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Vital Bodies: Living with illness, Charlotte Bates, Policy Press, 2019, ISBN: 978-1-4473-3506-1

At a time where there is an increasing awareness that not every illness is *visible*, Charlotte Bates' book 'Vital Bodies: Living with Illness' draws attention to the nuances of life with illness and its in/visibility. Bates provides twelve stories detailing experiences of living with illness based on ethnographic research conducted over one year. In striving to capture the vitality of life with illness, the road to visibility is achieved both substantively and methodologically, by studying the body and offering contributions in the creative and visual ways that this can be researched. Bates and her participants bring bodies to the fore with 'spoken words and written thoughts, drawings, photographs and video diaries' (p.2). These work at capturing what goes on and is felt within and beyond bodies in the context of illness, and with a deliberate shift away from medicalisation. The structure of the book speaks to the *sensorial* and the *embodied*, and with the first three chapters, this is taken directly from a participant's framing.

These first three chapters focus on the practices of the body. The first, titled 'Eat' explores the importance of diet and eating as a way of negotiating illness. Chapter Two 'Exercise' moves to the rhythm of everyday bodies and the complicated nature of exerting oneself in relation to health. The third chapter, 'Sleep' examines the challenges of everyday life and work and how this jars with sleep and rest time. At the heart of the book, there is the welcome and crucial interruption of the printed images of the still videos, accompanying descriptions and photographs of the written journals. These stills embody and speak to the text in the chapters, working to remind the reader of the overarching (in)visibility of illness through the taken-for-granted practices of the everyday. Returning back to the body of the text, Chapter Four titled 'Genes and Organs' examines the intimate interplay between the insides of bodies and the outside world, shining a light on how the internal can be made to be seen. Chapter Five then moves to the external parts of bodies, demonstrating how feet and legs, as body parts (and often working with supporting aids), connect us to the social world and our mobility within it. The final data chapter, 'Hands and Hearts' takes an emotional turn in shaping how bodies, minds and landscapes work together to locate meaning and belonging in everyday life. This chapter draws particular attention to the prominence and visibility of hands through the video diaries as a method. Together, these chapters

speak to the functions and facets of the body and beyond whilst living with illness, supported by the 'snapshots' (p.6) of participants' everyday lives made visible. What is also noteworthy, is how the end of each empirical chapter documents the passing of time and returns to the participants. In doing this, Bates offers a momentary reflection into the ebbs and flows of illness. The conclusion returns to the substantive contributions and theoretical threads that the previous chapters have engaged with. Ultimately, Bates contributes to the conceptual bodies of knowledge of rhythms, care, in/visibility and belonging, and in reserving academic literature to the conclusion, she assures and retains the vitality of the participants voices and visual representations to tell their own tales.

One section of the book that is particularly important and indeed should not be forgotten is the appendix, titled 'Sensuous Scholarship' and borrowed from Stoller (1997). This is a crucial, methodologically reflective section, and one that will be of great interest to qualitative researchers. Here, Bates reflects upon the practical implementation of participant journals (including the opportunities of 'lists' as an elicitation for further imagination), video diaries that capture bodies and the participants' experiences of being involved. I was particularly struck by the realities of encapsulating what it is like to take part in qualitative research and what it *provides* or *leaves* participants. Bates captures the ways in which participants move on with their lives after research is finished, or how their lives do in fact change. She also stresses however, the imprint and empowerment that research can leave on individuals taking part. All participants were given names beginning with 'A', provoking questions of the often forgotten about nature and tussles of choosing pseudonyms. This left me with questions as to how we ensure anonymity, but also the possibilities to re/claim identities when these lean on creative and participant-led approaches. Throughout the book, Bates demonstrates an attentiveness to those who participated, a duty that all qualitative researchers should be in tune with. My only disappointment was that I was left wanting to watch and hear the videos. However, this was compensated and justified by the presentation of still images with supporting transcriptions, allowing for your own imagination to play these, thus demonstrating Bates' ethnographic calibre to take the reader there.

Overall, this is a beautifully presented book which enables the reader to become immersed in both the lives of the participants, and the ways in which fragments of their

worlds were revealed. Throughout the book, there is a careful interplay between perseverance and struggle, disruption and reconstruction, and finally, finding contentment with one's body. The particular focus on the taken-for-granted practices and encounters of the everyday make it both a text and *medium* (to account for the visual) to easily become familiar with. This book is accessible to students of all levels and is of particular interest for academics working within the fields (or intersections) of the sociology of health and illness, and the sociology of everyday life. The presentation of the multiple methods makes the book useful to qualitative researchers, particularly those who are ethnographically driven, in the playful (and visual) portrayal of data to demonstrate everyday life. Bates' intimate and visual methodology alongside the micro encounters with everyday life with illness lead an important trail in the craft of an embodied sociological imagination.

References

Stoller, P. (1997) *Sensuous Scholarship*. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press.