

# DECONSTRUCTING THE BODY: BODY THEOLOGY, EMBODIED PASTORAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND BODY MAPPING

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## Keywords:

James B. Nelson; embodied pastoral anthropology; body mapping; narrative approach; holistic embodied spirituality

## Dates:

Received: 22 Dec. 2009  
Accepted: 03 Aug. 2010  
Published: 12 Oct. 2010

## How to cite this article:

Meiring, J. & Müller, J.C., 2010, 'Deconstructing the body: Body theology, embodied pastoral anthropology and body mapping', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 31(1), Art. #367, 7 pages.  
DOI: 10.4102/ve.v31i1.367

## This article is available at:

<http://www.ve.org.za>

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## ABSTRACT

This article is an effort to deconstruct narratives regarding the body. Body theology as developed by James B. Nelson forms the basis for a literature study as well as an exploration of an embodied pastoral anthropology, within the context of a postfoundationalist practical theology and an openness to interdisciplinary dialogue. Qualitative interviews and the body-mapping process were used within the context of narrative research to narrate people's stories regarding their bodies in relation to their spiritual journey as well as to increase an awareness of a holistic, embodied spirituality.

## INTRODUCTION

In 1989, Brian Wren wrote the following hymn, 'Good is the Flesh':

*Good is the flesh that the Word has become,  
good is the birthing, the milk in the breast,  
good is the feeding, caressing and rest,  
good is the body for knowing the world,  
Good is the flesh that the Word has become.*

*Good is the body for knowing the world,  
sensing the sunlight, the tug of the ground,  
feeling, perceiving, within and around,  
good is the body, from cradle to grave  
Good is the flesh that the Word has become.*

*Good is the body, from cradle to grave,  
growing and aging, arousing, impaired,  
happy in clothing, or lovingly bared,  
good is the pleasure of God in our flesh,  
Good is the flesh that the Word has become.*

*Good is the pleasure of God in our flesh,  
longing in all, as in Jesus to dwell,  
glad of embracing, and tasting, and smell,  
good is the body, for good and for God,  
Good is the flesh that the Word has become.*

(Wren 1989)

This hymn was dedicated to James Nelson. According to Richardson (2003:86), this hymn sums up the message of body theology: God's Word has become flesh 2000 years ago and continuously becomes flesh in our experience of the present. The work of James Nelson was also the initial inspiration for this research. How do people, especially those from a Reformed tradition, experience their own bodies and embodiment? How can a body be deconstructed? In which way does body theology assist in this process of deconstruction and create a deeper awareness of our own embodiment, an awareness that we do not only have bodies but also are our bodies? The starting point within the tenets of a postfoundationalist theology and a narrative approach is a specific and concrete context, in this case the specific bodies of co-researchers as lived and experienced in a concrete situation. This is also the viewpoint of Williams and Bendelow (1998:3) who investigated the need for an 'embodied' sociology in contrast with prevalent social theory according to which the tendency is to talk and write about the body in a 'disembodied, typically male way' and for a new approach of theorising from lived bodies.

## WAYS OF APPROACHING THE BODY

### The narrative metaphor and social constructionism

Demasure and Müller (2006:413) write that in all communication there is a process of refiguration. Everyone (including the pastor/therapist/researcher) is enriched by the 'fusion of their horizons'. In this sense also our stories will be fused with the stories of all the participants and our stories should also be told as a medium for transformation, albeit a background story. In terms of remaining objective, I am encouraged by Heshusius (1994:15) who suggests that the order between the self and other should be reordered if we want to free ourselves from objectivity and explore a 'participatory mode of consciousness'. This would mean that our stories are relevant to the act of knowing but during this participatory mode of consciousness, we should also be able to let go of our stories, not to intrude with our stories but to merge 'into a larger and more complex reality in which reality is seen in ways invisible before'. This also implies that there is not a direct access to some 'truth'.

Freedman and Combs (2002:14) write that Michel Foucault was always interested in marginalised discourses, the stories that exist on the periphery of society. These stories have the possibility to undermine the excessive power of the dominant metanarratives in society. According to Freedman and Combs (2002:13), Foucault argued for an inseparable link between knowledge and power. In a society there are discourses/metanarratives that determine what knowledge is supposed to be true or proper or possible. This then means that the amount of power people have in society is dependent on their ability or their access to the discourses that shape their society. Freedman and Combs (2002:14) themselves believe that 'in the most marginalised and disempowered of lives, there are always lived experiences that lie outside the dominant stories' and see their work as helping people to recognise the 'influence of restrictive cultural stories in their lives, and to expand and enrich their own life narratives'.

Social constructionism means that we interpret the world through the perspective of the societies we are imbedded in. Our lives are constituted by the stories that circulate in society. Demasure and Müller (2006:416) write that social constructionism has again highlighted the importance of the pastoral relation, because it has indicated how meaning is created in relation to others. They feel that marginalised voices are given the space to be heard as dominant stories in society are exposed, when people realise how they were created and what consequences their lives have.

### A postfoundationalist theology

In discussing postfoundationalism as a practical way of interdisciplinary work, Müller (2008:2) writes about a different perspective that is possible, depending on the epistemological position. He refers to a foundationalist or universal perspective whereby it is taken for granted that absolute truth is available to all, to a nonfoundationalist or diverse perspective that maintains that there are no foundations and only a diversity of opinions, and to a postfoundationalist or transversal perspective. The last approach moves beyond the boundaries of the foundationalist and nonfoundationalist perspectives and works with the notion of 'transversal rationality'. Müller (2008:4) quotes Wentzel van Huyssteen who wrote as follows:

*In the multidisciplinary use of the concept of transversality there emerge distinct characteristics or features: the dynamics of consciousness, the interweaving of many voices, the interplay of social practices are all expressed in a metaphor that points to a sense of transition, lying across, extending over, intersecting, meeting and conveying without becoming identical.*

(Van Huyssteen cited in Müller 2008:4)

### Interdisciplinary dialogue

Van Huyssteen (2006b:147) repeats the very important notion of a 'democratic presence' for Christian theology in an open, postfoundationalist conversation. Theology shares the interdisciplinary standards of rationality, which will not be hopelessly culture and context bound but will always be contextually and socially shaped. In this interdisciplinary conversation with other sciences, theology will act as an equal partner with an authentic voice in a postmodern situation. Van Huyssteen (2006b:148) also uses the term *wide reflective equilibrium* to point to the optimal but fragile communal understanding we are capable of in any given moment in time. A postfoundationalist notion of reality enables us to communicate across boundaries and move transversally from context to context, from one tradition to another, from one discipline to another. Van Huyssteen further states that in this wide reflective equilibrium, we finally find the safe but fragile public space we have been searching. In this space we could commute between deep personal convictions and the principles that finally result from interpersonal judgements.

Müller (2008:9) writes that the responses he received through his interdisciplinary dialogue for this paper strengthened his opinion 'that transversal rationality is possible on the basis of concern and compassion'. Maybe through transversal rationality this safe, fragile space can be created for a communal understanding.

Van Huyssteen (2007:422) maintains that transversal reasoning means that we have to be alert to *degrees of transversality* and that different theological approaches could have different degrees of success in interdisciplinary dialogue. It is, however, most important that theology and sciences can share concerns and can converge in their methodological approaches on specifically identified problems.

### Phenomenological research in practical theology

Heimbrock (2005:282) writes that phenomenological epistemology deepened into the specific relation between knowledge about data and human beings as knowing subjects. Here he refers to the work of the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty who wrote in 1945 about a broader concept of human perception as bodily perception. 'The perceiving mind is an incarnate mind.' He also describes the ambiguity of simultaneously having a body and being a living body. Even though the body with its emotions, desires and sensations is mediated by physical and social conditions, it is the basis for perception and knowledge of ourselves and objects within the world. Van Huyssteen (2006a) rephrases Merleau-Ponty, writing that 'to exist as a human being is to be body-in-the-world' and that we can only be conscious of the world through our bodies. He continues as follows:

*In Merleau-Ponty's highly concrete 'phenomenology of the flesh,' the human body in all its forms of behaviour, not merely in speech, becomes the carrier of meaning, and as such the carrier of tradition, passing on its culture, its history, its life. Against this background it is revealing to engage briefly with scholars from different disciplines on issues of embodiment and its crucial role in theology and science.*

(Van Huyssteen 2006a:276)

Phenomenology as a partner for theology can open an interdisciplinary conversation on fundamental concepts such as 'life' and 'reality'. A critical element is that research should be done with an open awareness, with 'an ignorant eye' and through sensual perception.

## A THEOLOGY OF THE BODY

### What is body theology?

Nelson (1979:15) makes the statement that the style of our Christian belief will be influenced by the way in which we experience ourselves and others sexually. Nelson (1979:20) equates sexual theology with body theology. He makes use of the term 'body-selves' to denote the integration between the body and the soul, the body not being an object outside or apart of how I experience myself as a person. The question for him is not simply what theology has to say about the body (then it would be a theme for moral theology or Christian ethics) but what it means that we as body-selves participate in the reality of God and how we as body-selves reflect on that reality. I prefer the use of the term 'body theology' rather than 'sexual theology'. The word 'sexual' in 'sexual theology' distracts from the concept of a body-self, running the danger of localising it to the genitals only. This again reduces what I do with my body to what I do with my genitals in relation to my sexual desires, turning body theology into sexual moralism. Sigurdson (2008:41) writes that it matters how we speak of the body and that we should do so in a manner of 'conceiving our embodiment with practical implications'. The body is not always this solid foundation but can also be viewed 'as an enigmatic dimension of ourselves that constantly faces the invisible and transcendent'.

Punt (2005:371) identifies three distinct patterns that contributed to the conceptualisation of body theology, namely, (1) process thought (seeing the world as ever becoming and its nature as relational and not dualistic), (2) liberation theology (the justice of God unfolding through individuals' bodies and in the lives of the oppressed) and (3) feminist theory (human experience identified as the creation of theology, with the body as the site of experience). Isherwood and Stuart (1998:10) write that the body has always been highly symbolic and that it is the way through which a person and the community express themselves. They then find it hard to understand that throughout the ages, the body has been despised and rejected rather than loved and celebrated. Nelson (1979:20) calls it a 'false spiritualisation' if I do not realise the profound extent to which I am my body. If this embodiedness is underplayed, when the body is not experienced as fully personal, interpersonal relationships are diminished and the world becomes foreign and external. The other statement of Nelson (1979:22) that influenced my interviews with co-researchers was that the way we feel about and perceive our own bodies influences the way we perceive and feel about the world and God. This then feeds back on our understanding of our bodies.

### Body alienation and sexual dualisms

Body alienation takes place when the mind is alienated from the body and the body from the mind. The body merely becomes a physical object that belongs to the self and could be used by the self. This leads to a dichotomised thinking, a self looking for simple reasons for things, a mind thinking black/white, male/female, good/bad, right/wrong, heterosexual/homosexual. When the body is an expression of the self, Nelson (1979:38) sees it as alive, vibrant and charged with feeling. Where this awareness of feeling and bodily attitudes is absent, a person is torn between a 'disembodied spirit and a disenchanting body'. Punt (2005) makes the point that the body was as much a problem in the time of Paul as it was in classical times and as it is today. He refers to Vorster in writing that

*the vulnerable, fickle body was inevitably dysfunctional and with its passionate eruptions that have to be resisted, evoked attempts to control and regulate the body in order to preserve the order and fabric of society.*

(Punt 2005:366)

Murphy (2006:37) maintains that biblical teachings based on dualism have been a result of poor translation and that there is no clear teaching on the metaphysical make-up of a person. In spite of this, throughout Christian history, Christians lived with the dualism between body and soul, mainly as a result of cultural influences. Murphy is of the opinion that a physicalist anthropology can lead to the reformulation of theology and that this can only improve our relationship with God, with the earth and with its inhabitants.

In her fascinating article on touch, Traina (2005:16–17) writes how gender stereotyping in cultures plays an important role in the expectation of and permission for touch. She found that women's body images are more harmed than those of men by low levels of affectionate touch at present and during childhood. Touch is often interpreted as sexual contact. In Euro-American culture, romantic attachments are the basis for families, and this then is the only reliable source of firm touch that is socially accepted. Ironically, 'the same romanticism that seems to breed this need for touch also sexualise touch and therefore increasingly forbids it' (Traina 2005:18).

### Sexual salvation

Salvation is sexual. By this Nelson (1979:70) does not mean that we are saved by our sexuality. By 'sexual salvation' he means that we are given a new life in and through this complete selfhood that we are. Fear is at the root of alienation and in the Gospel, salvation comes through the gracious love of God 'received in human openness and trust'. Nelson (1979) translates justification by grace as God's radical, unconditional

and unearned acceptance of us. He refers to the sermon of Paul Tillich, 'You are accepted', and then expands the words of Tillich, writing as follows:

*You are accepted, the total you. Your body, which you often reject, is accepted by that which is greater than you. Your sexual feelings and unfulfilled yearnings are accepted. You are accepted in your ascetic attempts at self-justification or in your hedonistic alienation from the true meaning of your sexuality. You are accepted in those moments of sexual fantasy which comes unbidden and which both delight and disturb you. You are accepted in your femininity and your masculinity, for you have elements of both. You are accepted in your heterosexuality and in your homosexuality, and you have elements of both. Simply accept the fact that you are accepted as a sexual person. If that happens to you, you experience grace.*

(Nelson 1979:78)

Traina (2005:11) writes that 'good' touch is a social affirmation communicating 'I accept you' and 'I affirm you'. She maintains that children have a right to touch that is crucial for their healthy physical and psychological development and that all people have the right to the amount of touch they need for physical and psychological health and for the relief of suffering. Nelson (1979:80) continues to discuss the dynamics of self-rejection and self-acceptance in the growth towards greater wholeness. This correlates strongly with the psychodynamics of shame and guilt.

### The church as sexual community

Nelson (1979:236) describes the church as a sexual community, having always been concerned with the sexuality of its members in creative and destructive ways and with its liturgy and doctrines shaped by the sexual perceptions of its members. Importantly, Nelson (1979:246) sees the affirmation of human sexuality as essential to a positive doctrine of the *imago Dei*, the image of God in humankind. He sees the insistence on human bodylines as an affirmation of human transcendence: 'my body is my being-in-the-world'. This image of God has often been distorted in Christian tradition whereby the fullness of the image of God was only associated with males and evil was identified with women. Nelson (1979) writes,

*that the move to find sexual identity as incarnational is a move towards radical human equality which itself is inherent in an adequate understanding of the doctrine of the imago Dei.*

(Nelson 1979:248)

Murphy (2006:141) refers to 'bodily identity' to explain that a person's identity will be understood in terms of the person's own body. *Imago Dei* is not an abstract concept. Van Huyssteen (2006a) writes that

*...the image of God is not found in some intellectual or spiritual capacity, but in the whole embodied human being, 'body and soul'. In fact, the image of God is not found in humans, but is the human, and for this reason imago Dei can be read only as imitatio Dei: to be created in God's image means we should act like God, and so attain holiness by caring for others and for the world.*

(Van Huyssteen 2006a:320)

Nelson (1979:261) is also of the opinion that when sexuality gets trivialised, one fails to recognise the 'intricate, subtle, and far-reaching ways in which it permeates current social issues'. The irony is that these issues of three decades ago are still so relevant and are still pleading for 'significant alleviation of their injustices'. Nelson (1979:263) writes that a holistic vision of sexuality can lead the church to respond more effectively to important sexual dimensions in far-reaching social issues such as social violence, racism and ecology.

### An embodied pastoral anthropology

Van den Berg (2008:119) is of the opinion that this division between body and soul shows that pastoral theology does not sufficiently reflect on pastoral anthropology and that this dichotomy still exists. Tracing the development within practical theology, especially within the field of pastoral

theory and pastoral therapy, Van den Berg (2008:120) identifies various paradigmatic movements. In the movement from a preaching model to a participatory pastorate, the context as well as an approach of mutual caring of believers is important. Van den Berg (2008:121) uses the space created by a postfoundationalist practical theology with an openness to interdisciplinary dialogue to formulate a postfoundationalist theological embodied anthropology. Du Toit (2006) uses the term 'postsecular holism' to describe postmodernism. A key concept in explaining postsecular holism is post-secularism. He defines it as follows:

*It is a realisation that our destiny lies on this planet. We have rediscovered our earthly bounds. Soul is indivisibly part of body; mind and body are one. We are God's co-creators and we can do something about our earthly plight. ... Neither the secular nor the spiritual side of our lives can be ignored: both need to be explained, structured and interpreted. We have to take responsibility for human nature, come to terms with it and accommodate it.*

(Du Toit 2006:1258)

Looking at Christian theology, cognitive neuroscience and philosophy, Murphy (2006:ix) is of the opinion that there is no additional metaphysical element to the body such as a mind, soul or spirit. We are our bodies. Such a 'physicalist' standpoint does not negate that we are intelligent, moral and spiritual. Murphy (2006:69–70) writes that both biblical studies and neuroscience point towards a 'physicalist account of the person', meaning that humans are not a mixture of matter but are purely physical organisms. This does not mean that any higher human capacities are nothing but brain function. She uses the term 'nonreductive physicalism' to explain that if there is no soul, these higher human capacities can be explained in another way.

*In part they are explainable as brain functions, but their full explanation requires attention to human social relations, to cultural factors, and, most importantly, to our relationship with God.*

(Murphy 2006:69–70)

Lakoff and Johnson (1999:568) write that in a short space of time, cognitive science gave us a way to know ourselves better in our physical being, 'flesh, blood and sinew, hormone, cell and synapse'.

## STORIES ON THE BODY

### Introduction

The Memory Box Project at the University of Cape Town started running Memory Box workshops in Khayelitsha in 2002 (Bodymaps n.d.). Memory work is used with people living with HIV/AIDS, helping them to prepare for their own deaths and to leave their story behind for their children. In these workshops, facilitators discovered that people who were undergoing ART (anti-retroviral therapy) treatment were more future orientated than looking at the past. A large group of people had begun to draw their life stories, hoping to live longer. Flowing from this discovery, Jonathan Morgan and Jane Solomon developed the body-mapping process. A body-mapping workshop was facilitated with CATIE (Canadian Aids Treatment Information Exchange) in October 2006 in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and another one was held in March 2007 in Lusaka, Zambia. In August 2008 two body-mapping workshops were facilitated by CATIE in Toronto, Canada. All this resulted in the writing of the 'Living with X' body mapping facilitator's manual by Jane Solomon, with psychosocial input by Jonathan Morgan. Brett-MacLean (2009:741) suggests that the body-mapping process could have other applications; for example, it could be used by people with eating disorders or people living with chronic pain.

This article made me very keen to explore the possibility of using body mapping in my own research. I wanted to try and understand some of the ways in which people make sense of the world in and around them through their bodies and was curious to find out whether the body-mapping process could help to tell the story of such a journey within the framework of

narrative therapy. I structured my research around quantitative interviews based on two photos I had chosen and the body-mapping process. Keeping in mind the concept of feedback loops in narrative research, I conducted a follow-up interview with each co-researcher.

Body mapping was done with the second group of co-researchers after I had conducted interviews in group format around the two photos. I wrote a narrative letter to each respondent as a way to interpret the interviews that I had conducted with them around their experience of the two photos as well as the body-mapping process. In this I was led by the work of Freedman and Combs (1996) with regard to letter writing:

*Letters not only thicken the story and help the people we work with stay immersed in it, but also involve us more thoroughly in the co-authoring process, giving us an opportunity to think about the language and the questions that we use. We find that in writing letters we have ideas we might not have had otherwise. This may be because we write letters from a reflecting position.*

(Freedman & Combs 1996:2008)

I was furthermore influenced by the guidelines that Meyburgh (2006:35) used in narrative analysis. In identifying the underlying narrative themes, she asked what the person was trying to tell her.

Thereafter she analysed the text to understand how experiences were narrated within the timeline of the past, present and future. Then she looked at the context of the narrative, searching for clues, metaphors and cultural discourses and at the end, she tried to grasp the meaning that was constructed with the participant and what it meant to her. I kept a journal as well in which I reflected on my experience during the process of doing narrative research as well as on my thoughts and feelings in writing this research report. I also partook in the body-mapping process, which brought to mind the concept of participatory action research.

### What is body mapping?

Solomon (2007:2–3) describes body mapping as a way of telling stories and making art about a person and the person's life. It provides 'a better understanding of themselves, their bodies and the world they live in'. She describes body mapping as a tool for using art in a healing way, helping people to remember things and to find answers to problems but primarily helping people to tell their stories. She maintains that body mapping works better in a group 'where everyone can support and inspire each other. It can become like a ritual or a ceremony'.

Meyburgh (2006:19) refers to Jonathan Morgan who describes the end products of body mapping as holding strands of art therapy, narrative therapy and body work with the potential to become a participatory qualitative research tool. Meyburgh (2006:15) writes that there are a variety of therapies, for example adventure therapy, dance therapy and movement therapy, that use embodied techniques and that the basic tenet is 'to move away from exclusively talking therapies by incorporating experiential and embodied means of healing and integrating mind-body techniques'. Meyburgh (2006:17) is of the opinion that trauma recovery involves the 'processing of implicit memories that are non-verbal and held in the body'. Alternative methods such as body mapping are then used to process these memories by retelling them but without retraumatising the person. I find the concept of 'implicit memory' quite fascinating. Meyburgh (2006:13) refers to Rothschild and Mae-Wan Ho to explain the difference between explicit and implicit memory. Explicit memories are those that are conscious and that enable us to tell stories and put experiences into words so as to construct chronology and to extract meaning. Implicit memory is unconscious and procedural. Body consciousness exists prior to brain consciousness, which is associated with the nervous system. Body consciousness has a memory linked to a proton jump conduction that is faster than the conduction of electrical signals via the nerves. Recent research indicates that traumatic memory is stored unintegrated with other

memories in the limbic system, bypassing the cognitive system. Meyburgh (2006:14) writes that the limbic system also regulates arousal, survival behaviours and emotional expression. The disconnection ‘between body and soul’ is one of the most important effects of trauma, and she refers to shamanic cultures in which the shaman calls the spirit to return to the body. I do find this image of the shaman to be a striking metaphor for the facilitator, in this case the narrative therapist and/or practical theologian, trying to journey holistically with the body in telling its story, bridging the mind-body dichotomy.

I used the ‘Living with X’ body mapping facilitator’s manual by Jane Solomon as the basis for the creation of body maps for my research. This is a process whereby the outline of each participant’s body is traced on a sheet of paper. Thereafter a self-portrait, hand and foot prints, different colours and symbols are painted onto the body map to tell some of the stories on the ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ of each participant’s body. I paid close attention to the metanarratives influencing various symbols used on the body map.



Source: Photo of bodymap of participant seven [August 2009]  
PHOTO 1

In an article at the back of the novel *Lighthousekeeping*, Jeanette Winterson (2005) writes that storytelling is

*a way of navigating our lives, and that to read ourselves as fiction is much more liberating than to read ourselves as fact. Facts are partial. Fiction is a more complete truth. If we read ourselves as narrative, we can change the story that we are. If we read ourselves as literal and fixed, we find we can change nothing. Someone will always tell the story of our lives – it had better be ourselves.*

(Winterson 2005:20)

## DECONSTRUCTING THE BODY

### Reflections and suggestions

In trying to stay true to the tenets of a narrative approach to research, I do not offer a conclusion but will rather reflect on my research and make some suggestions.

### On acceptance and rejection

A dominant theme that surfaced centred on acceptance and rejection. All of the participants grew up in a Reformed tradition. In spite of an awareness of grace and of a new status in Christ, acceptance was not viewed in that light. Acceptance is qualified by how one is perceived by others. Some of the co-researchers projected a lack of acceptance, namely rejection as rejection by God, or qualified God’s acceptance of them. This qualified acceptance is sustained by powerful metadisourses regarding sin, what it means to be a good Christian and to die to yourself for God’s kingdom, and concepts of heaven and hell, resulting in strong feelings of guilt. This in turn manifests in the body by way of eating disorders, stress, sexually alienating behaviour and dissociation from the body. It is not easy simply to accept that we are accepted.

### On patriarchal heterosexism

Experiences of rejection were also linked to extremely dominant metadisourses of what it means to be a good wife, a good mother, a pretty woman or an attractive man, the typical male. The language of these metadisourses is grounded in that of a patriarchal heterosexism. Our impression was that it causes much anxiety and confusion about a person’s identity. This once again manifested in eating disorders, stress and body alienation. It also had a deep impact on some of the co-researchers relationships, causing marriages to end in divorce or not allowing people to become physically and emotionally too close. These same patriarchal heterosexist metadisourses had an almost unbreakable hold on male and female participants’ image of God as male. Yes, some of the participants did view God as neither male nor female, but even when God was depicted as, for example, an aeroplane, it was a metaphor of distance. Of course Christ was historically a male, but this for many did not transcend their image of God. Even when some of the female participants said that they could identify more with the female figure, Christ could not be envisaged as female and God could only be seen as male. And how then does God as a heterosexual male view the bodies of women and other marginalised people? Probably the same as their husbands, male friends or fathers do. I am encouraged by the words of Desmond Tutu (1997:x) who said that ‘if the church, after the victory of apartheid, is looking for a worthy moral crusade, then this is it: the fight against homophobia and heterosexism’.

### On giving the body a voice

Isherwood and Stuart (1998:6) write about the epistemology of the flesh as body knowledge. ‘The body is experienced as a source and site of knowledge whose “voice” can break through the epistemology of oppression.’ We think this can tie in with the concept of the implicit memory of the body. A therapy such as body mapping can then be used as a way to unlock these

implicit memories, giving the body a 'voice'. Meyburgh (2006:70) writes that in her research, the participants experienced body mapping as useful even though they did not access traumatic events. It 'helps people to talk about their bodies that were in the event'. We do think that body mapping can give voice to, for example, stories of oppression and we were amazed at the number of metadiscourses uncovered in the body-mapping process. This can then lead to a deeper exploration of these metadiscourses with 'conventional' narrative therapy to try and plot the most dominant story and look for unique outcomes. We also found that the body-mapping process is extremely rich in metaphors. In evaluating the body-mapping process, the participants mentioned that they experienced their body maps as being a portrayal of them, making it easier to talk about their bodies and the stories of their bodies. This ties in beautifully with the concept of externalisation in narrative therapy.

### On promiscuity and touch

Referring to promiscuity, we would plead for more comprehension with regard to the oppression of bodies. Isherwood and Stuart (1998) write that many people experience their bodies

*as a source and site of resistance against 'terror and tyranny', for body knowledge trespasses over all sorts of boundaries including the boundaries established by traditional academic theology ... and the boundaries of hetero-patriarchy. ... it is therefore inevitable in a society which devaluates the body that the body should become a site of resistance.*

(Stuart 1998:99–100)

Meyburgh (2006:70) correctly writes that the body-mapping process does not offer the same 'embodied experience in therapy' with, for example, touch and sight that therapies such as dance or movement therapies would do. This is so. Once again, we would like to point to the significance of touch in general as well as in therapy. Traina (2005:3) writes that people ordinarily need touch in order to flourish, that 'affectionate, firm, appropriate touch is a human need and a moral right'. Touch is a form of communication and it would be worthwhile and fascinating to research the use of touch in narrative therapy.

### On bodily awareness and integration

Our impression is that body mapping is a powerful medium to create awareness regarding the dualisms and metadiscourses in society and that it can be used to facilitate a process of body integration or at least begin with this process. Martha Horn (2005:81) and others developed the Embodied Spirituality scale (ESS). This is an instrument designed 'to measure the level of integration between one's experience of sexuality and spirituality'. The results of these studies supported 'the concept of embodied spirituality as an integral relationship between sexuality and spirituality'. These studies were developed as a result of the change in perception brought by body theology, seeing sexuality as an integral and holistic part of human experience. It would have been fascinating to conduct an interview using the ESS before the start of the body-mapping process and then again at the end as a way to determine whether body mapping actually assists in body-spirit integration. This would also be one of the ways to work together with other disciplines.

### On a postfoundationalist embodied anthropology, phenomenology and interdisciplinary dialogue

I strongly agree with Van Huyssteen and Van der Bergh that a postfoundationalist or transversal theology opens a wide space for interdisciplinary dialogue and that this space can and should be used to formulate a postfoundationalist theological embodied anthropology. We would build on concepts of Van Huyssteen such as *wide reflective equilibrium* (to point to safe but fragile public space, the optimal but fragile communal understanding we are capable of in any given moment in time in interdisciplinary dialogue), *degrees of transversality* (the concept

that different theological approaches could have different degrees of success in interdisciplinary dialogue) and the very important notion of a *democratic presence* for Christian theology in an open, postfoundationalist conversation (Van Huyssteen 2006b:147). In no way should theologians feel intimidated or be arrogant in entering into conversation with scientists of other disciplines. They should take up their democratic space and step into the fragile, public space of interdisciplinary dialogue. When the body is approached as a holistic, integrated embodied entity, a postfoundationalist embodied theology should enter into conversation with other disciplines. The body is more than just a body. It is constructed through language, society, politics, religion and science. We would also take phenomenology seriously as a partner in practical theology.

### On the value of body mapping in narrative therapy and research

I am of the opinion that body mapping can be used effectively within the context of narrative therapy and as a qualitative research tool. It is rich in metaphors, assists strongly with the process of externalisation and can unlock various metadiscourses within the context of social constructionism. It can indicate graphically what the influences of these metanarratives are and in what way they are linked to each other and the body. One must be careful to accept unequivocally that all the stories are on the table (the body map). This body-mapping process is bordered by the process of narrative therapy and these stories must be explored further to establish which one is dominant and where a possible unique outcome lies. Body mapping definitely increases awareness of one's own bodylines and of a holistic embodied spirituality and can contribute to a sense of acceptance of the body-self.

### On the role of the church

I am convinced that like the ESS, body mapping could bring '*consciousness and intentionality* to the issues of embodiment' and could increase a person's sense of embodiment (Horn *et al.* 2005:97). The authors continue by stating that an increase in the level of embodiment has the potential to enhance healing within the individual, relationships, churches and society. This for us implies that the church has a huge responsibility in increasing these levels of integration/embodiment and that this can be done through a postfoundationalist pastoral anthropology or a holistic spiritual embodiment.

This journey of integration can also be facilitated by the language used in the church in relation to the body and to sexuality by using words to increase the perception of the goodness of the body and teaching the dynamics of self-acceptance and growth towards wholeness rather than using words depicting the experience of our body-selves as dirty, shameful, sinful and fragmented. The church can perhaps be more alert in its teaching regarding the *imago Dei* and the Incarnation, being aware of the way it has been distorted in the past and taking seriously how this is not just restricted to a part of a person's spiritual identity but pertains to the whole embodied human being. This is crucial if one takes seriously some of the implications of body alienation/disconnection:

- racism
- heterosexism
- homophobia
- social violence
- indifference to ecological issues
- depression
- self-hatred
- rejection
- toxic guilt
- identity confusion
- eating disorders
- stress.

## On imagination and mystery

In his paper 'Poetical pastoral counselling', Julian Müller (n.d.) refers to Brueggemann in writing that 'the challenge is to work with imagination and poetry in a "prose-flattened world"'. He advocates working with more mystery, assurance and quality in imaginative pastoral counselling against the technical way of thinking in terms of problem, certitude and quantity. I think that body mapping is one such an exploration of imagination.

## CLOSING REMARKS

In his novel *The body*, Hanif Kureishi explores the idea of personal identity and the extent to which we are rooted in our body. He writes about a middle-aged playwright who is offered the chance to trade his ageing, sagging body for a youthful, attractive body. Kureishi (2002:34) then portrays something of how the body is socially constructed:

*If other people's bodies get too much for you, you can stop them by stabbing or crucifixion. You can shoot or burn them to make them keep still or prevent them from saying words which displeases you. If your own body gets too much – and whose doesn't? – you might meditate yourself into desirelessness, enter a monastery or find an addiction which channels desire. Some bodies are such a nuisance to their owners – they can seem as unpredictable as untamed animals, or the feeling can overheat and there's no thermostat – that they not only starve or attempt to shape them, but they flagellate or punish them.... The older and sicker you get, the less your body is a fashion item, the less people want to touch you. You will have to pay. Masseurs and prostitutes will caress you, if you give them money. How many therapies these days happen to involve the 'laying-on of hands'? Nurses will handle the sick. Doctors spend their lives touching bodies.... Priests and politicians tell people what to do with their bodies. People always choose their work according to their preferences about bodies.*

(Kureishi 2002:34)

In contemporary society, the body has become a consumer item. The emphasis is on appearance and presentation. The body has become pliable through plastic surgery, tissue engineering and bionic and gene therapy with cyberspace changing the format of human embodiment. Ammicht-Quinn (2004:72) writes that one of the main features of contemporary lifestyle is being occupied with the body, with an entire industry to serve the needs for wholeness, beauty and salvation that traditional religious institutions fail to satisfy. Is it possible for the church to try and address these needs if it is still deeply embedded in a soul-body or mind-body heterosexist dualism? Is there then some value in these words of Ammicht-Quinn (2004)?

*...if incarnation is one of the key words in Christianity, if we realize Jesus' bodily impartiality and his bodily-rooted gospel then the proverbial Christian suspicion and mistrust towards the body appears in a new light. The New Testament's message can be read as a bodily-rooted and bodily-experienced message of salvation. The discredit of which the body and bodily well-being has been brought uproots the gospel. The occidental Christian suspicion and mistrust towards the body seems to be a huge and tragic misunderstanding in Christianity.*

(Ammicht-Quinn 2004:79)

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