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1 Materialising bodies: There is nothing more material than a socially constructed
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Over the last one of two decades, researchers within the physical education and sport pedagogy research frequently use the concept ‘the material body’. An initial purpose of this article is to explore what a concept of a ‘material body’ might mean. What other bodies are there? Who would dispute the materiality of bodies? I suggest that the use of a concept as ‘the material body’ suggests a hesitation before the radicalism of the linguistic turn in the sense that the concept ‘discourse’ does not include a material dimension. In this way ‘the material body’ relates to an interpretation of ‘the socially (or discursively) constructed body’ as void of matter. A further purpose with the article is to re-inscribe matter in the concept of ‘discourse’. This is done by way of discussing what theorists like Michel Foucault and, in particular, Judith Butler, has to say about the materiality of the body. In their writings, discourse should not be limited to spoken and/or written language. Rather, discourse is understood in terms of actions and events that create meanings – that matters. One conclusion of the article is that it is important to problematise the mundane view of discourse as ‘verbal interchange’ because it reinforces the promise of an objective knowledge that will eventually shed light on the ‘real’ body and the mysteries of sexual difference, what its origins are, what causes it. Another conclusion is that the physical education and sport pedagogy research should pay less attention to the body as an object (what it ‘is’), and pay more attention to how the body matters, and e.g. how movements make bodies matter.

Key words: poststructuralism, social construction, physical education, the material body, discourse, materialisation

Theorizing from the ruins of the Logos invites the following question: “What about the materiality of the body?” Actually, in the recent past, the question was repeatedly formulated to me this way: “What about the materiality of the body, *Judy*?” I took it that the addition of “Judy” was an effort to dislodge me from the more formal “Judith” and to recall me to a bodily life that could not be theorized away. There was a certain exasperation in the delivery of that final diminutive, a certain patronizing quality which (re)constituted me as an unruly child, one who needed to be brought to task, restored to that bodily being which is, after all, considered to be most real, most pressing, most undeniable. Perhaps this was an effort to recall me to an apparently evacuated femininity, the one that was constituted at that moment in the mid-‘50s when the figure of Judy Garland inadvertently produced a string of “Judys” whose later appropriations and derailments could not have been predicted. Or perhaps someone forgot to teach me “the facts of life”? Was I lost to my own imaginary musings as that vital conversation was taking place? And if I persisted in this notion that bodies were in some way *constructed*, perhaps I really thought that words alone had the power to craft bodies from their own linguistic substance?

Couldn’t someone simply take me aside?”

Judith Butler, 1993

Introduction (1)

Sport and physical education practices are, and have been, influencing knowledge formation about the body, and knowledge about the body is, and equally has been, important in relation to the forming of physical education and different sports. Up until one or two decades ago, the body as an object of scientific study was primarily a matter for medical and scientific

research. And medical and scientific research has had a huge impact on the education of bodies (Tinning, 2010). In accordance with the Cartesian division between mind (cogito) and body (corpus), the exploration of the body was first and foremost a medical and scientific venture. Thus, the body as an object of research primarily came to be understood in terms of physical matter, bereft of spirituality and cultural significance, governed by nature's mechanistic and universal laws. However, important for the development of the medical progress in contemporary societies, such knowledge has contributed also to the estrangement of the body to human beings (Bordo, 1996). As different areas of the body culture have been researched, medical and scientific research has highlighted functional aspects of body and embodiment, much to the expense of existential ones and value issues.

The twentieth century has seen a gradually increasing interest in issues of body and embodiment in the social sciences and humanities (e.g. Featherstone, Hepworth & Turner, 1991; Fraser & Greco, 2005; Shilling, 1993; Turner, 1984), and also in the physical education and sociology of sport research (e.g. Evans, Davies and Wright, 2004; Kirk, 2001; Wright and Harwood, 2009). One important feature of this scholarly work has been to move beyond the dichotomy between body and soul, and also beyond a whole range of dualisms related to this dichotomy, for instance mind/matter, actor/structure, male/female, etc. Moving beyond conventional dualisms is important for a number of reasons. Dualisms typically convey power orders in the sense that the binary also includes a hierarchy, rendering either side of the binary 'good or bad', 'high or low', 'active or passive' and, importantly, 'true or false'. In relation to the body, which commonly end up on the bad/low/passive side, dualisms like these give legitimacy to certain measures taken from the side of the high/active side of the binary.

Several attempts of moving beyond conventional dualisms have evolved, *inter alia* under names such as social constructionism and poststructuralism (which are designations that I fortuitously see as interchangeable). The notion of reality being 'socially constructed' was

highlighted in 1967 as Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's published their groundbreaking book *The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). As can be seen in the book title, Berger and Luckmann's work was primarily a contribution into epistemology. For myself, since I am a physical educationalist, I have become interested in what the notion of 'social construction' has to offer in the study of moving bodies. My entry into the conceptual universe of social constructions was however not through Berger and Luckmann's sociology of knowledge, but rather through a French scholarly tradition that has been called historical epistemology (Broady, 1990, see also Kirk, 2001), a tradition that radicalises the concept of reality, i.e. an ontological approach. Another expression of this tradition is *poststructuralist*, a term, however, that is sometimes not recognised by the researchers within the tradition in question (see e.g. Foucault, 1998).

First and foremost, my inspiration has come from the French philosopher and historian of ideas Michel Foucault. In my view, Foucault, almost simultaneous to Berger and Luckmann, outlined a highly influential framework for theorising bodies that has not yet been fully utilised; a framework that was further developed during the 1990s by American philosopher and professor of rhetoric Judith Butler. As indicated in the quotation above, however, Butler's radical constructionism met extensive criticism. In particular, the criticism seems to be based on the notion that viewing reality – and bodies – as 'social constructions' is a kind of discursive idealism, empty of matter; a critique that appears to be grounded within a view of language and discourse that is not, however, in accordance with the so called 'linguistic turn' in its radical sense.

Research within physical education has been highly influenced by poststructural theorising (see e.g. Macdonald et al., 2002; Wright, 1995; Wright, 2006), also when it comes to the study of the body (Azzarito and Solomon, 2006; Oliver and Lalik, 2004; Wright and Harwood, 2009). In the research, however, I believe that the most radical interpretations of

the linguistic turn and what it means for the study of the body is at times met with some skepticism. In simple terms, this is arguably illustrated by the use of concepts such as ‘material body’ (e.g. Brown, 2006, p. 168, 170 and 176; Kirk, 2001, p. 480; Tinning, 2004, p. 248) or ‘physical body’ (e.g. Ennis, 2006, p. 44 and 51; Wellard, et al., 2007, p. 83f; Fisette, 2011, p. 187ff). I do not want to suggest any particular interpretation of the use of such concepts here, but *per se the use* of them. It might even be that the authors in question want to make the same point with using ‘the material body’ as I do, but anyway, the concept is there and I want to explore a bit further what this means. Why don’t they just write ‘the body’? The concept ‘the material body’ is, arguably, not used by researchers within a classical research paradigm, where the body is indeed at the outset understood as material/physical. Neither would it, logically, be used among researchers who take the body to matter as a socio-physical phenomenon beyond the linguistic turn in its radical sense. From reading and discussing this issue with researchers within the field (some of whose articles I quote below), I have come to the tentative conclusion that researchers sometimes take a somewhat skeptic line as to how far-reaching the linguistic turn should be pushed in its radicalism in relation to issues of body and embodiment. Although it is often said that dualisms might be found in the practice of PE, and among practitioners’ ways of reasoning about practice and the body, but not in research and among researchers, I am not entirely convinced of this assertion.

For the sake of further discussion, I choose to interpret the use of the concept ‘material body’ and some statements in the literature on the body in PE as socially constructed as indications of a criticism, or possibly a skepticism, towards a radical poststructuralist account of the body as socially constructed. This, in turn, gives me a reason to discuss notions of materiality, or what ‘matters’, with a social constructivist/poststructuralist account of the body. It gives me a reason to discuss why there is nothing more material than a socially constructed body.

Guidance will be sought in the work of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. In particular, I will

return to Butler's discussion of how bodies matter in the book *Bodies That Matter* (1993). *Bodies That Matter* offers answers to a critique that Butler received after publishing her first book, *Gender Trouble* (1990), a critique that to its basic features resembles the problems regarding bodies as socially constructed that I want to discuss here. Of particular importance are Butler's thoughts on how bodies *materialise*. These thoughts can be seen as a proposal on how to dissolve the dualism between 'the socially constructed body' and 'the material body'.

'Bodies do matter' (1)

One article where the concept 'the material body' is used in the physical education literature is "The challenges of intersectionality: Researching Difference in physical education" by Ann Flintoff, Hayley Fitzgerald and Sheila Scraton (2008). The concept is used in a discussion about the need for an intersectional perspective in the study of physical education. The authors argue that social issues, issues of power, in the previous research have been studied too much based on singular social categories (gender *or* ethnicity *or* social class, etc.). The approach is considered important for understanding differences in the human condition in the context of physical education. The article has met a lot of attention and rightly so. My concern here is not to question the significance of it, but to grapple with a few formulations that express the theme of this article. Fairly early on the authors raise a warning finger against what they perceive as the 'fluid nature' of poststructuralist theorising:

Critiques of categorical thinking have lead to recognition of multiple and fluid nature of individuals' identities *and* the complex ways in which enduring inequalities are produced through social relations of difference.

However, although theory continues to shift and develop, new explanations raise new questions. A central problematic remains over the role of the material body. Although

schooling is increasingly recognized as an embodied practice, a focus on the body has been somewhat absent in feminist and critical educational research on difference and inequality. (Flintoff et al., 2008, s. 74)

Here, the concept ‘the material body’ relates to the question of the ‘multiple and fluid nature of individuals’ identities and the complex ways in which enduring inequalities are produced through social relations of difference’. The subsequent paragraph starts with ‘however’, which pinpoints the problematic relation between ‘the material body’ and the fluidity of poststructuralist theorising. My question is what ‘the material body’ might designate in this relation. What other bodies exist, apart from ‘the material body’? Are we to view ‘the material body’ as something solid and indisputable outside of the fluidity and uncertainty of poststructural theorising? Somewhat later in their article, Flintoff et al. (2008) highlights that:

Studies of young people’s experiences clearly show the importance of their embodiment to their identities and positioning in PE and schooling (e.g. Evans, Rich and Holroyd 2004; Gorely, Holroyd, and Kirk 2003; Scraton 1989, 1992; Wright, Macdonald, and Groom 2003). Different bodies do matter in PE; how they move and how they ‘look’ is central to whether individuals feel comfortable and are judged as having ‘ability’ and, hence, status in the subject (Evans 2004). (Flintoff et al., 2008, s. 78)

Flintoff and co-workers particularly emphasise the importance of embodiment and that different bodies ‘do matter’, but *in relation to what* is this important? Why do the authors continuously return to the materiality of the body? Perhaps we can grasp the problem better if we approach it from another angle? In my reading the relation between the fluidity of poststructural theorising and the fact that bodies do matter is linked to the relation between ‘difference’ and ‘inequalities’. “[D]ifference is one of the most significant, yet unresolved, issues for feminist and social thinking ...” (Flintoff et al., 2008, p. 73, with reference to

184 Maynard, 2002). Difference is indeed a focal problem in poststructuralist theorising, but
185 Flintoff and colleagues seem eager not to emphasise difference at the expense of inequalities.
186 This reading opens up a dichotomy between difference (the ‘fluidity’ of poststructural
187 theorising) and 'material inequalities' which is parallel to a dichotomy between ‘the multiple
188 and fluid nature of individuals’ and ‘the materiality of the body’. This reading relates to the
189 quotation below:

190 ... not all agree that such analysis [poststructural analysis; my note] are helpful, warning
191 that an over-emphasis on difference and diversity should not be at the expense of
192 ignoring enduring, *material* inequalities that remain evident (Francis 1999). (Flintoff et
193 al., 2008, p. 78; my emphasis)

194 My interpretation of this is that the concept ‘the material body’ is used here because of an
195 uncertainty, or scepticism, about what matters in a poststructural analysis. This takes us back
196 to Butler having to account for the materiality of the body: “What about the materiality of the
197 body?” (Butler, 1993, p. ix). In fact, bodies *are* of central importance in the poststructuralist
198 project, but not, I think, in the way that some critics assume it does.

199

200 ‘Mere discourse’ (1)

201 One of today's most influential researchers of physical education and the body is John Evans.
202 Together with a number of colleagues, he has in recent years published a number of articles
203 that have attracted much attention among other researchers. In some of these articles, Evans
204 raises concern about the poststructuralist approach in such a way that I think it is possible to
205 determine where the shoe pinches. In a footnote to the article "Levels on the playing field: the
206 social construction of physical 'ability' in the physical education curriculum," Evans and
207 colleagues (2008) writes:

We use the term ‘configuration’ rather than ‘construction’ to avoid the reductionism inherent in the latter concept and the rather absurd claim that ‘ability’ can be considered *simply* as a discursive production or linguistic artefact. The latter would leave us in the untenable position, unable to deal adequately with the affective and corporeal dimensions of embodiment, for example, pain, pleasure, sorrow, caring: qualities that are invariably involved in meeting criteria of ‘ability’. (p. 45; my emphasis)

I will devote particular interest to what, in the quoted passage, is seen as ‘simply a discursive production or linguistic artefact’. A similar way of framing the relation between discourses and bodies occurs in a later article, "The Body Made Flesh: embodied learning and the Corporeal device" (Evans, Davies & Rich, 2009). The following long quotation contains a number of interesting issues to discuss in relation to viewing the body as a social construction and what this construction entails:

We do not provide a detailed overview of the wide range of perspectives brought to bear on ‘the body’ through social theory but seek to explore and exemplify their differing capacities to deal with specific features of the body-culture nexus, without dissolving either or both to *mere* ‘discourse’ (p. 392; my emphasis).

And it is this latter element of our work, involving the interrogation of the lived experience of young people and how they actively interpret and react ‘agentically’ to the transmission of health knowledge/s in school, that has brought to the fore the significance of ‘the body’ not *just* as discursive construction, a conduit for the relay of messages outside itself, but as a biological body, a material relay of and for itself in processes of reproduction (p. 393; my emphasis).

Our data demonstrate that discourses are always inevitably mediated for individuals through their material (flesh and blood, sentient, thinking and feeling) bodies, their

actions and those of their peers, parents/guardians and other adults. And as a way of articulating the materiality of the *lived experiences* typically associated with acquiring the attributes required by obesity discourse and ‘the actual embodied changes resulting from this process’ (Shilling 2003, 13), we have been inclined, *pace* Bernstein, to talk of the ‘*corporeal device*’ – to focus on the body as not **just** a discursive representation and relay of messages and power relations external ‘*to itself*’ but as a voice ‘*of itself*’ (p. 393; my emphasis in bold).

The significance of the words ‘simply’, ‘just’ and ‘mere’ is of course not univocal. The authors might want to point out that a social constructionist/poststructuralist approach to the body is not enough in order to reach a deep and nuanced understanding of the body. I agree on this. But it might also have to do with that the authors hesitate before the radical account of the social constructionist/poststructuralist way of understanding the body and how matter is conceptualised within such a framework. In my reading, the quoted passages reproduces precisely the dichotomy between language and reality (materiality) that appears to be Evans and colleagues’ ambition to dissolve: ”... we seek to avoid a form of reductionism that separates the biological from the social ...” (Evans & Penney, 2008, p. 45). The dichotomy arises instead in terms of on one hand discourse/language and reality/materiality/body on the other. Understanding the words ‘simply’, ‘just’ and ‘mere’ in this way, suggests that it is the concept of *discourse* that is the culprit. In a conventional sense, were *discourse* represents what it states, the body is reduced to being “a source of inscription, a relay of social relations external to itself.” Hence, “it fails to interrogate the nature of the relay adequately, including the materiality of the body itself and its productive capacities” (Evans, Davies & Rich, 2009, p. 397).

This way of viewing ‘discourse’ echoes an everyday definition of the concept. According to the dictionary ‘discourse’ means a "verbal interchange of ideas" ([www.britannica.com /](http://www.britannica.com/)

discourse). Based on this definition, the referenced authors' reservations for a view of the body as a social, or discursive, construction appear relevant. Is it “that words alone ha[ve] the power to craft bodies from their own linguistic substance” (Butler, 1993, p. x)? And the injustices that Flintoff and co-workers refer to, can they simply be brushed aside with an 'ideological' notion of difference? The only question is who represents such a perspective?

Embodied descent (1)

During my years as a researcher with an interest in the body and within poststructuralist theorising, I have actually never come across someone who has made him- or herself the champion of the mundane definition of discourse, at least not in relation to researching the body and inequalities. However, it appears that sceptics of poststructuralism sometimes make that interpretation. To my knowledge there are no poststructuralist scholars who would deny the materiality of the body or existing inequalities. On the contrary, the term 'the social construction of the body' is indeed about the material body, and how inequalities materialise through discursive practice. This is about a material body that is not void of sociocultural potential. There is no contradiction between 'the social construction of body' and 'the material body'; it is about how bodies matter, not what the material body 'is' in an objectified sense. Poststructuralism offers an understanding of the materiality of the body as an alternative to the conventional and dualist understanding of the relationship between mind/subject and body/object. In *Gender Trouble* Judith Butler writes (1990) as follows:

A genealogical critique refuses to search for the origins of gender, the inner truth of female desire, a genuine or authentic sexual identity that repression has kept from view; rather, genealogy investigates the political stakes in designating as an *origin* and *cause*

280 those identity categories that are in fact the *effects* of institutions, practices, discourses
281 with multiple and diffuse points of origin. (s. ix)

282 Using this approach, one could describe a genealogy of the body as follows: *A genealogy of*
283 *the body would be about investigating the political stakes in designating the notion of a*
284 *'material body' as an origin and cause that are in fact the effects of institutions, practices,*
285 *discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin.* We will then, not surprisingly, end up
286 close to the French philosopher Michel Foucault's approach to the body in a text called
287 "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (Foucault, 1996). I hope the reader bears with me that I
288 devote considerable space here to a passage in this text that I find highly significant:

289 Finally, descent attaches itself to the body. It inscribes itself in the nervous system, in
290 temperament, in the digestive apparatus; it appears in faulty respiration, in improper
291 diets, in the debilitated and prostrate body of those whose ancestors committed errors.
292 Fathers have only to mistake effects for causes, believe in the reality of an "afterlife," or
293 maintain the value of eternal truths, and the bodies of their children will suffer.
294 Cowardice and hypocrisy, for their part, are the simple offshoots of error: not in a
295 Socratic sense, not that evil is the result of a mistake, not because of a turning away
296 from an original truth, but because the body maintains, in life as in death, through its
297 strength or weakness, the sanction of every truth and error, as it sustains, in an inverse
298 manner, the origin – descent. [...] The body – and everything that touches it: diet,
299 climate, and soil – is the domain of *Herkunft*. The body manifests the stigmata of past
300 experience and also gives rise to desires, failings, and errors. These elements may join
301 in a body where they achieve a sudden expression, but as often, the body becomes the
302 pretext of their insurmountable conflict.

The body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated Self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration. Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted in history and the process of history's destruction of the body. (p. 366)

No doubt Foucault speaks here about the materiality of the body and nothing else (nervous system, temperament, digestive system, respiration, desire). The quotation also illustrates that a genealogical approach, taken to be a discourse analysis of the body, is not an analysis restricted to 'what is said and what remains unsaid' (Sparkes, 1990: 9, see also e.g. Rossi et al. 2009, p. 75-6; Sage, 1993: 155) *about* the body, but more importantly *how practices make the body matter in the world*. In my view, this makes a poststructuralist approach to the body – and to moving bodies – interesting to physical educationalists as compared to merely studying what is said, and not said, about moving bodies. This is the starting point for Judith Butler in *Bodies That Matter*.

Bodies that matter - materialising bodies (1)

Poststructuralism can be described as a kind of hermeneutics of semiotics (see Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982), where the analytical focus is on the structural relationship between different signs/actions/events and the meanings that these differences produce. Reality is performed through the repeated occurrence of *certain* relationships, or differences, between signs/actions/events. This point was made already within the structuralist project, but within poststructuralism emphasis is shifting from general or universal patterns (i.e. abstract and with a focus on the synchronous) and a hub from which the sign system is governed, to local and historically specific differences (i.e. concrete actions and events and with a focus on the

327 diachronic). It is this gap that opens up for a material understanding of the sign – the action,
328 the event. Poststructuralist theories dissolve the distinction between the (abstract) sign and the
329 (concrete) signified. Butler’s preface to *Bodies That Matter* reflects this perspective:

330 For surely bodies live and die; eat and sleep; feel pain, pleasure; endure illness and
331 violence; and these “facts,” one might sceptically proclaim, cannot be dismissed as mere
332 construction. Surely there must be some kind of necessity that accompanies these
333 primary and irrefutable experiences. And surely there is. But their irrefutability in no
334 way implies what it might mean to affirm them and through what discursive means.
335 Moreover, why is it that what is constructed is understood as an artificial and
336 dispensable character? (Butler, 1993, p. xi)

337 In this passage, Butler chooses to write about what bodies do, what people do, and how they
338 experience it. This indicates an analytical shift from the bodily functions of living and dying,
339 eating and sleeping, feeling pain and pleasure, and enduring illness and violence, for instance
340 to how sport practices, i.e. training and competition, and health-related physical activity, etc.,
341 have regulated eating, sleeping, feeling pain and pleasure, and enduring illness and violence
342 in specific ways; a shift that has much to offer to physical educationalists. Butler emphasises
343 the material dimensions of how people experience actions and events since “[t]hinking the
344 body as constructed demands a rethinking of the meaning of construction itself” (Butler,
345 1993, p. xi). This reformulation of what is 'constructed' includes a settlement with the notion
346 that 'everything is discursively constructed': “for the point has never been that ‘everything is
347 discursively constructed’; that point, when and where it is made, belongs to a kind of
348 discursive monism or linguisticism that refuses the constitutive force of exclusion, erasure,
349 violent foreclosure, abjection and its disruptive return within the very terms of discursively
350 legitimacy ... Construction must mean more than such a simple reversal of terms” (Butler,
351 1993, ss. 8f). This comment is arguably motivated by sceptics’ disinclination to view reality

as socially constructed if discourse designates 'verbal interchange', or 'what is said and remains unsaid'. The concern about the materiality of the body that is highlighted in the aforementioned physical education and sociology of sport literature might be based on precisely such a reversal in terms: discourse can, in its everyday sense, not produce matter/bodies; therefore the poststructuralist/social constructionist position is absurd. As an alternative to 'construction', Butler offers a concept of *materialisation* to clarify that it is matter, or what matters, that we are dealing with here, and that we should pay attention to the processes that produce bodies as perceivable subjects and objects:

... the notion of matter, not as site or surface, but as *a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter.*

(Butler, 1993, s. 9)

This is not to say that discourse causes what it designates, but that there is no 'pure' or original body outside of practices of signification that can serve as evidence to what is designated to be a body (and how it matters) (cf. Butler, 1993, p. 10). Discourses viewed as concrete practices, rather than as linguistic regularities, produce objects and subjects. On several occasions in *Bodies That Matter*, Butler stresses that the sign of poststructuralism is to be regarded as a material sign:

The body posited as prior to the sign, is always *posited* or *signified* as *prior*. This signification produces as an *effect* of its own procedure the very body that it nevertheless and simultaneously claims to discover as that which *precedes* its own action. If the body signified as prior to signification is an effect of signification, then the mimetic or representational status of language, which claims that signs follow bodies as their necessary mirrors, is not mimetic at all. On the contrary, it is productive, constitutive, one might even argue *performative*, inasmuch as this signifying act

delimits and contours the body that it then claims to find prior to any and all
signification.

This is not to say that the materiality of the body is simply and only a linguistic effect
which is reducible to a set of signifiers. Such a distinction overlooks the materiality of
the signifier itself” (Butler, 1993, s. 30).

In this way, the ‘physical/material body’ is nonsensical, only bodies matter. Researchers refer
to a ‘material body’ as long as they imagine a body prior to signification that has explanative
potential, and that can validate propositions about ‘the body’. My approach to this is that it is
not meaningful to refer to any body before signification; not first and foremost because of a
general scepticism about the existence of any such body, but because of a critical approach
towards *the power to know*. To insist on referring to such a body constitutes a problem that I
would like to come back to in the final section of the article. Let me first suggest how the
dualism between ‘the socially constructed body’ and ‘the material body’ may be dissolved;
how ‘construction’ can be reconceptualised; how the body *materialises* in historical, cultural
and social practices.

Body – Action – Event (1)

Already Nietzsche pointed out the significance of the action/event (practice) for the
understanding of reality. In *The Gay Science* (2001, orig. 1882) and again in *On the
Genealogy of Morals* (1969, orig. 1887), he highlights the obsession within Western thought
to explain actions/events in terms of something that lays ‘behind’ the actual actions/events, a
tendency to understand actions/events in relation to their ‘origin’ and ‘cause’: God, Nature,
History, Will, the Subject, or, in this case, Language or Discourse. Instead, Nietzsche turned
attention to the actual actions and events, not to explain them in isolation caused by

400 'underlying' forces, but to understand them, precisely, within a flow of actions and events
401 resulting from past actions and events being constitutive to future ones. The tendency to seek
402 for origins and causes 'behind' reality is for Nietzsche about the will to power. God, Nature,
403 History, Language – 'the material body' – are invented to serve certain political initiatives
404 (Nietzsche, 2001/1882; 1994/1887). Foucault picks up these thoughts in the formulation of his
405 genealogical approach in 'Nietzsche, genealogy, history' (Foucault, 1996/1977) and that
406 Butler develops further in *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter* (Butler 1990, 1993).
407 Rather than 'origin' and 'cause' we should speak about 'descent' and 'performativity'. The
408 body should not be seen as caused by discourses, but rather as performed through discursive
409 practices of diverse descent, and sport and physical education practices can be seen as such
410 discursive practice.

411 In *Gender Trouble* (Butler, 1990), Butler outlines a genealogical understanding of body and
412 sex/gender. This understanding, which in *Bodies That Matter* leads to a formulation of the
413 concept *materialisation*, is performative in nature. It is true that the grounds for this theory
414 derives, *inter alia*, from linguistics, not least from Ferdinand de Saussure and his semiology,
415 and from J.L. Austin's and J.R. Searle's speech act theory (see Cobley, 1996). Butler,
416 however, as was stated earlier, rejects the idea of a split between signifier and signified, where
417 the signified is to be seen as *a priori* to the signifier. Rather, signifier and signified is
418 constituted in a single movement. For Butler, the sign is not an abstract representation of
419 something else, but something very much material and performative, something that performs
420 what it represents. In terms of the body, this means that 'bodies that matter' are bodies that
421 *mean something*, not a (fictional) 'material' body outside of discourse.

422 In *Gender Trouble* Butler makes up with the idea that 'behind' sex exists either a generative
423 force that causes individual gender identities tied to certain bodies or a social gender order
424 that imposes itself on passive bodies. Sex/gender (gender identities, gender roles) is

425 understood instead as a lived, or practiced, outcome of historical processes of power and
426 knowledge relationships.

427 The body gains meaning within discourse only in the context of power relations.
428 Sexuality is an historically specific organization of power, discourse, bodies, and
429 affectivity. As such, sexuality is understood by Foucault to produce “sex” as an artificial
430 concept which effectively extends and disguises the power relations responsible for its
431 genesis. (Butler, 1990, s. 92)

432 What, then, more specifically, constitute this 'organisation of power, discourse, bodies and
433 affectivity'? A basic answer to that question is that we as humans ‘do’ sex/gender – and that
434 we do it in precisely the way we do within the frames of what Butler calls a ‘heterosexual
435 matrix’ (cf. Butler, 1990, p. 35ff) – which results not only in the notion of 'sex' but also in the
436 notion of a ‘material, body’. I will come back to what a heterosexual matrix might mean, but
437 first a word about power relations. The notion of ‘the material body’ as the basis of
438 sex/gender should be understood as the result of a power struggle, where representatives of
439 science and medicine have managed to usurp a hegemonic position as a legitimate interpreter
440 of bodies in action. From a critical perspective, the ‘material body’ is a fiction as much as
441 factuality; a grand narrative that lends scientists and physicians their hegemonic position as
442 true knowers of the body. As noted in the beginning of the article, this is evident as behaviour
443 and performance in sport and physical education is discussed in scientific terms (Tinning,
444 2010). ‘The material body’ includes a promise of an objective knowledge that eventually, if
445 research may only be granted enough resources and fair recognition, will shed light on the
446 mysteries of sex/gender. I will return to this issue in short, but first a few words about ‘doing
447 gender’. According to Butler:

448 ... acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core substance, [...] Such
449 acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the
450 essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured
451 and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means ... (Butler, 1990, s.
452 136)

453 ‘Acts, gestures, and desire ...’ – from a sport pedagogy perspective it might be appropriate to
454 add *movements* – perform what we perceive as real. Butler is careful to emphasise that
455 recurrent or repetitive movements/actions (“a stylised repetition of acts”; Butler, 1990, p. 140)
456 produce reality. Perennial and within the context of power relations, socially regulated acts,
457 create the notion of a body that exists before all cultural signification (and is sometimes also
458 considered to be a direct cause of actions). Bringing together the world of sport and the
459 scientific research on the body is one example of how the notion of ‘the material body’ has
460 been produced. ‘Male bodies’ and ‘female bodies’ occur in relation to, for example, the
461 regulated use of either a 7.26 kg shot or of a 4 kg shot in shot put, or the use of either a 2.43 m
462 net or a 2.24 m net in volleyball. And sport science researchers try to determine what these
463 measures require of athletes as if these were ‘naturally’ divided into male and female ones. I
464 regard it as an illustration of what Foucault (1980) has called a productive alliance between
465 sport and science. This brings us on to the final section.

466

467 To settle with ‘the material body’ – emphasising movement (1)

468 Why should critical researchers of physical education and sport be careful with the use of the
469 phrase ‘the material body’, or at least adopt a more sceptical attitude towards it? First of all,
470 what other bodies are there? Today, few (if any) would assert the existence of an immaterial
471 body (even if Plato did so). The use of the phrase ‘the material body’ might be seen as a

472 polemic against a view of reality – and the body – that few or no-one advocates; a
473 contradiction in terms that poststructuralist theorising seeks to address (which is not the same
474 as a vaccine against poor poststructuralist analyses). Instead, it reinforces the promise of an
475 objective knowledge that will eventually shed light on the body and the mysteries of sexual
476 difference, what its origins are, what causes it, how they affect sport participation and
477 performance etc. Ultimately, it contributes to maintain the hegemonic position held by
478 scientific and medical knowledge about the body (and about sex/gender). To constantly refer
479 to a material body, as if someone were to assert the existence of an immaterial body,
480 contributes to the reproduction of a science hegemony within the field of body research.

481 Instead, we should talk about *bodies* and how bodies matter. We should talk about bodies in
482 terms of actions and events; processes that engender bodies (‘objects’) and embodiment
483 (‘subjects’, both ‘normal’ and abject ones). I propose that physical education and sport
484 pedagogy researchers shift their focus away from the body as a product/fact (object – what it
485 ‘is’) to the actions and events that constitute bodies and embodiment (materialisation) and
486 inequalities. Such an approach is outlined in Larsson and Quennerstedt (in press), where focus
487 is shifted away from bodies as objects to movements as constitutive to how bodies matter. In
488 this way we can challenge the medical and scientific paradigm’s hegemony. Why, then, ought
489 we to do that? Basically, the medical and scientific paradigm risk leading to a
490 decontextualisation of the body (like lifeless meat, driven by nature's universal, mechanistic
491 laws) on the one hand and the soul/psyche/personality (equally autonomous and
492 decontextualised) on the other. This type of knowledge has, it turns out, not much to offer
493 within an educational context, if you want to avoid a reduction of the acting person/body to
494 being an object; of conduct to being behaviour; of experience as a moral issue to being a
495 question of technical solutions to life.

496 What would a research approach like this look like? Firstly, it would not limit the analysis to
497 what is said and what remains unsaid about the body. It would explore the practices that
498 systematically form subjects of embodiment and objects of truth such as ‘the body’ (see
499 Larsson and Quennerstedt, in press). It would trace the historical descent of sport and physical
500 education practices and how these form subjects and objects of sport and physical education.
501 For instance, how are sport practices organized in terms of locality, temporality and
502 procedure, including the organisation of bodies as ‘after’, ‘next to’, ‘against’ of ‘among’ each
503 other, and the relation between human bodies and other bodies (e.g. balls, implements and
504 equipment)? How do sport practices engender bodies and embodiment – not the least how
505 gendered bodies and embodiment materialize?

506

507 Literature (1)

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