception of *habitus* places the reproduction of the external environment at the very heart of his conception of action (Bourdieu, 1984). The problem with this is that embodied action appears predetermined – it both echoes and replicates existing structures – leaving those who operationalise Bourdieu's work in their research employing strategies to modify its reproductive logic (see Shilling, 2005a).

Against this background, it is somewhat puzzling that the embodied focus on writers such as Hobbes, Parsons, Weber, Durkheim and a host of more recent theoretical figures including Foucault, Butler and Haraway, has not been accompanied by an equivalent interest in pragmatism. Pragmatism drew on various philosophical antecedents (Malachowski, 2004), but it was first formulated as an identifiable approach by Charles Sanders Peirce in the early 1870s, and named as a distinctive position by William James in an address to the Philosophical Union at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1898. It was developed further and deployed within substantive studies at the Chicago School of Sociology in the early decades of the twentieth century. John Dewey and George Herbert Mead were especially prominent in this respect. Only a few body theorists have taken this work seriously (e.g. Shusterman, 1992), however, despite more general theoretical studies highlighting the potential utility of pragmatism for analysing the social significance of corporeality (Joas, 1996). This is a serious oversight, I would suggest, as pragmatism's recognition and explorations of the distinctive properties of, and the dynamic relationship that exists between, the external and internal environments of human action can help avoid the dangers of conflation. This tradition of inquiry can also usefully inform substantive studies of embodied subjects in their social and material contexts, as evident in the work of the Chicago School, thus helping to address what some critics have described as the relative lack of empirically informed work in the field of body studies.

In explicating how pragmatism explores the corporeal dimensions of social action, it is useful to first clarify how it differs from the dominant traditions in sociology. During the early years of the twentieth century,

sociology was still coming to terms with how to translate the a priori assumptions central to its various philosophical foundations into methods and procedures that would facilitate empirical research. The French sociological tradition took as its starting point the primacy of the collectivity, for example, while the German tradition began with the self-directing individual (Levine, 1995). Yet both presented problems to sociologists interested in examining *interactions* between social actors and their environment without reducing one to the other. This was because the former tended to derive the capabilities of the subject from the properties of social structures, while the latter usually conceived the social environment in terms of the dispositions of (inter)acting individuals.

Pragmatism, in contrast, offered an alternative foundation for sociology. Instead of identifying either the collectivity or the individual as absolute starting points, it recognised that action was undertaken by individuals *always already within* a social and natural context, yet possessed of *emergent capacities and needs* that distinguished them from, and also enabled them to shape actively, their wider milieu. In this context, action, experience and identity arise from the ongoing interactions and transactions that occur between the internal environment of the embodied organism and its external social and physical environment.

It is this ability to maintain a view of the external and internal environments of action as distinctive, yet interacting, phenomena that is of particular utility for sociological studies of embodiment. Thus, pragmatism's insistence on the human potential to 'make a difference' turns what sociologists have sometimes treated as exclusively socially determined organisms into phenomenologically aware, active body-subjects whose corporeal properties enable them to intervene creatively in the world. At the same time, pragmatism's recognition that embodied actions are shaped in part by the distinctive properties of the social and natural world also avoids the dangers of viewing action as emanating from monadic subjects who are hermetically sealed from other people and from the material contexts in which they live (Burkitt, 1991). It is these characteristics that provide sociological studies into the corporeal dimensions of social action with a *potential* framework for investigation that differs in important respects from its classical antecedents.

I emphasise the word 'potential', because pragmatism provides us with no single theory ready to be applied in its totality to substantive studies of embodiment. Those most closely associated with pragmatism developed their work in distinctive directions, while the body-relevant studies conducted in the Chicago School were also characterised by much diversity. More radically, contemporary writers have harnessed the insights of pragmatism to theories which sometimes appear to have little in common with their antecedents (e.g. Rorty, 1982; Shusterman, 1992; see Halton, 1995). Rescher (1997) goes so far as to conclude that pragmatism has undergone a remarkable deformation from its original conception. Rather than condemning these developments, we might see them instead as

tributes to the continuing creative potential of an approach possessed of greater flexibility than many other theories. In the spirit of this flexibility, my own concern is not to seek to identify or promote any single 'authentic' pragmatist theory, but to explore how some of the key insights developed by the likes of John Dewey, George Herbert Mead and William James can be drawn together within a broad and flexible framework that facilitates sociological investigations into the *interactions* that exist between the external and internal environments of embodied action. It is these investigations into the external social and physical milieu (that contextualise and shape action), on the one hand, and the internal needs and capacities (that inform action), on the other, that enable us to explicate and explore the relationship between social action and bodily change that lie at the heart of this book. My focus on action is intended to complement the current emphasis in body studies on utilising theory not as an end in itself, but as a means of expanding those empirically informed accounts that add to our knowledge of body-subjects in their social contexts.

Chapter 2, *Embodying Social Action*, begins this process in detail by focusing on how pragmatism can aid our understanding of the environments of social action, and of the common sociological concern with identity or character. Chapter 3, *Embodying Social Research*, explores how this paradigm of thought was developed and deployed in the empirically oriented writings of the Chicago School of Sociology. These chapters illustrate and explore the promise of pragmatism, but there is still much to be done if we are to maximise its capacity to assist sociological explorations into areas of human life in which embodiment is centrally visible. This issue is perhaps particularly pressing in cases where the external or internal environments seem to place overwhelming constraints on individual action and on people's capacity for developing an integrated character or engaging in collective forms of moral action. It is also significant in relation to those cases in which the boundaries between these environments of action become particularly blurred or even, apparently, effaced.

This is the background against which Chapters 4–9 undertake a series of case studies which focus on embodied actions and bodily changes within radically different environments. The subjects covered in these substantive chapters provide illustrations of actions emanating from different contexts, and undertaken in situations characterised by wildly different constraints and opportunities. In terms of the contexts, three of them (Competing, Presenting and Moving) focus on actions associated with the contemporary, technological world. These deal respectively with the international significance of sport, transformations of the body involved in transgenderism, and the migrations undertaken by 'dispossessed travellers' in the global economy. The chapters on Ailing, Surviving and Believing, in contrast, analyse what might be described as more anthropological features of what it is to be an embodied human

(albeit within specific milieu). These concentrate respectively on illness, the confrontation with death and belief. In terms of the constraints and opportunities dealt with by these chapters, Surviving, Ailing and Moving focus on situations in which people's actions are *heavily circumscribed*, while Competing, Presenting and Believing switch attention to areas of life associated with the *cultivation* and *expansion* of at least a selection of human potentialities.

Chapter 4 focuses on a type of action which requires a *surplus* of energy over that required for mere survival, and is associated with the structured accumulation of skills in an area of life which receives considerable social recognition. *Competing* explores embodied action and change in sport. Sport has flourished in benign as well as in virulent social orders such as the Nazi state, tends to be associated in the public mind with health and fitness, and has been associated over the centuries with a broad range of social and political goals. In the contemporary era, sport also provides a particularly interesting example of how the competitive action that lies at its core mediates the relationship between individual character and national identity. Chapter 5, *Presenting*, explores the centrality of action to appearance by examining how transgendered individuals negotiate cultural norms surrounding the presentation of self. Sociologists have long suggested that presentational norms exert a major effect on a person's identity, but the stories of those possessed of a profound sense that they are inhabiting the 'wrong' body shows how people can negotiate these norms in a manner which provides them with new opportunities for development. Chapter 6, *Moving*, focuses on those dispossessed travellers who constitute the underbelly of human migration. It explores how the actions and identities of refugees, asylum seekers, low-paid migrant workers and others excluded from global wealth, are forged through the travels in which they engage.

Chapter 7, *Ailing*, is concerned with illness and impairment in the context of an external environment that is shaped on the basis of the performative priorities embedded in a 'health role' (Frank, 1991a). Visions of healthy and aesthetically perfect bodies pervade consumer culture, but the ideal they project is a myth. Sooner or later virtually all of us get sick (defined biomedically as involving a diseased organism) and experience illness (defined sociologically as the subjective encounter with the symptoms and suffering associated with sickness). Entry into the 'kingdom of sickness', as Susan Sontag (1991) puts it, or into the world of physical or mental impairment, can have a devastating impact on our capacities for action and on our identities. Chapter 8, *Surviving*, explores social action oriented towards maintaining existence in the face of overwhelming odds. There can be fewer cases where social action is so constrained, or where life is so precarious, than in the 'killing factories' of the Nazi concentration camps or in the Soviet Gulag. Despite the vital differences between these systems – the Soviet camps were not established with the aim of facilitating genocide – millions died in them and the accounts of survivors provide us with a harrowing insight into embodied action at the extremes of life.

Chapter 9, *Believing*, picks up on some of the religious undercurrents of Chapter 8 and addresses an important consequence of migration in the current era. Since the twentieth century, the West has been dominated by a technological culture predicated on the rational 'enframing' of society and nature (Heidegger, 1993 [1954]), yet this culture has confronted challenges to its hegemony. These have ranged in severity and scale from direct attacks on symbols of its authority (by terrorist groups who justify their actions on the basis of religious affiliation) to the growth of 'new age' spiritualities, which seek to ameliorate the effects of technological culture on people's lives and on the viability of the planet. In this context, Chapter 9 explores what belief means to different peoples, identifies contemporary attempts to utilise belief-systems as a means of mitigating technological culture in the West, and examines how the embodied bases of these forms of belief are central to the increasing religious conflicts that exist in the world today.

Chapter 10 concludes this book by drawing together the disparate threads of these substantive chapters as a way of assessing the general approach that has informed them. The framework employed here is not intended to provide a single, 'closed', theory of the body. Pragmatism's concern with the change occasioned by the dynamically interacting environments of action, and the phases of habit, crisis and creativity that cycle into and out of people's lives, runs against the spirit of such a totalising aim. Nevertheless, it does provide us with an approach which enables us to analyse the interaction that occurs between embodied subjects, and the environments in which they act, without conflating the properties of social or physical structures with those of human beings. Taken together, the substantive chapters in this book also raise issues which are key to the field of body studies and to sociology more generally. The conclusion focuses on these in more detail in its discussions of how our existence as embodied beings enables us to *transcend* the parameters of our basic bodily needs. This is a central theme which runs throughout this study. In contrast to those who accuse 'body studies' of engaging in an 'inverted Cartesianism', I draw on the analysis in this book to argue that while we are not simply our organic bodies, it is by *living in, attending to* and *working on* our bodies that we become fully embodied beings able to realise our human potentialities in a variety of ways. The first step in my analysis, however, is to show in more detail how I am intending to interpret and harness the insights of pragmatism to a framework which allows us to analyse the environments of embodied action.

2

Embodying Social Action

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to outline a general framework for analysing the environments of embodied action which avoids the reductionism characteristics of many existing approaches in the field of body studies. Pragmatism is useful in this context, as its concern with the interactions and transactions that occur between people and their surroundings provides us with a more dynamic conception of the relationship between bodily change and social action than is evident in reproduction models, possibly static typologies, or rational choice visions of preference maximising subjects. In their place, pragmatism adopts a processual approach to the phases of habit, crisis and creativity that mark (in various combinations and at various times) people's lives. These orientations towards action are important not only for what they have to say about the ability of people to respond to and/or change their surroundings, but because they impact cumulatively on the formation and development of individual character, and also on the collective capacities of social groups.

The environments of embodied action

The social and physical milieu

There is no better place to begin exploring pragmatism's view of the *external environment* of embodied action than with Mead's conception of a group of interdependent human organisms cooperating together and building a *social milieu* as they seek to survive. According to Mead, this cooperation encourages the development of gestures, inter-gestural understanding and, eventually, language as means for the efficient coordination of action. In turn, human communication welds people together into a purposeful society, possessed of normative standards and identities that develop as individuals become able, with the assistance of interaction and symbols, to 'take the role of the other'. This capacity is fostered from birth by the elementary structures of role-taking engaged in by care givers and pre-linguistic infants (Mead, 1962 [1934]), explored further by children in games, and taken-for-granted amongst adults socialised into experiencing

and managing their actions and identities 'from the particular standpoints of other individual members of the same group, or from the general standpoint of the social group as a whole' (Mead, 1962 [1934]: 138). Mead refers to this group standpoint as the '*generalised other*'; an 'other' which places a pressure on the individual to conform to the standards of the group in terms of how they act, and which filters the development of embodied identity. As Dewey (2002 [1922]: 316) argues, 'Gradually persons learn by dramatic imitation to hold themselves accountable' for their actions and identities according to the standards of their social group, and on the basis of the common social activity in which all are implicated. This 'organised set of attitudes of others', assumed by individuals towards themselves, is how society exerts normative control over its members (Mead, 1962 [1934]: 175).

The social milieu is vital to the external environment in which embodied action occurs, but pragmatism insists it be considered in conjunction with the constraints and opportunities afforded by the *physical milieu*. Social interactions themselves develop as people seek to survive in their material surroundings, and are often based around 'the manipulation of physical things' that occur within these settings. It is in this context that Mead talks about the human capacity to 'take the role' of *objects* as well as other people. This is essential if we are to adjust ourselves to, and survive within, our physical environment, and is integrally involved in the sense we acquire of our bodily capacities and competencies (Archer, 2000).

The external environment (in its social and physical dimensions) is for pragmatism essential for understanding embodied action. The generalised standards that develop with regards to communicative acts, for example, affect our appearance, diet and action, while the social shaping of people's identities does not occur 'in a void' but through 'prolonged and cumulative interaction' with the peculiarities of their physical environment (Dewey, 1980 [1934]: 28). Similarly, the body's schema, postures, muscle tensions, techniques and textures also develop as a result of us 'bumping into' and undertaking navigations through our physical milieu. Having recognised the significance of the external environment, however, pragmatism is also concerned with the *internal environment* of bodily being, and acknowledges the importance of the body's emergent needs and potentialities.

Body needs and capacities

In examining the internal environment of embodied action, pragmatism takes account of biological necessities (e.g. the need for food, water, and protection from the elements and other threats that may endanger survival) through its analysis of 'impulses' which proceeded 'from need' and evolved into a 'congenital tendency to react in a specific manner to a certain sort of stimulus' (Mead, 1904: 337; Dewey, 1980 [1934]: 13). The existence of these impulses entails that there exists a 'pre-reflective intentionality of the human body', directed initially towards survival, which means that

people do not just react to stimuli but intentionally select which stimuli are relevant depending upon the specific circumstances they encounter (Dewey, 1896; Mead, 1903).

This pre-reflective intentionality raises the issue of the *potentialities* of the organism as it implies that humans not only have needs they must meet in order to survive, but also are able to search out people and objects enabling them to meet these needs. Key to these potentialities is the capacity we have to manipulate things *outside* the topographical boundaries of our bodies. This is facilitated by the most basic features of embodiment. In an analysis which has strong affinities with phenomenology, pragmatism explores how the human senses extend from the individual to the environment. As Dewey (1980 [1934]: 13) notes, no creature lives within the confines of its skin and our senses are a 'means of connection' with 'what lies beyond [our] bodily frame'. The eye, the ear, and the senses of touch, taste and smell, unfold themselves onto, connect in their particular ways with, and gain information from, the environment (Dewey, 1980 [1934]: 237). Embodied subjects combine, utilise and deploy these senses in ways that give rise to multi-layered perspectives on social and physical situations (James, 1950 [1890]). The senses thus involve and contribute to the development of the body and the mind. They also provide the embodied basis on which it is possible for emotions to be 'called out' by physical and social objects, and to 'mark out' our particular relationship to the environment (Dewey, 1980 [1934]: 207; Siegfried, 1996: 164).

The interacting environments of action

Pragmatism's recognition that the sensory subject actively engages with, as well as being 'called out' by, the external environment, demonstrates that its acknowledgement of biological impulses and pre-reflective intentionality does *not* entail the assumption that human behaviour is genetically determined. Impulses are neither as extensive nor as unmalleable for humans as they are for other animals, while their specific manifestations and the objects they encompass are affected by the social as well as the physical milieu. Certain kinaesthetic and other experiences may be perceived as peculiarly 'private' phenomena (Mead, 1962 [1934]: 225). Nevertheless, while modern individuals may feel a strong sense of separation from others, even the smallest expressions of selfhood constitute 'expansive acts' that result in a 'breaking down of the walled-in self' as it responds to and is affected by social relationships and the physical environment (Dewey, 1958: 244). As we develop from childhood, these sensory dealings we have with the world around us become part of us. They shape our biological being and have a profound impact on our actions and identities. This means that social relationships are crucial in shaping the goal-directedness of impulses and intentions, and for adding to the human repertoire a range of non-impulsive bases for desire and action (Mead, 1962 [1934]).

If pragmatism is careful not to reduce action to its biological foundations, it is also determined not to conflate action with the external environment. This is clearly illustrated by its recognition that we possess the capacity to reflect practically on our dealings with the world, and to exert a degree of control over how we view ourselves and choose to act on our environment. The source of this practical reflection is related to the intentional orientation that we adopt to our surroundings – an orientation which requires regular adjustment and change as a result of the dynamism of life itself – and is founded on the immediate response of embodied subjects to their dealings with their world (Mead, 1962 [1934]: 175; Dewey, 2002 [1922]: 249). This capacity to reflect imparts to people a sense of 'freedom', 'initiative' and 'conscious responsibility', and is best known through Mead's account of how individuals engage in an internal dialogue with the group standpoint or 'generalised other'.

For Mead (1962 [1934]: 215, 202), there is 'always a *mutual* relationship of the individual and the community', and the 'I' is the term he uses to describe the creative source of 'the constant reaction of the organism to its socialised selfhood'. It is this 'I' that provides subjects with the capacity to react to, and depart from, the socialisation processes and cultural norms which have helped shape their bodily selves and actions (Scheffler, 1974: 165). The embodied subject can draw on perspectives marginalised by society or on their own experiences with the physical environment in order, for example, to act in ways which challenge the status quo (Mead, 1962 [1934]: 168). Thus, it is quite possible for those stigmatised within a community because of a physical disability or their sexual orientation to reflect critically on their 'spoiled identity', discover they are more capable than society assumes, and seek to develop an alternative sense of self which can in turn have positive consequences for their health and physical capacities. For Mead (1962 [1934]: 217), it 'is in such reactions of the individual, the "I" over against the situation in which the "I" finds itself, that important social changes take place'. Indeed, the long-term viability of any 'generalised other' impinging on people's embodied identities is significantly dependent on its ability to facilitate successful interventions in the social *and* physical milieu (Mead (1962 [1934], 1938; Joas, 1997). Without proposing an intellectual Darwinianism, it should not be surprising if norms and ideals that prove singularly unsuccessful in allowing a collectivity to engage successfully with its surroundings have a limited life expectancy (Rochberg-Halton, 1987: 197). Once again, it is the *interaction* between, as well as the existence of, the external and internal environment that is vital to our understanding of embodied action. This emphasis on interaction is reinforced further when we explore pragmatism's analysis of the distinctive modalities, or phases, of social action.

The phases of embodied action

Concerned as it is with pre-reflectively active individuals who face the demands and contingencies of their social and physical surroundings,

pragmatism views humans as *always already* active. It is not the initiation of action that has to be explained, but the characteristics of how people act in particular situations. In undertaking this explanation, pragmatism rejects the tendency in sociology to construct rigid typologies of action, and the propensity in rational choice theory to regard all action as maximising the realisation of pre-set preferences. Instead, pragmatism approaches action in terms of its orientation to phases of *habit*, *crisis* and *creativity*, modalities associated with degrees of conflict or equilibrium that exist within and between the environments of human being. Habits, crises and creative actions emerge as pre-reflectively intentional subjects engage with the complexities and contingencies of the world around them, and discover the possibilities of action made available to them by their bodily potentialities and situated lives.

Habitual continuity

Habitual action is associated with a relative equilibrium in the relationship between the social and physical environment, biological need and bodily potentialities. It involves embodied subjects discovering *routinised* modes of behaviour that are more or less effective in 'joining' them to, and enabling them to manage, their surroundings. This does not mean all habits are healthy, but routinisation is vital for humans to operate effectively. As Dewey (1980 [1934]: 15) notes, the embodied subject cannot be engaged constantly with what is novel and indeterminate. To do so would be biologically disastrous and socially unproductive as the very 'structure of the relation between organism and environment ... typical for human beings' entails that a certain 'stability' in action is 'essential to living'. People need to be able to bracket out stimuli as non-threatening and establish a minimally ordered relationship with their environment if they are to flourish, and habits enable us to 'economise and simplify our actions' by storing 'the fruits of past experience' so that we can act without having to devote heightened attention and consciousness to every move we make (James, 1950 [1890]: 114; Scheffler, 1974: 123). In planning a journey, for example, we may have a set of 'related habits' such as 'packing our bags, getting our railroad tickets, [and] drawing out money for use' which enable us to reduce the intellectual and emotional energy that would otherwise be expended and to focus instead on unexpected occurrences within the journey or on what we plan to do at the journey's end (Dewey, 1958: 285; Mead, 1962 [1934]: 126).

   Sociology has tended to forget the enormous analytical significance that habit held for the subject, but such matters were key to the founding assumptions of the discipline and have been kept alive by pragmatism's enduring concern with the 'durable and generalised disposition that suffuses a person's action throughout an entire domain of life or, in the extreme instance, throughout all of life' (Camic, 1986: 1046; see also Joas, 1996: 175; Kilpinen, 2000: 37; Dewey, 2002 [1922]: 199). It would

be a mistake to view habits as the bare reoccurrence of acts, however, as they involve much more of the embodied subject and have significant consequences for physical being and identity. Habits involve a 'special sensitiveness' to 'certain classes of stimuli', and are 'a potential energy needing only opportunity to become kinetic and overt' (James, 1900: 134; Dewey, 2002 [1922]: 44). They demand 'certain kinds of activity' and help 'constitute the self' by forming 'our effective desires' and 'working capacities' and determining which of our thoughts 'shall appear and be strong and which shall pass from light into obscurity' (Dewey, 2002 [1922]: 25). Habits seep into the furthest recesses of the body. They have a structural basis in the nervous system, shape the selections our senses make, condition our preferences, predate and provide a basis for our deliberative orientations to the environment, direct our muscular responses, and structure our identities (Mead, 1962 [1934]: 116; Dewey, 2002 [1922]: 30; see also James, 1900: 134). Once constituted, habits are *almost* self-perpetuating insofar as they 'stimulate, inhibit, intensify, weaken, select, concentrate and organise' our impulses and activities into 'their own likeness' (Dewey, 2002 [1922]: 125). Habits lie at the very base of our sense of self.

This conception of habit enables us to see how routines are both necessary but can also function to enlarge or restrict our relationship with the world. In terms of those that restrict our horizons, Dewey (2002 [1922]: 35) notes that 'bad habits' can exert a hold over us and override 'our formal resolutions, our conscious decisions'. He begins with the seemingly innocuous example of poor posture and notes that simply trying to *think* one's way to standing up straight is doomed to failure as the body is already committed to 'an established habit of standing incorrectly', and is bound to use existing muscle tensions as a (wholly inadequate) basis on which to avoid slouching (Dewey, 2002 [1922]: 35).

The reason a habit can exert this influence is not because it is some external imposition, but because 'it is so intimately *a part of ourselves*. It has a hold on us because *we are the habit*' (ibid.: 24; emphasis added). Furthermore, habits have consequences for the wider environment. The example of posture that Dewey discusses may seem inconsequential, but in the West back problems cost health services millions of dollars a year and mean that significant personal, occupational and public resources are devoted to issues that are nowhere near as widespread in countries such as China that promote different techniques of standing, sitting and walking (Mauss, 1973 [1934]).

In contrast to habits that damage and constrain are those that effect an increase in the capacities of the embodied actor. When a child learns to walk, for example, the assistance, examples and models set by others are encouragements, incitements and reinforcements for the child's own efforts at establishing an empowering habit. Habits can enlarge one's agential field of action (Dewey, 2002 [1922]: 70). Indeed, James (1950 [1890]) argued that habits are not opposed to rational action, but constitute its