

## FEELING, READING, AND MAKING BODIES IN SPACE\*

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*M*y legs felt shaky, my stomach churned, and my heart jumped wildly on my first-ever day of field research, standing outside the offices of the organization that was crucial to my gaining access to a significant proportion of my research subjects. From the onset of the research project my body reminded me of its own unpredictable and inconvenient effects. Later, however, my body became more than just the site through which anxieties manifested themselves, it became a research tool, useful in accessing research subjects and their geographies (Parr 1998a, 1998b). The very words *useful* and *tool* may seem strange here, for we are, after all, talking about bodies, our own fleshy space, something normally taken for granted. However, as recent social and cultural writings have indicated, bodies are complicated geographies, not just fleshy, and not always easy to understand. Viewing bodies as organic entities curiously “far from being natural phenomena” in geographical research prompts questions and uncertainties, both theoretical and methodological, about corporeal states (Bell and Valentine 1995a, 26). These uncertainties can be understood as emanating from the inherent instability of the body, it being neither completely social nor completely natural. This lack of completeness has arguably contributed to a sense that bodies are dangerous sites, reservoirs of fluid emotion and messy substances, certainly not suitable or relevant for geographical enquiry. However, in the light of feminist and poststructuralist theoretical writing, bodies have been recovered as both sites for geographical analysis and embodied entities that inform, build, and are intrinsically part of geographical knowledge (Evans 1988; Dorn and Laws 1994; McDowell and Court 1994; Bell and Valentine 1995b; Cream 1995; Longhurst 1995; McDowell 1995; Nast 1998; Parr 1998a, 1998b; Wilton 1999; Laurier and Parr 2000). This essay should be seen as contributing to current thinking about the body in geographical research, following upon some of my earlier work (Parr 1998a) and, in particular, making reference to the bodies of geographical researchers working in covert ethnographic field situations.

Although this is largely an empirical piece, deliberately designed to provide examples of and brief reflections on complicated corporeal interactions in the field, the focus takes a critical view of the ethics of geographical research, and this will be briefly signaled toward the end of the essay. In the main, however, I think through how the unstable body can be analyzed and deployed in geographical research, particularly in ethnographic work. I also offer observations on how the social naturalness of the body can lead to fruitful, if messy, research encounters. Understandably,

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