

# Embodiment in the poetry of Gabeba Baderoon

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## Prologue and Acknowledgements

Over the last couple of months, I have searched through many books and notes and documents collected over the years to aid my writing of this prologue. I wanted to write about my affair with literature, how it all began, retracing my steps to where it all began. Did it commence with the *My First Library* collection from when I was five or six, or was it spurred by the first time I heard Auden, or read *Macbeth*? Perhaps the tattered anthology of English poetry kept under my bed for the better part of my teenage years had something to do with it? Losing myself in *The Garden of Proserpine*, or feeling that *the world is too much with me*, too? I set out for days on end to find the perfect novel, drama, poetry collection, which could be said to have made the biggest impact on my life, my love, my career. This has, however, proven to be an impossible task, as although I am sure there must have been a discerning moment in which I realized that this, *literature*, was something to get excited about, I could not recall it. And then, as it happens, I was reading a book not too long ago, one of those second-hand copies with the torn, yellowing pages and notes from previous readers in the margins, and one seemingly insignificant passage struck me, in which the narrator gives the example of a famous German poem by Goethe:

Über allen Gipfeln  
ist Ruh,  
in allen Wipfeln  
spürest du  
kaum einen Hauch.  
Die Vögel schweigen im Walde.  
Warte nur, balde  
ruhest du auch.<sup>1</sup>

Subsequently, he writes:

The idea of the poem is simple: in the woods everything is asleep, and you will sleep too. The purpose of the poetry is not to dazzle us with an astonishing thought, but to make one moment of existence unforgettable and worthy of unbearable nostalgia (Kundera *Immortality* 28-29).

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<sup>1</sup> “On all hilltops / There is peace, / In all treetops / You will hear / Hardly a breath. / Birds in the woods are silent. / Just wait, soon / You too will rest.”

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This dissertation is not only the product of my own labour and love for literature, but also many others who have provided support and inspiration, some perhaps not even realizing the impact they might have had on me and my work. However, there are individuals whom I would like to thank extensively, and I hope this will serve as a symbol of my gratitude. First, to my family, and especially my mother, for their endless financial and moral support during my many years of study at the North-West University: without you, none of it would have been possible. To the North-West University, in particular the Research Unit: Language and Literature in the South African context, for monetary support without which this study would not have been achievable. To my supervisor, Professor Terblanche, for providing assistance with this dissertation, as well as giving me ingenious tools for literary studies in general. In addition I would like to thank my Hermanus High School English teacher, Mrs de Wet, for exposing me to the joys of poetry, for being an inspiration, and for unwittingly fuelling what has become a passion for the literary arts. Also to Professor De Lange for convincing me to continue on the postgraduate path, I have not yet looked back. A word of gratitude and appreciation to my friends, especially Joanne, for their endless support. And a special thanks to Alwyn, for being my biggest motivator, as well as my most vital reader. Without all of your dedication, enthusiasm and encouragement I would not have been able to complete this study successfully.

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# Abstract

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This dissertation examines the relation between embodiment and language, knowledge and memory, as explored in the poetry of South African poet Gabeba Baderoon. In her three published collections of poetry, namely, *The Museum of Ordinary Life*, *The Dream in the Next Body* and *A Hundred Silences*, she depicts seemingly trivial and everyday events or experiences with acute attention to detail, all of which are connected by her unique portrayal of their embodied nature. In doing so, her work illustrates that intellectual activities typically associated with the mind, such as language, knowledge and memory, in fact require the incorporation of the body. Therefore, this dissertation studies the mind-body relation represented in her work with regard to these thematic concerns, since it is a crucial aspect of her poetry and aids not only in understanding and interpreting her work, but also the discourse on embodiment in general. These concerns do, moreover, not remain on a thematic level, but are evident in her poetry itself; that is, her poems too act as a form of embodiment. Furthermore, Baderoon's poems are able to transcend the supposed mind-body dichotomy in a way that shows much in common with phenomenology, and especially the perspective held by authors such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty. This dissertation incorporates phenomenological ideas on the body and embodiment, as these assist in interpreting Baderoon's work, as well as for the reason that her poetry sheds new light upon the understanding of such phenomenological ideas, too. Thus, this dissertation seeks to elucidate the manner in which Gabeba Baderoon's poetry transcends the mind-body dichotomy by means of her exceptional employment of the notion of embodiment on a thematic as well as formal level.

**Key words:** Gabeba Baderoon's poetry, embodiment, corporeality, mind-body dualism, language, knowledge, memory, phenomenology, Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

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# Opsomming

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Hierdie verhandeling ondersoek die verhouding tussen beliggaming en taal, kennis en geheue soos verken in die poësie van die Suid-Afrikaanse digter Gabeba Baderoon. In haar drie digbundels, naamlik *The Museum of Ordinary Life*, *The Dream in the Next Body* en *A Hundred Silences*, wat deur haar unieke uitbeelding van beliggaming verbind word, beeld sy oënskynlike alledaagse gebeurtenisse en ervarings in besondere detail uit. Hierdeur illustreer haar werk dat intellektuele aktiwiteite, wat gewoonlik met die verstand geassosieer word, soos taal, kennis en geheue die gebruik van die liggaam veronderstel. Die verstand-liggaam-verhouding word voorts met laasgenoemde tematiese belange in verband gebring, aangesien dit belangrike aspekte van haar digkuns beklemtoon, wat nie net bydra tot die verstaan en interpretasie van haar werk nie, maar ook tot die diskoers oor beliggaming. Verder figureer hierdie belange nie net op tematiese vlak nie, maar is beliggaming ook duidelik in haar gedigte self en tree dit as 'n tipe beliggaming op. Baderoon se gedigte transendeer die veronderstelde liggaam-verstand-digitomie op 'n manier wat baie met fenomenologie in gemeen het, veral die perspektiewe van die filosoof Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Fenomenologiese idees van die liggaam en beliggaming word daarom in die verhandeling geïnkorporeer, omdat dié idees bydra tot die interpretasie van Baderoon se werk en verdere lig werp op die verstaan van fenomenologiese idees oor die liggaam en beliggaming. Die verhandeling poog dus om die besondere wyse waarop Gabeba Baderoon die verstand-liggaam-digitomie transendeer deur middel van die aanwending van die idee van beliggaming te beskryf, illustreer en duidelik te maak.

**Sleutelwoorde:** Gabeba Baderoon se gedigte, beliggaming, liggaamlikheid, gees-liggaam-dualisme, taal, kennis, geheue, fenomenologie, Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

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It is difficult to find the beginning. Or better: it is difficult to begin at the beginning. And not try to go further back. ~ *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein

### 1.1 Introduction

This dissertation examines the relation between embodiment and language, knowledge and memory, as explored in the poetry of South African author Gabeba Baderoon. In her three published collections of poetry, namely, *The Museum of Ordinary Life*, *The Dream in the Next Body* and *A Hundred Silences*, Baderoon depicts seemingly mundane, insignificant and everyday events, objects and people with acute attention to detail. The common factor that connects these trivial events or experiences in her poems with one another is her unique portrayal of *embodiment* that is clearly necessary in the acquisition of language, knowledge or experience, as well as in remembering.

Baderoon's poetry portrays intellectual activities typically only associated with encompassing the mind, such as the acquisition of language, ways of knowing as well as the process of remembering, as necessarily requiring the utilization of the body. Therefore, a study of the mind-body relation as depicted in her poetry is important and significant, since it can be viewed as a crucial aspect of her work which has up to date been neglected by critical inquiry, as well as for the reason that this consideration sheds unique light upon the mind-body dichotomy prevalent in Western thought.

In order to examine the manner in which Baderoon's poems transcend the aforementioned dichotomy critically, this dissertation employs the unique phenomenological perspective of philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty on the body and embodiment. His views, as will be explicated in chapters to follow, closely relate to the way in which Baderoon illustrates

bodies and the notion of embodiment in her poems, and will thus be incorporated in this study as it brings one to a new understanding and appreciation of her work.

## 1.2 Contextualization and problem statement

This dissertation argues that Gabeba Baderoon's poems transcend the mind-body dichotomy through the depiction of a phenomenological relationship between the mind and the body. Why is this contribution considered to be of significance though? First of all, it is important to understand that the relationship between the mind and the body is a much discussed topic, and has been for centuries. From the ancient Greek philosopher Plato (427-347 BC) who identified the duality of the body and the mind as the principle problematic in the formation of human civilization (Lewis 296), to Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) who described it as the *world knot*: a puzzle beyond human comprehension (Cavallaro 146), this relationship has always been enigmatic and difficult to explain.

The great theoretical split between the mind and the body occurred during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the period known as the Enlightenment, following the ideas of French philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650). His famous aphorism *cogito ergo sum*, I think therefore I am, suggests that *thought* provides the only solid anchorage for knowledge, and that the senses are inherently deceptive (Lewis 297). This method of argumentation has since influenced the methodology of all modern science and rational thought, thereby positing the mind in a superior position to the body in most of Western philosophy. In this mind-body dualism, the body is considered to be a mere vehicle of the mind, driven by its desires and appetites and thus requires the mind's restraining influence (Baldwin *et al.* 270). Therefore, the body is everything the mind is not, and is implicitly viewed as "unruly, disruptive, [and] in need of direction and judgement" (Grosz 3).

What makes this dualistic view *problematic* is the fact that it renders the body absent from the process of theorizing as well as theory itself, resulting in a strangely disembodied subject which is considered to operate in terms of "pure mind" alone (Shildrick and Price 1). Evidently, this cannot be the case, as humans are embodied beings, and everyday life is dominated by this corporeal existence (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2). Recovering the body,

as well as “getting the body into writing” (Brooks 1), has been a primary concern not only of social sciences such as sociology and anthropology, but importantly of literary studies too. It is to this point that Gabeba Baderoon’s poems are of particular significance, as they conceive a view of the body and embodiment which transcends the aforementioned dichotomy in a unique manner.

Baderoon’s poetry challenges the idea of the mind being privileged over the body in terms of various forms of “intellectual” enterprises. Consider the poem “Breath” (HS 33) in which the poetic figure is in the process of acquiring a new language. According to this poem, learning to speak a new language is not purely a mental activity, rather: it requires, to a large extent, the employment of the physical body.

### **Breath**

1      Language is breath,  
2      is touch, is spit,  
3      is the silence before speaking.

4      *Russian*  
5      A woman learning Russian describes  
6      the new inclination of her head,  
7      her chest, her hands,  
8      the tightening of her upper lip  
9      like bee stings around the mouth,  
10     the muscular changes in her tongue  
11     an invasion from the inside.

12     *Arabic*  
13     I teach you to say the first letter of my name,  
14     a sound between g and h,  
15     for which there is no letter in English.

16     Breathe in,  
17     take a sip of water,  
18     breathe out.

19     The sound of breath leaving the throat  
20     is the start of my name. (HS 33)

The opening line introduces language as “breath”, something which is crucial for the human body to survive. Thus, right from the beginning of the poem, language is seen as necessary for human existence, but in the same instance it is something physical, something bodily. Language is further shown to be “touch” (line 2) and “spit” (line 2), which deems it very much part of a physical experience. In the first stanza of the poem language is at the outset

an activity of the body, before it is necessarily one of the mind. The second stanza of the poem further unpacks the corporeality of language – in learning to speak a new language, the poetic speaker marks the physical adaptation of the woman's body: "the new inclination of her head, / her chest, her hands" (lines 5-6). This adaptation then also becomes part of her muscles, transforming her physical body as a bee sting to the lips would make it swell. Her upper lip tightens and the muscles in her tongue are strengthened and changed. What is interesting about the two final stanzas is that the speaker does not try to give a rational explanation as to the pronunciation of his/ her name by calling on the woman in the poem or the reader's knowledge of other languages, but rather tries to explain it by means of a physical activity. In this way, the speaker is trying to force the woman in the poem, as well as the reader, to speak out loud, to attempt to say his/ her name by breathing out, thereby making the speaking of a language a physical and embodied action.

Furthermore, the first line of the poem sensitizes the reader to the fact that "language is breath". One of the important implications of this image is that poetry, which consists of language, cannot merely be sounded out silently in the mind, but needs to be read out loud, needs to be heard. Thus, just as the figure in the poem needs to make the body part of her physical experience in acquiring a new language, the reader of the poem needs to sound out the letters and words – the poem also needs to become a physical activity, a type of embodiment. By suggesting that the reader "[b]reathe in, / take a sip of water, / breathe out" (lines 16-18), before trying to sound out the woman's name, the poet shows that the presupposed clear split between mind and body falls away, as it would not be possible to know the sound of the speaker's name without physically sounding out the letters. The body is therefore shown to be a radical and imperative part of the linguistic experience.

Poetry can, in and of itself, be seen as a form of embodiment. When taking into consideration the formal aspects of poems such as line breaks, sound and rhyme patterns, imagery, and so forth, one comes to think of these as the "physical" aspects of poetry. Just as the human being has an embodied mind, the poem can be seen, in its physical form, as an embodied thought or idea. Therefore, when a poem such as "Breath" calls upon the reader to sound out words in order to be able to understand or speak them, it also draws attention to the physical embodiment of *poetry*. In this sense, this poem should be read on (at least) two different levels – in terms of its content, as well as in terms of its form. Consider, for example, the first stanza of "Breath". The sound pattern most clearly identified here is the

alliteration of the s-sound. When saying the “s” in “spit”, “silence” and “speaking” in the first stanza out loud, one becomes aware of its hissing quality, as the breath hisses between the tongue and teeth (Mason and Nims 159). In a sense, it can be said that the reader reading the poem out loud, also becomes aware of his/ her body through the formal use of sounds in combination with the content of the poem, strengthening the connection between the cognitive process of reading and the physical performance of it. Thereby, the relationship between the mind and the body is contemplated in the poem by means of both its content *and* its form.

Similarly, several of Baderoon’s poems have as motif the mind-body dichotomy. In “True” (DNB 9-10) the reader is told that:

- 1        To judge if a line is true,
- 2        banish the error of parallax.
- 3        Bring your eye as close as you can
- 4        to the line itself and follow it.
  
- 5        A master tiler taught me this.
  
- 6        People wish to walk where he has kneeled
- 7        and smoothed the surface.
- 8        They follow a line to its end
- 9        and smile at its sweet geometry,
- 10       how he has sutured the angles of the room.
  
- 11       He transports his tools by bicycle –
- 12       a bucket, a long plastic tube he fills with water
- 13       to find a level mark, a cushion on which to kneel,
- 14       a fine cotton cloth to wipe from the tiles the dust
- 15       that colours his lashes at the end of the day.
  
- 16       He knows how porcelain, terracotta and marble hold
- 17       the eye. He knows the effect of the weight
- 18       of a foot on ceramic. Terracotta’s warm dust cups
- 19       your foot like leather. Porcelain will appear
- 20       untouched all its life and for this reason
- 21       is also used in the mouth.
  
- 22       To draw a line on which to lay a tile,
- 23       hold a chalked string fixed
- 24       at one end of a room and whip
- 25       it hard against the cement floor.
  
- 26       With a blue grid he shakes out
- 27       the sheets of unordered space, folds
- 28       them into squares and lays them end on end.
- 29       Under the knees, a room will become whole and clear.

30      At night, he rides home over ground that rises  
 31      and falls as it never does under his hands. (DNB 9-10)

In this poem, the activity of tiling becomes not only one of planning and mathematical accuracy, but rather an embodied activity which tells the reader that the master tiler in the poem knows “the effect of the weight / of a foot on ceramic” (lines 17-18) and how “terracotta’s warm dust cups / your foot like leather” (lines 18-19). This draws attention to the corporeal activity and the body’s role in such, more so than that of the mental process of mathematically deciding where to place a tile and how to determine which materials are best to use. Consequently, it foregrounds and undermines the assured hierarchy between mind and body, as the concrete experience comes first in the obtaining of knowledge.

Additionally, formal aspects in “True” also illustrate the embodiment of the poem in its physical form. When considering the line breaks in this poem, for example, one becomes aware of the manner in which the poem follows the movement of the poetic figure’s body. The beginning of the second stanza serves as a good example of this: “[p]eople wish to walk where he has kneeled / and smoothed the surface” (lines 6-7). The word “kneeled” appears strategically at the end of the line, imitating the bending of a leg as it kneels – the sentence continues into the next line, but is “bent” with the word “kneeled”. Similarly, the poem continues to imitate the tiler by means of its line breaks, as shown in stanza three where “kneel” appears again at the end of a line but as part of a continued idea, and it is said that the dust from the tiles “colours his lashes at the end of the day”, which also ends the stanza. In stanza six the tiler, using a blue grid, “shakes out / the sheets of unordered space” (lines 26-27) and then “folds / them into squares and lays them end to end” (lines 27-28). Again the imitation in the movement of the tiler in the poem can be seen in not only the choice of words used, but also the physical form of the poem. The final stanza completes this idea: “At night, he rides home over ground that rises / and falls as it never does in his hands” (lines 30-31) – the separation in the lines between “rising” and “falling” bearing likeness to the physical activity explained as the tiler rides his bicycle home. Clearly, the formal aspects of the poem reinforce and intensify the embodiment of knowledge found in its content.

In Baderoon’s poetry, the resurfacing of memories also becomes an experience closely associated with a form of embodiment. In the title poem of *The Dream in the Next Body* (33)

the speaker's longing for a loved one is made explicit and becomes a vivid reality as the speaker recalls how "my body continued / the movement of yours" (lines 13-14), but at the end of the poem, after the lover has departed, all that is left is "the impress of our bodies. . . a single, warm hollow" (lines 18-19).

### **The Dream in the Next Body**

1      From the end of the bed, I pull  
2      the sheets back into place.

3      An old man paints a large sun striped  
4      by clouds of seven blues.  
5      Across the yellow centre each  
6      blue is precisely itself and yet,  
7      at the point it meets another,  
8      the eye cannot detect a change.  
9      The air shifts, he says,  
10     and the colours.

11     When you touched me in a dream,  
12     your skin an hour ago did not end  
13     where it joined mine. My body continued  
14     the movement of yours. Something flowed  
15     between us like birds in a flock.

16     In a solitude larger than our bodies  
17     the hardening light parted us again

18     but under the covering the impress  
19     of our bodies is a single, warm hollow. (DNB 33)

This recollection does not only lie in the recalling of the lover, his/ her personality, but also in the impress his/ her body made, and the sense of physical absence in the speaker. The focus of memories thus shifts here to tangible, embodied instances of that which is no longer physically present, and in this sense such poems undermine the mind-body dichotomy in terms of recollection.

On a formal level, the "The Dream in the Next Body" (DNB 33) insists on the embodiment of meaning. The physical form of the poem, including its sound patterns, line breaks and rhythms becomes in itself a body, but also emulates the movement of the bodies in its content. Consider, for example, the third stanza of this poem. The enjambment of these lines allow for a continuation of the body and skin on a physical level which relates to that described by the content of the stanza. Similarly, the use of alliteration allows for a feeling of

movement and flow when read. The sounds imitate one another, as well as showing the inseparability of the lovers: the voiced “d”-sounds as in “dream”, “did”, “end”, “joined”, “body”, “continued” and “flowed”, along with the “m”-sounds as heard in “me”, “dream”, “mine”, “movement”, and “something”, allow for these lines to be as closely connected physically as the lovers described by its content are, illustrating once more the embodiment in the poem on a level of both content and form. The intertwined nature of content and form in Baderoon’s work allows her to transcend the presupposed split between the two, and by implication transcends the mind-body split, as well.

Clearly, then, a type of embodiment takes place in Baderoon’s poetry which is vital to a discussion of her oeuvre, not least because it challenges/ transcends traditional ideas about the mind-body dichotomy both in terms of its content and its form. In order to discuss this topic, it is of course assumed that such a distinction exists, but instead of reinforcing this idea, Baderoon’s work creatively alters this presupposition, asking instead for a re-evaluation of the relationship between the mind and the body. The question which arises may therefore be formulated as follows: *how* does Gabeba Baderoon’s poetry transcend/ challenge the mind-body dichotomy?

The idea of embodiment as found in Baderoon’s poetry closely relates to that of French phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), whose work on embodiment is considered seminal. Among other things, Merleau-Ponty poses a complex and informative challenge to the idea of Cartesian dualism, and it is evident that this brings his work in proximity to Baderoon’s. In *Phenomenology of Perception* he rejects the idea that the mind is the locus of subjectivity, and asserts that perception stems from an openness to the world, and is the manner in which we, as embodied beings, are projected into the world (Moran 418). For Merleau-Ponty the world is also made to be experienced by our sense organs, in other words, when our mind perceives or observes, it does so through a practical embodied location, that is, the human body (Kosut and Moore 21). This manner of reasoning foregrounds the importance of the physical body in “lived experience” and the embodiment of the self, and again significantly relates to Baderoon’s poetry with its openness to experience not only as an abstract phenomenon, but especially in terms of its corporeality. This is indeed a vital point from a phenomenological viewpoint of the kind entertained by Merleau-Ponty, as phenomenology shifts attention from knowledge as merely a set of abstractions to knowledge as part of “lived experience” and therefore requires *embodiment*,



which clearly indicates a link between the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty and the poetry of Baderoon.

As shown earlier, different forms of cognitive processes generally associated with “mind” are undermined in examples of her poems such as “Breath”, “True” and “The Dream in the Next Body”. Each of these represents different forms of such processes, namely language, knowledge and memory. As seen in both the content and form of the poems, Baderoon foregrounds and transcends the mind-body dichotomy in these poems by drawing attention to the fact that not one of these activities is possible solely by means of employing one’s mind – language, knowledge and memory need to be embodied physically, illustrating the importance of the corporal body in experience in a similar manner as Merleau-Ponty does in his work.

A further important part of the reason for reading Baderoon against Merleau-Ponty is that his understanding of the concept of *embodiment* brings one closer to understanding how Baderoon gives shape to it. For him the term refers to the perceptive way in which we know and experience the world through our own bodies, resulting in, for example, acquiring knowledge through the body which leads us to perform certain actions “without thinking” (Moore and Kosut 21). Baderoon’s poetry alludes to this matter as the bodies in her poems acquire knowledge necessarily in terms of embodiment, and are able to perform actions only as embodied beings, undermining the embedded hierarchy in a similar manner to that explored by Merleau-Ponty.

The argument to follow therefore focuses on how Baderoon achieves her unique expression of embodiment on two interrelated and often simultaneously rendered levels: embodiment as a motif, and her poetry as a form of embodiment. As mentioned earlier, it is this striking and complex relationship between the mind and the body which is of major significance in Baderoon’s oeuvre, not only in her mere engagement with the subject, but especially in the manner in which this is done.

On the basis of the above, the following questions arise:

1. How does Baderoon give shape to the mind-body relationship in terms of the motifs of language, knowledge and memory prevalent in her poems?

2. How does the poetry itself act as a form of embodiment, and what light does this shed on the significance and impact of her poetic oeuvre?
3. What light does phenomenology and Merleau-Ponty's conception of embodiment shed on the vitally important embodiment in Gabeba Baderoon's poetry?
4. What light does the expression of embodiment in Gabeba Baderoon's poetry, in turn, shed on phenomenology and the notion of embodiment?

### **1.3 Aims**

1. To illustrate how Baderoon gives shape to the mind-body relationship in her poetry in terms of the motifs of language, knowledge and memory.
2. To demonstrate how the poetry itself acts as a form of embodiment, and to show the significance of this for her poetic oeuvre.
3. To establish the significance of phenomenology and Merleau-Ponty's conception of embodiment, and to show how it can shed light on embodiment in Baderoon's poetry.
4. To establish the significance of the expression of embodiment in Gabeba Baderoon's poetry for phenomenology and the notion of embodiment.

### **1.4 Thesis statement**

This dissertation focuses on the relationship between mind and body, and embodiment, as depicted in the poetry of Gabeba Baderoon. "Embodiment", or the giving of a "tangible, bodily, or concrete form to an abstract concept" (Anderson et al. 511), plays an important role in Baderoon's three volumes of poetry. It argues that, by employing embodiment as a motif concomitant with a formal aspect, Baderoon's poetry undermines the dualistic legacy of

Cartesian thought. In order to illustrate this point, this dissertation will firstly consider how she gives shape to the relationship between the mind and the body in her poetry.

Baderoon uses motifs such as language, knowledge and memory as avenues of exploration of the relations between the mind and the body. These categories, typically associated with rational processes, are shown in her work to require the inhabiting of the physical body. In terms of the content of several of her poems, the mind and the body seem intertwined, as in the acquisition of language, or acquiring knowledge, or recalling an event of the past where the *physical* body of the speaker and the poetic figures play an important role.

The notion of embodiment is highly relevant to the form of poetry itself. Formal aspects of poems, such as line breaks, sound and rhythm patterns, shape the “body” of the poem. This dissertation argues that poetry can in itself be seen as a form of embodiment, as these formal aspects play an important role in forming the “body” of the poems, whilst simultaneously signifying their content. As illustrated earlier, Baderoon’s poems often mime the movements of the physical bodies of the poetic figures in the manner in which the lines continue or break. Likewise, the sounds used in her poems sensitize the reader to the physical presence of his/her own body, and closely relate to the content of the poems, heightening the experience of reading her work. Thus, her poems become “embodiments” of their content both on the level of poetry as well as for the person reading it.

Furthermore, it will be argued that the motif of embodiment in her poetry can be closely related to the phenomenological ideas of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and therefore these can be used as a means of interpreting and explaining how Baderoon makes use of embodiment to undermine the presupposed mind-body dichotomy prevalent in Western thought. Merleau-Ponty’s ideas, which also undermine the mind-body dichotomy, relate to those of Baderoon in a significant manner. This is especially clear when taking into account his idea that the body should not be studied merely as an object, and humans not merely as minds, but rather embodied beings. Reading Baderoon’s poems against a phenomenological perspective such as Merleau-Ponty’s, opens new avenues for exploration, understanding, and most importantly, appreciation of her work and her conception of the relationship between the mind and the body.

Therefore, the significance of Baderoon's oeuvre lies not only in the fact that she foregrounds and transcends the mind-body dichotomy, but especially in the manner in which this is done, by means of employing both content and form in her motifs.

## 1.5 Methodology

The dissertation takes a hermeneutical approach to reading poetry as its starting point, attempting close readings of the poems studied to illustrate the motifs identified in terms of both content and form. Such an approach has the aim of interpreting and understanding texts, as can be derived from the etymological relation of the word "hermeneutics" to the messenger-God Hermes, who is associated with "the function of transmuting what is beyond human understanding into a form that human intelligence can grasp" (Hawthorn 147-148). It employs the "hermeneutic circle" which is a term used to express the (seeming) paradox that the whole can only be understood once its parts are, whilst these parts, likewise, can only be understood by means of understanding the whole (Hawthorn 148). Therefore, this dissertation makes use of close reading techniques to illustrate how Baderoon's poetry transcends the mind-body dichotomy, but it does not suppose that this process only takes place on a "rational" level. The employment of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological ideas opens an avenue for the exploration of the text both as illustrating the necessity of embodiment, and also through an embodiment in itself.

Thus, this dissertation utilizes phenomenological ideas such as Merleau-Ponty's regarding the body, mind and embodiment, to acquire a better understanding of these terms. For example, his writing provides an account of the body which attends to lived and interpreted experience, as well as interaction with the world which transcends the conceptual dualism of mind and body. He also attempts to show that human beings are not merely "minds" (or "subjects"), nor merely "bodies", but should rather be considered "body-subjects"<sup>2</sup> (Matthews 93). This term does not only assert that subjects have bodies, but moreover indicates that minds and bodies, or subjectivity and corporeality, are intertwined in a fundamental, existential manner (Howson and Ingles 303-4). Thus the subject (or mind) *is*, in effect, the body, and the body *is* the mind (subject).

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<sup>2</sup> Merleau-Ponty does not actually use the term "body-subject", but it is commonly used to express his view of embodied subjectivity (Matthews 93).

Merleau-Ponty's conception of the body-subject can be viewed as an attempt to rethink the relationship between the human mind/ body and its relation to the world (Haddow 96), and this view should be related to the view posited in Gabeba Baderoon's poems. A phenomenological study of the body/ mind motif in Baderoon's poetry would then highlight the link between the physical body and its subject (or self), both in terms of the content of the poems as well as formal aspects which make out the "body" of poetry.

In order to achieve the aims set out in this chapter, Chapter Two serves as the theoretical background to the dissertation as a whole, attempting to provide definitions of the notions of "mind", "body" and "embodiment" as will be used in this dissertation. It also explains the phenomenological approach which this dissertation takes, as well as explicating the relationship between Baderoon's motifs of language, knowledge and memory and the notion of embodiment. Chapter Three closely examines the motif of language found in Baderoon's poems, attempting to illustrate how she shows it to be embodied. In order to do so, it focuses specifically on aspects such as the acquisition of language, the corporeal nature of words, as well as language's (in)ability to convey meaning. Similarly to the poem "Breath" discussed in this chapter, much of Baderoon's other poems shed light on her view of language as embodied, and it is to this point that Chapter Three makes its contribution.

Chapter Four focuses on the phenomenological view of knowledge and ways of knowing as found in Baderoon's poems. It argues that, with regard to knowledge, Baderoon's poetry portrays two main thematic concerns: knowledge as experience or skill, and knowledge as knowing and dwelling. As in the poem "True", Baderoon's poems comment on the nature of knowledge and its embodiment in other poems too, including "Learning to play frisbee"<sup>3</sup> (*HS* 11), "The Machine" (*DNB* 26), and "The Dance" (*DNB* 14), which are studied in-depth in this chapter of the dissertation. In turn, the motifs of memory and remembering in Baderoon's poems are the most important considerations of Chapter Five. It seeks to illustrate how Baderoon's poetry, such as "The Dream in the Next Body" (*DNB* 33), is able to embody the notion of memory and remembering both on the level of content and form, and thereby transcend the supposed split between the mind and the body.

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<sup>3</sup> Note that the inconsistent use of capitalization found here correlates to Baderoon's varied use of it in the titles of her poems.

It is important to note that the chapters to follow do not attempt to answer each of the research questions of this dissertation separately, since it would be impossible and unproductive to separate the content of the poetry from its form, as this would be a way of supporting the dichotomy. Instead, each of the poems are viewed as a whole, including content and form, and following the theoretical definitions of Chapter Two, subsequent chapters discuss the main concerns of this dissertation in a holistic and intertwined manner.

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## CHAPTER TWO

# PHENOMENOLOGY AND BADEROON: THEORIZING EMBODIMENT

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*I think, therefore I am* is the statement of an intellectual who underrates toothaches. ~ *Immortality*, Milan Kundera

### 2.1 Introduction

In order to appreciate the unique contribution Gabeba Baderoon's poetry makes to the understanding and interpretation of the body and embodiment, it is firstly necessary to examine these concepts and their meanings. How can the mind, body, and embodiment be defined? To this point, this chapter presents the terminology which will be used in chapters to follow to facilitate a clear understanding of embodiment and how it is portrayed in Baderoon's work. Since this chapter serves as the theoretical background to the discussion of embodiment, it also briefly introduces the brand of philosophy known as phenomenology, as well as Maurice Merleau-Ponty's most important ideas which will be incorporated in this dissertation. Furthermore, it looks to the major themes found in her poems, which will be discussed in depth in chapters to follow, and shows their respective relations to the notion of embodiment, and how these aid in the transcendence of the mind-body dichotomy as is evident in Gabeba Baderoon's poetry.

### 2.2 Toward definitions of the mind, body and embodiment

It is easy to assume that there could not be much difficulty in defining the concepts "mind" and "body", as we all "have" both, and their meanings are obvious to us. In keeping with this idea, the "mind" can be defined as first and foremost the "human faculty to which thought, feelings, intention" and so forth are ascribed, as well as our "intelligence or the intellect". The mind is also considered to hold "recollection[s] or remembrance[s]" and is home to

“original and creative thought/ imagination”. Importantly, the mind is defined as “(in Cartesian philosophy) one of two basic modes of existence, the other being matter” (Anderson et al. 1029).

Further definitions of the mind include that which is associated with the processes of thinking, perceiving and feeling (Cavallaro 145) as well as “mind” as equal to “thought”, in which “thought” includes language, memory and learning (Brown 122). To argue and illustrate the manner in which Baderoon’s poems incorporate the notion of “mind”, this dissertation finds it useful to attribute to “mind” these same characteristics – language, knowledge and memory. The reason for this is that these are clear themes in Baderoon’s poetry, and are used in relation to the notion of embodiment to transcend the supposed mind-body dichotomy, as will become evident in chapters to follow.

At first glance, these definitions of “mind” do not appear to be problematic, but when they are contrasted to those of the “body”, it becomes clear that there exists an embedded hierarchy in our denotations and uses of these terms. Understandably, it would be difficult to provide dictionary definitions of words such as “mind” and “body” without contrasting the one with the other, as in everyday life we do experience “having” both a “mind” and a “body”, which are distinct from one another. But is this truly the case? Are we able to discern between what exactly counts as “mind” and what counts as “body”? The “body”, of course, refers to the “entire physical structure of an animal or human being”, or the “flesh as opposed to the spirit” (Anderson et al. 174). But does contrasting the “body” as “opposed to the spirit” really provide us with an accurate description of the body as lived by us?

In the dualistic view of the mind and body, the body is considered a physical object, a *thing*, as opposed to the mind which harbours the “person”. In philosophy, an “object” is distinguished as “that towards which cognition is directed as contrasted with the thinking subject” (Anderson et al. 1123). In this denotation of the word “object”, the hierarchy between the mind and body becomes apparent – the physical structure is only considered as that towards which cognition *is directed*, rendering its role passive.

In recent times, much has been written on this topic in an array of disciplines which can provide useful insight to the dilemma. For example, Grosz defines the “body” as a “most peculiar ‘thing’, for it is never quite reducible to being merely a thing; nor does it ever quite



manage to rise above the status of thing” (xi). However, she explains that bodies cannot be “things” in the sense that other objects are, as bodies are the centres of “perspective, insight, reflection, desire [and] agency” (xi). Likewise, Hawthorn explains that the body is no longer considered merely as a purely physical system, but also a set of ideas which are seen to be already part of, and implicated in, the “non-physical” (30). Kosut and Moore (1) contend that speaking of, and about, bodies is often regarded as both a political and cultural act, as bodies can convey different statuses, ranks, and relationships (1). Bodies can be read in an aesthetic manner, bureaucratically, demographically, as well as through a medical-scientific lens, or through the ideologies of religion (1). They, in turn, define the body as the “fleshy, verdant, carnal, sensate, engaged organism that is composed of bones, blood, organs, and fluids, as well as statuses, hopes, fears, and anxieties” (2).

Hence, the body can be seen as both the raw material through which we navigate the world, as well as an entity that is invested with meaning (1). Clearly, the body should no longer be considered as the mere object towards which cognition is directed, as the dictionary denotation suggests, but rather viewed as “layered, nuanced, complex, and multifaceted – at the level of human subjective experience, interaction, social organization, institutional arrangements, cultural processes, society, and history” (Waskul and Vannini 2).

However, defining the mind and the body in this manner does not solve one of the most important problems considered in this dissertation: how are they able to interact? When faced with a notion such as the mind-body dualism, the assumption is that there are two distinct, “mutually exclusive and mutually exhaustive substances, . . . each of which inhabits its own self-contained sphere” (Grosz 6). When the two are then viewed together, they have incompatible characteristics (6). In this regard, the concept of “embodiment” provides a way of linking the mind and the body and explaining their intricate relationship, especially as found in Baderoon’s poems.

To “embody” denotes investing “a spiritual entity with bodily form” (Anderson et al. 511), but, moreover, is a term used to refer to the “indeterminate methodological field defined by the perceptual experience and mode of presence and engagement in the world” (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2). Furthermore, embodiment can be defined as the “patterns of behaviour inscribed on the body or enacted by people that find their expression in bodily form”

(Strathern and Stewart 389). These definitions illustrate that embodiment entails a focus on experience as well as one's interaction with the world.

What is important to note is that embodiment theory seeks to move *across* the mind-body dichotomy in order to understand the “embodied contexts of experience that are central to life's processes” (Strathern and Stewart 388). Thus, instead of merely shifting the object of analysis to the “body” instead of the “mind”, studying embodiment<sup>4</sup> implies a more holistic approach in which both are brought together with experience. In pursuit of this aim, much has been done on the front of philosophy, and in particular, in phenomenology. Upon reading Gabeba Baderoon's poetry it becomes clear that the manner in which she incorporates the body and shows embodied beings has much in common with what is done in phenomenology, especially the kind entertained by French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty. To be able to comprehend this link, a brief look at phenomenology and its basic concerns is necessary.

### **2.3 A brief look at phenomenology**

Phenomenology is a significant brand of continental philosophy which gained prominence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and originates with the writings of German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). His philosophy takes as its starting point the world “as experienced by our consciousness”, thereby seeking to “get back to the concrete reality through our experience of it” (Hawthorn 261). Therefore, the importance of phenomenology lies in its shift in focus – it should not be considered a “system” but rather a “practice”, and is best understood as an anti-traditional style of philosophizing which “itself attempts to get to the truth of matters, to describe phenomena. . .as it manifests itself to consciousness, to the experiencer” (Moran 4).

What brings this brand of philosophy in proximity to embodiment as found in Baderoon's poetry, is its focus on *experience*. However, experience should not in this instance be viewed as an object in a box.

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<sup>4</sup> The word “embodiment” is used frequently in this dissertation, and, after a while, the reader may feel that the word loses its impact and by implication its meaning. In an attempt to prevent this from occurring, this dissertation continuously adds “new” meanings and interpretations to the word.

As Husserl explains in *Formal and Transcendental Logic*:

. . . experience is not an opening through which a world, existing prior to all experience, shines into a room of consciousness; it is not a mere taking of something alien to consciousness. . . . Experience is the performance in which for me, the experiencer, experienced being “is there”, and is there *as what* it is, with the whole content and the mode of being that experience itself, by the performance going on in its intentionality, attributes to it (Moran 6).

In his major work *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) attempts to move away from such abstract theorizing about experience back to concrete human experience. He suggests that our experience of the world is that of “beings who are *in* the world, in some specific place and time, and for that very reason, experience or consciousness is not a matter of pure intellectual contemplation, but of active and emotional engagement with the world in various ways” (Matthews 85). This understanding of experience and human beings’ interaction with the world is expressed by Heidegger in saying that being human is essentially “being-in-the-world” (*In-der-Welt-sein*) (Matthews 85).

To explicate this focus on experience and its relation to our being-in-the-world as found in Baderoon’s work, it is useful to consider an example from her poetry briefly. “Give” (HS 9-10) effectively illustrates the phenomenological relationship often apparent between the poetic figures in Baderoon’s poems and their environments:

### **Give**

- 1 Before dawn, low voices briefly loud,
- 2 my father and his friend the ambulance driver,
- 3 his days off always in the middle of the week,
- 4 drive away from the house
- 5 with thick sandwiches and a flask of tea
- 6 and my father’s green and white fishing rod
- 7 whipping the wind behind the ’76 Corolla.
- 8 Camping by the sea,
- 9 we’d see him take his rod further down the beach,
- 10 walk waist-deep into the water, plant
- 11 himself with legs apart in the breakers,
- 12 reach back, cast the line
- 13 baited with chokka<sup>5</sup>, and pull,
- 14 giving then tightening the line, nudging
- 15 its weighted stream of gut to the fish.

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<sup>5</sup> Squid, colloquial

16 But in this place on the West Coast  
 17 they never disclosed,  
 18 they stand unwatched, out of reach  
 19 of each other's lines, at their backs  
 20 a fire on the beach not stemming  
 21 the dark but deepening it.  
  
 22 Often it would come to nothing,  
 23 their planting and pulling,  
 24 but sometimes the leather cups holding  
 25 the ends of their fishing rods strained  
 26 as they bent back against the high howl  
 27 of the reels being run to the limit  
 28 and holding.  
 29 Bowing forward and giving  
 30 and leaning back and pulling,  
 31 their bodies make a slow dance nobody sees.  
  
 32 And at home the scraping of scales  
 33 from galjoen<sup>6</sup> and yellowtail  
 34 and slitting the silver slick skin  
 35 to make thick steaks for supper,  
 36 setting aside the keite<sup>7</sup> for breakfast,  
 37 the head for soup and the gills and fat for the cats  
 38 while they tell us how they landed them.  
  
 39 I wonder about the empty days, more frequent,  
 40 the solitary standing in the dark at the edge  
 41 of something vast, sea and sky,  
 42 throwing a thin line into the give of it  
 43 and waiting, silent and waiting,  
 44 until something pulls  
 45 against your weight.

(HS 9-10)

It is worth noticing the engaged relationship between the speaker's father and his friend "the ambulance driver" (line 2) and their immediate physical environment. The poem not only provides a description of these two people fishing somewhere off the West Coast, but more so, depicts the engaged nature of this activity between the fishermen and the environment. For example, the fishermen do not climb into a boat or merely remain on the shore whilst fishing. Rather, the father walks "waist-deep into the water" (line 10) and plants "himself with legs apart in the breakers" (line 11), thereby becoming literally part of the landscape, and engaging with the environment on a visceral level. He is now no longer a fisherman only reaching into the ocean with his rod with the hopes of catching a fish, but he is in and part of the ocean. The "planting and pulling" (line 23) of the fishermen in trying to catch fish says

<sup>6</sup> A type of seawater fish only found along the coast of South Africa, the country's national fish

<sup>7</sup> Roe, Afrikaans

much about how other figures too are shown to be embodied beings-in-the-world in Baderoon's poems.

The poem suggests that there is no distinctive "split" between the world and the fishermen. Rather, they are able to inhabit the world, which relates Baderoon's work closely to the viewpoints held by the phenomenological perspective referred to in this dissertation. Through the "[b]owing forward and giving / and leaning back and pulling" (lines 29-30) the fishermen's bodies "make a slow dance nobody sees" (line 31). Baderoon's portrayal of their interaction with the world shows her focus on experience and her view of the engaged interaction that they have with the physical world.

Clearly, phenomenology provides a different approach to the mind-body dilemma than Cartesian dualism. Hence, phenomenological investigations consider the divisions between subject and object, and similarly between mind and body, as philosophical constructions which distort the true nature of human experience of the world (Moran 13). This aspect of phenomenology further relates to Baderoon's poems since it offers a more holistic approach to the relation between "objectivity and consciousness, stressing the mediating role of the body in perception" (Moran 13). As seen in the example of "Give" (*HS* 9-10), there is no clear distinction between the mind and the body in her work. The fishermen in the poem interact with the ocean by means of their physical bodies, too, and it is through the embodied nature of their skill, patience and movement that they are able to catch fish, as well as relate to their environment.

This importance of the body in perception can be further understood by means of the work of Merleau-Ponty, which also has much in common with Baderoon's portrayal of it.

### 2.3.1 "Lived" bodies and Merleau-Ponty

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) can be regarded as one of the key phenomenological philosophers of the body, as his work continually returns to the intertwined themes of vision and embodiment (Kosut and Moore 21). Merleau-Ponty emphasizes not only the existential nature of being human, but above all the *bodily* nature (Audi 558). His project is concerned with, among other things, overturning Cartesian dichotomies prevalent in Western philosophy by describing the ineradicably corporeal nature of being human in terms of his/ her

knowledge, experience and perception (Kosut and Moore 21). Reynolds (4-7) too proposes that Merleau-Ponty, in some of his major works such as *Phenomenology of Perception*, sets out to expose the problematic nature of, in particular, the mind-body dichotomy.

This aspect, predominantly, brings his work in close relation to Baderoon's, as Merleau-Ponty rejects Descartes' view of the mind as central to consciousness in favour of the body and its relation to existential experience in a similar manner to how Baderoon does. The significance of this similarity lies in the fact that Merleau-Ponty's work can provide the terminology necessary to interpret and appreciate Baderoon's poems, as well as the fact that it opens her poetry to further interpretative possibilities by reading it from a phenomenological perspective. Phenomenological philosophy, and especially Merleau-Ponty's, enables an in-depth understanding and appreciation of the manner in which Baderoon transcends the mind-body hierarchy.

The poem "Give" (HS 9-10) briefly discussed earlier, for example, shows that there is no clear-cut distinction between the mind and the body in Baderoon's work. Instead, she depicts body-subjects who engage and respond to their environment in a physical and embodied manner. The fishermen in this poem would not have been able to catch any fish had they not "planted" themselves in the water, physically, and performed their "dance" of "[b]owing forward and giving / and leaning back and pulling" (lines 29-30) which in itself can be viewed as their embodied way of perceiving and knowing the ocean. The link between Merleau-Ponty and Baderoon's ideas with regard to the role of the body in perception and knowing is thus unmistakable, and employing Merleau-Ponty's conception of these in interpreting Baderoon's work brings one to a newfound appreciation for her representation of embodiment.

In Merleau-Ponty's conception, there is no separation between one's existence and one's embodiment – the two are intricately connected and interdependent. As humans we do not merely exist in a world, rather, we *inhabit* it, and discover and respond to this world by means of our sense organs (Romdenh-Romluc 16-17). He claims that we *are* our bodies, and that lived experience of our bodies deny the detachment supposed by the mind-body dualism (*PhP* xii). As we exist in an embodied state, human existence cannot be conflated into a specific paradigm, as there is "no meaning which is not embodied" (Crossley 14). Neither the mind nor the body can thus be separated from one another (Reynolds 6), which means

that the perceiving mind is an “incarnated body” and the body, too, is capable of “thinking” and perceiving (Grosz 86). As the poem “Give” (*HS* 9-10) effectively indicates, Baderoon’s view of the body has much in common with Merleau-Ponty’s.

In terms of the manner in which the mind is embodied and the body is able to know, Merleau-Ponty elaborates his ideas by turning to insights regarding experience. As far as he is concerned, experience is not untrustworthy and should be viewed as something to be explained, as it is of direct relevance to the production of knowledge (Romdenh-Romluc 16). This is important as he conceives of experience as being located midway between the mind and the body, indicating that it acts as our locus of consciousness as well as illustrating its necessarily embodied nature (Grosz 94-95).

If we as humans, then, attempt to describe how we *actually* experience ourselves, we will conceive of ourselves as beings whose embodiment is inseparable from their subjectivity: this idea is popularly referred to as the notion of the “body-subject” (Matthews 93). In this view, the body is not only a vessel of the mind, but, to a great extent, determines the manner in which the self experiences and perceives the world around him/ her. The body discloses the world to us in a specific way (Moran 425), and also aids in our communication with the world as we move directly and in union with our bodies (Reynolds 13), and thus it cannot be disregarded as less important or significant than the “mind”.

The notion of the “body-subject” helps in comprehending the complicated relationship between the mind and the body, because it can be used to refer to the *self* or *being* in the world, and indicates how intricately the self is related to its corporeality. The permanent nature of the body, that is, the fact that the body is always *present*, implies that it is also necessarily an important means of communication with the world, as well as being the *condition* for the possibility of experience (Merleau-Ponty *PhP* 92). The body-subject thus replaces the objective Cartesian body, thereby invigorating the body as the locus and precondition for subjective action, as Wylie (148) also notes: “from the start, my body is the very basis of my intention and awareness; it is not a puppet figure animated by directives and representations emanating from a disembodied consciousness”.

Strikingly, Merleau-Ponty does not merely emphasize an account of our experiences of embodiment, but proposes that *embodiment is the very basis of our experience* (Crossley 44).

This idea relates to the depiction of embodiment evident in Baderoon's poetry, and by using phenomenological terminology and ideas such as Merleau-Ponty's, one is able to grasp Baderoon's special contribution to the discourse on embodiment in a more lucid manner.

These ideas regarding the lived body, the importance of experience, and the body-subject will be employed in subsequent chapters to illustrate how Baderoon uses these and other notions to give *her* conception of embodiment and the relationship between the mind and the body.

In order to understand and appreciate the manner in which Baderoon is able to transcend the mind-body dichotomy further, one not only needs to consider her poems from a phenomenological viewpoint, but, moreover, focus on her main thematic concerns. As previously mentioned, these include language, knowledge and memory, and how these concepts are embodied. Thus, the remainder of this chapter will seek to explain these concepts, as well as to theorize about their possible relation to embodiment as will be employed in this dissertation.

## **2.4 Language, knowledge, memory and embodiment**

From a dualistic perspective, language, knowledge and memory are usually associated with the mind, and for this reason these themes are able to reveal how Baderoon transcends the supposed dichotomy in her portrayal of their necessary embodiment. The question which comes to mind, however, is whether language, knowledge, or memory can be *embodied*? What would this mean? This section studies these themes and theorizes about the possibility of their embodiment, thereby serving as the theoretical background to chapters three, four and five to follow, which each elaborate on these ideas.

It is important to stress that from a phenomenological point of view as taken in this dissertation, the body and the mind cannot be viewed as separate entities. Merleau-Ponty explains in *The Primacy of Perception* that "the perceiving mind is an incarnated self" and that the "insertion of the mind in corporeality" (3) leads to the ambiguous nature of the mind's relation to the body. This ambiguity often renders the relationship too complicated or difficult to fathom, especially with regard to abstract concepts such as language, knowledge



and memory. For example, what would “embodied language” refer to? What would a “phenomenology of language” mean?

The structural linguist Ferdinand de Saussure teaches that in language, signifiers signify only in virtue of the system of differences among them, and never by directly expressing some discrete semantic content (Carman 197). This approach renders language almost purely as an abstract system of signs, and relates it closely to an activity which can surely only function in the mind. However, a phenomenological approach to language is, according to Merleau-Ponty, not an attempt to fit languages into a framework, but rather a return to the “speaking subject, to my contact with the language I am speaking” (*Signs* 85). He insists that our experience of speaking and listening testifies to “the power speaking subjects have of going *beyond* signs toward their *meaning*. Signs do not simply evoke other signs for us, on and on without end, and language is not like a prison we are locked into. . .” (*Signs* 81, emphasis added). Rather, Merleau-Ponty suggests, we experience and understand language as opening us onto a world.

This view, too, is posited in much of Baderoon’s poetry, as her poems suggest an important relation between language and the speaking subject, in that language is an embodied activity, something which takes place from within a body-subject and is projected in that manner. The physicality of language itself, the corporeal aspects of it, that is, the physical words on the page, are also shown to be of significance to her oeuvre. Her view of embodiment thus not only remains on the level of abstraction, but she accentuates the “body” of language and of poetry too by means of various different poetic techniques. In this manner, she emphasizes the physical nature of language in a phenomenological as well as visceral sense.

If a phenomenology of language suggests that language is not only a system of signs but moreover an embodied manner of creating meaning, what would a phenomenology of knowledge represent? A phenomenological perspective on embodiment holds that the body is not a mere object, but rather the instrument by which all information and knowledge is received and meaning is generated (Grosz 87). Furthermore, it is the body which I *live* that experiences the world, and provides a way for me to access and know it. This notion implies that knowledge can only be gained with and by means of the body, yet this is not what the mind-body dichotomy suggests.

It is commonplace to speak of different “kinds” of knowledge: knowledge from experience or skill, knowledge acquired through the senses or from being acquainted with a person or place, knowledge from inference, and so forth. It is also possible to further distinguish between “knowing how” to do something, as opposed to “knowing that” something is the case. If one considers the role of the body in the acquisition of knowledge, however, the focus shifts from knowledge *per se*, to the manner in which one is able to know, that is to say, to studying “ways of knowing”. This phrase refers to a person’s movement from one context to another and serves as a reminder that “knowledge is inevitably situated in a particular place and moment, [that] it is inhabited by individual knowers and that it is always changing and emergent” (Harris 1-4).

This view contradicts that which is held by mind-body dualists, since it implies that the body is necessarily part of the process of creating knowledge. Ingold, too, shares this idea and states that knowledge should be understood as a “movement along the way of life” (146), it is not a mere enactment of preconceived ideas. Thus, in studying knowledge in this dissertation it is important to regard it not as something static, it is not even *something*; rather, knowledge should be viewed as a process, and an embodied one at that. In Badaroon’s poems a similar conception of embodied knowledge is found, and, as will be established in chapters to follow, her work forces the reader to “judge if a line is true” (line 1) by “[b]ring[ing] your eye as close as you can / to the line itself and follow[ing] it” (lines 3-4) (“True” *DNB* 9-10), thereby implicating the physical body in the process of knowing.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that knowledge is not a process which only takes place outside of the natural world. We live and experience the world as embodied beings, but we also interact with the world as such, and thus “the world” is necessarily part of the process of knowing. From a phenomenological point of view, the manner in which we know the world has much to do with the concept of “dwelling”. Ingold describes dwelling in terms of practical activity: to dwell means to have “an ontological engagement with the material world” (Wylie 158). He supports the view that it is not only the mind which produces knowledge, and suggests rather that the mind should be viewed as “immanent in the whole system of [the] organism” (16). Thought and perception are therefore active and engaged, and occur through “interactions between people, and interactions between people and environments” (Wylie 159).

Correspondingly, Baderoon's poetry emphasizes the important relationship between people and other people, as well as people and their environments. It is this aspect of her work which also brings it in relation to the approach held by phenomenology, since her poetic figures are shown to be very much "beings" in and part of their world(s). This is especially true in her poems which have gardening as subject matter, and brings one to the question: what are these interactions between "people and environments" that Ingold refers to, and how can they be understood and explained?

In much of Baderoon's poetry the themes of environment and landscape play an important role, thus it is worth looking into these ideas to come to a better understanding of them before proceeding to read and interpret her poetry. The term "landscape" is popularly associated with a picture or a scene, which suggests that we as body-subjects do not have much interaction with it. Wylie underscores this point, and puts forward the idea that landscape "is tension", explaining that the concept holds within various tensions, one of the most significant being: "is landscape the world we are living *in*, or a scene we are looking *at*?" (1) The tension apparent in the concept of landscape thus has to do with our distance from it, as well as our engagement with it. A phenomenology of landscape implies, however, that we as body-subjects are not distant and detached from landscape, but rather, that it becomes part of the expression of our being-in-the-world itself; landscape as "a milieu of engagement and involvement", landscape as "lifeworld" (Wylie 149).

Chapter Four of this dissertation will further emphasize and illustrate this point with regard to Baderoon's work, but it is useful to consider at least one instance here to clarify this notion, as well as affirm its relevance to the interpretation of her poetry. In the poem "Landscape is passing into language" (*HS* 22), for example, the speaker tells of his/ her grandparents' engagement with their physical environment: "[m]y grandfather was the first / to build a house on this vlei. . .[t]his was the wild around which / my grandfather made a fence, / my grandmother a garden" (lines 1-6). What is striking about these lines is the engagement of the people with their environment, they did not merely live in a house on the "vlei", they *built* it, they *made* fences, *made* gardens. The "landscape" referred to in this poem is not a scene or a picture one can look at, but is an environment in which people lived their lives in an engaged manner.

The engagement with the landscape found in this poem can then also be related to the point made earlier regarding Ingold's notion of dwelling. From a phenomenological perspective then landscape can be equated to dwelling, as both suggest an interaction and engagement with the material world. This hypothesis, "landscape-as-dwelling" implies that "through living it, the landscape becomes a part of us, just as we are a part of it" (Ingold 191), which is clear in "Landscape is passing into language" (HS 22), since even after the grandparents no longer live in the "vlei", the environment becomes part of their/ the speaker's "language".

Knowing the world and the landscape is dependent on our interactions with the material world in the sense that we are able to *live* the landscape, and not only be in it. This idea is better explained by the term "landscaping", which Wylie uses to refer to "practices" of landscape, which entail the "ongoing shaping of self, body and landscape via practice and performance" (166). This includes activities such as walking, running, swimming, and gardening. Landscaping thus refers to an embodied manner of being (in) and knowing the material world, and is therefore significant for this study as it aids in explaining how we are able to know. In keeping with the example from "Landscape is passing into language" (HS 22), the activities such as building a house, fencing off certain parts of land, and making a garden would thus be considered practices of landscaping, and more importantly, embodied manners in which the poetic figures are able to know the world.

Our engagement with the world does not, however, only take place in the present, we do not only speak and learn in the "now", we also remember. The concept of remembering and memory is another theme which plays a vital role in Baderoon's poetry and makes a significant contribution to our understanding of her notion of embodiment. The term "memory" can be defined as the "diverse set of cognitive experiences by which we retain information and reconstruct past experiences" (Sutton). Furthermore, theorists often posit different "types" of memories. "Habit" memory refers to the memory of procedures, habits and skills, and can be equated to the linguistic expression of "remembering *how*". "Semantic" or "propositional" memory, on the other hand, refers to the memory for facts, expressed grammatically as "remembering *that*". "Recollective" or "episodic" memory, in turn, describes memories of experienced events, or personal memories, and is usually expressed by means of a direct object, as in: I remember speaking to my friends last week, and I remember feeling happy (Sutton).

Memory and the process of remembering have always been an important topic in literature, highlighting the mnemonic presence of the past in the present as well as re-examining the relationship between the past and the present (Neumann 333). The question which arises, however, is what is the relationship between the past, the present and the *body*? Is there a specific manner in which we remember, and does the body play any role in remembering? Unfortunately, Merleau-Ponty does not write much about the topic. In fact, the relationship between the body and memory can be viewed as a neglected aspect in his work. However, Edward Casey attempts to fill this void in *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*. He explains that a certain type of “body memory” exists, which is different from “remembering of the body”:

Body memory alludes to memory that is intrinsic to the body, to its own ways of remembering: how we remember in and by and through the body. Memory *of* the body refers to those manifold manners whereby we remember the body as the accusative object of our awareness, whether in reminiscence or recognition, in reminding or recollection, or in still other ways. The difference is manifest in the noticeable discrepancy between recollecting our body as in a given situation – representing ourselves as engaged bodily in that situation – and *being* in the situation itself again and feeling it through our body (Casey 147).

However, this difference is, as Casey admittedly states, not always possible to discern. Regardless, the relevance of it for the purposes of this study lies in the shift in emphasis; instead of merely considering memories in which the body is remembered as being a part of, this dissertation specifically examines instances in which the body is the main proponent of remembering, too.

In Baderoon’s poems, these often have to do with what Casey refers to as “habitual body memories” (147-165). As explained earlier, “habitual” memory denotes “remembering *how*” to do something, and in terms of the body this notion is closely related to embodiment. Casey’s idea of “habitual body memories” implies that the body is actively immanent in the past, and that its actions are embodied. For example, remembering how to drive a car firstly depends upon the embodied action of learning. Secondly, these memories of the past need to inform “present bodily actions”, for example: every time you drive a car, your body needs to be able to re-enact the memory of learning how to. Thirdly, habitual body memories operate in an orienting manner. This point has to do with familiarizing yourself with a place or an object. If such memories did not possess this factor, we would have to familiarize ourselves

with the different aspects of a car each time we wanted to drive it, and our skills in driving would not be transferable to different types of cars (Casey 147-165).

Considering body memory in this manner is useful in the interpretation of Baderoon's poems, since she does not only incorporate the notion of memory of the body, but illustrates the importance of body memory, too. An example of her work which demonstrates this point, and which shall be discussed at great length in subsequent chapters, is the poem entitled "Learning to play frisbee" (HS 11-12). Though this dissertation looks specifically at the notion of embodied knowledge found in this poem, it is also an excellent illustration of the kind of "body memory" that Baderoon's poems often exhibit. In the poem, the speaker states that even though s/he did not play much frisbee when s/he was young, ". . .today when you throw / the circle of yellow plastic / into the air with the ease of a child, / something young in me starts / out of its blocks" (lines 5-9), which then enables him/ her to ". . .swing / my body back, look away / from the line of the throw, wind/ the arm in a pure arithmetic / and, at the end, whip the wrist" (lines 18-22). Granted, the speaker re-learns how to play frisbee in the poem, but some indication of "body memory" exists in his/ her ability to be able to remember how to do so that shows similarity to Casey's notion of habitual body memory.

In addition, the act of remembering also necessarily involves a place. To be embodied *ipso facto* assumes a particular perspective and position, and thus also a specific place: "as embodied existence opens onto place, indeed *takes place in place*. . . , so our memory of what we experience in place is likewise place-specific" (Casey 182). The relationship between place and memory can be realized through the lived body, as it is only by means of the (lived) body that we can move into place, or indeed be in a place at all (Casey 189-190). This does not mean, however, that habitual body memory is necessarily confined to matters of place. Rather, what is important to realize with regard to "place memory" is the manner in which place can be embodied, as well as the relation between the lived body and the manner in which it inhabits place. This idea clearly links with the previously discussed notion of dwelling, or the manner in which we are able to know the world, since it puts forward that we as embodied beings not only live *in* a world but *live* it. But it can also refer to a manner in which we remember places, that is, our remembering of places has much to do with our previous inhabiting and knowing of them.

This notion of course implicates its opposite too – if place is important with regard to remembering, so is displacement. If memory always takes place in place, what happens to remembering when we are no longer in the same place? It is obvious that we do not need to be in the specific place where something happened for us to be able to remember it, but it is also true that when we do visit such places these reminiscences are stronger. Furthermore, when we find ourselves displaced, our bodies still retain their habitual body memories (rooted in previous places) which may lead to some disorientating experiences. To this end, many of Baderoon's poems have as theme temporary diaspora, and in much of these it is the speaker's habitual body memories associated with their previous place of occupation which results in their remembering. Put differently, the personas in Baderoon's poems often remember places in terms of their embodiment as if they are still there, which indicates the level in which memory can be viscerally embodied.

It is evident that what can and should be derived from this section is that there exists an intricate relationship between language, knowledge, memory and embodiment which may not always be apparent. In order to grasp these as portrayed in Baderoon's work with the necessary amount of appreciation, it is therefore indispensable to make use of the ideas and notions discussed here which can be closely related to the manner in which Baderoon depicts the various themes.

## **2.5 Conclusions**

In conclusion, this chapter sought to provide the definitions of "mind", "body" and "embodiment" as will be employed in chapters to follow. To illustrate optimally how the mind-body dichotomy is foregrounded and transcended in Baderoon's poems, the dictionary denotations of the terms "mind" and "body" need to be used. Assuming a distinction between the two exists, studying "mind" and "body" as "subject" and "object", will enable one to come to a better understanding of Baderoon's conception of embodiment, and how the dichotomy embedded in these denotations of the concepts "mind" and "body" are transcended in her work. Therefore, this dissertation considers "mind" to refer to practices of language, knowledge and memory, and "body" as the material or corporeal aspects of a person.

Furthermore, a brief introduction to the branch of philosophy known as phenomenology was provided, since it bears great relevance to the type of embodiment found in Baderoon's oeuvre, as was succinctly illustrated by means of the poem "Give" (*HS* 9-10). Phenomenology is a practice of philosophy which offers a holistic approach between objectivity and consciousness, and highlights the role of the body in perception. This is especially evident in the work of Merleau-Ponty, as he explains that a person should be viewed as an "incarnated self", a "body-subject" which experiences and perceives the world as such. From a phenomenological point of view, the body and the mind cannot be separated, and it is this approach which is also taken in this dissertation.

Moreover, this chapter theorized about the possible relations between the notions of language, knowledge and memory, and embodiment, concluding that there are many ways in which these ideas pertaining to the "mind" can be linked to the body and embodiment. Taking a phenomenological approach to language means going beyond the signs or signifiers of a language to what the words actually mean – and significantly, these meanings are embodied. Baderoon's poems illustrate how language is not only embodied in terms of its speaking, but also on the page, that is, the language of poetry itself. In studying the relation between language and embodiment, this dissertation will look to the poems and their meanings, as well as what is not said. It will also consider the physical embodiment of language found on the page in the poetry in a visceral sense, as this will aid in interpreting and understanding the manner in which Baderoon gives shape to her notion of embodiment.

The relation between the body and knowledge was explained as having much to do with the body-subject's way of knowing the world. Instead of viewing knowledge as something rigid and unchanging, this dissertation will study knowledge from the point of view that it is created by and through the body-subject's engagement with the world. The notions of landscape and dwelling, too, play an important role in this discussion, as these make it possible to explain how a person is able to interact with and come to know the physical world. As Baderoon's poems share much with these ideas, Chapter Four of this dissertation will specifically look at the embodied ways of knowing portrayed in her poetry, and will employ the phenomenological approach set out in this chapter to be able to do so.

Memory and embodiment can also be linked, as explained in this chapter, especially by means of the notion of "body memory". This does not refer to memory one has of one's



body, but rather memory which the body itself retains, such as driving a car. It was explained that this is commonly referred to as habitual body memory, as it has to do with things we learn via our bodies, and remember to employ without thinking about it, so it becomes second nature to us. Body memory can likewise be closely related to “place memory”, as memories always take “place” somewhere, thus it is also important to consider place when speaking of embodied memories.

Taking a phenomenological approach to studying Gabeba Baderoon’s poems, as this chapter has highlighted, enables one to appreciate the subtle yet effective manner in which she is able to transcend the implied dichotomy between the mind and the body. As the following chapters will make clear, her conception of embodiment has much in common with such an approach, and it is by means of employing these techniques in studying her work, that this notion becomes evident. Baderoon’s poetry shows the intricate relationship between language, knowledge and memory, and its necessary embodiment in such a manner that it moves beyond the supposed dualism to viewing these aspects of the “mind” as associated with and implicated in the body in a holistic way.

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# CHAPTER THREE

## BADEROON AND EMBODIED LANGUAGE

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Kein Wort der Sprache sagt's  
Kein Bild des Lebens malt's ~ Hebel<sup>8</sup>

Words strain,  
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,  
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,  
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,  
Will not stay still. ~ T.S. Eliot

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the manner in which Gabeba Baderoon challenges and investigates constructions and ideas regarding language and its relation to the body in her poetry by focusing specifically on the notion of embodiment and its unique portrayal in her work. In order to understand and explain the intricate relation between the body, embodiment and language in Baderoon's work, this chapter attempts to rethink the body in terms of its relation to language: how the body speaks, writes, is written, the body *as* language, the body *in* language, and so forth. To facilitate this discussion, it employs phenomenological strategies and techniques of exploration which relate to some of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's ideas, as set out in Chapter Two of this dissertation.

### 3.2 Language acquisition and embodiment

In the first chapter of this dissertation, the poem "Breath" (*HS* 33) was examined with regard to its portrayal of the importance of the "physicality" of language, both in acquiring a new

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<sup>8</sup> "No word in language says it / No image in life depicts it"

language as well as in speaking it. In this poem, the poetic speaker draws attention to the fact that language is, and needs to be, an embodied activity. As mentioned earlier, this idea is activated by means of both the content, “A woman learning Russian” (line 5), as well as formal aspects of the poem, for example the alliteration of the s-sound.

“Breath” (*HS* 33) foregrounds and highlights the importance of the relationship between language and the body, and this is already clear in the first stanza of the poem:

1        Language is breath,  
2        is touch, is spit,  
3        is the silence before speaking.

In the first line, language is equated to “breath”, making it very much a part of, and necessary for human existence. Language, as suggested here, is as essential for human existence as breathing is. In an article entitled “Heidegger and English Poetry”, Peter Morgan explains that for phenomenological philosophers such as Heidegger, “being” expresses itself through “breathing”, an essential activity “humanized in the ‘word’, cherished by the philosopher and the poet” (50). Just as “breathing” is necessary for human existence, writing is necessary for “being” human. Morgan contends that Heidegger is concerned with the “being of language: the language of being”, or rather language *as* being, “embodied in the word: poetry” (50). Similarly, in this poem, language is equated to “breath”, thereby implying it is equal to “being” on two simultaneously rendered levels in the Heideggerian sense, that is, language as breath in which breath equals being, and language as being in and of its nature.

The idea of language as *being* can be compared further to the view of language found in Merleau-Ponty’s essay “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence”. In this essay, he explains that “language is much more like a sort of being than a means, and that is why it can present something to us so well” (*Signs* 43). In this regard, Merleau-Ponty suggests that language is much closer to the self than a mere tool for communication. This relates closely to what the speaker suggests in this first line of the poem – “[l]anguage is breath”, it is not simply a means to an end, but part of one’s being. The relevance of this point lies in the illustration of the level of embodiment of language evident in this poem. Not only is language set as equal to breath which makes it physically “part of” the body, this metaphor also suggests that language is in a phenomenological sense part of “being”, embodying this activity of the “mind” as part of our being-in-the-world.

Comparing language to “breath” suggests further that, like breath, language moves from the inside of the body to its outside, much like air does. In *The Watkins Dictionary of Symbols* Jack Tresidder explains that breath symbolizes the life principle, both spiritually and physically (20). He contends that there is a link between breath and the spirit which is part of Western, Islamic and Eastern traditions (20). In keeping with this notion, John Fraim points out that the Arabic and Hebrew word for air, “ruh”, signifies both “breath” and “spirit”, which further indicates how closely the two meanings are connected. Hence, the comparison in the first line of the poem not only embodies language as corporally part of the body, but also equates it to a symbolic representation of the spirit, self or mind.

The second line of the poem states that language is also “touch”, which concentrates a view of language as something physical, something corporeal. In her book *Poetics of the Body: Edna St. Vincent Millay, Elizabeth Bishop, Marilyn Chin, and Marilyn Hacker* Catherine Cucinella (122) queries the link between language and “touch”, posing the question: “does touch open language thus making possible meanings beyond language itself, or does it demolish language and make it unnecessary?” In “Breath”, the idea that “[l]anguage. . . is touch” suggests that it has the ability to be able to touch and connect with others. In this regard, language as a tool for communication is seen as embodied through the use of a bodily metaphor. With regard to Cucinella’s question, “touch” in this poem simultaneously opens language to the possibilities of new meanings by showing how it does not only serve as a means of verbal communication, but also a corporeal connection with others.

Thirdly, “Breath” states that language is “spit” which indicates another manner in which it is *part of* the physical body. Speaking a language suggests an activity of the mouth after all, and in this sense “spit” is an effective word to use to depict an image of speaking a language. This is not to suggest, however, that language can only be spoken through the mouth. It can of course also be by hands as in deaf language, or through writing, or even “body language”.

Considering these three descriptions of language it is clear that all three are, to a certain extent, corporeal in nature. However, the images progress in terms of their level of interiorization and intimacy with the physical body. In the first instance, language is “breath”, which is essential for human life. But it is also air, a substance which moves from the outside into us, making it part of the body, which suggests a certain degree of initial

distance. The next comparison equates language to “touch”, which, pertaining to the idea of progression suggested here, moves closer to the body as it is something which can be felt, and not only by the self, but by others as well. The word “touch” implies contact with a part of the body, and with regard to language this could refer to a variety of parts. In terms of a comparison between “breath” and “touch”, “touch” seems more intimately bound with the body, even closer than “breath” in terms of its physicality. The third comparison in which language is “spit” is, to a certain degree, the “closest” language moves to becoming literally part of the physical body. In this metaphor, the image moves away from an abstraction of language as necessary and essential in communication, but also suggests that it is physically inside of the body, which transgresses the dichotomous split between the mind/ spirit (associated with breath and thus also with language) and the body.

Finally, the third line of the poem states that language is also “the silence before speaking”. In this regard, it is useful to again consider Merleau-Ponty’s essay “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence”, in which he explains that novels, and by implication other forms of literature, can express tacitly. He uses the example of a novel in which a murder is committed, but it is never explicitly discussed. Rather, the deed is suggested “between the lines”, what he describes as the “hollows of space, time, and signification” (*Signs* 76). These, Merleau-Ponty suggests, are the important silences which portray something other than the language, but also form part of it, the “silence[s] before speaking”. This notion relates to Badaroon’s suggestion that language can be the silence “before speaking”. This seeming contradiction – if language is speech how can it also be silence – further emphasizes the idea that there are many ways in which language can communicate, many “types” of languages.

This metaphor suggests that language can convey meaning through silence, and is not necessarily dependent on someone to speak it. However, these lines also propose another form of “silence before speaking” – that of “body language”. Many gestures and moves of the body are thought to convey meaning, and when taking into account the previous lines of the first stanza, the apparent move toward language as something corporeal, “the silence before speaking” could easily be interpreted as the “language” of the body, before words are uttered.

Moran (405) highlights that, to Merleau-Ponty, there is an indefinite boundary to our linguistic domain, where “language shades off into silence”. This idea relates to Badaroon’s

portrayal of language in this poem, as it incorporates this silence. This relation is significant, since it explains that silence can indicate further possible meanings. However, at the same time, it suggests a certain inability of language to portray these meanings, indicating the necessity of silence in collaboration with language.

Moreover, this line relates to the title of the collection of poetry in which this poem appears: *A Hundred Silences*. Considering Merleau-Ponty's notion of the meaning of words and language which is expressed through the silences, the title could indicate many (a hundred) such similar silences which exist in this literary work: the silence between each of the stanzas, before and after lines, the silences between poems, as well as the silences in the speaking of some of the poetic speakers, the silence between meanings, and the meaningful silences. Thus, these lines, as well as the title of the work, show how language is able to embody silences, too.

“Breath” continues with an explanation of how a woman who is learning to speak Russian physically adapts her body to be able to acquire the new language. This can be seen in “the new inclination of her head / her chest, her hands” (line 6-7), “the tightening of her upper lip” (line 8) as well as “the muscular changes in her tongue” (line 9).

4        *Russian*  
5        A woman learning Russian describes  
6        the new inclination of her head,  
7        her chest, her hands,  
8        the tightening of her upper lip  
9        like bee stings around the mouth,  
10       the muscular changes in her tongue  
11       an invasion from the inside.

This stanza describes the physical adaption required to learn a new language. It is not only the words and grammar that need to be learnt, but also a certain manner of speaking. Note the repetition of the rhythm pattern of the first stanza here in lines six and seven: “. . . her head / her chest, her hands” has a similar rhythm to “. . . is breath, / is touch, is spit” in lines one and two. The repetition of this pattern brings lines one and two in proximity to lines six and seven, making it almost possible to substitute the phrases as a result of their rhythm, which makes language “the new inclination of her head, / her chest, her hands”. Therefore, the underlying rhythm of the poem highlights the level of embodiment of language.

The simile in lines eight to nine, “the tightening of her upper lip / like bee stings around the mouth”, sketches a vivid image of the way in which the woman’s body needs to adapt in order to learn the language. This image contains a certain degree of violence, since a bee sting is an involuntary occurrence associated with plenty of pain. This could imply that the “tightening of the upper lip” and other adaptations made by the body is not necessarily done by choice. Underlying this notion is that the body has a certain “will” of its own. The next lines in which “muscular changes” (line 10) take place in the woman’s tongue, described as “an *invasion* from the inside” (line 11, emphasis added), further underline this idea. The changes brought about in the woman’s body upon learning to speak Russian do not seem to have anything to do with choices she has made in holding her head differently, or acquiring certain mannerisms. Rather, the changes are brought about by her body *itself*, which illustrates the manner in which the acquisition of a language is very much an embodied activity.

In the following stanza, the speaker teaches the reader/ poetic figure to say the first letter of his/ her name, “a sound between g and h, / for which there is no letter in English” (lines 14-15). In order to pronounce the speaker’s name it is suggested that you

16     Breathe in,  
 17     take a sip of water,  
 18     breathe out.

19     The sound of breath leaving the throat  
 20     is the start of my name.

This suggestion calls upon the reader not merely to contemplate how to pronounce the name, but to try it physically, further illustrating the essentiality of embodiment with regard to language. It is important to note that in this manner, Baderoon is able to transcend the supposed dichotomy between the mind and the body – since there is no letter in English for the sound of the speaker’s name, the only manner in which one is able to hear it is by means of a performance of the body. In an article entitled “Suddenly, Everything – Thoughts on Poetry and a Showcase of Emerging Women Poets from Southern Africa”, Baderoon highlights this point, too, by stating that one should

[l]isten to the physical qualities of language. Every language carries traces of its place. I grew up speaking English, but the other languages spoken in close proximity to me – Afrikaans, Xhosa and Arabic – full of sounds for which English has no letters also

trained my ears. Clicks, sibilants, several layers of gutturals, where breath slides into words (44).

Finally then, the speaker says that the “sound of breath leaving the throat / is the start of my name” (lines 19-20). Here s/he tells the reader what the first letter sounds like, but it is not a sound that can be imagined easily – rather, it requires the reader to perform the action it suggests. These lines indicate that language is literally an embodied activity, and also relates to the title of the poem, “Breath”, as well as to the title of this collection, *A Hundred Silences*. The final stanza suggests, therefore, that “breath” can also refer to a sound, and specifically the sound the poetic speaker’s name starts with. This makes the meaning of the first line of the poem, “Language is breath”, literal, as in this case language (or the start of the speaker’s name) is literally “the sound of breath leaving the throat” (line 19).

Furthermore, these lines tie in with the title of the collection, too. If one considers the sound of breath leaving the throat a “silent” sound, one could also consider the poem, in the sense that it is “written” or “spoken” by the speaker a form of “breath”, which then also renders it a form of “silence”. In this manner, the title implies that this is a collection of breaths or silences. This suggests that the poems are silences – in the manner in which they are found in the collection they are indeed silent until read, but could just as well relate to the “silence before speaking” (line 3) in the sense that poetry has the ability to connect through the use of language in a manner similar to silence. In addition, if one equates the poems to “breaths”, this could underscore the necessity of poetry, as well as its life-giving principle.

To summarize, this poem activates interpretations regarding the physical embodiment of acquiring a new language, that is, the manner in which the body adapts itself in order to do so. It also implicates the nature of language, suggesting that it not only serves as a form of communication, but is also necessary for human existence, as well as being physically part of the human being itself. This poem not only has the corporeal nature of language as its theme and imagery, but also uses a literal example through which to make this point lucid to a reader, prescribing that s/he imitates what the poem suggests in order to be able to understand what it is trying to communicate.



### 3.3 Embodied words and meanings

The necessary embodiment of language is also highlighted in the poem “Where Nothing Was” (DNB 25). Here, the poetic speaker explains to a loved one how s/he felt when they first met, and attempts to do this in language (lines 1-8):

1        When we met and your face first  
2        clarified itself  
3        from the world,  
  
4        I tried to find the words,  
5        to show where, in my chest,  
6        two senses fired  
  
7        at once –  
8        touch and sound.

In contrast to “Breath” (HS 33), however, this poem shows how language cannot always portray what a person feels, as the speaker explicates how s/he tries to find words for different feelings. Of course this is not an unusual notion. The difference in the speaker’s search for the right words to explain his/ her feelings, is that these feelings are more *bodily* (or embodied) than “emotional”. What I mean is that the speaker explains that s/he is looking for words to describe feelings in accord with certain physical, corporeal experiences. Ingold explains that speech is not so much “the articulation of representation *as the embodiment of feeling*” (147, emphasis added). This poem clearly shares this view in the sense that it searches for such embodiment of feeling, but finds language incapable of conveying such emotions.

Furthermore, the poem establishes a clear link with the notion of the body-subject held by Merleau-Ponty (see Chapter Two), seeing that the poetic body in this poem experiences emotion through the metaphor of the trapeze artists, that is, “bodily”. Hence, it is the body which perceives the feeling felt by the speaker when s/he first met the addressee. This feeling cannot be explained merely by means of the employment of words, rather s/he insists on the bodily experience of the meeting, “to show, where, in my chest, / two senses fired // at once” (lines 5-7). As Cucinella (120) contends, the body often has the ability to convey meaning which exceeds language’s capabilities, which is also made clear in this poem.

Another interesting point regarding the lines of the second stanza of the poem is that the speaker does not describe the feelings felt in his/ her heart, as would popularly be the case, but rather “chest”. The chest can of course easily be equated with the heart, but instead of using the word “heart”, which might have made these lines sentimental, the speaker suggests that the feelings are felt in the chest, emphasizing again the physical embodiment. Adding to this is the choice of using the description of “two senses” (line 6) firing “at once” (line 7), which makes the experience seem even more corporal, something which is better understood by means of the senses, that is through the body.

The speaker continues the search for the right words by means of the employment of various images. The first of these appears in line nine, in which the speaker searches for “[a] word for grip and hum together”. The words “grip” and “hum” relate to the aforementioned line, as “grip” has to do with “touch” (line 8) and “hum” with “sound” (line 8). This creates the image of a person experiencing that something is touching him/ her, taking its hold, but at the same time hearing (feeling) a sound – this is what happens when the speaker meets the addressee. The poem can thus be read, on one level, as concerning itself with the simultaneity of bodily experiences. Furthermore, what is made clear here is that there is no specific word in which the two senses experienced at the same time, touching and hearing, can be accurately described, hence s/he looks to an elaborate explanation which calls upon associations of the body to explain it. The poem continues:

9       A word for the thrum when  
10       the metal chain of an anchor whips  
11       hard and holds.  
  
12       Or the clout of hands  
13       as trapeze artists grasp each other,  
14       the brief, final clasp  
  
15       of coming to rest  
16       where you knew  
17       nothing was  
  
18       a moment before.

The final image shows two trapeze artists grabbing each other in “the brief, final clasp // of coming to rest” (line 14-15), and it is through this image that the reader is able to interpret the emotions of the speaker, through words. Instead of one specific word, the poem gives the reader a visual image which enables him/ her to imagine the speaker’s feelings. The image is

illustrated vividly even in the structure of the lines as, after the artists' hands have grasped each other, after the "brief, final clasp" (line 15), there is a break before the "coming to rest" (line 16) in which the reader can experience the brief clasp of the artists grabbing each other, on the level of reading, before the lines continue. This pause is suggestive of the imagined pause in the air when these artists perform, that brief moment in which they grab hold of each other in which time seems to come to a standstill. In this manner, the poem is able to embody the experiences of the personas even where language fails to, by means of doing so in a visceral manner.

Significantly, this image also incorporates the use of the body as its theme, and relates to the corporeality of the meeting of the speaker and the addressee. The speaker cannot find one single word to express that which is felt when they met. Only by imaging two bodies in the air, grabbing each other like trapeze artists, and then coming to rest, can one imagine the feelings of the speaker.

Moreover, these images evoke a scene of two lovers being intimate for the first time, the bodily experience of "touch and sound" (line 8), the "grip and hum" (line 9), which extends to "an anchor [which] whips / hard and holds" (line 11-12) as two people, two bodies come together. The fifth stanza accentuates such an interpretation by means of the figures "grasp[ing] each other" (line 14) until the climactic moment in which the "brief, final clasp" (line 15) takes place, followed by a "coming to rest" (line 16). The significance of such an interpretation lies in the fact that the poem suggests that though language might have an inability to communicate some feelings, it can embody bodily experiences, such as sex, by using language as its tool for communication.

Therefore, "Where Nothing Was" (*DNB* 25) does not only relate to language's inability to find specific words, but on a different level illustrates the manner in which it can, by contrast, embody certain lived experiences. The poem becomes a physical embodiment of the conflicting nature of language as having both the ability to express experiences and the inability of having the "right" words to do so.

Likewise, in "Each tragedy becomes the story of a tragedy" (*HS* 52), language falls short of complete description and proves inadequate on its own (Cucinella 121). The poem relates the tale of an actual historical event in which the ship *Estonia* sank in the Baltic Sea in 1994,

claiming the lives of 852 people. The subtitle to the poem provides the biographical information in the form of “notes from the final report on the sinking ship Estonia”.

The first seventeen lines comprise a description of what the people on the ship did, from an outsider’s perspective. These descriptions generally entail the people’s most basic actions, indicating their inability for contemplation during this difficult and confusing time:

**Each tragedy becomes the story of a tragedy**

*– notes from the final report on the sinking ship Estonia*

- 1 He noticed that the musicians had stopped playing.
- 2 The dancers had fallen several times.
- 3 Most people remembered their cabin numbers.
- 4 Some passengers stood still in the staircases,
- 5 and were passed by others.
- 6 The ship listed at 30 to 40 degrees.
- 7 The sound of the engine suddenly changed.
- 8 There was a knocking from the bow,
- 9 as though something was trying to come in.
- 10 He heard a rustling beneath his cabin.
- 11 Things fell from the table to the floor.
- 12 She took with her an alarm clock which stopped
- 13 at two minutes past one.
- 14 There was only one public announcement.
- 15 It was a woman’s voice. She sounded
- 16 afraid or injured.
- 17 He saw a crack in the ceiling.

The rhythm is staccato-like, indicating the frantic nature of the passengers on board, as well as the unexpectedness of the event. At first, an unknown he-character notices that “the musicians had stopped playing” (line 1). It is said that the “dancers had fallen several times” (line 2), which shows that whilst the incident took place, the people were jolly and dancing in the night. But then “[t]here was a knocking from the bow, / as though something was trying to come in” (lines 8-9) and the “ship listed at 30 to 40 degrees” (line 6). These lines point out the unexpected yet serious nature of the event, and foreground the tragedy to follow.

Interesting to note are the open spaces in lines five, nine, thirteen and sixteen, since this pattern of white spaces is not repeated in the remainder of the poem. The effect these have upon reading is to create a brief pause before continuing the line, but without separating the ideas as would have been the case had these pauses been suggested by stanza breaks. Rather, the pauses are incorporated in the content of the poem, making it an effective way of

embodying the circumstances on the level of form in the poem. For example, “[s]ome passengers stood still in the staircases” (line 4), after which the reading pauses before “and were passed by others” (line 5). The reading of these lines is thus viscerally brought to a short standstill before the other passengers pass, thereby embodying the passengers who stood still in the staircases. This idea is repeated in lines eight and nine, where the reading is again paused briefly after the “knocking from the bow” (line 8), as well as in lines twelve and thirteen in which an alarm clock stops, and is followed by a brief pause, embodying the action of the content on the level of form. These pauses also tie in with the frantic rhythm of these lines, since upon reading them they flow, and then stop, flow, and then stop, which creates the idea of movement of passengers running and pausing anxiously. Therefore, in this poem, form mimes meaning.

The first stanza is interrupted or paused further by

18     The meaning of the words  
19     *pitch*  
20     *roll*  
21     *brace.*

These lines pose the question: what is the meaning of the words “pitch”, “roll” and “brace” in a situation such as this one? At first glance, these words could perhaps seem random, rendering them without any true meaning. It would seem that what the speaker is trying to suggest here is that words have become useless in crisis situations. But a closer consideration of these lines forces the reader to search for the various meanings of the words “pitch”, “roll” and “brace”, which results in their significance here becoming lucid. The word “pitch” in line nineteen can relate to the passengers who are hurled or thrown off the ship as a result of it sinking, or who are falling “forwards or downwards” in the commotion (Anderson et al. 1239). But it can also refer to the ship itself, in which case “pitch” refers to a ship dipping and raising “its bow and stern alternately” (Anderson et al. 1239). Thus, the meaning of the word becomes apparent by means of the passengers experiencing it; it embodies both the movement of the passengers and the ship, and can only be fully understood in such circumstances.

Similarly, “roll” also embodies both the movement of the passengers and the ship. With regard to the passengers, the word can imply that some of them might be moving and

“turning over and over” on the ship as a result of it listing “at 30 to 40 degrees” (line 6) (Anderson et al. 1406). But it can also refer to the ship’s movement, as in “to turn from side to side around the longitudinal axis” (Anderson et al. 1406). Therefore, the word “roll” can also embody the circumstances on the ship, suggesting that the true meaning of the word can only be grasped once one experiences such a situation<sup>9</sup>. The word “brace”, on the other hand, does not embody movement in the way “pitch” and “roll” does. Instead, it conjures an opposite meaning; instead of implicating movement, “brace” refers “to steady or prepare (oneself or something) as before an impact” (Anderson et al. 190). Again, the stanza implies that the meaning of the word can only be understood and appreciated fully when experiencing it in this manner.

The next stanza describes another scene, in which the random tension of the first stanza has now become motivated; there are no more pauses and stops, since it is apparent that the situation is urgent:

22     Escaping passengers had to pull  
 23     loose the hands of those  
 24     who were paralysed with fear  
 25     and shout directly in their ears  
 26     not to block the way but to run  
 27     up to Deck Seven and save themselves.

Followed by

28     The meaning of the words  
 29     *list*  
 30     *heel*  
 31     *hold*.

Similarly to stanza two, the speaker urges the reader to consider the *meaning* of these verbs, they are not purely random. The word “list”, when used in reference to a ship, refers to its leaning over to one side (Anderson et al. 935), indicating the physical state of the ship at this stage in the poem. Likewise, “heel” refers to the act of leaning over, and as a noun “the inclined position of the vertical” (Anderson et al. 730). Both these words can act as verbs which indicate the movement of the ship, and as nouns which indicate its current state. As in stanza two, the implication of these lines is that the meaning of the words can only be grasped

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<sup>9</sup> This focus on experience to make something “real” suggests a strong link between Baderoon’s work and phenomenology, as Chapter Two of this dissertation highlights.

fully through bodily experience, as the passengers on the ship indeed do. Finally, the word “hold” relates to “brace” in line twenty one, in the sense that it does not suggest movement, but rather implies the opposite. In terms of a ship, “hold” can refer to “the space. . .for storing cargo” (Anderson et al. 751), but in this case it seems to rather imply the act of holding, to maintain “or be maintained in a specific state”, or to “restrain or be restrained from motion, action” (Anderson et al. 751).

Therefore, “pitch”, “roll”, “list” and “heel” all imply the movement of the ship, whilst “brace” and “hold” imply its stillness. These words therefore embody the movements of the sinking ship, as well as experience of it of the passengers on board, and imply that these meanings can only be understood through such an experience. In this manner, Baderoon not only comments on language’s ability to convey meaning, but also shows how these meanings are embodied in words, and in poems. The repetition in the structure of stanzas two and four creates rhythm in the poem, as well as the pattern of using two words which suggest movement, “pitch” and “roll”, followed by a word suggesting stillness, “brace”, and again two words implying movement, “list” and “heel”, followed by “hold”. This pattern mimes the action of the sinking ship, by moving, and coming to rest, moving again and coming to rest, much as the ship probably did. In this manner, the reader is able to grasp the embodied meanings of these words in his/ her own experience of reading the poem.

Other poems in Baderoon’s oeuvre too have as subject the meaning of words, albeit in a different manner. The short poem “fight” (*HS* 28), for example, suggests that some words do not need to be experienced as such to have meaning, but can already signify as a result of it being said:

**fight**

1     in the silence  
2     you wish to take  
3     two steps back  
4     inhale your words

(*HS* 28)

The silence presented in this poem relates to those previously discussed in this chapter in the sense that it is heavy with meaning. Similar to the Merleau-Ponty’s idea referred to earlier, this poem suggests that silence is also a type of language, is also meaningful. In this case, the silence following the spoken words in fact embodies the meaning of the words. In contrast to

the previous poem, the performance suggested here is taking the words back. Note the embodied gesture suggested, “take / two steps back” (lines 2-3) as well as the *inhaling* of “your words” (line 4). This inhalation of words brings the poem into proximity with “Breath” discussed earlier in this chapter. The poem “fight” requires a physical action to deem the words meaningless, but also suggests that words can have an enormous effect, as the heavy silence suggests.

In terms of the poem’s “physical” appearance, it is worth noting the lack of punctuation, which indicates the silence surrounding the fight. The short lines suggest that few words need to be used to express this silence, which ties in with the notion that words can indeed convey meaning. The poem “fight” too appears in the collection *A Hundred Silences*, and thus serves as another example of a momentous silence in Baderoon’s oeuvre. Thus, on a formal level, the poem embodies the silence of its content by means of its lack of punctuation and its brevity. The poem does not present the details of the fight, only the aftermath, which enables the reader to experience only the silence, a powerful way of indicating the effect of words.

In keeping with the conflicting nature of words as expressed by “Where Nothing Was”, “Each tragedy becomes the story of a tragedy” and “fight”, “Out of time” (HS 44) has a similar theme:

#### **Out of time**

1	I have nothing of yours	
2	I can keep	
3	only your words to me	
4	the way we place hands over faces	
5	close each other’s mouths	
6	time a hollow bone	
7	that draws us like breath	
8	out of time	(HS 44)

This poem is short and lacks punctuation, too. If one considers both “Out of time” and the previous poem “fight”, it appears that the lack of punctuation has to do with their tone – in these, the emptiness of silence, as well as the experience of emotions, is embodied through the lack of punctuation, as if the situation deems it unnecessary. In “Each tragedy becomes the story of a tragedy”, however, the first stanza has many commas and full stops, serving the purpose of creating a staccato-like rhythm, indicative of the fear and urgency. “Out of time”



on the other hand proposes emptiness and silence, and the lack in punctuation also makes the rhythm flow more, creates a smooth movement when reading the lines.

In this poem, words are the only “things” the speaker has to hold on to. This has a double meaning, since it could suggest that words do indeed have meaning because the speaker can “keep” (line 2) them for comfort, but it also suggests that words are in fact meaningless, as the speaker *only* has words left. Therefore, the words embody both their meaning and their lack of meaning simultaneously. This is significant as it links to the poems previously discussed in this chapter, and relates to the general theme found in Baderoon’s work with regard to language: it is able to both contain and embody meaning, as well as being unable to. Words are shown to be significant in the sense that they can embody experience, as portrayed in “Each tragedy becomes the story of a tragedy” (*HS* 52-53), and “fight” (*HS* 28), but they can also be insignificant and are unable to convey meaning, as “Where Nothing Was” (*DNB* 25) and “Out of time” (*HS* 44) have made clear.

Baderoon’s conception of language and its embodied nature is thus far shown to be complicated and often contradicting. One thing that is certain, however, is that through the use of language she is able to embody the nature of language in order for the reader to grasp it. This point is further underscored in the following section.

### **3.4 The corporeal poem**

As has already been mentioned, language’s inability to convey emotions and meanings is made ironic by the fact that these opinions are expressed and embodied in words, through the medium of poetry. This does not, however, make the point less accurate, it merely suggests that the relationship between language and its abilities is intricate. An example of a poem which illustrates this point well is “Shards” (*DNB* 53), which provides a speculation about language as well as poetry itself, and offers some clarity on the relation between embodiment and language in Baderoon’s oeuvre.

“Shards” (*DNB* 53) depicts a speaker who questions the act of writing poetry, and in the poem this process is also related to the body.

### Shards

1     When you write a poem,  
2     do your words scroll precisely  
3     down a pristine screen?  
  
4     Or do you clear away  
5     strands of sound like hair  
6     blown in your eyes,  
7     sweep up the shards of the day,  
8     note the stain on your shoes  
9     from the first, fragile snow flurry  
  
10    to find  
11    that, in running  
12    your fingers down  
13    your vagabond day,  
14    you have conducted  
15    a message to the earth,  
  
16    an alignment of murmurs,  
17    a shock,  
18    a poem.

(*DNB* 53)

This poem alludes to a possible paradox in writing poetry – is it a process which “happens” with precision and accuracy in a pure and untouched manner? Or is it rather a conflation of various “happenings” of one’s day, which arranges itself in an organized manner? The poem suggests the latter, illustrating the manner in which it, too, is created through a process of organizing random events. To put it bluntly, the speaker “sweep(s) up the shards of the day” in line seven whilst noticing “the stain” (line 8) on his/ her shoes from “the first, fragile snow flurry” (line 9), to find that s/he has somehow “conducted / a message to the earth” (lines 14-15), described as “an alignment of murmurs” (line 16) which form “a poem” (line 18). Importantly, therefore, this poem suggests that poetry does not occur in a restricted and precise manner, but rather through daily activities and events, through experiences.

This suggestion relates to a phenomenological perspective on our engagement with the world in two important ways. First, it stresses the manner in which we dwell and live the world, by means of our engagement with it. Poetry cannot be written as a result of perfection, but of experience of the world surrounding us, it comes forth from living our “vagabond” (line 13) days, and is only noticed when sweeping up its fragments. Second, this poem highlights the manner in which we are embodied in the world. The images used in stanzas two and three of the poem all pertain to the physical body, and equate poetry to it as well. For example, lines

and sounds such as found in poems are compared to “strands” of “hair” (line 5), “blown in your eyes” (line 6), thereby equating them to the corporal body. Further, in “running / your fingers down / your vagabond day” you are able to notice that a poem has been created, which again brings poetry into proximity with the body.

This suggests that writing poetry is very much a part of you, just as your body is. In this way, writing is not only compared to a body, but more so – it *becomes* something embodied, and is as inseparable from oneself as one’s own body. This is evident in lines which the “strands of sound” (line 5), or aspects of the anatomy of poems, are compared to “hair / blown in your eyes” (lines 5-6). Significantly, the “strands of sound” are not merely like hair, but rather hair *in your eyes*, suggesting that the sounds become part of your own body in an intimate manner, just like your own hair does not merely remain on your head, static, but moves with you, and can be blown into your eyes.

The imagery of “running / your fingers down/ your vagabond day” not only relates to the earlier mentioned “hair / blown in your eyes” as in the expression to run your fingers through your hair, but also indicates the level of embodiment required in the writing of poetry. Not only is poetry such a part of the speaker’s life that it can be compared to the manner in which his/ her own body is part of him/ her, but the metaphor of recollecting the events of the day relates to an embodied activity. Furthermore, this image ties in with the poem’s relation to phenomenology, since describing the day as “vagabond” suggests that it is idle, wandering, and unfixed, much like the way in which we inhabit the world.

In another sense, this poem “writes” the body, and compares poetry itself to a “body”. In this particular poem, Baderoon makes the body a necessary part of writing in such a manner that the poem *becomes* a body. Of course this is not an unfamiliar idea, as in general discussion we speak of a “body of work”. The difference in her approach, however, lies in the manner of this integration. This poem does not merely compare a poem, or the act of writing, to a body, but rather sketches the relation in such a manner that it can be derived that an act of embodiment is required when writing. To illustrate: this poem makes use of metonymical words such as “hair”, “eyes”, “shoes”, and “fingers” to refer to the body without using the term “body”. Thus, the poem and the act of writing are not compared to a body directly, but the poem implies it through the use of metonymy. However, these words are not merely used to compare a poem or the act of writing *to* a body – rather, the “body”-words are used in

relation to certain (bodily) acts, such as “clear away strands of hair”, “note the stain on your shoes” and “running / your fingers down / your vagabond day”. The actions performed by the person addressed in the poem imply and hint at the necessity of embodiment in writing poetry.

Interestingly, the descriptive words used with regard to the poem all have a somewhat disparaging effect – the “strands”, “shards”, “stain”, “murmurs” and perhaps even “shock” do not seem to indicate an efficacious poem, resulting in a sense of broken pieces, imperfections, indistinct utterances. But perhaps it is precisely this incomplete and imperfect nature of poetry which makes it *lived* in the sense that it can relate to our experience of being-in-the-world in a phenomenological sense. The use of the word “shock” in line seventeen of course not only evokes an image of disgust or surprise, since it can likewise denote “a number of sheaves set on the end of a field to dry” or even a “thick bushy mass” (of hair) (Anderson et al. 1501). In this sense, “shock” can also refer to a collection of “shards” (line 7), or can be viewed as the elaboration of “an alignment of murmurs” (line 16), indicating that it too refers to the poem as a collection of the “happenings” of the day, which may or may not surprise or disgust you.

In this manner, the poem is able to embody “itself” on the page, in the sense that it collects random events or fragments in an alignment and presents it to the reader. This is of course done by the poet, who conducts these “strands of sound” (line 5) to create a “message to the earth” (line 15). Therefore, this poem not only speaks of the embodied nature of language in the manner that we speak it, it further highlights to manner in which poetry, too, embodies language, and language embodies poetry. Thus, it transcends the notion that language can be considered purely as an activity of the mind, since it is necessarily always already embodied.

### **3.5 Conclusions**

This chapter illustrated the intertwined nature of language and embodiment as found in the poetry of Gabeba Baderoon. As illustrated in “Breath” (*HS* 33), the acquisition of a new language requires the interaction of the physical body, its adaptations are as necessary to speak a language like Russian as learning the words and syntax are. The poem shows,

however, that these changes are not brought about by means of cognitive decisions; rather, changes come from the inside, suggesting that the body adapts itself to these new inclinations. Furthermore, “Breath” (*HS* 33) equates language to elements associated with the body, such as “touch”, “spit” and, most importantly, “breath”. The importance of this poem in terms of its revelations regarding language and embodiment, lie in the fact that language is shown to be necessarily an embodied activity.

By contrast, “Where Nothing Was” (*DNB* 25) foregrounds the inability of language to convey specific emotions. The poem highlights the fact that some bodily experiences cannot be put to words, as shown by the speaker’s search for “the words / to show where, in my chest, two senses fired” (lines 4-6). However, the poem also illustrates how bodily experiences *can* be embodied in words – the words might not be able to convey the feelings or emotions felt, but are able to convey certain aspects of the meeting by sketching vivid images and metaphors, which, to a certain extent, embody what is or was felt.

“Each tragedy becomes the story of a tragedy” (*HS* 52-53) employs specific verbs, and questions their meaning; suggesting that words need to be *lived*, verbs need to be experienced firsthand, for them to be of significance. In terms of embodiment, the poem suggests that language can indeed embody such experiences, since the poem effectively illustrates this by miming the movements and pauses of the ship as it is sinking. The formal aspects of this poem are therefore able to replicate the experiences of passengers onboard the sinking ship for the reader to experience it on a visceral level, indicating that language can indeed embody experience.

The final poem discussed in this chapter, “Shards” (*DNB* 53), relates the matter of poetry, as well as the process of creating poems, to the body and embodiment. Words, sounds, and everything else that make a poem, are brought into close relation to the body, and not only by means of comparison: the parts of the poem become like parts of the body. Therefore, writing becomes a way in which one can embody the fragments of one’s day in a corporeal poem. Thereby, the poem suggests that language has a close relation with bodies, much as poetry does, and transcends the suggestion that there exists a definite split between language as an activity of the mind, and the body as a physical object.

In conclusion, it is clear that Gabeba Baderoon's poems illustrate different relations between the body and language, as well as language's role in embodiment. Though different poems show different viewpoints, the link between them is clearly the importance of the body in language, as well as the necessary embodiment of language. Her poems highlight the fact that language is an activity which takes place in the body and as part of the body, that one cannot speak without the body, and that words need to be heard. She also underscores the fact that words can only embody meanings in as far as they are lived and experienced viscerally, again indicating the necessity of embodiment. Baderoon's poems finally suggest that even poetry should be viewed as a form of embodiment. Thus, her work is able to illustrate that there can and should not be a distinction between the mind and the body in terms of language, since its embodiment is a necessity.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

# BADEROON, WAYS OF KNOWING AND EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE

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In order to arrive at what you do not know  
You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance  
...  
And what you do not know is the only thing you know. ~ T.S. Eliot

I am not able to stand back from the body and its experiences to  
reflect on them; this withdrawal is unable to grasp my body-as-it-is-  
lived-by-me. I have access to knowledge of my body only by living it.  
~ Elizabeth Grosz

### 4.1 Introduction

How can knowledge be embodied? Is there a certain manner in which we know? And how is Baderoon able to illustrate this in her poetry? This chapter seeks to find the relation between knowledge, ways of knowing and their embodiment as explicated in Gabeba Baderoon's poetry. To assist this discussion, it takes a phenomenological approach informed by Merleau-Ponty and others on knowledge and ways of knowing in an attempt to show how these ideas elucidate the view of embodiment which can be inferred from Baderoon's poems.

In order to do so, this chapter examines specific poems in terms of two main thematic concerns: poems dealing with knowledge and experience or skills, and poems dealing with knowing, dwelling and landscaping. With regard to knowledge and experience/ skills, this chapter demonstrates that Baderoon considers the knowledge acquired through experience or practised as skill to be part of the body, and not only a process of the mind.

This point is further highlighted in the section which discusses the relation between knowledge, dwelling and landscaping, as it shows that Baderoon sees knowledge as an embodied activity, and the process of knowing or the creation of knowledge as something

which is importantly also part of the body. Therefore, it argues that Baderoon's poems too, become embodied "ways of knowing".

## 4.2 Knowing, experience and skill

Knowledge and experience are commonly linked by the notion that many things can become known through experiencing them. The manner in which we experience things can be closely related to our state of embodiment, since the body acts in various ways as the instrument through which we experience the world, through which knowledge is received and thus through which meaning is generated (Grosz 87). The body is thus *the* being-in-the-world through which the world is and can be known to us. "Learning to play frisbee" (HS 11) illustrates this point, as in the poem the speaker reflects upon his/ her childhood in terms of the "physical" activity of playing frisbee versus the "mental" activity of reading. A turning point in the poem suggests, however, that even though the speaker might not have understood the sport when s/he was younger, the addressee in the poem makes him/ her realize the importance of the role of the body.

### Learning to play frisbee

- 1 In any case I was a child
- 2 who did not look up from books
- 3 and frisbee required
- 4 the full inhabiting of the body.
  
- 5 But today when you throw
- 6 the circle of yellow plastic
- 7 into the air with the ease of a child,
- 8 something young in me starts
- 9 out of its blocks.
  
- 10 I watch the spin of the disc
- 11 in the wind, the sly dip
- 12 at the end of your throw,
- 13 the body's ability to read and run.
  
- 14 I learn to move backwards to arrive
- 15 beneath the parabola
- 16 and not to close my eyes
- 17 at the last moment of touch.



18     Standing, I swing  
 19     my body back, look away  
 20     from the line of the throw, wind  
 21     the arm in a pure arithmetic  
 22     and, at the end, whip the wrist.  
  
 23     I watch your whole body read  
 24     the arc and the speed that signals  
 25     your readiness like an animal's  
 26     unafraid alertness,  
  
 27     your soft hands that do not block  
 28     the curve of the throw  
 29     but complete it.

The first stanza presents the “child / who did not look up from books” (lines 1-2) in opposition to the activity of playing frisbee, since it would require “the full inhabiting of the body” (line 4). The “inhabiting” of the body denotes living, occupying or dwelling in the body, which contrasts with reading here in the sense that reading does not require the “*full* inhabiting of the body” (line 4, emphasis added). These two activities are sketched as opposing, suggesting a prevalent dichotomy – the activity of reading may be associated with the mind, whereas playing frisbee is an activity performed by the body. Therefore, this stanza of the poem brings the dichotomy to the reader’s attention by relating to the popular notion of the separation of the mind and the body. This distinction further suggests a definite divide between the “body” required to read, and the “body” required to play a physical game, or rather: the degree to which the body is required in both instances, resulting in some activities to be regarded more “bodily” than others.

This view changes, however, at the beginning of the second stanza of the poem, indicated by the word “but” (line 5). The speaker feels “something young” (line 8) starting up as the addressee throws the frisbee in the air, and reconsiders his/ her perception of the game. The next stanza continues this idea, as the speaker watches how the addressee spins “the disc / in the wind, the sly dip / at the end of your throw” (lines 10-12) and witnesses the body’s ability to “read and run” (line 13).

In the first stanza, the activity of reading is considered something which does not require inhabiting the body, but in the second stanza the speaker learns of a different method of reading, the *body*’s, and the use of the verb “read” in this manner foregrounds the dichotomy

suggested in the first stanza. The reader is made to attend to the fact that the body can also “read” in its own way, which not only highlights the dichotomy but *transcends* it – the poem suggests that activities associated with the mind can also be performed by the body. Stanzas three and four unpack the manner in which the speaker now learns to “read” with his/ her body. S/he explains how to “move backwards” (line 14) to be in the correct position underneath the frisbee, and “not to close my eyes / at the last moment of touch” (lines 16-17), how to “swing/ my body back” (lines 18-19) and “at the end, whip the wrist” (line 20).

In order to grasp the manner in which the fourth stanza of the poem itself embodies the way in which the body “reads”, it is important to revisit the stanza as a whole:

18     Standing, I swing  
19     my body back, look away  
20     from the line of the throw, wind  
21     the arm in a pure arithmetic  
22     and, at the end, whip the wrist.

These lines not only explain the way in which the body “reads” by means of its content, but also embodies the notion of reading formally, through the employment of enjambment. The manner in which the body is able to read is presented to the reader by lines which replicate *movement*. Through reading them, one is able to experience the movements of the body, and come closer to understanding the manner in which the body also reads – by means of interpreting and understanding the situation, and moving in accord to these interpretations. The poem relates reading to movement, and also suggests that reading is a type of movement. Likewise, movement can be considered a way of reading. The poem thus literally embodies this idea by employing the technique of enjambment which allows the lines to flow into another, creating movement in the poem itself.

Similarly, the final stanzas of the poem incorporate this idea and also use enjambment to portray the body’s movement. These lines, however, point toward a further manner of “reading” in the addressee’ “*readiness* like an animal’s / *unafraid alertness*” (lines 25-26, emphasis added): the person’s body is capable of reading the situation and moving in accord. The human “readiness” of the addressee likened to that of an animal thus implies that the person acts on instinct.

Furthermore, these stanzas exhibit the manner in which the addressee plays the game: s/he does not merely catch the frisbee the speaker throws, his/ her “soft hands (that) do not block / the curve of the throw / but complete it” (lines 27-29). These lines indicate that the addressee is skilled at playing frisbee, and possesses a type of knowledge about it which one acquires through experience. In this poem, experience is something which is corporeally constituted, and is directly relevant to the production of knowledge (Grosz 95). The addressee acquires knowledge of playing the game by experiencing it through his/ her body, and the speaker acquires knowledge about the game as well as him/ herself by “reading” the addressee’s body(’s) signals, and experiencing the game for him/ herself.

“Learning to play frisbee” is therefore important with regard to the theme of embodied knowledge on two levels. First, it illustrates how Baderoon is able to transcend the mind-body dichotomy in her work by showing how both the “mind” and the “body” have the ability to “read”, thereby transgressing the notion that reading is an activity of the mind which it alludes to in the first stanza. Secondly, it shows how the body is able to *know* by means of the way in which the addressee “reads” the throw of the frisbee and acts upon it. The instinctive manner in which the body is able to act suggests a form of acquired knowledge, which again transgresses the notion that “knowledge” or “knowing” is merely an activity of the mind. In “Learning to play frisbee” the speaker not only acquires knowledge of the game through experiencing it, but also acquires knowledge of the body and its abilities which are often neglected or taken for granted.

“The Machine” further underscores the notion of bodily knowing depicted in Baderoon’s oeuvre (DNB 26).

1        Freud called it the *fort da* game.  
 2        A child throws away a toy tied  
 3        to a string and pulls  
 4        it toward herself again, and again  
 5        makes it disappear and calls it back.

This, the first stanza of the poem, portrays Baderoon’s unique incorporation of embodiment on a thematic as well as formal level in an effective manner. Upon closer examination it becomes clear that the use of words and line breaks imitate the action performed by the child in the poem. For example, “pulls” (line 3) appears at the end of the line, and, by means of the enjambment which urges the reader to read the lines flowing into one another, it creates the

effect of being “pulled” into the next line of the poem. Furthermore, the repetition of “again” (line 4) forms part of the enjambment into the next line (five), which acts as an imitation of the child’s sense of the toy disappearing and returning again on the level of form. As a result, the poem embodies the meaning of the words on the level of form, thereby emphasizing the lived action performed in the poem.

The second stanza explains what this game means in terms of the child’s development and awareness of self, by suggesting that

6       The fickle game is a machine of existence.  
7       When the toy leaves the child’s sight, it falls  
8       out of being.  
9       The infant philosopher contemplates  
10      that, outside of the gaze of the toy, she too  
11      is falling off the edge of the world.

Similarly, form mimes meaning in this stanza, especially in lines seven to eight, in which the line break coincides with the word “falls”. Playing this game leads the girl in the poem to question her own existence:

12      Over and over, she rehearses this fear:  
13      when the toy disappears, neither  
14      of them exists. In the end, from beyond  
15      this thought, she claws back  
16      a cautious triumph. The child rises  
17      from the game a self  
18      distinct from the world.

Importantly, the sight of the toy embeds the girl’s existence, since “when the toy disappears, neither / of them exists” (lines 13-14). The child plays the game until she has the sense that she is now a “self / distinct from the world” (lines 17-18). The child’s way of “knowing”, her certainty of her own existence, is thus dependent on the lived and embodied experience of a “*fort da*” game. This knowledge is firstly dependent on *sight* – the game relies on the relationship between that which can be plainly seen and that which is hidden from view. As soon as the child realizes that the toy does not cease to exist merely because it cannot be seen, she also realizes that she exists in a similar manner.

Therefore, the way in which the child in this poem learns to “know” is not only concerned with a realization made solely in the mind, but rather through playing a *physical* activity.

Thematically, the poem touches on the manner of knowing continuously depicted in Baderoon's oeuvre, that of knowing *through* the body. In experiencing this game, the child learns that her body is distinct from other things, and that her existence is real. This notion is further accentuated in the final stanza of the poem:

19 I enter a crowded room,  
20 my every glance a line pulling  
21 against an ancient undertow of doubt.  
22 One face gives me  
23 a purchase on the world  
24 by looking back.

Comparable to the second stanza, an inflexion of the word “pull” again appears at the end of the line (20), which, in combination with the effect of enjambment, mimes the action of the word on the level of reading. In addition, the variation in length and especially the elongated rhythm of line twenty one, “against an ancient undertow of doubt”, further accentuates the meaning through mimicry: just as the speaker's glances pull against the “undertow of doubt” asking for reciprocation to confirm his/ her existence, the iambic rhythm of the words in this line create the effect of something that pulls, or is being pulled. The “purchase on the world” (line 23) the speaker finally receives confirms his/ her existence in a similar manner as the *fort da* game did the child's. The face that looks “back” (line 24) proves to the speaker that s/he exists because s/he is finally *seen*. The manner in which the child as well as the speaker knows in this poem is thus importantly dependent on their own embodiment. Both acquire knowledge about themselves through experiencing their physical bodies.

As suggested earlier in this chapter, the most important manner in which we are able to know the world is by means of our experience of it. Through such experiences, we are not only able to acquire a certain amount of knowledge, but also develop skills in some areas of our interest. A further way of knowing the world frequently illustrated in Baderoon's oeuvre pertains to such skills. Quite a few examples of her work have as motif different personas whose skills define their ways of knowing, and these can be related to embodiment, too. “Time running across the night” (*HS* 56), for example, sheds further light on this topic. The poem tells of a woman spinning wool and weaving carpets in Stockholm, and what is especially noteworthy regarding this poem is the way in which the body is accentuated in the process.

### **Time running across the night**

– *learning to spin wool in the Ethnographic Museum in Stockholm*

1 To watch Zainab Tumturk set her mouth  
2 and write her name in a new script, to see  
3 her unsnarl wool with a metal comb, fit  
4 one piece of the soft mass to a hook and wind  
5 down a wooden stick a thinning strand, rub  
6 the stick upwards along her thigh  
7 and release it to twirl  
8 the thinning mass into thread,  
9 is to watch time made by hand.

10 With the fingers she counts  
11 the steps back to the beginnings  
12 of things, sheep on dry hills  
13 as war wages over names and existence.  
14 And, despite that, shearing, spinning, weaving,  
15 in nomadic lives, the words for time and permanence.

16 On the carpets beneath her feet are patterns named  
17 *stalk of grain*  
18 *throat of wolf*  
19 *evil eye*  
20 *love's hook.*

21 The patterns from the north of Sweden look  
22 like those from the Kurdish hills, evidence  
23 not of one consciousness flowing through us all  
24 but, in a carpet that takes a month to weave,  
25 time running across the night  
26 while the wolves come over the horizon;  
27 in the plane of thread, catching  
28 love's brief solace  
29 in the permanence of fingers.

(HS 56)

The first two stanzas of the poem highlight the importance of the woman's body in the process of spinning wool. This act can be viewed as an embodied manner of practising her skill, since she not only does so through and by means of her body, but the process also amalgamates her body with the carpet she is weaving. In addition, line two specifically draws attention to the poem itself as a work/ cloth/ body weaved by the poet in its reference to the "new script" which Zainab Tumturk creates. Much like the woman in the poem weaves a carpet through counting "the steps back to the beginnings / of things" (lines 11-12) "in nomadic lives" (line 15), the poet creates the text (cloth) of the poem by threading various ideas and images together through words, lines and sounds. In this manner "Time running across the night" (HS 56) can be read as an example of an *ars poetical* poem.

Another key element in this poem is the theme of time. In the first stanza it is said that to watch the woman spin and weave is “to watch time made by hand” (line 9). This instance of embodiment thus suggests the passage of time through the description of the woman spinning— not only does time literally pass during the account of this process, but line nine also suggests the passage of time that the reader “watches” (experiences) upon reading these lines. Watching time “made by hand” also draws further attention to the poem itself, because when reading these lines time passes, and since they are written, they are also in a sense *handmade*.

Similarly, the second stanza of the poem mimics the passage of time by means of the choice of words and the rhythm created by them. It is said that “with her fingers she counts / the steps back to the beginnings / of things” (lines 10-12), followed by a recollection of the woman’s past and country, but “despite that, shearing, spinning, weaving, / in nomadic lives, the words for time and permanence” (lines 14-15). The underlined syllables mimic the passage of time through their rhythmic movement, much like the ticking of a clock. Thereby, the poem embodies the manner in which time is woven into the wool, as well as the manner in which it is incorporated into the poem.

This poem further embodies the woman’s past and life story, the manner in which she lives and experiences the world. Lines ten to fifteen, for example, explain how Zainab “counts / the steps back to the beginnings / of things” (lines 10-12), and recollects “sheep on dry hills / as war wages over names and existence” (lines 12-13). This recollection is shown to be of great importance to her artistic expression in weaving as it becomes embodied in the carpets she creates as well as forming part of her own “fingers” (line 10, line 29). In this manner, the events of her life become part of her lived body, underscoring the significance of her body in her way of knowing the world. As the final stanza suggests, “the patterns from the north of Sweden” (line 21) are “evidence / not of one consciousness flowing through us all” (lines 22-23) but rather of “time running across the night” (line 25) and finds expression and embodiment in “a carpet which takes a month to weave” (line 24) as well as in “the permanence of fingers” (line 29).

Clearly the skill with which the woman in this poem performs the acts of spinning and weaving is important to the manner in which she knows, not only in terms of her work, but also herself and her past. Similarly, “True” (*DNB* 9-10), as mentioned before, has as motif an

embodiment of knowledge that pertains to skill. In this poem, a tiler is described who explains to the speaker how to “judge if a line is true” (line 1). The instructions are to “bring your eye as close as you can / to the line itself and follow it” (lines 3-4), the reason for this being to “banish the error of parallax” (line 2). The significance of these lines lies in the fact that the speaker suggests that in knowing how to judge whether a line is true, one needs to bring the body as closely into this process as possible. This assertion transcends the supposed mind-body dichotomy, as the speaker does not suggest one merely uses mathematical skills (associated with the mind) to “know” whether the line is true or not – rather, it requires the “inhabitation” of the body too.

Furthermore, these lines, much like those mentioned in “Time running across the night” (*HS* 56), draw the reader’s attention to the poem itself in an *ars poetical* fashion. “True” (*DNB* 9-10) is the first poem to appear in the collection *The Dream in the Next Body*, and placing these first four lines at the very beginning of a collection forces the reader to consider close readings of the poem to “judge” whether they are “true” too. This action is mimed in lines three and four which suggest that the reader bring his/ her eye as close to the line as possible to “banish the error of parallax” (line 2), which calls attention to the poem itself as an embodied work of skill.

It continues to use examples of embodied knowing, from other people who learn from the tiler, and with regard to the tiler himself. Stanza three, for example, also uses words pertaining to the body or bodily metaphors in expressing the way in which the tiler applies his knowledge and skill:

6        People wish to walk where he has kneeled  
7        and smoothed the surface.  
8        They follow a line to its end  
9        and smile at its sweet geometry,  
10       how he has sutured the angles of the room.

The tiler’s manner of working clearly calls upon the notion of embodiment as a way to *know* certain things. The words used in this stanza highlight this fact: lines six and seven conjure an image of a tiler who “kneels” and “smooths” his working surface, illustrating the close relationship between him, his body, and his work. It continues to say that people want to walk on his floors, and “smile at its sweet geometry” (line 9), especially to see “how he has sutured the angles of the room” (line 10). The verbs used in this stanza, in one way or



another, all have to do with an aspect of the body. Even the manner in which it describes the tiler's work mode, his *suturing* of the "angles of the room" (line 10) brings to mind the stitching together of bodily surfaces (Anderson et al. 1641).

The stanzas to follow describe the way in which the tiler does (and knows) his work in further detail:

- 11     He transports his tools by bicycle –  
12     a bucket, a long plastic tube he fills with water  
13     to find a level mark, a cushion on which to kneel,  
14     a fine cotton cloth to wipe from the tiles the dust  
15     that colours his lashes at the end of the day.
- 16     He knows how porcelain, terracotta and marble hold  
17     the eye. He knows the effect of the weight  
18     of a foot on ceramic. Terracotta's warm dust cups  
19     your foot like leather. Porcelain will appear  
20     untouched all its life and for this reason  
21     is also used in the mouth.

Note the manner in which even the tiler's use of his tools relates to his body: "a cushion on which to kneel" (line 13) as well as "a fine cotton cloth to wipe from the tiles the dust / that colours his lashes at the end of the day" (lines 14-15). This creates the idea that the tiler's knowledge and skill are incarnated ways of knowing and understanding his world.

The next stanza confirms this idea: lines sixteen to twenty one explain the manner in which the tiler knows certain materials used in the process of tiling, and this is done in an embodied manner through the use of phrases such as "hold / the eye" (lines 16-17), "the effect of the weight / of the foot" (lines 17-18), "cups / your foot" (lines 18-19), "appear / untouched" (lines 19-20) as well as the final reference to porcelain being "also used in the mouth" (line 21). The choice of words here clearly reflects the degree of embodiment required for knowledge of tiling, and by extension then, for *knowing*. This manner of knowing illustrates that the tiler utilizes his body to receive knowledge, and employs his skills in an embodied manner.

The reference to the word "mouth" also relates to the poem drawing attention to itself as a poem, as well as the theme of language discussed in Chapter Three. Similar to the porcelain used in the mouth, the poem can, or should, be found in the "mouth" of the reader as a result

of his/ her reading of it. As mentioned in Chapter Three, much of Baderoon's work draws attention to her plea that poetry needs to be read aloud, it needs to be sounded out and experienced bodily, it needs to be heard. This plea is hinted at again by means of this reference, calling the reader's attention to the bodily nature of poetry.

According to Ingold (316), applying his/ her skills *is* the skilled practitioner's way of knowing the world. Accordingly, by means of the tiler's direct contact with his tools used in the tiling process, such as the "bucket" (line 12), the "long plastic tube" (line 12), the "cushion on which to kneel" (line 13), the "fine cotton cloth to wipe from the tiles the dust" (line 14), as well as the materials he uses, such as "porcelain", "terracotta" and "marble" (line 16) he is able to *apply* his technical knowledge obtained from this process. For this reason, Ingold contends that skill is both a form of knowledge and a form of practice – it is both "practical knowledge and knowledgeable practice" (316). This point is important since it accentuates the relationship of the physical body to the tiler's way of knowing. The illustration that both "aspects" are equally necessary thus transcends the supposed mind-body dichotomy.

The final two stanzas of the poem make clear the tiler's habits with regard to his work:

26     With a blue grid he shakes out  
27     the sheets of unordered space, folds  
28     them into squares and lays them end on end.  
29     Under his knees, a room will become whole and clear.  
  
30     At night, he rides home over ground that rises  
31     and falls as it never does under his hands.

The tiler orders "space" (line 27) by folding a "blue grid" (line 26) into "squares" (line 28) and laying them "end on end" (line 28). In this manner, he makes a room "whole and clear" (line 29). The tiler is able to apply his skill to fashion order in a world which, as suggested by the two final lines of the poem, is not always as ordered. In keeping with the reading of "True" (*DNB* 9-10) as an *ars poetical* work, the final stanzas also relate to the process of writing poetry as well as its nature – the poet may be able to order the lines of a poem and create a world which is "whole and clear" (line 29), but outside of the poem the world remains unpredictable and unordered.

The poem becomes, in and of itself, an embodiment of the activity required to read and understand the poems in the collection. In order to judge and interpret the poems, it is necessary to “bring your eye as close as you can / to the line itself and follow it” (lines 3-4). These lines call upon a close reading of the poem, and since it is the first poem in the collection, suggest that the others be read in a similar manner. If one considers the poem in this light, various other instances substantiate such a reading. For example, lines eight to ten explain how people who “walk” and “kneel” where the master tiler has tiled, “follow a line to its end / and smile at its sweet geometry”. Similarly, a reader reads these lines to their “ends” and if s/he notices that line eight also literally ends with the word “end”, it makes him/ her aware of the “geometry” of the poetry itself.

Therefore, “True” (DNB 9-10) is not only a poem concerned with the skills and knowledge of a master tiler, but moreover those of a poet. The poet is equated to the master tiler, as s/he creates meaning by ordering reality into art by means of the application of skill. Similar to tiling then, the manner in which poetry is and can be *known*, is brought in relation to embodiment: in order to be able to know a poem, one needs to “Bring your eye as close as you can / to the line itself and follow it” (lines 3-4).

“The Dance” (DNB 14), likewise, brings the subject of embodied appreciation and experience of art to the forefront.

### **The Dance**

1	Once in a museum I stood	
2	at the entrance to a room looking	
3	at Matisse’s <i>Dance</i> .	
4	A man walked in front of me,	
5	stopped.	
6	He tilted his head, as though	
7	listening more than seeing	
8	and, for a moment,	
9	I saw the dance pass	
10	through his whole body.	(DNB 14)

Here, the speaker imagines that the man standing in front of him/ her with his head tilted whilst looking at the painting experiences the “dance pass / through his whole body” (lines 9-10). Through the speaker’s imagining of the event, s/he reveals a further manner in which we are able to know the world, which is also embodied: by means of our imagination. This idea

finds artistic expression in the poem as the man looking at the painting moves as if dancing in the speaker's mind's eye, though he is not moving literally, as a result of the appreciation of the painting. Taking a brief look at the painting referred to in the poem clarifies this idea:



The artist of this painting, Henri Matisse, is considered one of the dominant figures of Fauvism, a movement of Expressionism in the early twentieth century in Europe (Kleiner and Mamiya, 964-965). One of the key aspects of this movement's work was their expressive use of colour, of which this painting testifies. Matisse, in particular, believed that colour plays a primary role in conveying meaning, and upon close examination of this painting, this notion becomes apparent.

In the painting, we see naked figures that are connected by and through a dance, holding hands and moving in a circle with their eyes closed as if in a trance-like state. The predominant shapes seen in the painting are circles, especially in the women's breasts and their stomachs, as well as all the figures' buttocks, their heads and even their joints. In this manner, the shapes in the painting suggest a continuation of the dance, in a circular fashion. The background to the figures is simplistic and flat, which is not true to reality, but adds to the expressive nature of the work, as these elements do not draw attention away from the focus of the work, which is the dance.

Likewise, the figures do not interact and communicate with the viewer directly – when looking at the painting, we cannot, for example, make eye contact with them. However, the painting communicates to its viewer by means of its basic and striking use of colour, the almost distorted shapes of the figures, especially in their hands, and the strong horizontal and circular lines which emphasize its expression of the bodily movement of the dance. These flowing lines and shapes may “move” our own bodies upon observing them, such as the speaker in the poem imagines seeing in the man.

The painting, as well as Baderoon’s poem, also brings to mind the final lines of a poem by Yeats entitled “Among School Children” (242-245):

O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,  
How can we know the dancer from the dance?

Likewise, the viewer of the painting is not able to distinguish between certain persons specifically who take part in the dance, since they form part of the dance, become the embodiment of it. In Baderoon’s poem, too, the speaker sees the dance pass through the body of the man viewing the painting, as though he is also part of the circle of the dance depicted in it, and the speaker is actually the viewer looking from the outside of a work of art. The manner in which the man in the poem is able to “know” and appreciate the painting is by becoming an embodied part of it, even just for “a moment” (line 8). Likewise, the way in which the speaker is able to understand and appreciate the painting is by seeing (imagining) the man as being a part of it.

Upon reading the poem then, this imagining of the dance passing through the body of the man is also experienced by the reader who looks at the painting, and is able to imagine, similarly to the speaker, how the dance passes through man as well as the reader him/ herself. This poem further relates to the phenomenological notion of our being-in-the-world as body-subjects and lived bodies who all form part of the “dance”.

Apart from the focus on embodied experience and skill in knowing the world, Baderoon’s poems also emphasize the manner in which we as incarnated subjects engage with our *environment*, with the landscape we live in. As set out in Chapter Two of this dissertation, this important aspect of Baderoon’s poetry has much in common with the phenomenological notions of “dwelling” and “landscaping”, and illustrates the vital contribution which

Baderoon's work makes in terms of our understanding of embodied knowing. The following section of this chapter focuses specifically on these themes demonstrated in her work.

### 4.3 Knowing, dwelling and landscaping

As mentioned before, much of Baderoon's poems depict the manner in which we as embodied beings engage with our physical world, and this contributes greatly to her understanding of the embodied way in which we are able to know it. Chapter Two explained that Ingold, similarly to Baderoon, suggests a view of our environment, our landscape, as part of our dwelling, which implies that "through living in it, the landscape becomes a part of us, just as we are part of it" (191). The notion of "landscaping" goes even further by suggesting the relation between the body-subject and landscape to pertain to practices of landscaping, that is, embodied activities such as walking, running, swimming and gardening (Wylie 166). In terms of Baderoon's poems, the practice of gardening is worthy of discussion in this regard, as it illustrates a relation between the body-subject and landscape which aids in interpreting and understanding Baderoon's poetic depiction of embodiment knowing with regard to landscaping and dwelling.

"A hundred silences" (*HS* 49-50), one of the title poems of her collections, presents a way of knowing which corresponds with Ingold's notion of the dwelling perspective, as well as ideas concerning embodied landscaping. This poem also illuminates the relationship between knowing, dwelling and landscape which is vital to understanding Baderoon's conception of embodiment as found in her poems.

#### **A hundred silences**

- 1     Light is receding like heat from the day.
- 2     Under his hands, the ground feels warmer than the air.
- 3     He has been in the small garden since returning
- 4     from work, weeding. It is a word for being alone.
  
- 5     He loosens the grip of the soil with a trowel,
- 6     tugs then eases out the plants
- 7     with their threading roots.
- 8     Time lengthens, enters the ground.

9       The sun sinks  
 10       behind the garage early in the afternoon.  
 11       Shadows narrow and slide against the grass,  
 12       up the wall, soft and anonymous.  
  
 23       Geese fly overhead towards the mountain,  
 24       the downward beat of their wings marking  
 25       the place where the distance ends,  
 26       like a sheet touching skin.  
  
 27       The weeds become shape and grain in the dusk.  
 28       Any moment a voice will call through the window.  
 29       He will not finish this today. He rises  
 30       and walks to the garage to store the trowel.  
  
 31       Across the wall, hundreds of birds  
 32       come to settle in the neighbour's plum tree,  
 33       twittering and jabbing and rustling  
 34       then, on a breath, quiet.  
  
 35       He hears a hundred silences fall,  
 36       break and fall again. (HS 49-50)

The manner of knowing in this poem finds poetic embodiment in the persona's engagement with the environment. The very first stanza explains that "under his hands, the ground feels warmer than the air" (line 2), which accentuates the persona's physical and bodily involvement with the garden. It is said that he has been there "since returning / from work, weeding" (lines 3-4), and that "weeding" is "a word for being alone" (line 4). This indicates that his involvement with the physical environment becomes an extension of himself, he is able to be "alone" whilst weeding, which suggests the meditative effect the process has on him. The poem proposes that "weeding" (line 4) is not only important in terms of the garden, but also the persona himself, since after a long day's work he prefers to unwind there, engaging with the material environment in a way that is soothing and comforting.

The second stanza of the poem further describes the weeding process, explaining that through this process "Time lengthens, enters the ground" (line 8). This idea indicates that "time" can be experienced as a result of our engagement and involvement with our landscape, thereby metaphorically putting it "into" the ground, and resulting in a manner in which we are able to "know" time. Through the uprooting of weeds, time passes, which metaphorically becomes part of the ground, too, just as the persona does in the process. Likewise, the lines in this stanza lengthen the poem, illustrating the embodiment of meaning in the poem on a formal

level. The third stanza, too, embodies the “lengthening” of time, in the way it sketches the lines of shadows “narrow[ing]” and “slid[ing]” “against the grass, / up the wall / soft and anonymous” (lines 11-12). Envisioning how the light and shadows move and change as the sun “sinks” (line 9), mimes the metaphor of time “lengthening”, suggesting its passage.

The fourth stanza employs a bodily simile to sketch the landscape, the wings of the geese flying toward the mountains “marking / the place where the distance ends, / like a sheet touching skin” (lines 14-16). This simile compares the environment to a body, which reduces the presupposed distance between the persona as body-subject and the environment, connecting them more closely. Moreover, the image of the “sheet touching skin” suggests that that which we *see* is the “outside” of the earth’s “body”, much like our skin, whereas when we are close to the soil “the ground feels warmer than the air” (line 2). This introduces the relationship between the inside and outside of the earthly “body”, and it is important to note that the persona’s interaction with the earth in a literal, bodily manner results in his way of knowing and understanding the earth in this way.

The image of the birds in the final stanzas of the poem embodies the event at the beginning of the poem too: just as the man’s work day ends with the lengthening of time through the process of weeding to finally come to a standstill, so too the birds “twit”, “jab” and “rustle” (line 23) before falling silent. This image also creates a similar state of mind which the process of weeding does, that of becoming restful and soothed. As the birds sing and fall silent, sing again and fall silent again, the persona hears “a hundred silences fall, / break and fall again” (lines 25-26). These lines hint at the level of engagement the persona has with the “world” in his ability to identify and notice patterns of song in birds, as well as the significant way in which these embody his own experiences and emotions as “rising” and “falling”.

This is an important consideration in terms of Baderoon’s notion of embodiment and knowledge since it illustrates how she sees the relationship between the being-in-the-world and his/ her environment. A person is not merely “in” an environment, but rather, through the process of knowing and dwelling, becomes “part of” such an environment, the person comes to embody the environment, and vice versa. The “hundred silences” of the final stanza of the poem not only refer to the moments in which the birds fall quiet, but also to the title of the collection, and can thereby refer to the “silences” of the poems themselves. These come to embody our level of engagement with the world, as well as poetry (which forms part of the



world) – much as the persona is able to “hear” and experience the silences which fall in between the twittering of the birds, we are able to “listen” to the silences the poems in this collection present. Our manner of knowing both the environment that we *live*, as well as the poems in this collection, therefore depends upon our embodied “listening”.

In “My Tongue Softens on the Other Name” (*DNB* 31-32), the speaker describes a domestic scene at his/ her mother’s house and in her garden:

**My Tongue Softens on the Other Name**

1 In my mother’s back yard washing snaps  
2 above chillies and wild rosemary.  
3 Kapokbos<sup>10</sup>, cottonwool bush, my tongue softens  
4 on the rosemary’s other name.  
5 Brinjal, red peppers and pawpaw grow  
6 in the narrow channel between  
7 the kitchen and the wall that divides  
8 our house from the Severo’s. At the edge  
9 of the grass by the bedrooms, a witolyf<sup>11</sup> reaches  
10 ecstatically for the power lines.  
  
11 In a corner in the lee of the house,  
12 nothing grows.  
13 Sound falls here.  
14 Early in the day shadows wash  
15 over old tiles stacked  
16 against the cement wall.  
17 In the cold and silence  
18 my brother is making a garden.  
  
19 He clears gravel from the soil  
20 and lays it against the back wall.  
21 Bright spokes of pincushion proteas puncture a rockery.  
22 For hours he scrapes into a large stone a hollow to catch  
23 water from a tap that has dripped all my life.  
24 Around it, botterblom<sup>12</sup> slowly reddens the grey sand.  
25 A fence made of reed filters  
26 the wind between the wall and the house.  
27 Ice-daisies dip their tufted heads  
28 toward its shadows.  
  
29 At night, on an upturned paint tin, he sits  
30 in the presence of growing things.  
31 Light wells over the rim of the stone basin  
32 and collects itself into the moon.  
33 Everything is finding its place.

(*DNB* 31-21)

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<sup>10</sup> Afrikaans, cottonwool bush

<sup>11</sup> Afrikaans, white olive

<sup>12</sup> Afrikaans, butter flower

This poem brings into play various contrasting images which are useful to our understanding and interpretation of the relation between the body-subjects in the poem and their engagement with their environment. The first two lines, for example, illustrate a domestic image of washing hanging in the mother's back yard above the "wild rosemary" (line 2), which initially indicates the contrast between the domestic and the "wild". It seems as though the mother has made a home for herself "in spite" of the wildness of the environment, but the lines to follow indicate that this is not the case, since the names of the "wild" rosemary are so familiar in the mouth of the speaker. Instead, they suggest that there exists and interrelatedness between the persons and their environment, a familiarity which can only be attained through living in a place.

The reference to the "softening" of the speaker's tongue on the name "cottonwool bush" instead of "kapokbos" which has loud, occlusive sounds in the Afrikaans pronunciation, further relates this poem to Chapter Three's discussion regarding the embodiment of language, too. The speaker experiences that his/ her tongue viscerally "softens / on the rosemary's other name" indicating the manner in which language is part of his/ her body. "Kapokbos" is a colloquial name for the wild rosemary, which is mostly indigenous to the Western Cape area, and the use of it here effectively illustrates the engaged manner with which the persons in this poem live their environment.

Lines five to ten provide the image of a lush growing vegetable garden in contrast to the wall that "divides / our house from the Severo's" (lines 7-8), and in even further contrast to the "corner in the lee of the house" (line 11), where "nothing grows" (line 12). However, as line eighteen indicates, the speaker's brother is now "making a garden" in the place where "old tiles (are) stacked / against the cement wall" (lines 15-16), despite the "cold and silence" (line 17).

In the description of how he does this, one sees the manner in which he is performing the act of landscaping: clearing the "gravel from the soil" (line 19), planting "proteas" (line 21) and "botterblomme" (line 24), as well as creating a water feature of the dripping tap (lines 22-23). In this way, the speaker's brother begins to *know* the landscape; through engaging with the environment, with the earth in an embodied manner, he is able to come to a new understanding of his surroundings.

The final stanza makes this point especially lucid, in which he reflects upon his work “[a]t night, on an upturned paint tin” (line 29), sitting in “the presence of growing things” (line 30). Finally, the tap which the speaker describes as dripping “all my life” (line 23) has a purpose, too, as in it “[l]ight wells over” and “collects itself into the moon” (line 32). It can be said, therefore, that the practice of embodied landscaping serves as a powerful method to engage with one’s environment in a physical and visceral way.

On a different level of interpretation the poem embodies the garden in our *imagination*, in a similar manner in which “The Dance” was embodied in the speaker’s imagination earlier in this discussion. This is done by means of the vivid imagery and extensive descriptions provided in the poem, as well as the sonorous selection of plant names, for example “kapokbos”, “brinjal”, “pawpaw”, “witolyf”, “pincushion proteas” and “ice-daisies”. Especially the indigenous Afrikaans names create rich sounds in the poem as a whole, and aid in the depiction of the garden in the reader’s imagination – one which is not only visible in the mind’s eye, but is also felt on the tongue through the pronunciation of the words. The use of these indigenous words shows the manner in which the colloquial language of the region reflect and embody the environment, and the speaker’s use of these, in turn, illustrate the manner in which s/he too is incorporated in the environment. Thus, as the poem suggests, “[e]verything is finding its place” (line 33).

Relating to this discussion is “Devil’s food” (*HS* 17) which describes how one should collect and harvest wild mushrooms. The vital aspect in this poem is the manner in which it suggests that one goes about this activity: these are not mere instructions for the picking of mushrooms, but rather a manner in which to know how, as well as a *way* of knowing and understanding one’s environment, through the body specifically. For example, the poem prescribes one to first of all “[p]ay attention to where you walk” (line 1), including noticing the “kind of moss underfoot” (line 3). Furthermore, “[l]earn which mushrooms are perfect, poisonous, / and which, misshapen, brown, are best of all” (lines 6-7). In order to do this, one must “[t]est the give of the flesh” (line 8) and “[u]se your hands” (line 12). Further, the poem suggests that you “[f]eel for the spiky underside of the head / and the soft stem, thinner than your finger” (lines 13-14). The only manner in which to learn how to pull them from the soil perfectly, “when to pull” (line 18), and “when it will yield” (line 18), is “by touch alone” (line 17).

Noteworthy is the use of words pertaining to the body, or a form of embodiment, which include “underfoot”, “flesh”, “hands”, “head”, “finger” and “touch”. The manner in which the incarnated self needs to *be*, to dwell, in his/ her environment in order to select and pick wild mushrooms needs to incorporate the physical, the corporeal. In this sense, the poem represents another way of knowing the earth, the world. The mushrooms, too, are a form of embodiment, as the final stanza of the poem explains:

21     Do not eat  
22     until they are cooked.  
23     They taste of the soft metals of the earth,  
24     themselves, not themselves,  
25     the presence of older things.

The mushrooms “themselves” (line 24) are embodiments of the “soft metals of the earth” (line 23); since they grow from soil, which forms part of the earth, they are able to hold “the presence of older things” (line 24) and in eating them, these things become part of the human body. The poem thus provides a holistic view of the process of life, as well as suggesting an embodied manner of harvesting from the earth, by means of instructing the persons in a particular way to *know* how to do so, by means of incorporating and relying on the experience of the body as such.

Relating to the notion of the mushrooms being the embodiment of things of the past, “This is not my father’s garden” (HS 46) too presents a previously embodied environment which now only retains memories:

1       At the gate, the frangipani flowers  
2       have fallen into the letterbox again.  
  
3       The roses have given up,  
4       only one lingers at the edge of the path.  
  
5       The hibiscus is gone  
6       from the centre of the grass,  
7       now wild as veld.  
  
8       By the wall, the freesias smell  
9       of oranges and cigarette smoke.  
  
10      This is not the garden of my father  
11      but one of succulents and uncertain rains,  
12      his death suddenly clear.

13     This is not my father's garden  
 14     but in a dream he looked at me calmly,  
 15     back curved as a large snail,  
 16     saying, this is alright. (HS 46)

This poem notes that the father's garden has deteriorated as a result of his absence: "the frangipani flowers / have fallen" (lines 1-2) and are not being picked up, the "roses have given up" (line 3) and the "hibiscus is gone" (line 5). Even the flowers' smells have changed – "the freesias smell / of oranges and cigarette smoke" (lines 8-9). This suggests that the engaged and embodied manner in which he used to be able to dwell and work in the garden nourished it, and now, as a result of its absence, everything is falling apart. The father's engagement with the environment was thus necessary in order to maintain the garden, which indicates the important relationship between the being-in-the-world and the world itself.

The only comfort the speaker has from this deserted garden which does not embody his/ her father any longer, is a dream in which he appears to him/ her, "back curved as a large snail" (line 15), to announce that "this is alright" (line 16). Significantly, the image of the snail suggests that the father is still part of the garden in a metaphorical sense. But more so, it conjures a picture of the swirl-shape on the snail's shell, which suggests something cyclical about the process of life. In keeping with this idea, reading the first two lines again one notices that the "frangipani flowers / have fallen in the letterbox *again*" (emphasis added), an image which suggests a return to the place of origin, since flower seeds were often received in the post. Similarly, the image of the father as a snail in the speaker's dream could indicate the process and cyclical nature of life, much like the patterns on the shell of a snail, and the flowers returning to the letterbox from which they came. The garden then may appear deteriorated, but it forms part of life, and in this manner it also embodies this knowledge.

#### 4.4 Conclusions

In Baderoon's poetry, knowledge is not depicted as *something* which can only be applied or acquired by the mind. Instead, it is generated in the course of our lived experiences of the world in an embodied manner. This point is made clear in poems such as "Learning to play frisbee" as well as "The Machine", which both indicate that experience is dependent on the

self as an incarnated being. “Time running across the night” and “True” further emphasize the importance of the body in the application of skill, both on the level of incorporating the body in the physical activities, as well as the importance of the body in writing poetry and appreciating poetry itself. Similarly “The Dance” indicates that our understanding and appreciation of art is an embodied activity, too.

Furthermore, landscape and the environment are shown to play an important role in the relationship between the body and knowledge as well. The various poems discussed in this regard illustrate that our ways of knowing and being in our world, in the phenomenological sense, have much to do with our embodiment. Since we do not merely exist as minds, our bodies play an intricate role in the way in which we are able to live and engage with our environment, which should not be neglected. In fact, as Merleau-Ponty also underscores, Baderoon’s poems indicate that we cannot know the world by any other means than through our bodies, since they are necessarily part of the process.

What is noteworthy about the poems discussed in this chapter is not, however, the mere fact that they suggest a relationship between knowing and embodiment. Rather, they contribute significantly to our understanding and use of the term “embodiment”. Embodiment does not merely refer to the state of a mind incorporated in a body, but instead an intertwined interrelatedness between the two – as the poems discussed in this chapter indicate, there is no way in which we are able to know “in spite” of our bodies, and moreover they are intricate in the process of knowing.

Our ways of knowing the world do not only refer to cognitive processes of perception, but rather embodied ways of understanding and experiencing the world as lived by us. As has been made clear in this chapter, embodiment likewise refers to a way in which to engage with the landscape, with our physical environment, which shortens the supposed distance between “us” and “the world”. Instead of positing a view of landscape as an image to be seen and experienced from the “outside”, Baderoon’s poems suggest that we are beings embodied in the physical world, too.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

# BADEROON, REMEMBERING AND EMBODIED MEMORY

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Anyone who approaches. . .the classical problem of the relations of soul and body will soon see this problem as centring upon the subject of memory. . . . ~ Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*

Many very different things happen when we remember. ~ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*

In short, to remember is to reconstruct, in part on the basis of what we have learnt or said since. ~ Umberto Eco, *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*

### 5.1 Introduction

The importance of the body in memory, with regard to both *how* we remember and *what* we remember, is not always apparent. Perhaps this is part of the reason for the body's absence in much of memory studies in previous years. However, this does not mean that the body does not play an important role in this process. Gabeba Baderoon's poetry clearly illustrates this fact: the body is necessary in remembering. This chapter seeks to show how by examining her use of the notion of embodiment. In order to do this, it specifically looks at the notions of "body memory" as well as "place memory", as set out in Chapter Two of this dissertation, to elucidate the importance of embodiment in remembering. Furthermore, it discusses the various manners in which objects can be artefacts of embodiment, too, as well as briefly looking at the notion of forgetting.

### 5.2 The body (dis)placed

In Gabeba Baderoon's poems, memory plays an important role in terms of its embodied nature. Memories are shown to be both "of the body" as well as "body memories", thereby

undermining the notion that they are purely an activity of the “mind”. As set out in Chapter Two of this dissertation, one of the important ways in which they also relate is through habitual body memory. This section focuses on this notion, since it assists an interpretation of the embodiment found in Baderoon’s oeuvre.

Consider, for example, the following poem:

**Point of View**

1     In the kitchen she reaches for the nutmeg grater  
2     and remembers it is in another cupboard,  
3     another place.

4     In the post office she fills in the address  
5     she has left behind.  
6     She tears up the form  
7     and starts again.  
8     Her mail follows her  
9     like outstretched hands.

10    In the sky on the way home  
11    a hawk hangs motionless,  
12    moving, yet still,  
13    pinning the sky.

(*DNB* 13)

In the first stanza, the persona reaches for a familiar object in her kitchen only to realize that it is no longer there, it is “in another cupboard / another place” (lines 2-3). This action is an example of a habitual body memory, as the persona does not consciously think about where the nutmeg grinder is positioned; she does not consciously consider where to find it. Rather, her body knows and remembers, and thereby automatically reaches for it, as if by habit. The memory of the nutmeg grinder’s place in the cupboard is thus embodied in the persona’s fingers, in her hand that reaches, in her physical body. A similar example is given in the second stanza, in which the persona fills in her address on a form at the post office, again by habit and without thinking about it, only to realize that the address is no longer the correct one. The writing of the address is another embodied activity of her past; her hand has become so used to performing this task that it remembers it of its own accord.

Casey explains that these familiar habits of our bodies are memories that serve, to a certain degree, to orient us in terms of our world (146). For this reason, the woman in the poem is destabilized when she finds that her address has changed, that the nutmeg grinder is not



where it is supposed to be. Habitual body memories serve to familiarize us with our world, our environment, our place as lived by us. In this manner, it also relates to the way in which we are able to know the world, which indicates a similarity to the dwelling perspective discussed in Chapter Four of this dissertation. Our embodied interaction with the world not only determines the manner in which we know it, but it also stabilizes and provides comfort through its habitual remembering of our world.

As a result, the woman in this poem becomes aware of her displacement by means of her body memories, and so she “tears up the form / and starts again” (lines 6-7). As Chapter Two explained, embodied memory necessarily “takes place in place”, and we seldom remember something without attributing a specific place to it (Casey 182). This point is especially significant in “Point of View” (*DNB* 13), seeing that the first stanza already emphasizes that the persona finds herself in “another place” (line 3). Place is therefore vital in terms of the body and memory as “unless *it* (the body) feels oriented in place, we as its bearers are not going to feel oriented there either” (Casey 195).

This poem thereby introduces the opposition between place and displacement. On the one hand, the woman finds herself in a place with which she is unfamiliar, but her body still habitually recalls the previous place she inhabited, and acts accordingly. On the other hand, with specific reference to stanza three, the woman is “placed” somewhere definite: “In the sky on the way home / a hawk hangs motionless, / moving, yet still, / pinning the sky” (lines 10-13). Together with the title of the poem, this stanza emphasizes a specific place in which the woman currently finds herself, despite her perception of displacement. The hawk pins the position of the place, and the woman is able to realize (as suggested in the title) that feelings of place/ displacement depend on one’s point of view. The opposition thus creates tension between the place where the woman finds herself, and her own feelings of displacement. These are emphasized further by means of her habitual body memories which serve as a constant reminder of the previous place she inhabited.

As is often the case in Baderoon’s poems, her utilization of the theme of embodiment does, however, not remain on a thematic level. Embodied language also plays a significant role in this poem, especially with regard to stanza three. For example, the poetic device of meter aids in pinning the woman to a specific place, as the hawk’s actions, and inactions, become physically embodied on the page. Line eleven especially incorporates the use of a spondee –

“a hawk hangs motionless” – which halts the rhythm of the stanza, and by implication pins the hawk to the sky. The spacing and pauses found in lines eleven to thirteen further mime the stillness of the hawk,

a hawk hangs motionless,  
moving, yet still,  
pinning the sky.

resulting in the embodiment of the meaning of these words on the page.

The importance of this poem with regard to the discussion of embodied memories and place lies in the fact that it is the body which affects the woman’s perception of displacement, since it is through the body’s recollections that the woman remains constantly aware of the fact that she is in a different place. A further example of Baderoon’s employment of body and place memory can be found in the poem entitled “Hunger” (*DNB* 24). In this poem the theme of displacement or diaspora is much more prominent.

### **Hunger**

1 All day I watch the cooking shows, perhaps  
2 for the company of the colours. I have slow,  
3 apricot memories. I think I seek in them  
4 a grandmother and a kitchen heavy  
5 with years. I think I watch  
  
6 for beginnings, perhaps all beginnings.  
7 A girl learning to keep from crying  
8 when she slices an onion, when  
9 she remembers the country she has left.  
10 All day I watch to keep from crying. (*DNB* 24)

The speaker watches cooking shows “all day” (line 1) to combat his/ her loneliness, as well as for the “company of the colours” (line 2). The second stanza of this poem equates the speaker with the girl who learns “to keep from crying” (line 7) by means of the repetition of these words in the final line. As a result, we “read” the speaker as the “girl”, and come to understand that the loneliness she experiences is a result of leaving her country behind. Importantly, it is the bodily performance of slicing an onion and physically trying to stave off her tears which remind the girl of what she is trying to forget, in a similar way that the speaker watches cooking shows “to keep from crying” (line 10). Her loneliness finds further

poetic embodiment in the title of the poem, “Hunger”, which highlights her feelings of diaspora<sup>13</sup> and displacement having left her country. Significantly, these feelings are recognized through a physical, bodily experience of not being nourished, indicating the level of embodiment on which they are felt.

The metaphor in lines two to three, in which the speaker has “slow, / apricot memories”, brings about a number of interpretative possibilities with regard to memory. The image of the fruit evokes a specific colour, texture and smell, which the speaker associates with her home or even childhood. In this sense, the speaker recalls her past as if through the senses. Moreover, apricots are often used for preservation, be it in jam, atchar, or chutney, and combining this idea with the reference to a grandmother suggests that she could be referring to memories regarding a kitchen “heavy / with years” (line 4) in which a grandmother used to prepare food and preserve fruits (such as apricots). Describing these memories as “slow”, specifically, illustrates that they are in process of becoming, and develop over time. The image of the apricots thus becomes an embodiment of the speaker’s memories, and one which is associated with sensorial experience, thereby again implicating the body in the process of remembering.

Clearly, both “Point of View” and “Hunger” illustrate that Baderoon’s depiction of memory is importantly linked to embodiment, and especially in terms of body memories. This link is significant, as it shows how Baderoon is able to transcend the supposed mind-body dichotomy through her notion of memory’s necessary embodied nature. Furthermore, both these poems incorporate the conception of place memory, exhibiting that memories essentially occur in place. These also bring into play the opposition between place and displacement, as in both poems the speaker finds him/ herself in a state of displacement, whilst recalling memories of the place left behind. This aspect brings them in relation to the previously discussed notion of dwelling in Chapter Four, and highlights the importance of one’s being and interaction with the world in terms of both body and place.

Not all of Baderoon’s poems “about” memory are concerned with place and displacement, however. In some, memories become embodied in specific objects, which then act as traces of previous experiences. The following section looks at these in further detail.

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<sup>13</sup> “Diaspora” is used to refer to “the experience of dispersion” from a former place, home, or homeland (Bardenstein 20).

### 5.3 Gestures and traces of memory

In her first collection of poems, *The Museum of Ordinary Life*, Baderoon depicts various objects which become invested with meaning as a result of the memories they represent. This aspect relates to the title of the collection in a noteworthy manner, since much like objects in a museum, her collection holds various artefacts which embody specific moments and events of history, and in this case, the history of “ordinary life”. An example of a poem which illustrates this and relates to the discussion regarding embodied memory is

#### Possession

1 Your shoes lean against the bureau,  
2 one tilted a little when you touched  
3 a hand against the wall and levered  
4 out your foot, the angle still echoing  
5 your gesture. I see you there  
6 and understand why people refuse  
7 to move the possessions of the dead.

8 In loss we do not straighten the chairs,  
9 nor close the books,  
10 nor give away the clothes.  
11 The angle of Freud's chair  
12 on that last day at his desk shows  
13 his absent glance on the figurines on the shelf,  
14 the pen he left with its top off,  
15 still holds a ghost of touch.

16 With older senses, we apprehend  
17 the immediate echoes in a room.  
18 Behind a voice, another voice  
19 causes us to trail  
20 off in conversation, our eyes catching  
21 a motion made just now  
22 or a hundred years ago.

23 So I will leave your shoes, one leaning  
24 slightly on the other, while you are still  
25 here with me to repeat  
26 the gesture that lingers in this room.

(MOL 14)

The first stanza proposes that inanimate objects, such as shoes, are able to contain “gestures” of a person as a result of their contact with them. The addressee’s shoes, by means of the angle at which they are left, echo the gesture made upon their removal from the person’s feet;

they indicate to the speaker that the person “touched / a hand against the wall and levered / out [his/ her] foot” (lines 2-4), and thereby embody the gesture itself.

The fact that the memory and movement of the person are embodied in the angle of the shoes makes the speaker comprehend why “people refuse / to move the possessions of the dead” (lines 6-7), because possessions are able to embody certain aspects of a person even when they are no longer there. Stanza two continues this idea, wherein the speaker suggests that the angle of “Freud’s chair / on that last day at his desk shows / his absent glance on the figurines on the shelf” (lines 11-13) and further, that the “pen he left with its top off, / still holds a ghost of touch” (lines 14-15). This “ghost of touch” is also the “gesture” in the angle of the chair as well as the shoes in stanza one – it is a non-physical, absent reminder of the previously embodied nature of objects such as chairs, shoes, pens. The “ghost of touch” implies that some time ago, these things were touched and held by the persons who came into contact with them, but now these things are only able to embody the memories of these persons.

The notions of “gesture” and “ghost of touch” as used in this poem closely relate to our understanding of memory – memories are recollections of things, events, places, habits of the past, they are not these things in the present, but serve as reminders of them. This relates further to the title of the poem, “Possession”, which indicates that objects can be one’s property, as well as hold a certain quality, characteristic, or knowledge of something (Anderson et al. 1269). These objects, therefore, “possess” memories, they contain knowledge and presence; even though they are not directly these things, they serve as reminders which embody them.

The third stanza of “Possession” suggests that we are able to “apprehend / the immediate echoes in a room” (lines 16-17) with “older senses” (line 16). These lines relate to the matter of knowing discussed in Chapter Four, by indicating that one of the manners in which we are able to know is by means of our senses. With regard to the role of the senses in perception, it is useful to return to Merleau-Ponty’s work on the matter. He explains that sense experience is that “vital communication with the world which makes it present as a familiar setting of our life” (*PhP* 52-53). In experience, we are not given “‘dead’ qualities (of things) but active ones”, and through experiencing by means of our senses, scenes of life become invested with meaning.

The problem we are faced with lies in understanding the strange relationships

. . . which are woven between the parts of the landscape, or between it and [us] as incarnate subject[s], and through which an object perceived can concentrate in itself a whole scene or become the *imago* of a whole segment of life (*PhP* 52).

“Possession” gives examples of these “strange relationships” with its reference to the embodied gestures left in shoes and chairs, the “ghost of touch” which lingers in clothing and books when someone is no longer around, as well as the “echoes” in an empty room of those who have been there before. Importantly, the poem thus underscores the significance of the body in our experience, knowing and understanding of memory.

Correspondingly, “The Art of Leaving” (*DNB* 39) embodies traces of memory with particular reference to our experience of loss.

#### **The Art of Leaving**

1      Of all the things I do not wish to know  
2      death whispers to me this terrible secret:  
  
3      I will never know joy  
4      except in its departure.  
  
5      I will not know you  
6      except in the traces  
  
7      once you have gone.  
  
8      The warmth is leaving  
9      your shirt, hanging over  
10     the back of the chair.  
  
11     Slowly it is giving back  
12     everything it had of yours. (*DNB* 39)

Similarly to “Possession”, this poem indicates that an object such as a shirt can embody a remembrance of a person once they are no longer there. In this instance, a shirt “hanging over / the back of the chair” (lines 9-10) embodies the warmth of the person who used to wear it, and upon their leaving, its warmth, too, is fading. Thus, objects can be “traces” of memory, in the sense that the English word “trace” refers to “a barely perceptible inscription (an impression of some kind) and also to a path, a trail or a track – a *way*” (Lucy 122). Hence the “traces”, much like the gestures and ghosts of touch found in “Possession”,

simultaneously refer to an impression of memory left by those who came into contact with the objects, as well as a pathway to remembrance for those who come into contact with these objects later.

Furthermore, this poem suggests that these “traces” which embody memories of people are not permanent; much like memories they also fade with time. They do, however, remain as a way to the process of remembering, and thus also link to the notion of knowing: “I will not know you / except in the traces // once you have gone” (lines 5-7). The “traces” left by others embody them once they are no longer there, but also serve as a way in which we are able to know them, which links it to the notion of our embodied way of knowing the world.

“White carnation” (*MOL* 20-21) elaborates the way in which we are able to “know” memories, and is also concerned with the prominent idea of memory as a “trace”, as found in “Possession” and “The Art of Leaving”.

### **White carnation**

1     We lose  
2     even our loss.

3     At the funeral of a young woman aged 25,  
4     death is everywhere.  
5     We walk past the small house of her coffin  
6     lay a single white carnation  
7     by her photograph  
8     and feel alone again,  
9     an aloneness that is a curtaining of the self,  
10    when the lights go out in the house  
11    and the fire stills.

12    I touch the back of the young woman’s mother  
13    and hold her long in my arms.  
14    When I let her go, she bends double,  
15    shakes her head, needing to stiffen  
16    against the loneliness that follows holding.  
17    Only the body knows,  
18    the back that bends double,  
19    the head that turns slowly, so slowly  
20    and nothing changes.  
21    A cry escapes her mouth, but only  
22    for a second. She swallows the sound again.

23     Afterward, at home, I switch on all the lights  
24     and make a fire  
25     and drink tea, sweet and hot,  
26     and fall asleep with the logs yellow against my back.  
27     I wake to cold  
28     and feel the ceasing again,  
29     and the bleeding of colour into darkness.

30     A photograph makes its offering of one instant,  
31     but in it hovers the instant just before.  
32     In the photograph, the young woman looks  
33     as though a smile has just faded from her face.

34     In the morning a bird flies overhead.  
35     Its shadow touches the ground,  
36     the house across the way, the flowers.

(MOL 20-21)

What is significant about this poem, though, is its focus on a *photograph* as an embodiment of memory. The fifth stanza explains that a photograph of the young woman who has died “makes an offering of one instant, / but in it hovers the instant just before” (lines 30-31). Looking at the photograph, the speaker can “see”, or rather, perceive, the smile which has “just faded from her face” (line 33) even though it is not captured in the photograph itself.

It has been said that photographs differ from memories since they grasp what is given as “a spatial (or temporal) continuum” whereas the images of memory retain what is given “only insofar it has significance” (Jens Ruchatz 369). In this sense, a photograph can be seen as an externalized image, whereas memory remains internalized. However, as Ruchatz notes, a photograph still refers to a particular and significant moment in time that is “inevitably past when the finished product is looked at” (370). A photograph is able to contain that which has been present, though it is no longer, and offer it as if it still is.

In this manner, photographs relate to the previously discussed notion of “trace”, in the sense that they are able to represent something whilst incorporating its absence. As Roland Barthes explains, photography is not only useful in the way it is able to give an impression of the presence of things, but more so, it gives “an awareness of its having-been-there” (44). Similarly, the photograph in this poem does not directly portray the young woman smiling, but rather alludes to her “having smiled”. Thus, it contains the trace of her presence, as well as the memory of her smile, even though it is not directly visible.



In relation to the poems discussed previously, “White Carnation” (*MOL* 20-21) therefore presents another important manner in which memories can be embodied by means of objects, in this case photographs. Clearly then, Baderoon’s conception of embodied memory does not end with notions such as body or place memory – she suggests that objects too can be embodied memories, or reminders of our embodied nature, even in their absence. The following poem takes the notion of embodied memory a step further, suggesting that even in dreaming, memory has an embodied nature.

**You do not see what it is**

1     In the middle of a conversation  
 2     you remember a dream  
 3     in which your dead father absently brushes  
 4     something from the side of your face  
 5     just above the brow.  
  
 6     The touch returns  
 7     like a rustle in your memory.  
  
 8     As you talk, something brushes  
 9     you gently just above the brow  
 10    and though you turn quickly  
 11    you do not see what it is. (*HS* 55)

The persona in the poem remembers only the *dream* of a touch, but this is enough to have it return “like a rustle in [his/ her] memory” (line 7). In this sense, s/he experiences the recollection of a dream in a corporeal way; s/he recalls it so vividly that it returns to him/ her as if it is a true experience. This idea is also found in her poem “the country after midnight” (*DNB* 35) in which she states that “a dream is a physical thing / when you are afraid / your muscles run” (lines 6-8).

What these two poems suggest is that activities of the “mind” such as dreaming and remembering are also activities of the body – dreaming is a “physical thing”, and in remembering we are often able to “feel” someone’s touch even though we are not *actually* experiencing it. Our embodied existence extends to the “world” of dreaming, resulting in the fact that there is no distinct line between what the mind experiences and remembers as opposed to the experiences and memories of body – two are *interrelated*, and thus dreaming, knowing, thinking and remembering all occur simultaneously on both the mental and physical level.

To recapitulate, what “Possession”, “The Art of Leaving”, “White Carnation” (*MOL* 20-21) and “You do not see what it is” have in common is the proposition that inanimate objects such as clothing, furniture and even photographs, which form part of our experience of everyday life, become *embodied* with meaning and, more importantly, with memories. Baderoon’s conception of embodied memory does therefore not end at the idea of memories of the body, or body memories, but includes the notion that even objects that form part of our life-world can become embodied extensions of ourselves.

## 5.4 On forgetting

The topic of forgetting has always “accompanied, like a kind of shadow, the theories and techniques of memory, and, like a shadow, it highlights the latter’s dark sides and dilemmas” (Esposito 181). For this reason, the opposite of remembering, that is forgetting, will also be discussed in this chapter, since it contributes to the type of embodiment evident in Baderoon’s oeuvre. Harald Weinrich explains that in understanding forgetting, it is useful to consider the following metaphor:

If. . .memory is represented as a (“topical”) landscape – as it is in the image-field dominant in the rhetorical art of memory – then the metaphors of forgetting occupies primarily the desert wastes, the *sandy* areas in which what is to be forgotten is *gone with the wind* (4).

Or, if one considers memory as a storehouse, as many ancient philosophers have, then “the deeper we descend into its cellars the closer we come to forgetting” (Weinrich 4). What then could be the relation between forgetting and the body or embodiment? And how, if at all, does this manifest in Baderoon’s poems? The first poem to consider in this regard is “Postscript” (*MOL* 16). The title suggests that it is something written afterwards, which serves as the theme of the poem. Likewise, the poem itself can be considered a type of postscript, implying that it is a literal embodiment of its title.

### Postscript

- 1 In my old bedroom I reach for boxes
- 2 and the dust of the undisturbed years rises
- 3 in the afternoon light. As children we drew

4      our names on such powdery floors. I flick  
 5      through high school report cards, forgotten  
 6      library books, letters now tearing and flaking.  
  
 7      My hand pauses on an envelope, sealed but unsent.  
 8      On the front, the name of our neighbours,  
 9      on the back, above the name of my family, I slide  
 10     a finger under the flap and tear open the years.  
 11     Inside, I find, on a Christmas card two decades old,  
 12     a greeting to the tailor next door, who has since died,  
 13     in the writing of my father, who has since died.  
  
 14     How brief and irretrievable our actions,  
 15     the writing and the forgetting,  
 16     and the lives that unfolded from them.  
 17     Opening a letter not addressed to me,  
 18     I wonder if I am stealing a gift,  
 19     or completing a small, necessary ritual.  
  
 20     In the dusty room I say their names out loud  
 21     and place the card again among the old papers. (MOL 16)

In this poem, the first stanza alludes to the popular metaphor of memory as a storehouse mentioned earlier, and the “dust of undisturbed years” (line 2) also brings to mind forgetting as the “sandy areas” in the landscape of memory. The dust can be seen as an embodiment of this forgetting, the physical residue of what has been forgotten, of the “undisturbed years”. However, what has been forgotten here also evokes the process of remembering, as the speaker notes: “[a]s children we drew // our names on such powdery floors” (lines 3-4), recollecting his/ her experiences of the past. The speaker’s physical contact with what has been forgotten returns him/ her to the state of memories. This physical experience is underscored by the alliteration of the “f”-sounds, as in “flick” (line 4), “forgotten” (line 5) and “flaking” (line 6), which make the reader aware of his/ her own body upon reading the poem.

The sentence in line seven fills an entire line and interrupts the rhythm of the poem, much like the speaker’s “hand pauses”, which too interrupt the process of remembering. The speaker inspects the envelope, slides his/ her finger “under the flap” and thereby tears open “the years” (line 10). What is noteworthy about this description is the embodied nature of his/ her actions, which indicates the manner in which s/he engages with the world. In this second stanza of the poem, s/he finds an old Christmas card addressed to a neighbour who is deceased. This action makes the speaker reminisce: “[h]ow brief and irretrievable our

actions, / the writing and the forgetting, / and the lives that unfolded from them” (lines 14-16). These lines may appear to cast forgetting in a negative light, since it seems that we perform it so “easily” and then merely continue with our lives. But it should also be noted that these lines suggest that forgetting is an inevitable part of our way of living and being, which relates to Nietzsche’s well-known notion that “life in any true sense is absolutely impossible without forgetfulness” (7).

In comparison to the poems previously discussed in this chapter, the Christmas card found here is an example of another embodied artefact. The difference, however, is that this card does not only embody a trace of the speaker’s father who wrote it, but more significantly serves as a reminder of what has been forgotten. Through opening the envelope the speaker is not sure whether s/he has completed a “necessary ritual” (line 19) or stolen “a gift” (line 18). In reconciliation of this action, s/he then says the names of both his/ her deceased father and the tailor “out loud” (line 20), summoning them into the present, into remembrance. The card thus embodies both the process of remembering and forgetting, suggesting an intertwined relation between the two.

The poem “I forget to look” (*HS* 26) further explores the relation between forgetting and embodiment in Baderoon’s oeuvre. In this poem another photograph is able to embody a memory, as well as what has been forgotten.

### **I forget to look**

1     The photograph of my mother at her desk in the fifties  
2     has been in my purse for twenty years,  
3     its paper faded, browning,  
4     the scalloped edge bent then straightened.

5     The collar of her dress folds discreetly.  
6     The angle of her neck looks as though  
7     someone has called her from far away.

8     She was the first in her family to take  
9     the bus from Claremont  
10    up the hill to the university.

11    At one point during the lectures at medical school,  
12    black students had to pack their notes, get up and walk  
13    past the ascending rows of desks out of the theatre.

14 Behind the closed door, in an autopsy  
 15 black students were not meant to see,  
 16 the uncovering and cutting of white skin.  
  
 17 Under the knife, the skin,  
 18 the mystery of sameness.  
  
 19 In a world that defined how black and white  
 20 could look at each other, touch each other,  
 21 my mother looks back, her poise unmarred.  
  
 22 Every time I open my purse,  
 23 she is there, so familiar I forget  
 24 to look at her.

(HS 26)

The opposition between remembering and forgetting plays an important part in the interpretation of this poem. On the one hand, the photograph serves as “trace” of the mother, which makes the speaker recollect and reminisce about her, taking him/ her back to the fifties, a tremulous time in South African history. The photo itself is old, its “paper faded / browning” (line 3) and its “scalloped edge [has been] bent then straightened” (line 4). In this sense, the photograph is an embodied artefact of the past – it not only shows a picture of the mother from long ago, but is itself something old and part of history. Furthermore, the photograph acts as a pathway for the speaker’s reminiscences about the past, that is, his/ her mother’s past. By means of this recollection, s/he recalls a time during which people who did not have “white skin” (line 16) were treated unjustly and inhumanely by the Apartheid regime. The photograph thus embodies this time in history for the speaker, as it makes him/ her recall it.

Moreover, this recollection serves as an example of how the body itself can be written, judged, labelled, marked; how the physical body is an embodiment of a person. The irony, however, lies in the “mystery of sameness” (line 18): the “outside” of the body might be subject to labels, judgements and unfair ridicule on the grounds of race (or sex), but there is a sameness “inside”. Similar to the opposition between remembering and forgetting then, this poem brings into play the relation between outsides and insides. Therefore, the photograph, serves not only as an embodied memory of the past or a reminder of what has been forgotten, but hints too at the relation between what is happening on the “inside” – “in a world that defined how black and white / could look at each other, touch each other” (lines 19-20) – and what is visible to the “outside” – “my mother looks back, her poise unmarred” (line 21).

The final lines of the poem return to the photograph's place in the purse, the speaker explaining that it is so "familiar" there, that s/he "forget[s]/ to look" at it (lines 23-24). These lines indicate, in one sense, how "forgetting" also forms part of our knowing and being in the world. On a larger scale, since the fall of the Apartheid regime, the political history of South Africa has become such a "familiar" (and to some, faded) memory, that it's almost easy to "forget" to think about it. The photograph, much like this poem, serves as an embodied reminder of this fact, underscoring that though it may be easy to "forget to look", this does not change what happened, and does not make it unimportant. "I forget to look" (*HS* 26) also appears in the collection entitled *A Hundred Silences*, suggesting further that the poem is an embodiment of one of these silences, in this case specifically the silent voice of history.

"Postscript" and "I forget to look" serve as examples of the manner in which the act of forgetting, much like the act of remembering, can be embodied in poetry. Thematically the poems show how artefacts such as Christmas cards or old photographs not only act as "traces" of memories, but are also artefacts of forgetting, embodying the "having-been-there" that is in the past. The poems themselves also serve as embodied objects, evoking the opposition between remembering and forgetting, by simultaneously alluding to both. These poems are thus important in terms of Baderoon's depiction of the embodied nature of memory, since they illustrate that her work is not only concerned with showing how the body remembers in and of itself, but how other objects too can fulfil the action of embodiment.

## 5.5 Conclusions

The relationship between remembering and the body is complex and multifaceted. Not only are we subject to memories in which our bodies play a role, but we also remember by means of our bodies, that is, our bodies, too, are able to remember. This point is elucidated in Gabeba Baderoon's poems "Point of View" (*DNB* 13) as well as "Hunger" (*DNB* 24), in which it is clear that the body is able to have its "own" memories. As explained in Chapter Two, Casey defines these as habitual body memories, since they pertain to previously acquired habits, which we perform in the present as second nature. "Point of View" (*DNB* 13), as well as "Hunger" (*DNB* 24), depicts persons who perform actions remembered through their bodies without consciously thinking about it.

It is now also clear that even these “body memories” do not occur separately from “place” – all embodied acts “take place in place”. Casey defines these as “place memories”, and they too are at work in Baderoon’s poems “Point of View” and “Hunger”. The place aspect of these poems also brings into play the notion of displacement, as in both these poems the speakers/ personas are *displaced*, they are somewhere, whilst remembering and longing to be somewhere else. In both poems the acts or performances of the body remind them of their diaspora, as well as certain objects which make them remember.

Furthermore, “Possession”, “The Art of Leaving”, “White Carnation” as well as “You do not see what it is”, all bring into focus Baderoon’s depiction of objects as embodiments of memory. In these poems, she refers to objects containing “gestures”, “traces” or “the ghost of touch”, which thereby serve as embodiments of people as well as the past. The embodied nature of memory is thus not only evident on the level of the body itself, but also in objects with which the body comes into contact. Likewise, photographs of bodies/ people also contain “traces” of them, since they contain an awareness of one’s “having-been-there”, and form part of our being in the world.

This notion is further evident in “Postscript” and “I forget to look”, with one difference – in these poems, objects serve as embodiments of *forgetting*. Christmas cards and photographs simultaneously embody what has been forgotten, as well as evoke memories, thereby transcending the opposition between remembering and forgetting.

What all the poems studied in this chapter have in common, apart from their thematic concern with memories and remembering, is that they function on the border of some or other opposition – be it place/ displacement, inside/ outside, remembering/ forgetting, and so forth. Interestingly, these binaries share much with the mind-body dichotomy in terms of structure, and through her transcendence of these in her poems, Baderoon is also able to undermine the mind-body dichotomy successfully.

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# CONCLUSION

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Our bodies are with us, though we always had trouble saying exactly how. We are, in various conceptions, in our body, or having a body, or at one with our body, or alienated from it. The body is both ourselves and other, and as such the object of emotions from love to disgust. ~ *Body Work: Objectives of Desire in Modern Narrative*, Peter Brooks

This dissertation sought to illustrate how Gabeba Baderoon's poetry transcends the supposed mind-body dichotomy by means of her employment of the notion of embodiment. It argued that she uses the thematic concerns of language, knowledge and memory as a way to signify the "mind", but instead of reinforcing the idea that a hierarchal relationship exists between the mind and the body, she undermines it. This is accomplished through the equating of the mind to the body on both a thematic and formal level. Thus, she uncovers the body from its previously disadvantaged position by showing how the body is *necessarily* part of processes such as language, knowledge and memory, and thereby transcends the dualism.

In order to show how Baderoon achieves this transcendence, this dissertation set out four important research questions, the first being: how does Baderoon give shape to the mind-body relationship in terms of the motifs of language, knowledge and memory? The second question which is inseparable from the first in terms of discussion was: how does the poetry itself act as a form of embodiment, and what light does this shed on the significance and impact of her poetic oeuvre? To answer these two questions, this dissertation discussed the thematic concerns of language, knowledge and memory, as well as the embodiment of these portrayed in the formal aspects of the poems, in three separate chapters, each highlighting the manner in which Baderoon's poems illustrate that the relationship between the mind and the body is intricate and intertwined.

In terms of the motif of language, Chapter Three illustrated that much of Baderoon's work highlights the relationship between the body and different applications of language. First, the chapter focused on her portrayal of the acquisition of language showing, at the hand of the poem "Breath" (HS 33), that Baderoon views the body as an intricate part of the procedure. The body is not only essential as a tool for applying language as speech, but rather: language forms a visceral part of the body, indicated by images such as "[l]anguage is breath, / is



touch, is spit” (lines 1-2). Furthermore, her poem describes the manner in which the body adapts when acquiring a new language, a process which the persona in the poem experiences as “an invasion from the inside” (line 11). Her poem too suggests that the reader “[b]reathe in, / take a sip of water, / breathe out” (lines 16-18) in trying to pronounce the person’s name, highlighting the fact that poetry needs to be a physical experience, something not only read but performed by the body.

The second aspect of language studied in Chapter Three pertained to the embodiment of words and their meanings. “Where Nothing Was” (*DNB* 25) showed that, at times, language has an inability to convey corporeal experiences and feelings. The poem searches for “[a] word for the thrum when / a metal chain whips / hard and holds” (lines 9-11) but is unable to find it. Instead, the description of these feelings as bodily is the only manner in which the persona in the poem can communicate them. This idea is underscored by Baderoon’s use of alliteration in these lines, which, upon sounding them out loud, also implicate the necessity of the physical body.

In keeping with the notion of embodied words, “Each tragedy becomes the story of a tragedy” (*HS* 52) also illustrates how language can fall short of complete description, and thus requires the employment of the body. In this poem, the meaning of the words “*pitch / roll / brace*” (lines 19-21) as well as “*list / heel / hold*” (lines 29-31) come into question, and the poem indicates that the only manner in which these can be *truly* understood, is by means of experiencing them, as the people on the sinking ship do. The poem also emphasizes the frantic nature of the people, not only by means of its content, but by employing differing rhythm patterns, too. In this manner, the language on the page attempts to imitate the experiences of the people, but as the poem suggests, these can only truly be known through visceral, bodily experience.

The poems “fight” (*HS* 28) and “Out of time” (*HS* 44), on the other hand, suggest the importance of silence as language, indicating that at times the lack of words or language as speech can communicate meanings too, which is again emphasized by the formal aspects of the poems, such as a lack of punctuation.

The final aspect of language discussed in Chapter Three was concerned with the embodiment of a poem in itself, as illustrated in “Shards” (*DNB* 53). This poem depicts the manner in

which poetry is written, showing that the process itself is an embodied one. This is done by means of the corporeal images used in the poem, such as equating lines of poetry to “strands of sound like hair / blown in your eyes” (lines 5-6). Thereby, the poem shows that the body is not only required in writing, it is already necessarily part of the process.

These different applications of language were all shown to require the involvement of the body in some way or another. The importance of this aspect of Baderoon’s poems in terms of the mind-body dualism then, is that her work shows that, in terms of language, the supposed hierarchy does not exist. Rather, she emphasizes the embodied nature of language: the body is not a mere tool for the mind’s use in speech, but is a visceral part of language, shaping the way in which we speak, embodying the meanings of words when language falls short, as well as forming a necessary part of the process of creating language and poetry itself.

With regard to the theme of knowledge, Chapter Four of this dissertation showed how Baderoon’s poems depict the relationship between the body and its ways of knowing in terms of experience and skill, as well as dwelling and landscaping. In the first instance, this chapter discussed the various ways in which Baderoon’s poems illustrate the embodied nature of experience and skill. In the poem “Learning to play frisbee” (*HS* 11), for example, Baderoon shows how the body is able to remember and know certain actions as if by second nature, including how to throw a frisbee. What is also significant about this poem in particular is the manner in which the poem incorporates the body’s movements, miming its actions through the use of enjambment. This effect underscores the notion that the body is able to know certain things as a result of physical experience, suggesting that one cannot “know” how to throw a frisbee without physically performing the action, and by implication much of what we know depends on our physical performance of it. The body should thus not be disregarded in the process of knowing.

“The Machine” (*DNB* 26) further accentuates this point in its depiction of a young girl learning that her existence is, much like other objects, separate from the world. The only way in which she as a young child is able to come to this realization, is by means of performing a game in which her physical body plays an important role. In experiencing the manner in which her own body disappears and reappears from view, the girl establishes herself as a “self / distinct from the world” (lines 17-18).

In terms of the acquisition of skill, “Time running across the night” (*HS* 56), as well as “True” (*DNB* 9-10), suggests that the body plays an irreplaceable role in the application of certain skills. Both these poems indicate the embodied manner in which the persons know their world through applying their skills – on the one hand, a woman who weaves a carpet, on the other, a man who tiles. In both instances the formal aspects of the poems, especially in terms of its line breaks, mime the actions performed by those in the poems themselves. This suggests, as Chapter Four argued, that the knowing of skills is intricately connected to the embodied nature of being.

Another important aspect which these two poems have in common is their *ars poetical* nature. Both poems bring the nature of poetry itself to the reader’s attention, be it a poem as a woven tapestry, or as a tiled room. “True” (*DNB* 9-10) especially highlights the importance of the body in reading and experiencing poetry, too, by means of stating that to “judge if a line is true” (line 1) one must “bring your eye as close as you can / to the line itself and follow it” (lines 3-4). In this manner, Baderoon’s poems not only indicate that our ways of knowing pertaining to experience and skill are embodied by nature, but that our ways of knowing poetry should be too.

Moreover, “True” (*DNB* 9-10) also emphasizes the embodied appreciation of art, much like “The Dance” (*DNB* 14) does. In “The Dance” (*DNB* 14), the speaker suggests that through our imagination certain ways in which we know are also embodied, like the man in the poem’s appreciation of Henri Matisse’s artwork is “known” to him by its passing “through his whole body” (line 10) (as the speaker imagines).

Furthermore, Chapter Four studied the relation between embodiment, knowing and the environment as depicted in Baderoon’s work, since it is crucial to our understanding of her employment of embodiment. This chapter showed how the manner in which Baderoon illustrates our knowing of the physical world has much in common with the “dwelling perspective”, which too asserts an embodied way of knowing. For example, the poems “A hundred silences” (*HS* 49-50), “My Tongue Softens on the Other Name” (*DNB* 31-31) and “Devil’s food” (*HS* 17), depict practices of landscaping, and specifically gardening. These serve not only as examples of how we interact with our physical environment, but moreover, illustrate the engaged and embodied way in which we are able to know it.

Finally, “This is not my father’s garden” (*HS* 46) serves as an example of how a physical environment can embody the memory of a person as a result of his/ her previous (bodily) engagement with it. Therefore, Chapter Four of this dissertation showed that in Baderoon’s conception of it, knowledge is not *something*, it is rather a process that is acquired by means of lived experience and interaction with one’s world.

Chapter Five, in turn, discussed the important relationship between the body and memory, or remembering. It argued firstly that memories of the body are not only “about” it, but can also be through it. In this regard, the poem “Point of View” (*DNB* 13) depicts a woman who “reaches for the nutmeg grater” (line 1) automatically, before remembering (upon not finding it there) that it is “in another cupboard, / another place” (lines 2-3). This action implies that her body “remembered” where to find the grater of its own accord, and serves as an example of a habitual body memory.

Importantly, the way in which the body remembers might include place, which “Point of View” (*DNB* 13) as well as “Hunger” (*DNB* 24) also illustrates. For example, the poem “Hunger” (*DNB* 24) shows a person who has, as in “Point of View” (*DNB* 13), been displaced from his/ her previous place of occupation. In particular, the girl in the poem longs for “the country she has left” (line 9) behind, and these memories are brought about, significantly, through physical experiences such as slicing an onion, or watching cookery shows.

Furthermore, Baderoon’s poems on the subject of memory are not only concerned with recollection as a result of physical activity or experience, but also the way in which the body is able to leave “traces” of its embodiment, and how these contribute to remembering. To illustrate, Chapter Five discussed the poem “Possession” (*MOL* 14) as depicting artefacts of embodiment. In it, the speaker indicates that “the angle” (line 4) of “your shoes” (line 1) still echoes “your gesture” (line 5), and this explains to him/ her why people “refuse / to move the possessions of the dead” (lines 6-7). Therefore, the “gesture”, similarly to the “ghost of touch” (line 15) referred to later in the poem, becomes a way in which memories are embodied. This notion is further explicated in the “The Art of Leaving” (*DNB* 39), in which inanimate objects, such as a person’s clothes, are also able to embody a “trace” of their existence.

“White Carnation” (*MOL* 20-21) shows an object which embodies memory, but in this case the object is a photograph. As Chapter Five explained, such “traces” of memories can simultaneously serve as an impression of something, as well as a pathway to it, and in this sense a photograph acts as both an impression of a memory, as well as a pathway to remembering. As Barthes explained, a photograph contains an impression of something’s “having-been-there”, and thereby serves as an embodiment of memory.

Though objects can act as traces of remembering, they can serve as traces of what has been forgotten, too. The poem “Postscript” (*MOL* 16) highlights this point in its depiction of forgotten books and cards which serve concurrently as pathways to remembering, as well as embodiments of what has been forgotten. In the poem, the speaker finds an unsent Christmas card in forgotten boxes, and upon reading and opening it, the card serves as an embodied memory of the past. In keeping with the previously mentioned aspect of a photograph as an embodiment of the past, “I forget to look” (*HS* 26) illustrates how photographs can embody the forgotten as well. What has been forgotten in this poem not only refers to the act of looking at the picture of the mother in the speaker’s wallet, but more significantly, thinking about South Africa’s turbulent history. Thus, the photograph serves as a reminder of that time, and the poem urges the speaker, as well as the reader, not to become too used to it to forget to think about it.

In terms of the embodiment of memory, Baderoon’s poetry indicates that not only can the body itself remember, but other objects can be embodied by our memories as well. This process does, however depend on the body’s interaction with such objects, such as shoes, clothes or furniture. Likewise, photographs have the unique characteristic of suggesting the awareness of someone/ something’s “having-been-there”, and in that matter also embody those people or things.

Therefore, it is clear that Baderoon’s poems depict the thematic concerns of language, knowledge and memory in a unique manner, which contributes greatly to the discourse on embodiment in general. In order to see this contribution clearly, it is useful to return to the two remaining research questions this dissertation set out to answer: what light does phenomenology and Merleau-Ponty’s conception of embodiment shed on the vitally important embodiment in Gabeba Baderoon’s poetry? as well as: what light does the

expression of embodiment in Gabebe Baderoon's poetry, in turn, shed on phenomenology and the notion of embodiment?

Chapter Two of this dissertation set out to explain why phenomenology, and especially the kind entertained by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, is useful in understanding the distinctive manner in which Baderoon employs the notion of embodiment. It indicated that phenomenology is a brand of philosophy which considers the traditional divisions between oppositions such as the mind and the body as philosophical constructions which distort the true nature in which we experience the world. Instead, it offers a holistic approach to the mind-body dichotomy, highlighting the fact that both are necessary in perception and experience. It is in terms of this facet that Baderoon's poems show their first similarity to the perspectives held by phenomenological thinkers.

Moreover, Merleau-Ponty's conception of the body shows further significant similarities to those which Baderoon's poems depict. For example, he emphasizes the *bodily* nature of being human, and describes this aspect as intricately part of our knowledge, experience and perception of the world. Furthermore, he states that the body is that which is *lived*, it is through and by means of the body that we perceive and know, leading to his notion commonly referred to as "body-subjects". With regard to all these facets of his philosophy Baderoon's poems show much similarity, and for this reason, this dissertation used these to consider her work from a phenomenological point of view to elucidate the manner in which her notion of embodiment functions.

The effect that her work, in turn, has on the understanding of the notion of embodiment is multifaceted, and indicates the significance of her oeuvre overall, which has up until the present been neglected by critical enquiry. In terms of her depiction of language, Baderoon's poems illustrate that language is a process which the body *experiences*; it is not only a system of arbitrary signs arranged by the mind, but rather a way in which the body, too, is able to communicate and express. For this reason, language not only refers to the spoken or written word, but moreover the experience and performance of these words, as well as the silences between words. In this manner, Baderoon illustrates that the *embodiment* of language does not merely refer to a language as spoken by and through a body, but more importantly, to the corporeal experience of language, to language as a lived process.

In turn, the embodiment of knowledge also not only refers to the manner in which the body is able to perform the tasks set out by the mind. Knowledge, as Baderoon's rich poems have illustrated, is not a "thing" but a way or process towards knowing. Through this process we are able to communicate with our world. An embodied view of knowledge suggests an interaction and engagement with the physical world, whether it is in terms of applying certain skills, admiring artworks, or performing techniques of landscaping – the way in which we know necessarily requires our bodies. Thus, embodiment not only refers to the physical form of an abstract or spiritual structure, but rather the *manner* in which we as being(s)-in-the-world *are*, as well as know.

Likewise, an embodiment of remembering and forgetting does not only imply the obvious. Instead, Baderoon's poems show how bodies are able to attain their own forms of knowledge, as well as their own memories, which we perform without consciously even thinking about it. Similarly, the places where we go and the objects we come into contact with too become "embodiments" of us – our engagement with the physical world renders various places and objects embodied with meanings and memories. The embodiments then serve as traces – simultaneously referring to an impression left by us, as well as a way toward recalling such impressions.

In this manner, the term "embodiment" itself is able to embody the various ways in which we communicate with, understand and know, as well as remember the world as lived and experienced by us. Baderoon's poems show that there is no language without the body, there is no knowledge without the body, and there are no memories which are not, in some manner, related to embodiment. This phenomenological perspective of embodiment and the nature of the body is not only an important thematic concern in her work, but is also exhibited on a visceral level – on the level of the "body" of poetry itself. It is this aspect of her work, in combination with her thematic concerns, that makes Baderoon's undermining of the mind-body dichotomy particularly special in nature, and worthy of further critical investigation.

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