

**The story in the body:
narrative rememberings and the illness experience**

Submitted by

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Abstract

Through the stories of a woman whom I have called Anna this thesis explores the experiences of 'being ill' without a medical diagnosis. Anna suffered an extreme form of unexplained paralysis following what appeared to be an asthma attack a few years ago and has never recovered. Through Anna's illness narrative she identified her 'self' through the medical, scientific discourse as 'consciousness' and an 'object' body and described herself as being 'just a head'. This study reveals some of the consequences of 'being' a medicalised Cartesian body. The dominant scientific assumptions of the body in health care have resulted in some major theoretical tensions that both contradict and complicate theorising the body. In response to what Anna experienced I have drawn upon theorists who are committed to re-thinking the body to deepen my understandings of the experience of illness. The way that knowledge and meaning are constituted through language and the body are a feature of the analysis in this study.

Through the process of telling Anna's and my stories I have attempted to account for 'difference' and 'subject experience' through an analysis of the stories that we chose to tell about ourselves. These stories reveal something of the social and material conditions that shape our lives and opens up the possibilities that there are many 'truths'. Anna and I engaged in critical conversations that revealed many gaps, inconsistencies, and contradictions as our stories unfolded. This activity allowed us to make unique sense of our lives.

The stories in this thesis expose how both Anna's and my Cartesian understandings of the world so dramatically shaped, but at the same time concealed our stories and thus our experiences. Anna's stories challenge people to explore a range of different positions on the problematic of illness and the body as it becomes clearer how narrative may shape and construct our lives and thus our reality.

Statement of authorship

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis presented by me for another degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

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