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PUTTING ‘HUMPTY’ TOGETHER AGAIN:

**A TESTIFYING OF THE EMBODIED NATURE OF HUMAN
EXPERIENCING**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in Psychology at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.**

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ABSTRACT

The complex functioning of the human body produces the biological, historical and environmental contingencies of lived existence. These experiences of embodiment are chiasmic, dialectical and dialogical, and underpin the narrative dilemmas we create through the storied nature of our attempts to make sense of them. In testifying my own embodiment this autobiographical form of sensual scholarship emphasizes the subjective basis for my body's psychology. By developing the complicating action segments of my life story told through interview data into a chronologically-ordered and textually-layered account of personally significant memories, I craft a story of my panicking body. My upbringing was influenced by discourses that reinforced parental and family affiliation at the expense of my feeling body. Unravelling my need to exercise as a contingency of this affiliation provides retrospective meaning to the distress my panicking caused. Situating my feelings, thoughts, emotions and actions within the broader constraints of my family's history, community, religion and culture reveals the contingent nature of my embodiment. Describing the shifting contingencies of a life lived since my upbringing in the small, rural town of Inglewood, New Zealand, provides the opportunity to recognize and to re-align the dialectics of identity that help to make up my body's psychology. Juxtaposing this narrative meaning-making are my revelations of experiential integration achieved through the flow of exercise. Understood as an extension of my body's fundamental sensuality, this evolutionally-refined capacity for engagement underpins my lived experiencing. Together these sentient and reflexive forms of testimony confirm the inherence of my sensuality and the circumstance of self-hood, and invite you, the reader, to explore the workings of your own body. By revealing the sensual and symbolic strands of my embodiment this story of human contingency reveals something of the fleshy consciousness that we all share, not by speaking for anyone else, but by calling attention to the taken-for-granted nature of its unfolding. By arguing for a psychology more relevant to lived experiencing, my thesis questions the body of Western science and, in particular, psychology's version of it. Articulating the felt nature of my experiencing situates my mind back in my body and, in doing so, fleshes out its psychology. While the insights shared here are personal, the relevance of the felt-body is found in the ways it becomes discoursed and narrated.

The content that illness stories offer is valuable for a variety of purposes: for the teller's reordering of her life story, as guidance to others who follow, and to provide caregivers with an understanding of what the ill experience. But the body testifies in excess of all these contents. Illness stories are told by bodies that are themselves the living testimony. (Frank, 1995, p. 140)

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To my family, this story of my body is for you. May its reprieve be a source of insight and encouragement to those of you who may need it.

CONTENTS

List of photographs	viii
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Preface	ix
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SECTION ONE: THEORISING THE BODY

Chapter One. A Chiasmic Body

The phenomenological body	1
The chiasmic body	6
The homo sapient body	9
The Merleau-Pontian body	11
The reflexed body	13
The sensuous body	15
Summary	18

Chapter Two. A Dialectical Body

The physical body	19
The historical body	22
Psychology's body	24
Summary	27

SECTION TWO: RECOUNTING THE BODY

Chapter Three. A Dialogical Body

Narrative research	28
Narrative as metaphor	32
Dis/embodied narrative	34
Psychology as narrative	38
Autobiography as phenomenological narrative	39
Summary	43

Chapter Four. An Autoethnographical Body

Theoretical framework	44
Data collection	45
Ethics	48
Researcher	49
Embodied reflexivity	51
Summary	53

SECTION THREE: FLESHING OUT THE BODY

Chapter Five. Re-membering my Body

Early days	55
My father's shadow	61
Incense and agony	69
Something is wrong with me	77
Cloak of secrecy	83
Leaving home	89
The death of God	96
Jill	100

Chapter Six. Re-minding my Body

Letting go	106
Giving myself the run around	109
Contingency, trust and reassurance	116
Cognito ergo sum timidus	122

Chapter Seven. Re-bodying my Mind

An integrated body	125
A flowing body	128
A mindful body	133

SECTION FOUR: TESTIFYING THE BODY

Chapter Eight. Re-living my Body

A disciplined body	137
An action-oriented body	142
A contingent body	146
Coda	152
Summing up	155

Chapter Nine. Shared Embodiment

An ethical body	158
Summary	162

Chapter Ten. Conclusion

Re-Negotiating the Body	163
Summary	170

Postscript.	171
References.	175
Appendices.	
Information Sheet	192
Participant Consent form	194
Authority for the release of Tape transcripts	195
Letter of Ethical Approval	196

PHOTOGRAPHS

Figure 1. Me.	54
Figure 2. Dad and I.	61
Figure 3. Mums and Dads.	69
Figure 4. Sixth form.	77
Figure 5. The backyard boys.	89
Figure 6. A Theologian.	96
Figure 7. One of my favourite photos.	100
Figure 8. Two very tired boys.	103
Figure 9. Under 12's.	107
Figure 10. By a nose.	109
Figure 11. Into the unknown.	116
Figure 12. Another favourite.	123
Figure 13. Off to school.	158