Interview with Bryan S. Turner: Reflections on the 25th Anniversary of *Body & Society*

Tomoko Tamari

Abstract

Body & Society started in 1995. The journal has been continuously exploring and problematizing critical issues which have been opening up new horizons in the field of the body studies. As an interdisciplinary journal, it has engaged with a wider range of innovative approaches to the body, which includes sociology, cultural studies, psychology, philosophy, anthropology, history, science and technology studies, sensory studies, and media studies. To celebrate the 25ᵗʰ anniversary of *Body & Society*, managing editor, Tomoko Tamari invited Professor Bryan S. Turner who was one of the journal's founders (with Mike Featherstone), to reflect on the academic and historical background of *Body & Society* along with his own academic trajectory over the last 40 years.

Key words

Body, Foucault, Constructionism, Covid-19, Phenomenology

To celebrate the 25ᵗʰ anniversary of *Body & Society*, managing editor, Tomoko Tamari invited Professor Bryan S. Turner to an interview. He is the key pioneer in the field of the body and still today a leading figure, continuously developing the field. Since the 1980s, there has been an upsurge of research and writings on the importance of the body in social life. The journal, *Body & Society* (first issue was published in 1995) remarked that 'the body as an overt and thematized issue now appears to be central to a good deal of contemporary thought and practice' (Featherstone and Turner 1995: 1). The journal initially attempted to explore the embodiment of social actors, the symbolic significance of the body, the representational and cultural notions of the body, and the historical epistemology of the body. More precisely, it debates which were related to areas such as: body image, the self, ageing, consumer culture, the body as a social agent, the body as a sign and symbol, affectivity and emotions, sport, gender and sex, technology and science, and the history of the body.

Tomoko Tamari: Bryan, you were one of the founders of the journal (with Mike Featherstone). You have been working on the body as one of your area of academic expertise and continuously producing a number of significant books and articles since the 1980s onward. Could you please tell us when and why you became interested in the body? Also, what were the critical influences for you to start working on the body? What was the background to starting the journal, *Body & Society* in 1995?

Bryan S. Turner: My interest in the body began long before the creation of the journal *Body & Society.* My involvement in the journal and my interest in the sociology of the body starts with my involvement in *Theory Culture & Society* (hereafter TCS). Three themes run through my work: medical sociology, religion and body studies. They are all interconnected from an early stage.

I completed my PhD (*The Decline of Methodism*) at the University of Leeds in 1970 and got my first lectureship at the University of Aberdeen in 1969 to teach the sociology of religion. My first major publication was *Weber and Islam* in 1974; It was generously reviewed by Ernest Gellner. Despite the success of my study of Islam, I had very few students interested in religion, and fearing for my future, I retrained in medical sociology, where I was never short of student interest. My first major publication in the field was *Medical Power and Social Knowledge* (1987). These two facts about my early career are important to this story, because religion and medicine as topics came to play an important role in my own interests in the body. I am now going to tell how my academic interests and career began to focus on the human body, especially in religion and in terms of health and illness. In particular, Christianity always struck me as a religion in which the body had a central focus: the resurrection; the finger of doubting Thomas; the miracles of healing. Christian theology spoke to human vulnerability – our frail bodies, our inevitable death. From an early stage in my work on religion and health, the vulnerability of the human body was, in my view, inescapable.

Are our academic interests just driven by intellectual curiosity? Not entirely. I am a small person – around 5 foot 5 inches or 165 centimeters. I was always convinced that, while height may be 'socially constructed', its consequences are real. I was never going to be a professional cricket player and the range of female companionship for me would be limited. Consequently, the debate with constructionism has been a constant issue in my work as I will discuss when I get to my publications on ageing, dance, left-handedness, and pain.

Mike Hepworth was also at Aberdeen at the time and it was through him that I first met Mike Featherstone and became involved in the early years of *Theory Culture & Society* which first appeared in 1982. The first issue was very strong, and the board grew to include figures such as Roland Robertson. The early days of *TCS* were great fun especially with Mike Hepworth who was endlessly witty and humorous. I remember the occasion when Mike signed up with Sage to publish the journal. Various members of the Board were gathered for the ISA conference in New Delhi. We met Steve Barr to thrash out the details of the journal. Fearing to drink water or fruit juice, Mike Hepworth, Roland Robertson and I stuck to gin all afternoon. Fortunately, Mike Featherstone remain in control of the meeting at least to convince Sage were not completely insane. The *TCS* book series also began to expand and in it we published *The Body. Social Process and Cultural Theory* (Featherstone, Hepworth and Turner, 1991).

TCS was one of the most successful journals of our generation with an international reputation. Fortunately, academic life in those days did not have the constraints faced by young academics today. Perhaps in the modern context the journal would have been closed down by some dean concerned with impact factor, research score, or national interest. No head of department or dean ever told us what and where we had to publish, and so I was experimenting with new ideas and topics without interference from corporate university targets.

Can I just return to Mike Hepworth? We had quite a close academic relationship, and his work with Mike Featherstone on the mid-life crisis influenced my later interests in ageing. I still remember one day in 2007 walking in the Botanical Gardens in Singapore near my flat and received a telephone call from Mike to say Mike Hepworth had died. A very sad day, and something of a turning point in my life and career. I would get no more postcards from Mike with his characteristic recommendation "Keep on taking the tablets" or drink beer with him looking out to the North Sea from Stonehaven. For one thing, with his death my connections with TCS grew weaker and more distant as the journal had become increasing part of the 'cultural turn' with new boards members, while my own interests had become more influenced by political theory. My peripatetic existence didn't help.

In 2010 I took up a visiting professorship at Wellesley College in Massachusetts, and shortly afterwards became the Presidential Professor at the Graduate Center, City University of New York, where I ran the Committee for the Study of Religion. In my final years there, I ran a

seminar series on 'Happiness' that eventually led to an edited work *Regimes of Happiness* Contreras-Vejar (Tice Jen and Turner, 2019)*.*

TT: One of your important books, the first edition, *The Body and Society* was published in 1984. In retrospect, how do you see the context both personal and social, in which you wrote *The Body and Society* and our social and political context now?

BT: *The Body and Society* was first published with Blackwell. I remember being driven round the lanes of Oxford by a young Blackwell editor who wanted me to write a book on the comparative history of capitalism. He was very reluctant to take a book on the sociology of the body. The body and Foucault were not to his taste. In addition to Foucault, I had become seriously interested in Nietzsche having published *Nietzsche's Dance* with a German friend Georg Stauth in 1988. It was an instant failure, because it was published in the philosophy list and the title was too clever. Nietzsche had complained that Germans, with their heavy diet of pork, cabbage and potatoes, could not dance. I think he meant experience joy. By contrast, *The Body and Society*, also influenced by Nietzsche, Heidegger and Foucault, was an immediate and long-lasting success. Despite good reviews and translations – into Spanish in 1989, Danish in 1992, and Japanese in 2002 – it ceased to be published with Blackwell and was acquired by Sage through the good offices of Chris Rojek in conjunction with TCS in 1996 as the second edition. The third edition came out in 2008, and was reprinted in 2002, 2004, 2006, 2007.

This reference to the work on Nietzsche is important as I will attempt to show in later questions about more evolving views about body and embodiment, and about the issue of social constructionism. Suffice it to say, that of course in the 1980s I was not alone in my focus on the body and sociological theory. My book appeared at exactly the time other sociologists were busy launching the sociology of the body. John O'Neill, who was eventually to join me as an editor of the journal *Citizenship Studies,* published *Five Bodies* in 1985 and Chris Shilling (1993) brought out *The Body and Social Theory,* which has now gone into many editions. In passing I should recognize the fact that Chris Shilling has been by far the most active sociologist in the new field of body studies.

These personal accounts of body crises were, for me, further ammunition in my dissatisfaction with the idea of social constructionism. I tried to deal with these issues with a distinction

between body and embodiment. If the first can obviously be understood as an object that can be subject to social construction, the second concept refers to actual processes. If you like it is a contrast between discourse and practice. In my recent work, I have become increasingly focused on the idea of practice, specifically following Pierre Bourdieu on the idea of habit and habituation. Perhaps we can think of the body as an ensemble of more or less stable practices. We normally think of the obvious examples such as riding a bike or learning to eat with chop sticks.

The first venture into this area of bodily practices came with my collaboration with Steve Wainwright (2003; 2004) on classical ballet. It involves as a minimum a disciplined body engaging in dance practices in space. Our interviews were looking at the experiences of pain (and early retirement) through the accomplishment or mastery of a series of actions or practices. We examine this pain and ageing issue through a notion of ballet careers. This collaboration gave rise to a range of publications on dance performance, bodily pain and ballet careers.

But let me (finally?) try to get to grips with social constructionism. While I have suggested that for sociologists we might start with Peter Berger, recent body studies have been predominantly developed by feminists. Over the last thirty years or so since my book came out, the field has been expanded by feminist research which is now probably the dominant paradigm in the area. There is no shortage of examples and much of it has appeared in the journal *Body & Society*. Judith Butler *Bodies that Matter* created an original paradigm that supports social constructionism in its focus on the role of iteration in constructing and sustaining gender identities. However, I agree with the criticisms of her position as outlined in Hacking (1999) *Social Construction of What?* I find her recent work more compelling especially the idea of grief work.

Against this background, I would summarize my position as simply saying that the body, while interpreted through the lens of culture, is a more or less stable ensemble of acquired practices whose limited life-span is characterized by an inescapable vulnerability. As a result, perhaps we should abandon the idea of 'the body' which suggests a fixed and more or less enduring form of being. We should, as many have in the field of body studies, stick to the idea of embodiment as a process of coming into being. In employing this language, I am reminded that much of my theoretical interest in the topic has been drawn from Heidegger's *Being and Time*.

Looking back, *TCS* and the journal *Body & Society* have made a major contribution to British sociology and cultural studies, and beyond. Body studies is now a major field of development. My own view however is that some of the core issues around social constructionism remain unresolved.

TT: The first edition's title of the introduction is 'Body Paradoxes'. You wrote, 'the paradoxes illustrate the confusion. The body is a material organism, but also a metaphor' (1996: 42) and 'the body is the most proximate and immediate feature of my social self, a necessary feature of my social location and of my personal enselfment and at the same time an aspect of personal alienation in the natural environment' (1996: 43). The book was strongly influenced by Marx, Weber, Althusser and in particular engaged with structuralism as well as French social theory, and the work of Foucault. Why did Foucault's theories become so important to develop your thinking on the body?

BT: Foucault was there at an early stage and then went backstage as I changed jobs and topics. And then returns as I began to read more of his work, especially the lectures he gave at the College de France (1978-1980) that were published as *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008). Again, I have to return to the *TCS* journal to give you the full picture.

It was through the journal that my own theory horizons began to expand, and I quickly became interested in the work of Michel Foucault. What struck me at the time was the body as a persistent them in Foucault's work especially and obviously in *Discipline and Punish.* His reflections on Jeremy Bentham's panopticon interested me, especially as I became interested in Bentham for somewhat different reasons at a later stage. I became committed to the idea of employing Foucault and emerging interest in the sociology of the body to develop my medical sociology and through my growing interest in the history of medical concepts. Aberdeen University had a brilliant library in which I discovered original copies of early medical treatises and began to read the works of the eighteenth-century doctor George Cheyne (1672-1743), a famous Scottish physician who worked among the elites in Edinburgh and London. I was struck, reading Cheyne through Foucault, by the fact diet – Cheyne referred to 'regimen' - had a double meaning: regulations for the health of the human body, and governmentality in general. Cheyne had a lot of sensible things to say about exercise, vegetarianism, and limitations on drink. I published 'The Discourse of Diet' in the first issue of the journal in volume 1 1982.

I have been in many respects a nomadic academic. I had two periods at Aberdeen (1969-74 and 1979-82). In between those two periods, I was at Lancaster University where I came more under the influence of John Urry and Nick Abercrombie whose interests were broadly Marxist – before Urry became influential in mobility studies and tourism in connection with *TCS*. My interest in the body was inevitably on the back-boiler. I eventually left to become Professor of Sociology at Flinders University in South Australia, where I taught sociological theory and medical sociology again under the intellectual impact of Foucault.

At the time Australian sociology was influenced by various Marxist scholars such as Agnes Heller and Ferenc Feher. They and other emigres from Hungary were members of the so-called Budapest School whose origins lay with the work of Georg Lukacs. Heller and other members of the Budapest School joined La Trobe University in Australia in 1977. The Foundation Professor of Sociology at Flinders University was Ivan Szelenyi who, with George Konrad, had published *Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power* (1979. For his criticisms of the Communist state, he had been expelled and stripped of his Hungarian citizenship. How could I – a British sociologist with an interest in diet – compete? Against this background of a 'Marxist humanism', it was no wonder that my colleagues at Flinders University thought Foucault was a terrible right-wing French theorist! Their suspicions about me were probably confirmed when I published *The Body & Society* (1984)*. I wonder how long it took for them to get the radical nature of Foucault's work?

Perhaps one further issue here about Foucault's continuing influence, in recent years I have become more and more interested in demography, especially the idea of a second demographic transition - low mortality rates and low but declining fertility rates producing declining and ageing populations. One solution is to increase immigration which is of course much resisted by the Far Right. So population has become a major political issue of such militant and violent movements as InCel or Involuntary Celibate. My current empirical research is on *The Far Right. Intellectuals, Masculinity and Citizenship* with an Australian Research Council. Foucault's *Security, Territory, Population* 1977-1978 (Foucault, 2007) touches on a range of issues that are germane to my current interests.

TT: The second edition was published in 1996, twelve years after the first edition which seemed to be influenced by structuralism. In the introduction of the second edition, 'The Embodiment of Social Theory', you suggested that '[t]he sociological notion of the body must embrace the idea of phenomenological experience of embodiment and the facticity of our place in the world' (1996:33). Could you please explain a little bit more of your thoughts about social constructionism and the phenomenological approach to the body? Also, could you please say a little about what came after?

BT: My interest in social constructionism goes back to the work of Peter Berger. I read his work in the sociology of religion in my days as a postgraduate student. I am not sure when I first read Berger and Luckmann (1967) *The Social Construction of Reality*, but it had a lasting impact on my work. At some stage I realized that most commentaries on Berger have overlooked or ignored his dependence on the philosophical anthropology of Arnold Gehlen whose most influential work, published in Germany in 1940, was called simply *Man. His Nature and Place in the World* (1987). Berger wrote the foreword to Gehlen's *Man in the Age of Technology* (1980). While Gehlen had widespread influence, his connection to the Nazi Party forced him into a programme of de-nazification before he could eventually get a university position at Aachen Technology University (1962-1969). His basic argument was that humans are uniquely poorly equipped biologically to cope with the world into which they are thrown. They are instinctively poor and dependent for many years before they can survive independently. Furthermore, humans are not designed for a specific environment – they are 'world-open'. Given the limitations of their organs, humans cope with the world by developing institutions, technologies and techniques. In short, humans have to socially construct the world in which they live. Berger took this basic collection of ideas to spell out his own version of philosophical anthropology namely that we socially construct institutions both to create a social environment and give it meaning. These institutions are nevertheless unstable and prone to collapse without constant management. In my terminology, our constitution means that we are profoundly vulnerable. At no place in this sociology – from Scheler, to Gehlen to Berger- is there any indication that our bodies are socially constructed.

In the light of this background, I constantly come up against issues relating to disability. Given my growing interest in the idea of vulnerability, I have always been ready to accept the idea – itself controversial - that we are or will become over time disabled persons or TAPS (Temporally Able Bodied Persons). These topics and concerns went with me to Cambridge

University (1998-2005) where I ran a body studies group connected to the Martin Richard's *Centre for Family Research.* Apart from teaching sociological theory, I taught a medical sociology 'paper' that was open to medical students and I supervised a sociology PhD student looking at the medical curriculum of traditional and progressive medical faculties. Most of my medical students thought that sociology was a mickey mouse subject, but some were more open. I took my intellectual revenge so to speak supervising a medical student on poor or inadequate doctor-patient communication. I am sure the dean thought the results were highly suspect.

At one stage I worked alongside Sir Thomas William Shakespeare 3rd Baronet FBA Tom Shakespeare (better known as 'Tom') who suffered from achondroplasia and came later to publish *Disability Rights and* Wrongs (2006). Tom and I disagreed about the character of disability, but it is in the nature of university life to allow – indeed foster – respectful disagreement. Given my interests in the social rights of citizenship, I had no difficulty accepting his view that disability is or involves a loss of rights, but we disagreed about almost everything else.

TT: 'The Debate over Nature and Nurture' was the title of the introduction of the third edition's *the Body and Society* (2008). You mentioned that the new genetics research and remarked that it could open up 'innovative opportunities for a more sophisticated dialogue between social sciences and genetics' (2008:13).

Recently with the increasing interests in neoliberalism, biopolitics, and the Anthropocene along with the development of the new biology, the expansion of digital and computational technologies, the debates between the body, and science and technologies become critical topics in the journal, *Body & Society.* What has changed is that the social sciences, natural science and computer science have been brought together in dialogue to help better understand human life, or even what it is to be human. It is safe to say that the biocultural nature of the human body can interact with socio-cultural contexts and experiences. The body can also reveal significant 'information' by telling us how it is influenced by the complex social environment. In this vein, the body is important, because it can often be seen as data.

Could you please say something about what you think are the current collaboration research/debates of the body, science and technologies? How could it be possible to find a better way to explore human life without falling into scientific reductionism/determinism.

BT: Of course, we humans depend, and always have done so, on techniques and technologies. Making fire and making beer might be too obvious examples. Having said that, I think I have a conservative distrust of advanced technologies. Here again I have depended on Heidegger's critique of technology. Modern technologies that have allowed humans to live in every climate on the planet also have destructive outcomes. I have also been critical of the utopian element of modern, especially medical, technologies. In many of my medical publications, I have been critical of the optimistic vision of a future without pain. It is true that medical innovations keep us alive for much longer than any previous generation, but at what cost in terms of dignity and basic comforts. In my own encounters with hospital treatment, doctors and nurses correctly focused on pain thresholds, while neglecting the long and problematic character of discomfort. Putting this together, I am deeply skeptical about the prospects of 'living forever' – the dream of many social gerontologists. With Alex Dumas (2016), we published *Antivieillissement. Vieillir a l'ere des novelles biotechnologies*. I also indicate ways in which the study of the body can be appreciated more fully in mainstream social science.

Can I raise another issue relating to the 'natural sciences'? What I am going to say now may spell the end of my sociological career. I now see sociology as the rear-guard action against the influence of Darwinism. The idea that we are animals with large brains but with the remains of an instinctual apparatus that we have inherited from the greater apes does not sit lightly with the optimistic pre-suppositions of social constructionism. The idea that our world can always be reconstructed was part of the optimistic world of the 1960s especially as Britain was becoming a dominant player in popular culture and as the baby boomer generation was becoming politically visible and socially influential. Social constructionism says that what looks fixed and permanent can be deconstructed and re-assembled. Gender identities, in particular, are negotiable. Race and age are not fixed categories but open to negotiation. Nature can be reorganized and re-directed by technological interventions. Life has no fixed limits once we recognize that social constructions are ideological masks. There is only gender or at least we must abandon the outdated notion that there are two sexes, that are defined biologically – we can change it though modern medical procedures.

Darwinism had a very different message in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Our animal ancestry cannot be ignored or disguised, and we are conditioned by drives for sex, domination and food that are not easily buried. In some respects, Darwinism was a biological rewriting of Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism in which there are only two significant drives: seek out pleasure; avoid pain. Utilitarianism in this limited sense was not optimistic; we cannot avoid these drives which we can understand in simple quantitative terms. There is no ultimate satisfaction of the quest for pleasure, leaving us disappointed. John Stuart Mill, while trying to remain loyal to his father James Mill, said there were also culture and intellectual pleasures that were not measured in Bentham's felicific calculus. Nietzsche and Weber both rejected utilitarianism which they called the doctrine of English Happiness. Nietzsche said it was an ideology suitable for the masses in which humans were no different to a herd of pigs. Weber and Nietzsche had more difficulty coming to terms with Darwinism. Nietzsche wanted to rise above the animal world to create the Superman. Weber accepted Darwinism in his famous Freiburg Lecture in which he said all life is struggle (and the survival of the fittest?). He warned that pleasure loving Catholic Poles were replaced serious Protestant Germans east of the Elbe.

We can see contemporary SC as another optimistic rejection of Darwin. For example, the roles of men and women are not fixed by biology. Men can be socialized to stay at home and nurture their children rather than going to war, while women can go to work and ignore the myth of a ticking biological clock. Masculinity is an outdated life-style rather than a mode of life grounded in an instinctual substructure. This interpretation of SC is compatible with the official interpretation of Berger's social construction of reality- structures are malleable. Perhaps an unofficial reading is that Berger's social theory was in fact conservative. Precisely because the meaningful structures of the very day world are fragile, they need defending.

SC is of course another facet of identity politics. We can transcend our given bodies to adopt new identities that indicate that we are not locked into a fixed or particular body. Because disability is ultimately a denial of equal recognition and equal opportunities, we can all rise above the particular bodies we happened to inhabit. In more recent years, I have been able to formulate my position with more clarity – at least or myself. This is where I think my sociology of religion and body studies converged around the idea of bodily practices. This also goes back to my sociology of religion where I always found surveys about what people believed unhelpful if not pointless. I always thought that what people practiced (including or above all ritual) was the real issue.

I have made that more obvious in my 'Ritual, belief and habituation: Religion' *European Journal of Social Theory* (2017). I find the work of Pierre Bourdieu perhaps the most productive contribution to modern sociology especially his notions of habitus and practice. In my own recent work, I have paid tribute to the late Saba Mahmood who employed Bourdieu and others to defend the idea of female agency among pious women in Egypt. Her work drew on various authors including not only Bourdieu but Talal Asad. In addition, her interventions did much to remind us of the legacy of Aristotle – in many ways the founder of ideas around virtue (virility), habit and practice. I have used this Aristotelian legacy in recent work on happiness (*Eudaimonia*), habituation, and vulnerability. Another key thinker in this tradition is the British philosopher (now at Duke University) Alasdair MacIntyre whose *Dependent Rational Animals* should be on everybody's reading list.

TT: Are there any other body books you love and recommend us to read? Also could you say how these books influenced your work and research area?

BT: I probably get more insight into rituals, body and culture from reading anthropology – after all the anthropology of the body pre-dates its sociological companion. Given the importance of Emile Durkheim in sociology, the work of Marcel Mauss has been somewhat neglected. His short article in 1934 on 'Les techniques du corps' is an inspiration. In more recent anthropology, the work of Mary Douglas has been especially important. Her *Purity and Danger* is rightly constantly quoted, but, within religious studies her work on Leviticus is more scholarly and significant. Unlike Mauss, however she was exclusively focused on the symbolism of the body and not so much on bodily practices. I was lucky to get an invite from Sarah Coakley (the daughter of Mary Douglas) to write a chapter around the theme of body and religion –'The body in western society' in 1997.

My taste in scholarship has always been somewhat eccentric and eclectic. I should note that the study of the body is not a peculiar interest of sociology alone. I have always enjoyed anthropological approaches to the study of the body. To keep things simple, let me just list five books that I have loved and would put on a reading list for a course in the sociology of the body: Farrer, D.S. (2009) *Shadows of the Prophet. Martial Arts and Sufi Mysticism;* Frank, Arthur (1995) *The Wounded Story Teller;* Luzzatto, Sergio (2005) *The Body of Il Duce.*

Mussolini's corpse and the Fortunes of Italy; Paravicini-Bagliani, Agostino (2000) *The Pope's Body*; Porter, Roy (2003) *Flesh in the Age of Reason;* Surak, Kristin (2013) *Making Tea, Making Japan.*

I include the book on making tea to comment on how ritual performance is connected to national character. You can see from the book on tea and the second on Sufi mysticism and martial arts that I have an interest in studies of Asian cultures. In my *Regulating Bodies* (1992) collection of reprinted work on medical sociology, there is an interview in 1991 with Richard Fardon who wrote the definitive biography of Mary Douglas. He asked me, given my work on Islam and my criticisms of Orientalism, I hadn't written on bodies in Asian cultures? He also pressed me on how I could believe in a common ontology for humanity? These were searching question for which I probably gave partial and inadequate replies.

Years later there was yet another migration to the National University of Singapore (2005-2009), where I was responsible for developing research on globalization. This move was important in my exposure to Asian cultures, but also difficult. I had no relevant language and experts found my appointment difficult to accept. Having married a Vietnamese woman and having a Vietnamese daughter has inescapably tied me to Asian cultures. I would as a result like to see more work on the body in other cultures. With my colleague Zheng Yangwen at Singapore, we published *The Body in Asia* (2009). Again, through Mike Featherstone's network I visited Kobe University on many occasions and became fascinated by the poise and perfection of Japanese body culture.

TT: When you discussed vulnerability in the third edition in 2008, you lready predicted the possibility of a pandemic in the future. 'With globalization there is greater interconnectivity between societies, making the rapid spread of infectious disease more problematic. With technological development, the risks of industrial pollution and hazard are much greater --- In short, with modern social change, human vulnerability and institutional precariousness increase' (2008:14).

Although we knew it was coming, we now become vulnerable. The Covid-19 pandemic revealed the negative impact of the Anthropocene, which is the era when human activities has become dominant and distractive over the planetary ecosystem. The shrinking natural

environments creates more opportunities for human bodies could come across and infect countless abundant unknown viruses in once-remote-unattached environment. The socio-economic, cultural and religious changes (that led to the Italian Renaissance) after the 14th century Black Death's devastation in Italian society could make us wonder – how our society could be changed after the emergence of Covid-19. You have already addressed this question in "Is Covid-19 Part of History's Eternal Dance macabre?' in *A De Gruyter Social Sciences Pamphlet, 12 Perspectives on the Pandemic* (2020) and argue that there are two major observations from two opposed theodicies: the religious and political. The first considers the meaning of suffering in the Christian message of vulnerability, and the second concerns political crises which indicate emergence of 'extreme ethno-nationalism addresses the alienation of "the left-behind" and "the deplorables" from liberal democracy.'

This suggests that we are living in extremely volatile times in which existing social beliefs, values and structures have been destabilized and challenged by the major pandemic which allegedly, could have been created by our (human) less sympathetic attitude to, and understanding of, nature.

Could you explain how you see the current situation - how do you imagine our corporeal situation in future social life in terms of the dominant forces of neoliberalism and the critical idea of biodiversity in the era of the Anthropocene?

BT: As I write this retrospective overview of the sociology of the body, we are all confronting a global Covid-19 pandemic. Vulnerability appears to be the name of the game both individually and collectively. At my age and with several preconditions, I need to be realistic. The times when I would casually fly the 24 hours from Sydney to London for conferences in Potsdam, where I have a professorship, are over for the time being. Perhaps the age of globalization and cosmopolitanism is coming to an end. Some societies – Brazil, Yemen or Lebanon - may not survive the crisis, and at the very least it will require some major rethinking in the continuously evolving field of body studies. The enclave society – objects move through a global world without too much restriction, but human movement is sticky- is with us. I don't see any quick fix to the problems confronting the US under Trump, where Covid-19 has exposed the deep divisions in American society along racial and income inequalities. In foreign policy, Trump appears to prefer to work with autocratic societies against America's traditional allies. Britain facing the problems of Brexit and the pandemic has exposed poor management

and foresight, problems in the NHS, and critical indifference to the plight of the elderly in care homes. The 'break-up of Britain' is an increasingly a realistic assessment of the prospects of the archipelago.

In this uncertain context, we might imagine three rather different consequences. The optimistic outlook may be that by next summer, we have an effective and relatively cheap vaccine and the pandemic is then under the same level of control that we currently have over influenza. Perhaps governments become complacent and are once again not prepared for the next global pandemic. Another outbreak in the next five years, on the same scale as Covid-19, revives the old tensions between China, Russia and America. Five years may not be enough time for badly hit European countries to recover and tensions inside the European Union may deliver a fatal blow, opening possibilities for extremist versions of populism to dominate democratic politics.

The second scenario is that there isn't an effective or cheap vaccine and the pandemic continues with deeper consequences. The democratic framework of Europe and most commonwealth societies breaks down allowing far right political movements to infiltrate the military (as they have already done in Germany) and the police and security forces while more extensive nationalist parties emerging to extend border closures against ethnic or religious communities who may be regarded as insufficiently compatible with the sovereign community. Pandemics thus feed into a nationalistic and racist agenda. Globalization and neoliberalism are both off the agenda.

The final, possibly fantastic, scenario is a more radical and profound version of the second scenario. Because lockdown procedures and distancing have broken down, the pandemic cannot be adequately controlled without more extensive government regulation. Public health systems collapse, there is widespread civil unrest and economies begin to decline sharply with widespread unemployment and suffering. Keep in mind that in all three options we have the effects of the second demographic transition and populations shrink and age, but the pandemic has the effect of removing large sections of the elderly population and simultaneously removing the burden of the elderly on the health services. If small, weak and divided societies begin to collapse, we do not have an Anthropocene, but rather what radical green policies have envisaged namely the 'wilding' of vast areas of the planet. Of course, returning the planet or parts of it to the wild would paradoxically require some level of human intervention via geo-engineering. It is often argued that this intervention alone would not reduce or reverse the

negative effects of climate change and rising temperatures. However, we have seen that pollution levels have fallen dramatically as a result of stay-at-home policies. In addition, in many parts of the world during the current pandemic, we have seen wild animals begin to return to urban areas. In any case, 'wild' animals are now regular inhabitants of urban areas. When I lived in New Jersey some 35 minutes train ride to New York's Penn railway station, we had black bears wondering around the neighborhood. With Covid-19, many Australian households have discovered the benefits of keeping chickens in the back yard as kangaroos roam the high streets of Adelaide.

In this third scenario, traditional policing and security measures would breakdown. These circumstances open up opportunities for gangs to begin to exploit opportunities for rackets, illegal trade, narcotics, prostitution and trafficking. This environment would put an end to feminist politics, returning us to the reign of 'hegemonic masculinity' and in extreme circumstances local warlords. The masculine body would be in much demand and fertility rates might recover as old-style patriarchy found a second breath. The third scenario might be defined in terms of the re-feudalization of societies as city life declined, the food chain was compromised, and heavy industry disappeared in favour of highly localized small-scale production.

Perhaps the Anthropocene cannot be reversed but perhaps it cannot survive either. With a series of uncontrolled pandemics in a globalized human environment, the global population will decline, but not in a uniform and controlled manner. A range of African societies might collapse and disappear – Congo, Sudan and Zimbabwe – to be followed by societies in North Africa (Libya) and the Middle East (Iran and Syria). Many aboriginal societies around the world could collapse – even the Navaho of the southwest of the US. In Asia, Myanmar and Afghanistan may struggle to survive. Rather than an Anthropocene, is this situation the return of the vision of Charles Darwin? The post-Anthropocene will be in this limited sense a familiar environment, namely Darwin's survival of the fittest. The Darwinian future is made up of warrior societies, aggressive masculinity and the re-feudalization of societies that may actually collapse.

Perhaps readers of this interview might believe that the third option is indeed fantastic. However, who would have thought that a civilized society such as Germany could give birth to the Third Reich or that the United States could turn its back on NATO and the EU or that the British would vote in favour of Brexit in the dream of becoming a free-roaming global

trading nation? I recently took a holiday in Rome and was once more impressed by the sophistication, the grandeur, the technological wizardry, and the sheer brilliance of their architecture. As with many observers before me, I was struck by the obvious question: how did all of this collapse?

When I was 18 years old, I took with my Jewish - I refer to his Jewish identity because his family were communist refugees from Germany and to record that my life has been blessed by Jewish and Muslim friends - school friend a long and organized communist trip from Ostend to east Berlin, Krakow, Leningrad, Helsinki and back. That communist world also collapsed rapidly and catastrophically. Life to quote G.K.Chesterton is one damn thing after another.

Our own situation unfortunately illustrates the value of focusing on vulnerability and I would argue further that we need as sociologists to have a far more definite view of the uncertainty and risks of social life. It is perhaps ironic that the contrast between risk and uncertainty was developed by Frank Knight who translated Max Weber's *General Economic History, and* was a key figure in the sociology of risk and uncertainty. Body studies needs to embrace this work if we are to deepen our understanding of vulnerability (Turner, 2003).

TT: Finally, could you let us know what are you working on now and why you think it is important and relevant?

BT: Some years ago, it occurred to me that sociologists typically get interested in failure: failed institutions, failed marriage, failed communities, failed capitalism, and failed social movements. There are whole libraries on why revolutions fail. What ever happened to successful institutions? This basic question brought me eventually to questions about happiness, satisfaction, and wellbeing. This question involves a long detour through Aristotle (*Eudaimonia*). It also involved a return to utilitarianism. Most answers to this question have come from economics and Quality of Life research in which health and wealth are the most common ingredients of measures of happiness. The most complex answer to this topic came through collaboration with Rob Stones (2019) in our recent article on 'Successful Societies: decision-making and the quality of attentiveness'. In large measure the research shows that happiness is tied to health and wealth. So I am back to where I began: the need for sociological answers to medical questions and the inescapable body.

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TT: Many thanks, Bryan. Your long successful academic journey and your life as a thinker provide a range of fascinating stories which illuminate the history of sociology of the body over the last 40 years. Your huge contribution to the field has been globally acknowledged and the expectations of your future work from a wider readership continues to grow. The fourth edition of *Body and Society* will be published in the near future. We look forward to seeing your book which surely will bring about the opportunity to better understand contemporary issues and the world we live in.

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