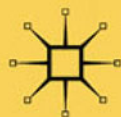


Embodied Performances

Sexuality, Gender, Bodies



Beatrice Allegranti



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Beatrice Allegranti

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*To the memory of my mother, Bridget O'Keeffe Allegranti,
with love and gratitude*

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Introduction

The age of the monolithic theory has passed and so this book emerges from my own passionate politics by responding to the feminist call for advances in conversations across disciplines (Butler 2004).¹ As such, it offers an interdisciplinary blend of dance movement psychotherapy (DMP), performance and feminism in an attempt to engage with the complexities and multiplicities of what it means to be human. After all, *being* human may be described as a quintessentially interdisciplinary process and one where, as I hope to make clear in this book, we literally embody *both* nature (our biological body) *and* nurture (our socially constructed body).

In these pages, and in the accompanying film episodes is a crystallization of my professional experience to date, experience born out of my inhabiting a range of seemingly incompatible worlds. I work as a choreographer, clinician, academic researcher and educator, and having integrated an interdisciplinary approach, I comfortably shift positions according to the context. I am deeply committed to a variety of methods of dissemination, whether performative, academic or clinical and I consider these different approaches as potential ‘interventions’ and agents of change in society. To this end, the book offers an insight into a practice-based inquiry, which, in turn, has formed the basis for emergent theorizing about embodiment.

Embodiment

In response to the long-held (and seemingly enduring) Cartesian body-mind split (Descartes [1644] 1996), which has overshadowed philosophy and psychology for centuries, the process of putting the organism back together or ‘embodiment’ now needs to be front-page news. Encouragingly,

embodiment is a term that is gaining theoretical momentum across diverse fields such as dance/performance (Briginshaw 2001; Buckland 2001), dance movement psychotherapy (Allegranti 2009a; Bloom 2006; Meekums 2006), psychoanalysis (Orbach 2004a, 2004b, 2006), body psychotherapy (Totton 2008), neuroscience (Gallese 2009b), and developmental theory (Beebe et al. 2005; Overton et al. 2008). However, it is feminist theorizing that for me most succinctly problematizes the complexities of embodiment, not only in terms of the social construction of the gendered and sexual body (Butler 2004, 2005) but particularly in a call for the inclusion of biological explanations and neurobiological data in understandings of 'being in' our bodies (Fausto-Sterling 1985, 2000, 2010; Grosz 1994, 2005; Wilson 2004). Consequently, a core pre-occupation, articulated throughout this book, is embodiment or how we can 'be in' and develop our relationship with our bodies through integrating dance movement, psychosocial and biological processes and understandings of human agency.

'Being in' our bodies is not a reductive experience; it is a plural and multilayered coalescence of the different anatomical body systems: biochemical, genetic, respiratory, muscular, cardiovascular, circulatory and reproductive, alongside a fleshy integration of psychological, social and cultural shaping. From the moment we are born, bodies are necessarily involved in a complex process of, in de Beauvoir's (1949) sense, *becoming* women and men. Moreover, this process of becoming is temporally and geographically contingent and how we go about incorporating this palimpsest of experience is lifelong.

Therefore, my intention in this book is to provide a working definition of embodiment as *a process* and one that changes according to our lived body experiences over time. Moreover, I offer some unfolding perspectives of how to engage with/in embodied processes by highlighting autobiographical, relational and political aspects of our selves as interwoven. By no means intended as definitive; this perspective is suggested as a contribution to a growing practical and theoretical understanding of embodiment.

Consequently, the chapters in this book provide examples (embodied evidence perhaps) of how social performances of sexuality and gender can be perniciously embodied and a proposal for expansive ways of deconstructing (undoing) and re-constituting (re-doing) sexuality and gender and thus more embodied ways of doing life. The book suggests an ethical approach to life through embodied performances and provides practice-based evidence of how this re-visioning can be achieved.

Sexuality, gender, bodies

As a white (Irish-Italian), educated feminist drawing on the Anglo-American tradition, I hope to remain respectful and aware of discourses from post-colonial feminists of diverse ethnicity, reminding myself and the reader that it is impossible and naïve to ignore my position of privilege and that I need to be wary of assuming the white Anglo-American feminist view as universal. This is something of which I am mindful when writing this text and as a practitioner, where I encounter and work with children and adults in the multicultural diaspora of London. One of my overall aims is to be appreciative and respectful of difference at all levels: sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity, and class.

My engagement within the feminist tradition stems from a desire to unpack taken-for-granted ideas about women and men, specifically in social contexts and within my professional arena (Allegranti 2004a, 2004b, 2009a, 2009b). I am interested in how our sexual and gendered bodies are contested sites (Foucault 1977) and follow Judith Butler's (2004: 204) view of the necessary 'social transformation of gender relations'. To this end, my main proposition in this project is to deconstruct and re-constitute the performance of sexuality and gender in everyday life and in performance (dance film). I use the term 'deconstruction' to refer to a dismantling exercise, which allows critical interrogation of the way in which the everyday ideas of sexuality and gender are ordinarily embodied and expressed.

Rather than use the term 'sexual difference' in this project, I have deliberately used the terms 'sexuality' and 'gender'. Further to this, I separated these terms in order to highlight the possibilities for sexuality that are not constrained by gender; in other words, one's gender does not presuppose a given sexual practice. Also, by separating 'sexuality' and 'gender', I am not suggesting a radical polarization since, as Jennifer Coates (2006: 23) states, the terms are often conflated 'because heterosexuality is an intrinsic component of the dominant ideology of gender'. They are interconnected but not necessarily interdependent and one of the aims of this book is to explore this link and move towards a deeper understanding of these terms. Nevertheless, the site and 'sight' of sexuality and gender *are* the body in a plurality of ways: biological, psychological, social and cultural. My emphasis on the plural suggests the body in non-dualistic terms and in what de Beauvoir describes (following in the tradition of Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty) as a 'situation'. But beyond this, I suggest problematizing de Beauvoir's (1949)

notion of 'biology as destiny' to include social, cultural and psychological layers of the body as a *complex* situation.

Fear and loathing of the body have persisted in Western contemporary culture for millennia and feminists emphasize body–mind integration, which sits very comfortably with my DMP practice. However, theorizing the body within DMP is peculiarly absent. Consequently, what is specifically significant about this project is that it suggests that the process and outcomes of DMP and choreographic performance-making assist in moving beyond dominant hegemonic and Cartesian discourses. This is made possible by re-presenting bodies and language and, in doing so I suggest that the practice of these movement-based forms operates outside of the logocentric order. In other words, this book and film work present research beyond the culturally exalted malestream and suggest more equal, more embodied and therefore non-oppressive ways of seeing ourselves and each other.

Undoing and re-doing performances

I would like to clarify my use of the word 'performance'. As a performer and choreographer, I regard the notion of performance as an art form. Although my background and professional training were in contemporary dance and choreography, I have evolved my own working definition of performance to include a broad range of multidisciplinary activities which may be understood under the banner of 'performance' to the extent that the notion may be viewed as a 'constellation of practices' (Huxley and Witts 2003: 2). What characterizes all these practices is the established relationship of a performer and a spectator, whether this is live performance as for dance/theatre or through new media such as film. Moreover, the locus of my own performance practice is an unequivocal engagement with the body. Also, as a result of my own idiosyncratically positioned body, in both performance practice and DMP, I recognize that there exists an uneasy and unarticulated relationship between the two. Thus, my attempt in this book is to bring these aspects together and to articulate the ethics of this collaboration (in Chapter 2).

I also align myself with Thornborrow and Coates (2005), who use the term 'performance' in two different ways: the first is in relation to the performance of identity and the social self, the second is the telling of a story as performance (this story can of course be a dance, a film, a psychotherapeutic conversation or in written form). Therefore, I rely on these notions of performance and, in the Embodied Performances project I use

the medium of film to disseminate my research as well as to present an artefact (I use the term 'film' generically to also include digital video).

In the context of sexuality and gender, a further (political) layer which simultaneously intersects with, and yet is distinct from, the notion of performance, is Butler's consideration of performativity '*as that aspect of discourse that has the capacity to produce what it names ... this production actually always happens through a certain kind of repetition and recitation*' (1994: 33) (author's emphasis), suggesting that sexuality and gender are something that is 'done' and that it is 'done' over and over again. It is worth noting that Butler's (2004) most recent text calls not only for an examination of how gender is 'done' but how it can also be 'undone' in order to live a more ethical life. In this project, I also focus on the importance of how sexuality and gender can be 're-done' or 're-made' through the body in dance movement practice.

Embodied Performances in everyday life?

An interrogation and suggestion for Embodied Performances of sexuality and gender at this point in world politics and history are appropriate. Interwoven human rights issues of sexuality, gender and the body form a large part of everyday cultural existence. For example, in the context of everyday relationships in the UK and the US, opposition to Gay and Lesbian marriages and parenting/adoption rights are ongoing issues (BBC 2005a). Also, the law around paternal custody is slowly being revised and men are speaking out but the tradition has been to award women custody of children in a divorce, since the dominant belief system asserts that women's function is to rear children.

Contemporary religious issues under debate in the UK and worldwide include: contention over Gay and Lesbian Clergy within the Church of England and the Anglican Church who are involved in a 'sexuality dispute' between conservatives, who oppose the ordination of homosexual clergy and the blessing of same-sex unions, and liberals (see Beckford 2009; Morgan 2005). In the Catholic Church there remains steadfast exclusion of women as priests (Gledhill 2006), despite feminist activism specifically addressing inequality within this institution (Katzenstein 1995). Moreover, the anti-contraceptive stance held by the Catholic Church has implications for the spread of HIV/AIDs in Africa where people are not encouraged to have agency in their own sexual relationships (BBC 2005b; United Nations 2003). Deriving from Plato, the Christian doctrine amounts to a profound somatophobia (Grosz 1994); it is based on a mind-body dualism where the flesh is sinful, bodily impulses

must be mastered and, in certain cases, sexuality renounced. Moreover, emerging from these ancient beliefs, the mind and the soul (or consciousness) are seen as unified and separate from nature and the body (which represents the natural world). This pernicious hierarchical superiority of mind/soul over body infiltrates into historical and contemporary scientific discourses (see Descartes et al. [1644] 1996), discourses that bleed into our everyday conceptions of what the body should (and could) be.

Backed by culture and religion, patriarchy is dissected in the courageous work of Somalian activist, author and filmmaker, Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Hirsi Ali lives with death threats and her Dutch collaborator, Theo van Gogh, was killed by Islamic extremists because their film, *Submission*, told the story of a Muslim woman, forced into an arranged marriage, who is abused by her husband and raped by her uncle. It triggered an outcry from Dutch Muslims as one scene in the film showed an actress in see-through garments with Koranic script *written on her body*, which also bore whip marks (Hirsi Ali 2007a). For me, this also highlights the (perverse) power of words and the fear and loathing of the female body, something that both Islamic and Anglo-American Feminism are counteracting (Moghadam 2002). Hirsi Ali (2007b: ix) herself has called for a reformation of Islam, which dominates the lives of families and relationships down to the smallest detail. The lived experiences of traditional Islamic relationships reinforce a physical and mental separation of the sexes and as Hirsi Ali (*ibid.*) observes, it is 'an ideology, political conviction, moral standard, law and identity', which signifies deeply embodied fundamental principles.

These fundamental principles are played out on the bodies of girls and young women where female genital mutilation is one of the most political areas of women's health. Hirsi Ali (*ibid.*: 119) makes the important distinction between 'mutilation' and 'circumcision', where the latter implies an acceptable practice, as in male circumcision, but 'if male circumcision meant removing the glans and testicles, and adhering the remains of the penis to the empty sac, the comparison would be valid ... it is not acceptable. Nor is it culturally excusable.' Worldwide, it is estimated that well over one hundred million women have been subjected to this procedure (Amnesty International 2007). This is an extreme form of oppression of women since it denies women the experience of sexual pleasure, notwithstanding the childhood abuse commensurate with such an act. Hirsi Ali (2007a: 32) recalls how as a young child, held down by three women and a man:

The scissors went down between my legs and the man cut off my inner labia and clitoris. I heard it, like a butcher snipping the fat off a piece of

meat ... Then came the sewing: the long blunt needle clumsily pushed into my bleeding outer labia, my loud and anguished protests.

A further annihilation of female subjectivity intertwined with culture has been apparent since the introduction of China's 'one child policy' in 1979, where there have been reports of infanticide of baby girls (Greenhalgh and Li 1995) and more recently widespread cases of sex selective abortion (Xing Zhu et al. 2009). The 'missing' girls of China have resulted in a gender imbalance in the population, which has an excess of males. The personal and public implications of this for both women and men are surely deeply embodied. Both Chinese and Japanese feminists have been counteracting this polemical matrix of gender inequality and a gender gap in birth by opening up debates over eugenics, gender, sexuality and the psyche (Barlow 2004) and the problematization and contingency of women's 'rights' in an international context (Kato 2009). During my facilitation of an Embodied Performances project which led to the making of a short film in Hong Kong, one woman reflected: *'some of the time I really have resistance to being seen ... there is ambivalence ... resistant desire of wanting ... being watched. So when we were outside [filming] I just felt: I want to be visible, I just want to be visible.'* Her embodied words can be heard in the film *City Ghosts* (2010), which explores the intersecting issues of visibility, gender and culture for four Hong Kong Chinese women.



Still taken from *City Ghosts* (2010)

Assault on bodily subjectivity is vividly present in military contexts. There are reports of high percentages of Israeli women soldiers experiencing sexual harassment, alongside other reports detailing high rates of stress and suicide of their male counterparts (Segal 2010). Further complex intersecting global issues arising out

of conflict are those of terrorism and gender politics which sees the phenomenon of suicide bombers, the ultimate 'embodied sacrifice', where female suicide bombers in particular are given front page media coverage due to Western contradictory social and political expectations. News frames often reflect a gender bias where female terrorists are 'othered' and turned into victims of circumstance rather than agents of political will (Mikell 2009). By contrast, male bodily vulnerability is acutely present in the voices and images of violence, torture and rape occurring at Guantánamo Bay (see Falkoff 2007). Similar to Abu-Graub, we hear of displaced bodies submitted to the will of others.

The body in the field of politics reflects our contemporary life. Thus, body politics demands our attention as it suggests both the pernicious effect of limited views on sexuality, gender and bodies as well as, if we can bear to see it, an expanding possibility in terms of how we can perform our lives in the world. This expanding possibility is exemplified in the case of David Alan Harris' (2007) embodied interventions with former child soldiers in Sierra Leone. There are an estimated 300,000 child soldiers around the world and every year the number grows as more children are recruited for use in active combat. These children (of which there is a higher percentage of boys) experience the conflicting role of perpetrator and victim of violence. Specifically, in the civil war in Sierra Leone children fight for both the rebels, the Revolutionary United Front, and the pro-government local militia, the Kamajors. Dance movement psychotherapist, Harris (2009, 2007), introduced a rehabilitation programme where boys and young men brought their embodied histories into movement. Harris' DMP work helps the boys and young men to re-discover empathy through a kinaesthetic process: the capacity to feel into another's situation and suffering through the body. The culmination of such work in a community performance is both heartening and transformative since the youths symbolically embodied the language of kinaesthetic empathy and were welcomed by elders back into community life (Harris 2009).

As evident in the examples discussed above, feminists undoubtedly have an unfulfilled job in contemporary globalized culture. A recent UK (2009) radio debate asked: Is feminism dead in the water? My unequivocal answer is – no. Valenti (2007: 18) claims that, far from being an outmoded stance, feminism is essential to women's lives, 'especially given the society we live in, which constantly and consistently tells women that we're just not good enough'. I would add to this the importance of examining what feminism can bring to men's lives in the evolution of a politically progressive culture. Feminism is concerned with equal rights and with the possibility of seeing our humanity. Consequently, we need to recognize that women, men and children are sovereign (Ikeda 2006), that we are the main protagonists of our personal and public embodied performances, and then with a sense of responsibility, take action based on that realization.

Reading the book and viewing the film

Holding the tension between embodied lived experiences and theorizing has been a feature of writing this book. I have held this tension by

presenting parallel strands in relation to embodied performances of sexuality and gender: (1) textual 'data' of individual performers' verbal reflection after movement experiences; (2) film episodes, which re-present embodied experiences for the performers, of sexuality and gender; and (3) still images from relevant film episodes.

The crucible for the research upon which this book is based is the *Personal Text Public Body Lab*, first established in 2000 for a group of professional arts therapists and performers (Allegranti 2004b, 2009a, 2009b). The Lab continues to work across disciplinary boundaries and geographical locations; however, the specific focus of this book and film episodes emerges from a practice-based doctoral project carried out between 2004 and 2007 (Allegranti 2007). The nine performers in the Lab comprise a mixture of professional and non-professional dancers and actors with some individuals who are also arts therapists.

The *Personal Text Public Body Lab* explored an awareness of how the body is interlocutor of both personal and public domains (Allegranti 2004b, 2009a, 2009b). It was established as a practice-led research process investigating the interrelationship between psychotherapy and performance. Building on my work in this way allows me to contribute to emerging trends within the academy and the field of practice/performance *as* research and performance-based research (Allegranti 2005a, 2005b; Allegranti and Hagell 2002; Allegue et al. 2009). Additionally, over the past eight years my practice has evolved into an engagement with digital technology as a means of disseminating my work.

As a point of embodied entry to this project, I recommend that you, the reader, view the Embodied Performances on the website now, prior to reading the rest of this text. This work has, after all, been developed around the personal and public performances of the nine people involved in this project and, consequently, their bodies speak volumes. These film episodes have been screened around the world in a variety of arts venues and at conferences (*Personal Text Public Body*, 2007–10). The film episodes can be accessed as follows: <http://www.embodiedpractice.co.uk/videos/>. The password is: embodied.

Overview of the book

The book is organized into five chapters. Moving beyond a Cartesian framework and proposing an interdisciplinary view of embodiment, Chapter 1 situates bodies *as* knowledge, by discussing the tensions between the socially constructed body and the biological body and the concomitant and interweaving psychical, physical and cultural discourses. Situated

within a range of feminist perspectives, I draw on: poststructuralism, psychoanalysis and philosophy, cultural and film theory as well as recent neuroscientific and biological discussions and research. This chapter argues that a contemporary feminist framework most appropriately holds an interdisciplinary range of perspectives that include re-definitions of the patriarchal philosophical truths, thus pointing toward a positive problematization of the body.

Chapter 2 is a call for embodying ethics in dance movement psychotherapy, performance and practice-based research. It examines regenerated epistemological and ontological issues including agency, methods of validation, context of discovery and giving participants a 'voice', and as a result I address these in the evolution of Embodied Performances.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 present a textual re-presentation of the embodied performances of sexuality and gender and are to be read in conjunction with viewing the Embodied Performances on the website. In line with Alldred (2000: 149), I prefer to use the terms 're-presentation' and 're/presentation' to indicate that my research account is actively produced by me and embodies my perspective, using the former when emphasizing process and the latter when emphasizing its significance for cultural politics. These three chapters are interrelated with recurring and overlapping theoretical discussions in relation to each 'data' excerpt over time. However, for critical and discursive coherence, I have separated them in order to posit autobiographical, relational and political aspects of embodiment. My overall intention in these chapters is to flesh out a discussion about how performances of sexuality and gender are embodied and not to enter into an interpretation of each individual participant's reflection. Also, by viewing the film episodes, these overlapping autobiographical, relational and political embodiments will be hopefully clear to the reader/viewer.

Along with Elizabeth Grosz,² I have come to view 'concepts and theoretical principles, not as guidelines, rules, or blue prints for struggle, but as *tools* and *weapons* of struggle' (Grosz 1995: 56 author's emphasis). Armed with this theoretical arsenal, my aim in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 is to develop some of the theoretical insights introduced in Chapter 1 from feminist poststructuralism, language, psychoanalysis, film and cultural theory, as well as current biological and neurological explanations. At the forefront of my awareness when developing this dialogical relationship between the performers' voices and theory, is Leventhal's (2005: 13) insight not to 'fit the human being to the theory but the theory to the human being'. The performers reflected on aspects of deconstructing and re-constituting their sexual and gendered performances by paying

attention to their autobiographical process, relationships inside and outside the Lab space, and by considering the political implications of their expressions of sexuality and gender. I re-present performers' discourses with a written 'data' excerpt accompanied by a photographic (film) still and a relevant film episode. However, I consider that each film episode can be 'read' in many ways. In line with my epistemological claims (in Chapter 2), I am including valuing and being transparent about my own subjective reflections as author.

The book concludes by arguing that absencing embodied performances comes at a cost. Consequently, suggestions are made for how the body can be dynamically present in theorizing and practice in the areas of performance, therapy and research. Drawing on the Embodied Performances of the previous chapters, recommendations are made for how discourses and bodies can inform one another in a transformative way.

1

Bodies as Knowledge

Harding and Norberg (2005: 2009) point out that ‘our lives are [powerfully] governed by institutions, conceptual schemes, and their “texts”, which are seemingly far removed from our everyday lives’. Consequently, in the context of critical analysis of existing literature and research in this chapter, I investigate several conceptual schemes or ‘texts’ that ontologically ground ‘knowing’ with/in the body. Specifically, I turn to the feminist areas of: poststructuralism, autobiography, psychoanalysis, cultural, performance and film theories. In doing so, my aim is twofold: first, to enrich these texts by incorporating recent biological discourses, neuroscientific and developmental research and, second, to consider how a feminist embodied practice can potentially invigorate dominant (biological) discourses about the body and human development. By interweaving these discourses, I am afforded the opportunity to elicit tensions between views of the socially constructed and the biological (sexual and gendered) body and thus argue for an interdisciplinary view of the body and the process of embodiment. Notably, my positioning is underscored by my DMP and performance practice where I ground the body *and* dance movement improvisation at the heart of any theorization and ‘knowing’, something I aim to make clear throughout the chapter.

For me, feminism as a theoretical and political framework congruently holds interdisciplinarity since it affirms an embodied practice and thinking rather than reinforcing the Cartesian convention of disavowing the body (see Moore and Kosut 2010; Grosz 2005). My own engagement with this literature has been dynamic, as I have shifted between reading, dancing, choreographing and facilitating in the studio, film shoots and editing, capturing photographic stills and writing. Consequently, the main aim of

this chapter is a turn to the body as a coalescence of systems that simultaneously incorporate political, biological and cultural dimensions.

Over the past 15 years, pioneering feminist scholarship about the body has challenged the artificial separation of reason (mind) and emotion (body), and feminists have come to 'view emotion as both a legitimate source of knowledge and a product of culture that is as open to analysis as any other culturally inscribed phenomenon' (Fonow and Cook 2005: 2215). The shift has been from studying the body as an object of inquiry to using the body as a social category of analysis. The body has come to be seen as the site of culturally inscribed and disputed meanings, experiences, and feelings that can, like emotion, be mined as sources of insight and subjects of analysis (ibid.: 2216). Feminists now speak of 'writing the body, reading the body, sexing the body, racing the body, enabling the body, policing the body, disciplining the body, erasing the body, and politicizing the body' (Lee 2003). Several publications have emerged which tentatively theorize the body in psychotherapy (Orbach 2006; Totton 2008) and bodies within a socio-political context (Orbach 2009). However, there is a danger that *theories* about the body distance us from individuals' everyday embodied experiences. My aim, therefore, is to consider Wolff's (1995: 18) suggestion that theory can *inform* practice and that the 'feminist artist, critic and academic ... [and I would add therapist] may in fact be the same person'. Since I regularly shift between multiple identities (as a therapist, performer, choreographer, film maker and researcher), my interest lies in exploring how practice has the potential to *re-shape* DMP and performance praxis and how individuals can benefit from this.

Throughout this book, I argue that part of the process of embodied practice involves addressing the concepts of 'public' and 'private' within the individual and within the body. These concepts have come into awareness through the work of feminist historians 'as a [recognition that] social theories, concepts and models [have] been overwhelmingly developed around male activities in the public sphere' (Ribbens and Edwards 2000: 7). Feminist researchers in social science also acknowledge that "'public" and "private" are ... ambiguous concepts ... [which] ... have strongly gendered implications' (ibid.: 8). A further layer of privacy is personal space, which involves paying attention to experiences that are constituted around a sense of self or identity, to do with emotions, intimacy or the body (ibid.: 14). Moreover, by drawing on current theories of sexuality and gender, my aim is to articulate an embodied language, which explores the interconnection between the 'personal' (psychological and biological) and the 'public' (social) world.

Feminisms and poststructuralism

Poststructuralism and contemporary feminism are late twentieth-century movements that share a certain self-conscious critical relationship to established philosophical and political traditions. Consequently, feminist scholars have 'exploited' this relationship to their own ends (Scott 1988). It is not my intention to discuss these 'exploitations' in detail but, rather, to highlight the focus on language, subjectivity and power which feminism has adapted from poststructuralism (Weedon 1987: 11).

Situated alongside the postmodern genre, Weedon (ibid.: 10) states: 'Poststructuralism offers a useful, productive framework for understanding the mechanisms of power in our society and the possibilities of change'. Weedon goes on to say:

For a theoretical perspective to be politically useful to feminists, it should be able to recognise the importance of the *subjective* in constituting the meaning of women's lived reality. It should not deny subjective experience, since the ways in which people make sense of their lives is a necessary starting point for understanding how power relations structure society.

(ibid.: 8; author's emphasis)

However, de Lauretis (2007: 190) argues that subjectivity is a feminist concept, not a poststructuralist one, and she thus reclaims her difference from Weedon's 'all-encompassing poststructuralism' where she states that in Weedon's discussion, 'poststructuralism is the theory and feminism is just a practice' (ibid.: 191).

I agree with de Lauretis' critique and also turn to Butler (2004: 195) who states that 'poststructuralism is not a monolith; it is not a unitary event or set of texts, but a wide range of works that emerged in the aftermath of Ferdinand de Saussure, Hegel, Existentialism, phenomenology and various forms of linguistic formalism', adding to this a Foucauldian influence (de Lauretis 2007; Foucault 1970). With this historical multiplicity in mind, I emphasize the plurality of language and the impossibility of fixed meanings in relation to sexuality and gender, since spoken accounts form a significant part of my research. Additionally, my practice as a therapist and performance maker involves the integration of verbal and non-verbal. I have argued elsewhere for a postmodern approach to DMP where I focus on verbal and non-verbal multiplicity and fluid re-positioning of gendered subjectivities (Allegranti 1997, 2004b, 2007a, 2007b, 2009a). The poststructuralist project posits that the self, as subject,

is constituted through language and disallows the fantasy of speaking from outside of the language system. This is supported by feminist writers influenced by poststructuralism (Butler 1988, 1990, 1993, 2004, 2005; Cameron 2001; Cameron and Kulick 2003; Coates, 1996, 2003; Grosz 1994, 1995; Weedon 1987). However, I propose that the self/subject is also constituted non-verbally through the process of embodied performance (Allegranti 2009a).

Authors Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous write in a poststructuralist tradition and have taken 'sexual difference' as the starting point for exploring specific features of feminine embodiment. Hélène Cixous appeals for women to 'write the body' in order to escape the constraints of phallogentric language. These 'difference' feminists have looked for ways to give expression to women's bodies as the sites for pleasure and sensuality or maternal *jouissance* (Cixous 1976, 1990; Irigaray 1989; Kristeva 1987). However, the French poststructuralist feminists have been charged with essentialism and for giving priority to experience, particularly maternal or heterosexual. It is argued that they do not do justice to the differences in women's experiences of embodiment (Davis 1997: 9) and the body is viewed metaphorically and is thus abstractly represented rather than valued for its material reality. The body as metaphor or symbol is a feature of feminist social constructionism as highlighted by Judith Butler (1994) who refers to the inherent contradiction in *Bodies that Matter*, identifying the tension between the *symbolic* and *social* significance of the body. However, as Grosz (2005: 78) points out, the feminist project of transforming matter (noun) to mattering (verb) 'desubstantializes it ... the process of mattering cannot be cut off from what mattering really is ... in this case biological or organic matter'. When referring to the body, I suggest that we need to include the layers of lived experiences that give way to a palimpsest of processes: from verbal to non-verbal and biological to cultural.

A central focus of poststructuralist analysis is seeing the term 'language', not simply as words or even a set of grammatical rules, but rather a meaning constituting system: 'any system – strictly verbal or other – through which meaning is constructed and cultural practices organized and by which, accordingly, people represent and understand their world' (Scott 1988: 34). Historically, feminists' attention to language involved addressing a process and changing it; new words appeared, for example, sexual harassment. Thus, in the wake of the 'linguistic turn', words can be seen as powerful tools for social change. To this end, Deborah Cameron (1994: 33) draws on a Foucauldian position when she asks, 'Why on earth should we not pay close attention to the implication