

**David Kirk, *The Body, Schooling and Culture*. Deakin University Press, Geelong, 1993. Illus. pp. 61. \$16.**

In this monograph David Kirk provides an introduction to theoretical concepts and practical examples for studying physical activity and the body, and considers whether we have evidence of a postmodern body emerging in school physical education. To explore this question Kirk has drawn on a range of literature, concepts and contexts which represent a valuable interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary approach. More specifically, the theoretical framework borrows from sociology, anthropology, feminist and cultural critique, and history, and it is for readers who have a background in these fields, together with physical educators, that this text may be both novel and informative.

The text was prepared for coursework in Deakin University's Master of Education degree. It is accompanied by a reader of the same name. Thus, the intended audience is postgraduate students, primarily in the field of physical education, who are interested in questions of the social construction of the body through schooling. For those not familiar with the language of social theory, the text can occasionally seem impenetrable. However, the reader was assisted by the ample use of examples, illustrations, metaphors and provocative questions to clarify the thrust of the argument.

The monograph is comprised of three chapters together with an introduction and conclusion. Chapter One is a review of literature which forms a basis to understanding how the body is represented and constructed in Western culture. Kirk argues that 'Physical education, sport and various forms of dance are highly institutionalised and codified sets of practices which school the body' (p. 17). The notion of 'schooling the body' (albeit an able, Anglo-Saxon body) is a useful hook upon which readers can hang much of the text which follows.

Chapter Two explores the links between physical education and other key sites where the body is constructed. These sites include media sport, tertiary education, and the exercise and fitness industries. Kirk asks how it is that the 'trim, taut and terrific' body, constructed at several

different sites, has become a metaphor for so many desirable social goals.

Chapter Three, the longest chapter, steps back into the history of physical education in Australia. Here, Kirk is articulate in tracing how the drills, exercises, and gymnastics in early Australian physical education reflect modernist corporeal discourses. It is argued that there is little evidence that school physical education, as with other socio-cultural phenomena, is moving towards postmodern representations of the body.

This chapter raises important questions for all physical educators, whether they be undergraduate or postgraduate, and provides a springboard from which educators can question their own practices. Has the purpose of physical education changed or is it still fundamentally an exercise in control and regimentation? To what extent does physical education continue to reproduce a separation of the self and body? What might be the function of physical education in a post-modern world?

In closing, Kirk draws on the work of Bryan Turner, author of *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory* (1984), to discuss alternative theories for articulating the body in culture. Thus, for sports historians, there is a breadth of theory upon which they may build a parallel analysis of the social construction of the body in and through sport. Questions, similar to those asked of physical education, could be investigated focusing on sport, particularly elite sport, as it is clearly a site saturated with regulation of the body.

Those teaching in multidisciplinary programs of human movement studies, sport science and the like, will find this book a useful reference for undergraduate and postgraduate student work in the fields of philosophy, history, sociology, gender studies and curriculum theory. It could also be a platform for asking reflective questions of the dominant discourses which are produced and reproduced by faculty and students in many departments. In doing so a lively debate is bound to ensue!

Doune Macdonald

Department of Human Movement Studies

University of Queensland