

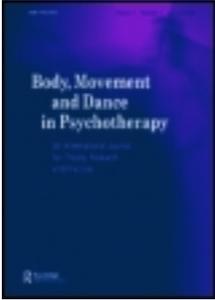
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Embodied performances of sexuality and gender: A feminist approach to dance movement psychotherapy and performance practice

Beatrice Allegranti*

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This paper is situated within contemporary views of sexuality and gender and advances in conversations across disciplines. It offers a model of 'Embodied Performances' that combines elements of dance movement therapy (DMT), performance and feminism. By drawing from examples of my practice and research, an explanation of how it is possible to deconstruct and re-constitute (or 'undo' and 're-do') the performance of sexuality and gender in everyday life and in performance (dance/film) is provided. It is argued that embodied performances of sexuality and gender highlight an 'autobiographical,' 'relational' and 'political' unfolding through verbal and non-verbal expression. By building on feminist notions of working in the spaces 'in-between' dominant discourses and embodiment through language, this paper presents examples of how the process and outcomes of DMT and performance-making assist in moving beyond dominant hegemonic discourses. Furthermore, it is argued that bodies and discourses can be in constant dialogue with the potential to transform one another.

Keywords: sexuality; gender; embodiment; language; performance; inter-disciplinarity; feminism

Introduction

Passionate politics inform the suggestions for theory and practice which are presented in this paper. Examples of my practice-based research¹ (Allegranti, 2007a) are woven into an interdisciplinary blend of dance movement psychotherapy (DMP), performance and feminism. For over a decade I have worked within the feminist tradition where I actively seek to unpack 'taken-for-granted' ideas about women and men, specifically in social contexts and within my professional arena (Gill, 2004; Allegranti, 2004, 2007b, 2002). Following Judith Butler's (2004, p. 204) view that 'feminism is about the social transformation of gender relations,' my main goal as a practitioner and researcher is to investigate how the performance of sexuality and gender can be deconstructed and re-constituted in everyday life and in

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performance (dance/film). In this paper, the term deconstruction is used to refer to a dismantling exercise that allows for critical interrogation of the way in which the everyday ideas of sexuality and gender are ordinarily embodied and expressed. It is argued that this interrogation, both theoretically and in practice, promotes embodied performances of sexuality and gender.

A feminist framework

Feminism began ostensibly as a political movement that came to acknowledge ‘the personal as political.’ Contemporary feminism espouses a political commitment to diversity and a validation of a multiplicity of approaches, positions and strategies (Kemp & Squires, 1997). Feminism, as a theoretical and political framework, holds interdisciplinarity congruently since it affirms theory interwoven into an embodied practice, rather than reinforcing the Cartesian convention of disavowing the body (Fonow & Cook, 2005). Interdisciplinarity is important and, as Deborah Levy (2006, p. 16) asserts, ‘there was a time when the term “interdisciplinary artist” provoked real confusion if not derision . . . but as Simone de Beauvoir might have said . . . we’re not born interdisciplinary artists, we become one.’ I have become an interdisciplinary practitioner because I want to challenge existing canons and this paper offers alternatives to what discourses in DMP, performance and feminism traditionally ‘should be.’

As a therapist, performer, choreographer, film-maker and scholar, I regularly shift between these multiple identities and in this practice the body becomes a ‘knowing’ subject and an interlocutor of personal and public domains. 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.

This paper highlights the specific focus on language, subjectivity and power which feminism has adapted from poststructuralism (Weedon, 1987, p. 11). Poststructuralism and contemporary feminism are late twentieth century movements that share a certain self-conscious critical relationship towards established philosophical and political traditions. I specifically turn to Butler (2004, p. 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.’ To this I would add a Foucauldian influence (de Lauretis, 2007; Foucault, 1970). With this historical multiplicity in mind, the plurality of language and the impossibility of fixed meanings in relation to sexuality and gender is emphasised, which is reinforced daily since my practice involves striving towards both verbal and non-verbal integration.

Sexuality, gender and performance

The site and the ‘sight’ of sexuality and gender are firmly located in the body. Fear and loathing of the body has pervaded Western contemporary culture for millennia and feminists emphasise a body–mind integration that sits very

comfortably with DMP practice. However, theories about the body within DMP are peculiarly absent. This paper suggests that the process and outcomes of DMP and performance-making assist the practitioner in moving beyond dominant hegemonic and Cartesian discourses.

Rather than use the term 'sexual difference,' I have purposely used the terms 'sexuality' and 'gender.' Further to this, these terms have been separated out 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,' a radical polarisation is not suggested since, as Jennifer Coates (2006, p. 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 paper to explore this link and move towards a deeper understanding of these terms.

As a performer and choreographer, I regard the notion of performance as an art form. Performance may be viewed as a 'constellation of practices' (Huxley & Witts, 2003, p. 2). What characterises all these practices is the established relationship of a performer and a spectator, whether this is live performance, as for dance or theatre, or through media such as film (the term 'film' here is used generically and includes digital video). Another useful perspective is offered by Thornborow and Coates (2005) who state that there are two distinct kinds of performance: (1) the performance of identity and the social self, and (2) the telling of a story as performance (this story can of course be a dance, a film, a psychotherapeutic conversation, or in written format). Within my practice-based research, the medium of film is used to disseminate 'findings' as well as to present an artefact.

A further layer that expands the notion performance, in the context of sexuality and gender, 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, p. 33) (author's italics), suggesting that sexuality and gender is something that is 'done' and that it is 'done' over and over again (Thornborow & Coates, 2005). 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' (or deconstructed) in order to live a more ethical life. To this end, I focus on the importance of how sexuality and gender can be 're-made' (or reconstituted) through the body and this paper offers examples of how this was possible in the *Personal Text Public Body Lab*.

The *Personal Text Public Body Lab*: producing embodied data

In order to create a space to interrogate how sexuality and gender could be 'undone' (deconstructed) and 're-made' (reconstituted), the *Personal Text Public Body Lab* for Arts Therapists and Performance practitioners was established. The Lab is a developmental space in the Winnicottian (1960) sense as it provides a 'holding environment': in another discourse this would be

called a 'performance space.' Thus, the Lab is a construct that was designed in order to reveal therapeutic 'process' as well as constructing an artefact or performance 'product.' The Lab is considered an appropriate space for the expression and investigation of 'everyday-life' where it is possible to examine the relationship between personal and public performances of sexuality and gender. As such, the Lab is an ongoing interdisciplinary space that investigates and develops 'Embodied Performances.' An outcome of the Lab is the production of film-based performance work, which is shown internationally.²

This paper offers specific data episodes or 'vignettes' of my practice-based research, which was established as a closed group for nine 'self-referred' professionals for the duration of one year between 2005–2006.³ This Lab comprised three cycles that were repeated: each cycle was for six days. During each Lab cycle, the first half focused on personal process and the second half focused more on group interaction and public performance, including location filming. Consequently, five days were spent in the 'private' studio space and the last day was spent filming in a 'public' location.

One core directive, also a dance movement improvisation task, in the Lab included my creating boundaries in the space by delineating four quadrants: Body, Sexuality, Gender, Relationships. Participants were invited to explore and embody their relationship to each category and develop solo and group movement and verbal phrasing. The Lab was filmed throughout, and at the end of each day there was a group discussion. These discussions, after each movement experiential, formed the context for my data production. The 'data' for the research was not only 'embodied' within the participants but also existed in the co-creation of meaning between participants and myself as a 'practitioner-researcher' (Payne, 1993). Consequently, the term 'data production' is preferred since it implies that information is gathered and produced by the researcher as a social process rather than 'collected,' which implies that 'facts' are out there waiting for the researcher to spot them (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 154).

Finally, each verbal discussion was audio recorded and analysed using discourse analysis (Coates, 1996; Potter, 2003; Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001), a sociolinguistic tool that emphasises the interpersonal aspects of conversation (Coates, 2005) and attends to the broader social meanings within the research (Aldred, 2000, p. 156). This egalitarian aspect to my research, which was underpinned by feminist principles and practices, is now described.

A feminist methodology

As a feminist researcher I have chosen to write in the first person or 'active voice' (Tong, 1989, p. 228) throughout this paper, and in so doing I seek to challenge the dominant ideology, which stresses a linear and objective third person voice. Narrating in an impersonal way can be considered as an excuse for a passive voice and, as Irigaray (1985) further argues, this distances subject from object and hides the identity of the speaker from the reader/listener.

If I were to remain absent from this research, I would be maintaining the status quo values of authority and power.

Feminist scholars have influenced my approach, particularly those philosophers who have refashioned old concepts, and generated new ideas regarding a range of epistemological issues, including agency, methods of validation, context of discovery and giving participants a 'voice' (Fonow & Cook, 2005; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2003; Tickner, 2005). There are parallels between feminist and more recent auto-ethnographic approaches (Ellis, 2000, 2007; Richardson, 2000; Wyatt, 2005) that also present the first person narrative: the authorial 'I'. However, the emphasis is on the physical process of writing and 'performing' the written story from the page. The auto-ethnographic process may well play a part in the larger autobiographical unfolding for an individual, for example, it may be used as a methodology in order to source written material. However, my emphasis in this project is on starting with dance movement improvisation and allowing language to develop *from* embodied sexual and gendered performances.

Furthermore, a feminist approach not only acknowledges subjectivity but also works towards deconstructing the power relationship in the research process. Although a detailed discussion of these methodological issues is beyond the scope of this paper, I suggest that deconstructing the power relationship in research is possible by consciously attending to the relational process between researcher and participants, as well as, a move towards a more embodied authorial 'I.'

In the next section, three data examples are presented which suggest the gendered and sexual body as: *autobiographical* and *relational* and *political*. The reader will see that specific sentences and words from the data episodes below are emphasised and form the basis for discussion. The overarching concept of performance is woven into all three levels: performance in everyday life and in performance (dance/film).

Gayatri Spivak (1988) sums up her understanding of 'concepts and theoretical principles, not as guidelines, rules, or blue prints for struggle, but as *tools* and *weapons*' (in Grosz, 1995, p. 56, authors italics). Armed with this theoretical arsenal, the data examples are fleshed out and a path is negotiated between the theoretical insights of feminist post-structuralism (Butler, 1990, 1994, 2005), feminist approaches to language (Coates, 2005), aspects of feminist psychoanalysis (Benjamin, 1995; Orbach, 2000, 2004) feminist film theory (de Lauretis, 1994; Mulvey, 1999) and feminist cultural theory (Hooks⁴, 2000). It is my intention is to present a dialogic relationship between the data excerpts and theory, rather than taking an interpretive stance.

The autobiographical body

One way of 'bringing yourself to language' (Benstock, 1988) is through the concept of autobiography. As Birch (2000, p. 175) describes, this involves a process of telling stories about yourself and its relationship to developing a sense of self. This autobiographical process can unfold non-verbally as well

as verbally. It is this meld of verbal and non-verbal autobiographical process that is termed 'Personal Text'.

In the Lab space, each individual is encouraged to 'speak' their Personal Text, for themselves, prior to interaction with others. The facilitative approach during the Lab was informed by my own embodied learning of 20 years as a dancer and over a decade as a therapist. Consequently, participants were invited to view their body as a holding space for 'felt level' (Gendlin, 1996) material, particularly in relation to the four spatial quadrants (sexuality, gender, body, relationships) as described above. Another way participants were helped to 'speak from the body' was to request they work with their 'Dreambody' experiences. Mindell (2000, p. 510) describes the 'Dreambody' as 'a sentient, pre-signal experience manifesting in terms of symptoms and unpredictable motions.' Our dreaming body 'knows', in this sense, our (dream) body precedes us in 'knowing'. The dreaming body is also a dancing body as it can perform unconscious aspects of our 'selves.'

This first excerpt from the Lab presents a reflection from Geoffery that took place after the location shoot in a dank underpass next to a railway station. The following discussion raises issues of embodied social gender performances where a connection between felt-level dance movement, language and power is made.



Film still taken from *Sexy Baby*

Sexy Baby

Geoffery: my emotions . . . when I was working with Jinji in *the sexy baby thing*; there was a young girl by the train station who kept watching and I was very aware of her presence and *this horrible voice doing all of this dirty baby thing* and I really felt quite filthy with that which was quite disturbing . . . and also I remember at one

point it went on for a long time and I was like, how much longer can I do this for? And in my mind I was going 'Beatrice say cut please say cut' and I was trying to continue and then wanted to laugh hysterically and say—no stay with it, stay with it stay with it—and this was so vile, this is so awful, what are people thinking? So that was there emotionally I really did feel quite a *disgusting pervert*.

Working at a felt level, Geoffery appears to hold a range of feelings which collide with the dominant discourses, the everyday social expectations and prejudices that we unwittingly consent to. He was able to experience and hold a range of powerful emotions and to recognise internalised social prejudices as a result. This also seemed to extend his ability to work with the 'uninvited guest' or a temporarily marginalised aspect of his dreaming body.

The sexy baby thing was an iteration that Geoffery can be heard to chant repeatedly in the film episode: '*ooh yeah baby, sexy baby, ooh sexy dancing baby*' and so on. His movements, along with Jinji's cooperation, are part parody and part trance-like: '*it went on for a while*,' Geoffery reminds us. Geoffery is also acutely aware of the presence of a young girl watching this location filming, perhaps amplifying for him his use of language. Interestingly, the fact that this repetitive action was allowed to unfold somehow heightened how repeated gender acts 'congeal' over time (Butler, 1990).

The use of conventional gender language in the *sexy baby* mantra became a somewhat ironic comment on the man as desiring subject and the woman as desired object. Interestingly, during public screenings of the film episode *Sexy Baby*, the overwhelming response from the audience has been one of laughter. hooks (1996) claims that laughter is never innocent. I would add that laughter is also a felt level expression and perhaps in this case it revealed audience recognition of both the parody and the seriousness of dominant (hetero-normative) discourses around sexuality and gender.

We are all inevitably influenced by dominant discourses about sexuality and gender, but to what extent? The significance of this for DMP is that we need quite literally to watch our language, to scrutinise our own internalised dominant discourses. These potentially oppressive social discourses may be woven into our verbal and non-verbal autobiographical stories, shaping and regulating our bodies along the way. Therefore, as practitioners, we need to constantly examine our own fleshy autobiographical texts and address our own embodied, and possibly marginalised, developmental experiences of sexuality and gender. Attending to the plurality of language and the impossibility of fixed meanings in relation to sexuality and gender is therefore important.

In my work, an ongoing focus is the process of verbal and non-verbal integration. I reflected on the discrepancy of my use of language and its relationship with power between the private studio space and the public location filming spaces. During the location shoots I was in directorial (or possibly dictatorial) mode as I allowed Geoffery's action to unfold for some time. I was literally shouting 'Action!' and 'Cut!' which felt strangely at odds with the way I used language in the facilitative space of the Lab where, at times, movement-based words were used in order to reflect somebody's dance movement phrase. In DMT practice, movement-based words or reflections back to the client can be a way of communicating non-judgmentally, for

example describing the quality of a movement as ‘weighty’ or the shape of a body as ‘closed.’ In this context, my words are suggestive and encouraging: ‘perhaps this image...’ or ‘give yourself permission to...’, thus my use of language allows for choice. Although the intention, in the above example, was to democratise the space, it is recognised that not all relations within this space were equal: this can also be said of the therapy space. In order to work safely within therapeutic practice, democratising surely means being able to recognise, acknowledge and work with the constant flux of awareness of hidden sexual and gender hierarchies within our own bodies and those of our clients and to allow this flux to inform the language we use in therapeutic practice. By acknowledging this flux, we can view democratising as a constantly evolving process rather than a fixed state, thus allowing a more explicit negotiation of power relations within the therapeutic encounter.

The relational body

There has been a very strong argument from many feminists for ‘thinking in terms of relations’ (Chodorow, 1978; Orbach, 2004). A relational identity construction suggests that each story and identity is co-created in relationship, not in isolation. This next data episode from the Lab is a reflection from Silvia following a dance movement experiential in the studio space. In this excerpt, Silvia describes how she whispers a secret to the camera. Consequently, in the following discussion I explore the camera as intersubjective ‘seer’ (Benjamin, 1995) highlighting its function as both therapeutic and performative.



Film still taken from *Kick Shit*

Whispering a Secret

Silvia: there's such an *intimate* . . . d'you know . . . possibility that I can actually say *as if I was whispering a secret*. I know it isn't but in that second . . . d'you know it really sighing . . . *I managed to say something . . . not because the camera . . . not for the camera but actually inside me*.

As seen in the film still above, Silvia is approaching the camera with a very direct gaze. By paying attention to my body countertransference, I was guided by a strong desire to hold everyone in my gaze and hold very intimately what they were doing, I wanted to get physically closer with the camera, and the camera began to offer me a more intense 'holding environment' (Winnicott, 1960). Interestingly, Butler (2005, p. 59) conceptualises the transference as Winnicott's holding environment 'which offers a bodily presence in a temporal present.' If this camera is considered as an intersubjective 'seeing body' perhaps it becomes a good enough witness for Silvia's *secret*. This camera sees, contains and carries everyone's temporal images and then projects it back. This leads me to wonder whether this process then allows participants to shift from 'obscured' vision to clarity, from darkness into light? I am required to consider whether being 'held' by myself in tandem with the camera facilitated the narrating of Silvia's *secret* in a more fully expressive way, which goes beyond verbal language.

During the Lab, participants were encouraged to playfully engage not only in dance movement improvisation, but also with 'seeing' and 'being seen' by camera. Playful activity was facilitated though verbal interventions where it was emphasised that there was no 'right' or 'wrong', rather, a space where participants could give themselves 'permission' to experiment with other moving bodies as well as with the camera.

In the film episode *Kick Shit*, Silvia is playing with her relationship to the camera or 'seer.' Although it doesn't have the same quality as a potential 'Linus blanket,' Silvia refers to the *intimate possibility* of the camera which may be seen to become a transitional object for her, an 'object' for her projections which invariably becomes a vehicle for literally projecting her. If the camera is the mid-way or transitional point then Silvia may be said to be experimenting with the 'me-in-relation', and by playing with the transition she allows her body to be a 'relational body' (Orbach, 2000, p. 23).

It is through Silvia's intersubjective relationship with the camera, rather than the emphasis on the boundary between her and the camera, that offers her a reflective opportunity to *say something* for herself rather than for the camera. By doing this she subverts the conventions of a voyeuristic camera (or male) gaze (de Lauretis, 1994, 2007; Mulvey, 1999). Fascinatingly, the fact that it remains *a secret* for Silvia seems to speak of the oppressive social impact of 'who does the seeing and who gets seen' and I am struck by the powerful gaze with which she confronts the camera ('seer').

The use of camera in the therapeutic space is a relevant issue in DMT supervision, particularly for trainees. If we are to engage with this digital technology and play with its representative possibilities, as explored above,

we may find that the camera offers new interventive skills. However, as Bruna Seu (1998) warns, the therapeutic space cannot escape from the same ideological dynamics that govern the rest of our lives. Therefore, within the therapeutic relationship, we need to heed who is doing the seeing/knowing as well as how and when, if we are to be attentive to intersubjective power relations. Surely our body countertransference is layered with our sexual and gendered subjectivities and, as Dance Movement Therapists, this warrants our close scrutiny? I would suggest that seeing/knowing is not a politically neutral place, just as language is not neutral: knowing from the inside is also informed by dominant discourses. For example, if the therapist is organised by a hegemonic heterosexual bias, then this will influence attitudes and interventions towards the client.

The political body

In this section it is argued that by virtue of ‘becoming’ public, the body is politically implicated, because of its ‘situatedness’ in the social. I work with the notion of the political at a micro and a macro level and I argue that the current Third Wave of so-called post-feminism is de-politicising. Feminists are concerned with politics at personal and public levels and Second Wave feminism has been misconstrued as attacking *individual* men, whereas this is not the case. The challenge was to the patriarchal, a political system that maintains male power. The following data episode is from Vaughan after his participation in a dance movement experiential. He reflects on the social and political discourses of ‘being a man’.



Film still taken from *Sniff and Spin*

It's alright for a man to be led

Vaughan: *I experienced a lot of the feminine when I was playing with Dominique and... as she was leading me and playing with me (laughter) and I was allowing myself to be really vulnerable with her and it was a really nice feeling to be led and know that person's actually just being playful with you that this is about fun, this isn't about leading you to a dark place or any where, this is, this is just about fun and actually sometimes it's alright for a man to be led you don't have to be yang and out there doing...you know...which I'm often in that role...I'm often pushed into that role especially at work 'cos there's a predominantly female team and I have to...(laughs)...so it was really nice to feel that and then when I came over here I got very much into that male part and when I ran and lifted Dominique...and I didn't know...should I? And she's a woman and she might mis-read me...and those sorts of things and I had to make sure that I picked her up just sort of in the right place cos it might...so I just thought 'go for it' and I did and it worked alright...*

During the dance movement experientials in the Lab, Vaughan reflects: *'I experienced a lot of the feminine when I was playing with Dominique.'* This experience seems to have introduced Vaughan to a possibility of experiencing a shared space where *'she was leading me and playing with me and I was allowing myself to be really vulnerable with her.'* Vaughan's expression of vulnerability is a challenge to the dominant discourses around masculinity.

The dominant discourse dictates that men *'need to be yang and out there doing'* as Vaughan identifies for himself, yet he is able to hold this awareness whilst shifting position, where he states, *'you don't have to be yang and out there doing.'* He acknowledges the wider political discourse on 'how men should be' whilst also allowing himself to play with this restrictive construction of masculinity in dance movement improvisation. Vaughan explains another aspect of his experience of 'how men should be: *'I'm often put in that role...especially at work...cos there's a predominantly female team.'* This comment highlights the importance in acknowledging the role women play in maintaining and perpetuating sexism and as Hooks (2000, p. 68) reminds us *'patriarchy stripped men of certain rights, imposing on them a sexist masculine identity.'*

Vaughan describes an important transition from his public and professional role when he states *'and then...I got very much into that male part...I ran and lifted Dominique.'* However, rather than perpetuate a 'sexist masculine identity,' Vaughan explored less constraining aspects of masculinity by *'playing with Dominique.'* Grosz (1995, p. 124) states that *'unless men can invent other ways to occupy space...than according to the logic of...domination...unless they can accord women their own space, and negotiate the occupation of shared spaces...unless they respect spaces that are not theirs, entering only when invited...can they share in the contributions women have to offer in the reconceiving of space and place.'* During the Lab, Vaughan did *'negotiate the occupation of a shared space'* with Dominique through playful improvisation. He describes how he sensitively acknowledged her position and this is evident in his uncertainty: *'I didn't know...should I?...and she might mis-read me.'* Therefore, Vaughan allowed himself to experiment with the possibilities of newly co-created corporeal embodiments.

Conclusions: therapy, performance and beyond

By interrogating sexuality and gender through therapeutic and filmic techniques a ‘working’ model has been created. Leventhal (2005, p. 4) suggests the importance of developing a working model since it offers a road map or ‘holding’ of yourself as you are evolving. Consequently, my working model is feminist and the strength of feminist theory is ‘not its closure of certain positions with which it disagrees, but its openness to its own retranscriptions and rewritings’ (Grosz, 1995, p. 80).

This working feminist model is termed ‘Embodied Performances’ and, as discussed in this paper, it emphasises that embodied performances of sexuality and gender highlight autobiographical, relational and political unfolding both through verbal and non-verbal expression. By asking questions about ‘how’ sexuality and gender is performed, the intention has been to ‘bring fresh perspectives to bear on old questions and ask new questions about ourselves and the social worlds within which we interact’ (Harding & Norberg, 2005, p. 2110). The examples in this paper show how the repeated act of gender ‘congeals over time’, and introduces the possibility of ‘doing’ and ‘undoing’ gender and sexuality in a multiplicity of non-oppressive and embodied ways.

For me, therapeutic, artistic and social intervention intersect. It is not suggested that as practitioners we need to identify with a political movement and that everyone become feminist, but that practitioners consider contemporary feminist principles since they offer ideologically and politically responsible ways of positioning ourselves where we can work more explicitly with issues of power and agency. Additionally, a feminist interdisciplinary focus points towards equalising at the level of theoretical perspectives where there can be an ‘equal valuing of difference and an awareness that there are no single absolute truths or even therapy theories that explain everything’ (Chaplin, 2001, p. 135). This equalising perspective reflects my use of dance movement improvisation both as a clinician and as choreographer, where sexual and gendered performances and relationships are co-created and in a constant state of flux and this has led me to evolve an ethical stance which informs more democratic (therapeutic and artistic) interventions.

The personal *is* political, more so if we strive towards embodied practice. A political awareness may encourage a more ethical approach to practice. If we do not pay attention to our performances of sexuality and gender we risk marginalising core aspects of our embodied identity and those of our clients. Thus we risk dis-empowerment and dis-embodiment. Embodiment is possible by paying attention to how we perform our lives. We continually reconfigure our subjectivities throughout our lives as, for example, when a major event occurs like birth, death or illness. But we also reconfigure in everyday interactions and relationships that shape and re-shape us physically, emotionally and mentally. If we don’t allow ourselves to be curious about the process of re-shaping; if we remain unconscious about it, then we limit the possibilities open to us in life and health. We risk being the object rather than the subject of our own lives. *Tempus fugit*. We need to expand our awareness now; our bodies are waiting.

Notes on contributor

Dr. Beatrice Allegranti is a Senior Registered Dance Movement Psychotherapist, Artistic Director of the *Personal Text Public Body* Lab and Co-ordinator for the MA/PhD in Dance Movement Psychotherapy at Roehampton University, London. Beatrice's interdisciplinary experience over the past sixteen years includes: clinical practice in adult mental health within the UK National Health System as well as performance/choreography for dance, theatre and film and training actors, dancers and therapists. Her international work includes: facilitation (*Arts for Peace Foundation, Ireland*), teaching (*Institute for Dance and Psychotherapy, Warsaw*), performance, and film making (*City Ghosts* 2009, *In My Body* 2005, *Personal Text Public Body* 2007). Visit www.embodiedpractice.co.uk.

Notes

1. This Practice-based Doctoral Research included 36 short film episodes that were an integral part of the written thesis. The project took place between 2004–2007 and was made possible with a scholarship received from Roehampton University, School of Human and Life Sciences.
2. For details of Lab film screenings visit www.embodiedpractice.co.uk
3. All participants in the Lab doctoral research project gave consent for their names to be used and images to be shown publicly.
4. The author, bell Hooks, uses unconventional lower casing for her name.

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