

PETER NYNÄS

Multiple bodies in the spirituality of the gay porn star McCree

Reflections on corporeality and subjectivity

Introduction

Body modification practices have lately gained growing visibility in contemporary Western cultures. It is more like a trend or fashion ranging from, on the one hand, decorative tattoos and piercing, to branding, implants and surgery on the other. In most forms body modification occurs without any obvious religious, spiritual or ideological marks attached, but some forms involve discourses that explicitly address such aspirations. However, despite the fluidity and diversity of practices, it can be claimed that body modification represents specific or distinct ways of working with the body that differ from other forms of contemporary Western body cultures. Further, it needs to be considered as part of the broader body culture. Hence it draws our attention to the role of corporeality in contemporary Western culture.

Anthony Giddens (1991) wrote about the body-project and suggested that the ontological insecurity of late modernity fosters a growing concern with identity and body. David Lyon (2006) argues in a slightly similar way that there is mutual interdependence between the growing role of new media and contemporary body culture. The 'excarinate' nature of communication through new media, that is, its lack of corporeality has, according to Lyon, resulted in its opposite, 'hypercarinate' cultural expressions. From this perspective body modification could be regarded as a reaction to the nature of contemporary society, a way of compensating the lack of corporeal engagement in the world. Its former association with different subcultures might underpin this oppositional position. On the other hand, some scholars regard body-modification as nothing but part of the contemporary free floating carnival of signs, as mere mainstream supermarket signifiers, emptied of meaning and deprived of any external references (see Sweetman 1999).

In this article I will put emphasis on forms of body modification that more explicitly connote religion. From an empirical perspective I will explore one

example of body modification, the story about the spirituality of the gay porn star Logan McCree. This is a personal narrative about spirituality in which tattooing plays a central role. Still, despite being personal it is also part of McCree's public image. Further, it clearly highlights the extreme and contrasting possibilities for self-expression that contemporary Western society provides individuals with.

The focus in this article is not put on body modification and its spiritual form. With the help of both literature and the examples on body modification I refer to, I will explore the place of corporeality in the story of McCree. My aim is to shed some light on corporeality and in particular in relation to subjectivity.

The article develops in the following way. After some general and preliminary notes on contemporary body modification, I will outline more theoretical points of relevance for my discussion. Robert C. Fuller (2008) presents an interesting account of the relevance of the body for the study of religion. He draws partly on neurophysiological and evolutionary perspectives, but still without claiming a reduction of religiosity. In addition, critical theory and in particular feminism have lately challenged our understanding of corporeality from the perspectives of both psychoanalytical thinking and philosophy. In particular the writing of Elizabeth Grosz (1994) has been of value in contributing a clear overview of Western thinking on the body. Fuller and Grosz share a critique of the dualistic way of assuming a split between mind and body. From this perspective I will hopefully be able to discuss in more depth the story of Logan McCree and sum up the article with some general remarks and questions.

Body modification

The history of body-modifications seems to be as long as human civilization, and it will not be discussed here. Still, it might be relevant to acknowledge that these practices have fulfilled very different functions. They have indicated group affiliations such as belonging to a certain clan or tribe, or been used as signs of age or status within such groups. In a similar way they have also been used to mark out groups of individuals such as criminals and slaves. Further, body-modifications have been associated with attaining magical powers, or included as part of ritual events. Finally, they have also been used to alter self–other relations by making the visual appearance more attractive or frightening. (Camphausen 1997.) It is quite natural to assume that the

contemporary renaissance of body-modifications draws on these historical practices and there is no need to dismiss any of the many functions or roles of body-modification. However, the great variety in functions also indicates that body-modification needs to be interpreted with regard to its place and time, and not on a general level.

The contemporary world or culture of body modification is just as diverse as its history. It includes many different forms and practices. It might involve activities such as wearing specific clothing and cosmetics; tattooing and branding, piercing; ritualized body extension; surgical and technological alterations of the body, and body implants. Mike Featherstone (1999) also includes in the term body modification dieting, weight training, and cyborg imagery. The practice of tattooing and piercing has accelerated since the mid 1980s, becoming part of a mainstream consumer culture and an exotic fashion trend and has resulted in creating concepts such as modern primitives and neo-tribalism (Sweetman 1999).

As mentioned in the introduction, the question of how to understand this growing trend divides scholars, in particular on the issue of meaning. Paul Sweetman (1999) argues that body-modification in contrast to the ever-changing character of fashion accessories in general is associated with permanency. The association with permanency, he concludes, makes body modifications different from fashion and gives them a connotation of anti-fashion. From this perspective he emphasizes a connection to time and memory and stresses body-modifications as means of identity construction. He writes that contemporary body modifications 'can indeed be interpreted in these terms as attempts to anchor or stabilize one's sense of self-identity, in part through the establishment of a coherent personal narrative' (Sweetman 1999: 53).

In contrast to this, the idea of permanency as a central aspect of body-modification is questioned and nuanced by Stephanie Springgay (2003). She refers to Renata Salecl (2001) and states that we encounter a paradox between body modification as a process of individualization and its way of being a permanent alteration of the body as protests against the ideology that everything is changeable (Salecl 2001). Springgay writes:

Tattoos may be permanent (or not, given the possibility for laser removal these days) but many involved in extensive tattooing see it as an art form that is constantly under revision, extended, and modified. Designs merge into others, colours change, and symbols are introduced into the picture plane. It is the fantasy of potential transformations, the process of creation, that renders tattooing as incomplete and uncertain, and incises the fundamental impossibility of arrival. (Springgay 2003.)

Instead of underlining permanency, Springgay highlights the continuing transformative dimension of body-modifications.

A multifaceted corporeality

One theme seems to occur as a background to both the brief notes above on contemporary body-modification and my scholarly interest in body modification. This is the very problematic and challenging question of how to understand the role or place of human corporeality. As Springgay (2003) writes, body modifications are usually understood as practices for controlling and regulating the body, and for the expression of particular identities or interior true selves. Further, in most cases the explanations are embedded in a 'binary of oppression-resistance in which bodies are controlled, directed, and transcribed by the mind' (Springgay 2003). I will elaborate on this theme a bit further. It is a challenging quest. As Ann Oakley (2007: 33) states it is not until the intimate interconnectedness between mind and body is disrupted that we become aware of the problems with a dualistic epistemology.

Contesting a dualistic epistemology involves by necessity an investigation of the relationship between corporeality and subjectivity. Subjectivity has, however, occurred to me as a very common but also a very vague concept. It is seldom defined, and sometimes it seems to equate identity and function as a reminder that people are also reflexive subjects, with feelings and thoughts of their own that matter (cf. Smith 2010). However, I would argue that a more elaborated way of understanding subjectivity could primarily refer to the construction of the individual subject within culture, history and discourse and within particular relations of power. Secondly, implied in this is the need to stress that this construction is a diverse, fluid, incomplete and continuing process, characterized by a complex mix of both resonances and dissonances. Finally, this continuing process of construction brings into view and position specific sorts of subjects with particular capacities to act. Hence, subjectivity can be thought of as a shift in the understanding of subjects accounting for the making of an architecture within which particular identities and subjects are possible and rise—and others not. Body and corporeality form a central aspect of subjectivity (cf. Biel, Good & Kleinman 2007).

In his book *Spirituality in the Flesh* Robert C. Fuller (2008) provides insights into how a stronger focus on the role of the body in religion can provide new and critical categories for studying and understanding religion. He puts particular emphasis on the biological foundations of religious thought and

experience and how these biological foundations shape religious representations. As he puts it: 'Our bodies, then, provide metaphorical patterns for understanding ourselves and the world we live in' (Fuller 2008: 156). Hence, Fuller gives the body a privileged role for the subjective experiences of ourselves and of the world around us. Fuller inhabits a functional position in his way of comprehending the representational and imaginative functions embedded in the body. Religious thought, as Fuller declares, serves bodily activities (Fuller 2008: 157). According to him '[t]o note that religion arises as an embodied experience, then, is to realize that it serves the biological purpose of constructing models of the world conducive to our bodily needs and aspirations' (Fuller 2008: 157). The body provides a corporeality of innate and internalized techniques through which the body also can negotiate and adapt to its surroundings in novel ways. In his examination of pain in religious traditions Ariel Glucklich (2001) draws on a neuropsychological understanding of the self which proposes a similar perspective as Fuller. Glucklich argues that 'modulated pain . . . facilitates the emergence of a new identity' (2001: 207).

Even though Fuller's perspective is in part based on contemporary neurophysiological perspectives, he argues against the mainstream position of the cognitive study of religion. According to Fuller, the cognitive study of religion in general provides a wholly negative assessment of religion (Fuller 2008: 158). In contrast to this negative evaluation of religion, Fuller himself argues that the human body, in particular in its encounter with limit-experiences, where the sensory and rational approach to life does not provide vehicles enough for human adaptation, enters a quest for fulfillment and wholeness. From Fuller's perspective, the role of religion is to provide mental constructs that can work as hypotheses and provide an embodied hope and he proposes that working with and on the body is a way also to work on thought, emotion and perception.

With this analysis of the body as a biological site for religion, Fuller presents an effort to bridge the gap or split between the mind and the body that has been very common to Western thinking and that also has a trajectory in the Western dichotomy between materiality and meaning. Still, I would argue that he merely relocates the border which delineates a split with body and mind on the one side, and culture and society on the other. Fuller's perspective is very biological in the way it accounts for how we need to avail ourselves of 'what is known about our bodies, the neural structures of our brains, and the genetic basis of our perceptual and cognitive interactions with the world' (Fuller 2008: 163). Even though he acknowledges the role of culture in human experience, he leaves the quest to understand the intertwining of body and

culture open. This is where the work of Elizabeth Grosz (1994) contributes in a relevant way.

Grosz's (1994) aim is similar to Fuller's, in other words, to address the relevance of corporeality and the body in contrast to the dominant focus on mind and interiority and the mind-body dualism. Still, Grosz embarks on this quest from another perspective, with an emphasis on subjectivity.

Grosz's (1994) aim is to shed light on the body with regard to the complexity of subjectivity and from the background of feminist perspectives. In the introduction she outlines three categories of feminism (Grosz 1994: 15–19). The first group takes the position that biology must be changed, while the other puts emphasis on the necessity to change beliefs, attitudes and values. In contrast to these views that both maintain a strong mind-body dualism, Grosz's own position seems to come closest to the final group that she describes. This group is concerned with the lived body as a cultural, social and political subject/object *par excellence*: 'Far from being an inert, passive, non-cultural and ahistorical term, the body may be seen as the crucial term, the site of contestation, in a series of economic, political, sexual and intellectual struggles' (Grosz 1994: 19). One can read this as a statement about human corporeality as the main site of subjectivity. This is, however, not an easy position to elaborate in a definite way.

In her effort to challenge dualistic understandings, Grosz (1994) draws our attention to two separate streams in western thinking. She addresses two movements: the inside out movement and the outside in movement. In her discussion of the former she relies on psychoanalysis and phenomenology and, for instance, Freud, Lacan and Merleau-Ponty. For a discussion of the outside in movement she draws on Nietzsche, Foucault and Deleuze. It should be noted that both movements try to oppose or dissolve a dualism of mind-body, but in different ways.

The inside out movement is concerned with the psychological coding of bodies, that is, 'the ways in which the inside constitutes and accepts itself as an outside, how experience itself structures and gives meaning to the ways in which the body is occupied and lived' (Grosz 1994: 115). This is a process through which the body is experienced and rendered meaningful in various ways and constituted as marking the boundaries of subjectivity, its limits or edge. The psychological interiority makes the body its exteriority, but it is very crucial to acknowledge that this exteriority does not follow the physical limits of the body. At this point we encounter a view that is different from how Fuller comprehends the body.

Based on a psychoanalytical and phenomenological perspective, Grosz draws our attention to the concepts *body image* and *imaginary anatomy*. In making the body its exteriority the inside also stretches the body outside itself, or expels parts of the physical body. In this view we encounter a transformed, or modified corporeality. Body image (or imaginary anatomy) is a concept that describes this inside out movement, how subjectivity shapes a particular corporeality. Body image is a 'site of the intermingling of mind and culture' (Grosz 1994: 116) that provides 'a sense of its place in the world and in connection with others' (Grosz 1994: xii). Grosz cites Merleau-Ponty (1963: 5) who writes that, 'Our body is not in space like things; it inhabits or haunts space' (Grosz 1994: 90) and hence our corporeality is the condition and context through which we are able to have a relation to objects (Grosz 1994: 86). Consequently, body image as the 'real' corporeality sets the limits and possibilities for human agencies.

From the other perspective that Grosz presents, that is, the outside in movement, the reflection develops in a different way. In contrast to body image this movement can be conceptualized in terms of body writing. In this case the body becomes more or less a *tabula rasa*, a blank page, a surface onto which social, political and cultural inscriptions can take place. As Grosz writes '[t]he messages or texts produced by this body writing constructs bodies as networks of meaning and social significance, producing them as functional "subjects" within social ensembles' (Grosz 1994: 117). Pedagogical, juridical, medical, and economic texts, laws and practices are instruments for a body writing that carves out subjects which on the one hand are intelligible, rational and understandable in particular contexts and, on the other hand, eligible for particular identities, capabilities and agencies. Bodies are fictionalized by various discourses that provide them with a social seal.

The very radical edge in this thinking is clearly exemplified in the case of sexuality. Sexuality is traditionally referred to as a very spontaneous and natural force in its own right. With reference to Foucault, Grosz concludes that that 'sexuality is deployed by power to enable it to gain a grip on life itself' (Grosz 1994: 152). Inner depth or a natural drive, such as a felt attraction or arousal, is nothing more than the corporeality invaded by discourses in society and culture. Judith Butler writes with reference to Foucault: 'There are no desires that are muted by repressive rules, but, rather, only an operation by which the self constitutes itself in discourse with the assistance of another's presence and speech' (Butler 2004: 163).

Here we can see how the central idea grounding the concept of a body image is contested in the outside in perspective. The body is considered to

be only a series of surfaces, linkages, energies and forces. A hidden depth, a desire for communication, expression or interpretation, or a desire to be revealed and socialized does not constitute this perspective. Hence, comprehending the place of the body in terms of an outside in movement puts more emphasis on the role of punishment (in various forms). Grosz refers to Nietzsche (1969) and concludes '[c]ivilization instills its basic requirements only by branding the law on bodies through a mnemonics of pain, a memory fashioned out of the suffering and pain of the body' (Grosz 1994: 131). This implies, however, that bodies are also sites of resistance against dominant or hegemonic discourses, and therefore also a site of emancipation. Still, we do not necessarily need to locate this resistance in a body as viewed by Fuller, or as viewed as an inside out movement.

In order to conclude these theoretical reflections in brief, I would like to underline some relevant points. First, we encounter in general an ambition to repudiate the mind–body dualism and to acknowledge the body as a central source or place of various subjectivities. Second, this involves a view of the body as a centre of meanings and agencies. But, before I leave these theoretical considerations, it needs to be underlined that they deploy very different views on subjectivity as part of corporeality. Fuller gives priority to the body as a distinct neurophysiological entity that continually strives to frame subjectivities as particular experiences, emotions and thoughts in order to achieve more adapted subjects. To some extent the concept body image, or imagined anatomy, that Grosz draws our attention to comes close to Fuller's view, but allows for a more fluid model. From this perspective it is not a distinct physical body that situates us in the world, but the imagined corporeality into which societal and cultural elements are internalized. The body is not a box, but a continuous making of an outside/inside boundary. Finally, in contrast to these perspectives, we can argue that there is no such thing as a subjective body in the sense assumed in the two previous models. On the contrary, our corporeality is a silent surface, or an empty space, invaded by networks of social and cultural scripts and discourses, striving, competing and fighting over a wasteland of subjectivities. From this perspective Oakley's (2007: 66) reflection makes sense: 'Bodies are forms and products of capitalist industry, shaped by a process that's alienating at its very core.'

A body chained to Jesus

The following example is from an article in the weekly gay magazine *Boyz* (2010) and from a similar article on the website for 'coming out spiritually', MyOutSpirit.com (2010), where Logan McCree provides a personal story about his passion for tattoos and the spiritual dimension the tattoos carry for him. In the introduction to the short article in *Boyz* (2010) we can read that McCree is 'one of the hottest porn stars on the planet' and that his spirituality is 'the most important thing in his life.' There is also a photo of McCree showing how his upper body is covered with tattoos. A slightly provocative, aggressive and eroticized masculinity characterizes the picture overall, making him look like an ancient warrior. A similar image of McCree is found also on the website MyOutSpirit.com (2010). Here he also uses the word warrior to describe himself and McCree is described as a spiritual man 'working to free himself and others from social and ego bondage'. In other words he is presented as a warrior of emancipation.

In several ways McCree is presented as a 'self-made man' when it comes to spirituality. Overall his spirituality and associated themes are articulated along lines of individualism, in accordance with what is often described as a turn to the self and the subjectivization of religion (e.g. Heelas *et al.* 2004). It is said that he does not come from a very religious upbringing. Spirituality or religion was not part of his family life. On the contrary, Logan tells the story of a boy being individually devoted to a spiritual realm from young age and how Jesus played a central role in the life of this boy and still does. This theme is reinforced even further on MyOutSpirit.com (2010) where the relevance of angels is central. Logan says, 'Since I was a little boy I felt that I am not 100 % human and I felt very connected to angels. I still believe that I am part angel and as a symbol for my deep connection with the heavenly warriors I got my own armature as a tattoo.' In this story, big wings are added to the photo of Logan.

A small difference in nuances can be observed between the article in *Boyz* (2010) and the article on the website. Whereas the connection to angels was on the surface on MyOutSpirit.com (2010), Christianity is more relevant to the fabric of the story in *Boyz* (2010). 'Jesus is the biggest inspiration to me', McCree states and he is described as a very devoted Christian who strongly feels that God leads him. He recollects: 'I gave up making plans when I figured out that God pushes me into different directions and I just have to follow.' He experiences his belief very strongly and he can therefore see no place for an intimate relationship or a partner in his life.

In addition to the very Jesus-centred story and the somewhat familiar discourses about devotion and giving one's life to the hand of God's master plan, McCree also describes his spirituality in very contemporary terms. Again we read a story that reinforces the theme of being a 'self-made man'. No church nor other religious organization or group is mentioned as central to his spiritual development. It is an individual spiritual quest McCree has entered, a place of his own. This position is based on the recognition of some sort of inarticulate pluralism or universalism, mastered by McCree himself. He states that 'my spiritual path isn't just a Christian one; I stand between or above all religions'. The eclectic approach involved in this is a central theme in the article. In *Boyz* (2010), for instance, Logan stresses that he is a Capricorn, that a wolf is his spiritual guiding animal, and that the archangel Michael is important, alongside the prince, as a mythological figure.

As I indicated, the conflicting relation between religion and (in particular queer) sexuality (cf. Munt 2010) is addressed already at the beginning of the stories in the form of the juxtaposition of being a porn star for which spirituality is the most important thing. 'Porn stars tend to get objectified both ways—usually neither the people enjoying the product nor those judging it see them as spiritual, conscious or complex human beings', McCree says (MyOutSpirit.com 2010). This is another part of the self-made spirituality that runs through the story. McCree declares that he is well aware that other Christians would probably not call him a Christian because of his profession and the form of belief he reinforces. However, in correspondence with juxtaposing these contrasting elements also the relevance of morality is underlined. It doesn't matter if Jesus is the Son of God or not, for McCree Jesus, described as a rebel with high moral integrity, is an important ideal for his own ambition to 'do the right thing', 'connect to the world', 'helping people', and to care for people and 'saying "no" if I see something wrong going on', as McCree puts it in *Boyz* (2010).

The relevance of Logan's moral position is not in conflict with being part of the sex industry. On the contrary, it is described as being an integral part of his profession. He reflects on his profession as a porn star in terms of one step along in his calling to become a public person and being able to reach out to other people. He explains on (MyOutSpirit.com 2010): 'That way I can "touch" as many as possible with the energy God gave me. Unfortunately it is not easy to keep this energy high all the time, especially when you are surrounded by people with negative energies. But that's why I am a warrior . . . because it is a fight after all.' Having high morals puts demands also on his daily work: he prefers to shoot films with people he can have a high opin-

ion of, a position he claims that the production company has accepted and respects. In this sense he is also described as a person that inhabits a unique position in the porn industry, in having a personal integrity. McCree can be said to establish distance from the stereotypical view of gay-life as sexualized, while still maintaining a positive identification.

The reason I address this case is, of course, that the contrasting and conflicting aspects are presented as a form of corporeality in McCree's life. The bodily aspect provides a basis for his subjectivity and it is through the body that meaningful connections are established. This is made explicit. In *Boyz* (2010) McCree states: 'My belief is the most important thing in my life and my tattoo chains me to that. So if I should ever lose my way, they'll be a reminder of what's really important to me.' His spiritual identity is imprinted in the form of tattoos all over his upper body. His body is covered with a harmonious pattern that unites and combines the various elements into one unique inscription. However, it is worthwhile noting that the body enters the story also in other ways. It is strongly present and sexualized through his work as a porn star, but is similarly a vehicle in addressing the theme of ascetic ideals. McCree does not allow himself to have intimate relationships and conducts a heavy daily workout programme, finally claiming to be willing to die for friends.

Finally, and before discussing this case a bit further, I would like to conclude by underlining that it might be problematic to look for one single corporeal subjectivity in the story about McCree. On the contrary, it is full of dissonances, an aspect that makes the story iconic and meaningful to a larger audience. The relevance, and strong presence, of such dissonances might also allow us to reflect on the story in terms of a fragmented body, or a story of the struggle in negotiating several bodies. Narratives and scripts, as Sara Ahmed (2004: 145), explains, 'shape bodies and lives including those that follow and depart from such narratives in the ways in which they love and live'.

Overlapping discourses

The iconic image of McCree in the magazine *Boyz* (2010) and on MyOutSpirit.com (2010) presents a self-made man in several ways. The choice of being religious is his. Further, he masters the content and the borders of this spirituality. He denies parts of himself and his body and trains it for other purposes—like an ascetic. Finally, he devotes himself to his spirituality and chooses to make it his destiny, being willing to die for others like a warrior. All this is scripted onto his body and into his self in several ways.

As indicated above, this story makes use of a very contemporary position. It mixes expressive and contrasting elements in an eclectic fashion and reinforces the self as a centre. The kind of spirituality given voice through McCree is not foreign in any way to Western culture today (cf. Frisk 2009). However, in the articles it is both directly and indirectly claimed that the context within which subjectivity and spirituality is connected makes it unique in the way it becomes an expression for emancipation. It is shown how the subjectivized religious space can be used to transgress discursive conflicts and hegemonic scripts. It is shown how this space allows for claiming a similar voice as the 'certain class of people. . . who care for and minister the souls of others and whose task is to cultivate them ethically and to know and direct the conscience of others,' as Butler (2004: 161) puts it. McCree explicitly identifies himself as a (future) minister of souls.

It is obvious that this story has to be read as a counter narrative of the marginalized gay culture. The self-narrative and biographical form of the story is intrinsic to late modernity, but has also been particularly prevalent in gay subcultures (cf. Munt 2010: 3). Personal stories that intersect with contemporary cultural forms have further become even more common and public through the growing relevance of different media (cf. Lundby 2010: 58–62). The articles gain their meaning from bringing to the surface the conflicting discourses between sexuality and religion that has often troubled both the queer community and public voices claiming religious authority. McCree is the gay porn-star who does not even try to adjust to prevailing norms by making himself invisible. Instead, he contests and exhibits an inverted model, simultaneously claiming moral dignity and identifying with the stereotype about the over-sexualized character of LGBT-lives. As an icon he embodies a resistance against the hegemony exercised by the alliance between the heteronormative society and religious authorities over the body. The masculine ascetic warrior fits well into the image of this holy war to conquer new land and space that is connoted in the story. The play of stereotypes and public images provides elements that make the story meaningful, and connote emancipation and hence also transformation.

However, the personal form of this narrative also reinforces the relevance of McCree as a real, coherent person, despite the fact that this involves the externalization of a fragmented and conflicting corporeality, of the necessity to bring forth a subjectivity constituted by different bodies. From this perspective, the narrative is also about the vulnerability involved in marginalized subjectivities. It is a story about the personal sacrifice involved in collective transformation and it represents what could be called a politics of becoming,

that is, the 'paradoxical politics by which new cultural identities are formed out of old energies, injuries, and differences' (Connolly 1996: 261). In contrast to—or in cooperation with—the element of transformation and emancipation, McCree's story expresses simultaneously a fantasy of a new form of identity characterized by stability and permanency. Sacrifice and vulnerability is the language of this fantasy.

The aim of this article was to explore an example of how bodies and corporealities entering a particular story pose a greater challenge. From some brief notes on body culture in general and body modification in particular, I pointed out some examples of how to interpret these trends in general. I referred to ontological insecurity, compensating hypercarnate cultures and quests for identities in combination with the problem of permanency vs. transformation. Further, from a discussion about how to understand corporeality and to repudiate the mind–body dualism, the body was depicted as place of various subjectivities with different emphases. I pointed to the body as a vehicle of adaptation in terms of adjusting experiences, emotions and thoughts, in addition to framing corporeality in terms of body image internalizing social and cultural elements or scripted bodies, a silent surface invaded by hegemonic scripts.

Do any of these interpretations fit the example? Even though they, to some extent, represent conflicting understandings of human subjectivity, I would like to argue that they still provide material for interpretation and that the story of or about McCree has elements that correspond with them. The story is obviously a contemporary story about the search for and construction of a secure identity. It speaks the language of a new form of spirituality that further, in its particular contexts, entails a promise of empowerment.

On several levels, almost like a main theme, the body is given the role of a main agent or site in this search for a space that is simultaneously about transformation and permanency, not either or. The idea of change is connected to bodywork and, for instance, chaining oneself in several ways. Further, it is also a story about the necessity of controlling and working with the body as a means of adjusting the emotions, thoughts and experiences embedded in marginalized subjectivities and achieving a sense of dignity and pride. Finally, it is a story about how the body is articulated by and for hegemonic others and how new forms of agencies are made possible within the imagination of alternative bodies. Still, I would also like to point out that the distinction between the excarnate and the hypercarnate dimension of our culture can be questioned. The corporeality of a new iconic identity is mediated through a magazine and the internet, that is, the hypercarnate culture and the relevance

of corporeality is expressed within the excarnate sphere. On more general level, this can also help us to see that we are not dealing with bodies here, but with visual and discursive representations of bodies. We are dealing with body-talk, a body-talk directing our attention at forms of subjectivities, suppressed, lived and imagined.

The brief reflections above are not necessarily a feature of this story only. I will briefly point to another example. A somewhat similar pattern can be recognized if we turn to the website of the Church of Body Modification. It presents itself in the following way:

The Church of Body Modification represents a collection of members practising ancient and modern body modification rites. We believe these rites are essential to our spirituality. Practising body modification and engaging in body manipulation rituals strengthens the bond between mind, body, and soul. By doing so, we ensure that we live as spiritually complete and healthy individuals. (Church of Body Modification 2010.)

Similar themes (spirituality, health and being a complete whole of mind, body, and soul) are strongly underlined in both the mission statement of the church and its statement of faith, in combination with an emphasis on personal growth and development and the marginalization of the idea of a transcendental world. Further, the Church of Body Modification gives a very inclusive and eclectic impression and allows and fosters a mix of spiritual practices. Some of the ministers call themselves shamans or urban shamans. Some have a background in Wicca and others as seekers. Still—the biographical stories about the ministers more or less depict body modification as the ultimate goal, the end of a road of seeking. There is a strong statement of the right to alter the body, in combination with a stress on respect for the body.

In this case a new corporeal subjectivity is mediated through the internet. The Church of Body Modification seems to operate mainly through the internet. You become a member by applying online; you buy your ritual box on the same site; you apply to become a minister by a similar application in combination with an online interview. You gain the information and support you need in the internet community for members only—or by e-mail contact to some of the ministers. Finally, the self-identity of the Church of Body Modification also involves a sense of marginalization and empowerment similar to that of the LGBT-discourse. For instance, the internet community for members only has a class for discussing 'discrimination in the workplace, in schools, and in the family setting' that provides assistance and help from

church ministers. The deviant way of using the body calls for emancipating strategies.

Concluding remarks

Where does this take us? First and foremost my reflections above indicate that the academic discourses and the discourses in the story about McCree and on the website of the Church of Body Modification are overlapping. Hence, both parts can be understood as trajectories of a more general interest in the body that extends into what we conceive of as cultures quite different from each other. They are not independent of each other. It is worthwhile underlining that in both cases we encounter not bodies, but discourses about bodies, even though much of the academic discourse seems to assume that we could encounter and explore bodies as such. We are not dealing with corporeality, but with visual and discursive representations of our bodies in order to focus subjectivities. Body-talk represents a way of referring to what it is to be human, but of course a way that carries certain features and implications. The body seems to represent a sort of strong epistemological centre in an era of subjectivisation. The possibility of connecting this to religion also indicates that the body can be given this central role.

This should not, however, be understood as an effort to dismiss the relevance of the academic discourse, but rather as a critical position towards the strong epistemological claims made within this discourse. Oakley (2007: 149) makes a modest, but very relevant claim when she writes in the following way: 'Perhaps the body and the sense of self are linked (or not) in many different ways, but we only know about some of these because of the bias in the way knowledge is made.' It might be relevant to reflect on corporeality, not as much in terms of exploring parts of a more or less relevant ontology, but as representations of a changing epistemology, a discursive space through which we encounter, affect, master and change the world.

Understanding the story of and about McCree (and the construction of the Church of Body Modification) might require us to account for several and even conflicting understandings of the body and the role and place of corporeality in relation to subjectivities. Reimagining alternative bodies is meaningful in contrast with the idea of scripted bodies. The story about McCree is more or less about the re-scripting of a scripted body. The body we need to account for is not one body, but several bodies, in a way that is in accordance with the complexity of subjectivities. Hence, McCree's iconic body

makes sense as an incompatible and fragmented corporeality of several bodies: 'The wounded body often becomes a template of individual and collective memory, both a map and a moral charter' (Sheper-Hughes 2007). This brings us once again back to the question of epistemology.

As I pointed out above, subjectivities as a continuous construction of the individual subject within culture, history and discourse and within particular relations of power imply a sensibility for a process that is incomplete and a complex mix of both resonances and dissonances. The questions I have posed through my discussion above in this article are as follows: does repudiating the classic mind–body split involve recognition that the way subjectivity and corporeality are connected has to be just as complex as our understanding of subjectivities? Does this mean that we need to account for a corporeality constituted by several bodies, in other words, the body as a body scripted by prevailing hegemonies and their counter-scripts, and further their trajectories of imagined bodies striving also to dismiss, negotiate and adjust themselves to the different conflicting scripts? Is the effort to define a single body—scripted, imagined or neurophysical—an idealistic position in relation to every contextualized corporeality? The implications of this for the different discussions referred above presents, finally, a separate question.

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