

**PHILOSOPHY OF MIND AS A PHILOSOPHY OF THE
BODY**
**A COMPARATIVE DISCUSSION ON INTROSPECTIVE PROPRIOCEPTION
AND THE SUBTLE DIMENSIONS OF BODILY SELF-AWARENESS IN
SĀMKHYA-YOGA, ADVAITA VEDĀNTA AND KAŚMIR ŚAIVISM**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I AT MĀNOA IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN

PHILOSOPHY

MARCH 2016

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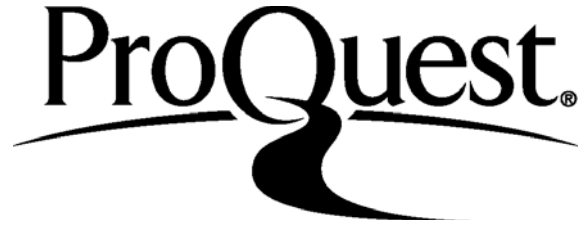
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DEDICATION

To Every-body

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is hard to imagine how this dissertation might have developed had I not been hired as faculty in the Masters of Arts in Yoga Studies at Loyola Marymount University while writing it. Not only did this job provide the means to support myself during the process, but it also helped shape the arguments through the dialogue with my students, avid contemporary yogis and yogīnis who, in their dedication to become more aware of their own bodies, have begun to touch upon the deeper layers of yoga and, most importantly, of their selves. I am deeply grateful to Dr. Christopher Chapple, director of the program, who has not only been my boss, but also an exemplar mentor. His patience and compassion to me and to the students, and his commitment to the practice of yoga as well as to the scholarly study of it have been a constant source of inspiration during my time in Los Angeles.

This opportunity would not have been possible without the help of my advisor Dr. Arindam Chakrabarti, who encouraged me to apply for the job. His guidance throughout the process of writing the dissertation has been invaluable, always giving me the perfect hint to continue whenever I felt lost in the argument. As a great teacher and philosopher, he has the ability to critically destroy the argument at the same time that he makes the student see, in a glimpse of clarity, the exact way to reconstruct it and make it stronger. I do not know how much I was able to keep such clarity, but I hope that, in spite of the shortcomings of the final argument, I was able to somehow maintain the glimpse.

Talking about clarity, I want to thank also my students Samantha Calvano and Trang Huynh for their editing help. A warm acknowledgement to my friend Lisa Widdison for helping me out with logistics and also to Joshua, who taught me how to think and love in English.

Finally, I owe special gratitude to my mom, my dad, my brother, and Mari for their unconditional love and support.

ABSTRACT

Awareness of one's own body has usually been understood within Western philosophy as the ability performed by the soul or the mind to observe one's own bodily states, implying with this the idea that the body is an unconscious, mechanic instrument; a passive receptor of sensations. However, mind/body dualism has been strongly criticized within the recent history of philosophy. In spite of current attempts to avoid dualist perspectives in understanding processes of attention towards one's own bodily states, the distinction between an awareness proper of the body (proprioception) and an awareness proper of the mind (introspection) continues to be commonly held, both within reductionist materialist accounts and non-reductionist phenomenological approaches. This dissertation argues that, if mind-body dualism is false—as most contemporary phenomenologists and philosophers of the mind have intensely argued—then a different notion of bodily awareness is needed to account for bodily sensations that are not reducible to bodily movements or position of the limbs, but that include self-aware experiences that are introspectively felt, such as sadness, happiness, and other abstract feelings (perhaps even thoughts and other cognitive processes).

This dissertation defends a notion of introspective proprioception that is not reduced to the conscious attention of one's bodily position or movement, and presents a somaesthetic account of introspection by discussing the notion of bodily self-awareness as found in three Indian philosophical traditions: Sāṃkhya-Yoga, Vedānta Advaita, and Kaśmir Śaivism. It shows how the non-reductionist conception of the body present in these schools of thought can help overcome the traditional mind-body dualism without necessarily having to commit to materialist or idealist presuppositions. The notion of introspective proprioception is critically examined through a phenomenological interpretation of the concept of “subtle body” (*sūkṣma śarīra*) in these Indian schools and a comparison with the notion of the “lived body” as developed by Maurice Merleau Ponty and Luce Irigaray. Recent studies in embodied cognition and philosophy of mind are also considered in relation to the experience of paying attention to one's breath, for it is through conscious observation of one's own breathing that the distinction between awareness of one's body and awareness of one's mind is shown to be dissolved.

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A body doesn't stop thinking itself, weighing itself.
Un corps ne cesse pas de se penser, de se peser.

Jean Luc Nancy, *Corpus*

The meaning of the word “brahman (absolute or universal self)”
is indeed the same as the meaning of the word “body”.

There is no difference in their meaning
just as there is none between liquid and fluid.
*Ya eva brahmaśabdārtho dehaśabdārtha eva saḥ
nārthayanayorbhedo vidyate'ambvambhasoriva*

Yoga Vasiṣṭha, VIb, 210, 20

The “subject” of the dream (and of anguish, and of all life) is the *one*—
i.e. the body as *enclosure (enceinte)*—
Enclosure which we leave since the body is *visible*, a “sort of reflection.”

Maurice Merleau Ponty, *Working Notes*, November, 1960

PREFACE

This dissertation is about bodily self-awareness. What does it mean to be aware of one's own body? If mind-body dualism is false, as most contemporary phenomenologists and philosophers of the mind have relentlessly argued for, then, can we understand our awareness of the body as awareness of our mind or as our body's self-awareness? Or does giving away the sharp distinction between the mental and the physical imply that one needs to be reduced to the other? In other words, does getting rid of dualistic thinking means that one has to choose between physicalism or mind-only idealism? Can we do away with the body-mind distinction without embracing a physicalist or an idealist position?

I did not come to these questions just by reading the raging debates between brain-mind identity theories, anti-materialist champions of irreducibly subjective qualia, anomalous or non-reductive monists, and functionalists and connectionists. These questions began brewing in my mind when I first started practicing yoga more than ten years ago. How could my body itself *be*— not just have— a mind is a question I literally felt in my guts. As it is common for a westerner interested in yoga practices, my encounter with yoga has been eclectic, with a mixture of physical poses (*āsanas*), breathing exercises (*prāṇāyāma*), and many different kinds of meditations (*dhāraṇa* and *dhyāna*). I must have started by assuming that one does the postures with one's body and that one meditates with one's mind. But when I practiced the breathing exercises, I could not figure out reflectively if this was a mental practice or a physical one. It seemed to be neither merely physical nor purely mental (at that time I was unaware that in German, the verb “to breathe” becomes the verb “Atmen”, a word that in Sanskrit means “self”, *ātman*).

In spite of the fact that my introduction into “yoga” was in a non-traditional setting I, just as many other westerners who are introduced into this practice, started experiencing my body in ways that I had never felt before (even though I had been part of the basketball team in highschool, had done aerobics during my teenagehood, and had attended dance classes during college). It was as if I had become aware from inside of my own body for the first time in my life and such awareness was impacting not only the relation to my own body, but also my relation with everyone else and my life in general. This “bodily awareness” was making me notice not only bodily parts and bodily movements but also, my own thinking patterns, emotions and attitudes of dealing with myself and the world. Suddenly, my alertness toward my own body was indistinguishable from my alertness to clearly “non-bodily” aspects of myself. For one thing, I could observe my states of anger, happiness, frustration, or excitement in the very way I was breathing. And I could even feel highly abstract thinking processes in different parts of my body, in my eyes, in my hands, shoulders, or upper-back. How could it be that mere attention to body posture and bodily mechanisms like breathing or just sitting still could bring so much transformation into the perception of oneself and the world around us? Would it not be embarrassingly childish or “New-Agey” to admit that I was having an inner moral feeling of needing to be less cruel to others right in the middle of my chest, or that I could know the correctness or wrongness of a certain decision by the feelings around my navel? I wanted to understand what type of philosophy of mind or philosophy of the body was behind this practice called “yoga” which emphasized the role of attention with respect to bodily self-awareness in ways that had an immediate effect on one’s mind and on one’s good or bad, right or wrong relationship to others. And in order for me to understand these questions I had to write this

dissertation which, in itself, is an activity that is not just mental, but also physical— of course typing and reading what one is typing are bodily processes for everyone.

Philosophers in the West have traditionally focus on how we look out to the world and also on how the external and social environment determines our perception, sensations, feelings and internal processes. It is not until recently that Western philosophy has started to be interested in the way we look at our own bodies from within. Still a lot remains to be done to understand the relation between “bodily awareness”, self-awareness, attention, and awareness of the world, making room for a fully self-sentient body.

The phenomenological study of the body has shown that one’s own body discloses itself to experience not just as an object, but as a special type of object. This living body presents itself as “my body”. The relationship of ownership is seen and felt as so intimate that contemporary philosophers of the body take the sentence “I have a body” as radically meaning “I am this body”.

Being aware of one’s own body does not necessarily entail being “reflectively conscious” about it. As Husserl, Gibson, Merleau Ponty and the new enactive approach to perception have shown, every act of perception presupposes a tacit, pre-reflective awareness of one’s body. In order for me to grab an object a proprioceptive mechanism needs to be active, that is, an implicit awareness of the position of my limbs needs to be present for my body to appropriately interact with the object and coordinate with my intention to grab it, for example. In a very important sense, the information picked up from the world provides information about the embodied self, in such a way that to be bodily self-aware is to experience one’s body as perceiving, acting, and attending to the world and the surrounding environment.

The sensorimotor and enactive approaches to self bodily awareness also contemplate those instances where one becomes aware of one's body in relation to itself, that is, in relation to sensorial events that relate to the lived body in its subjective and also, visceral aspect. I can notice, for example, the coldness of my fingers while touching ice, or the firmness of one hand grabbing the other, or pain and strain in my eyes when trying to focus at a very close point, a sharp sensation in my stomach after eating something spicy, etc. However, when considering this sensorial aspect of bodily self-awareness, both phenomenology and enactive psychology usually leave aside the type of sensations and feelings that we experience as subjects of affection, perhaps because feelings and emotions are not immediately associated with an awareness of the body, but rather with an awareness of something more psychological. Most phenomenological studies on self bodily awareness tend to focus only on the content of somatic proprioception and the experience of the lived body as subject of perception whose intentionality is aimed at something different to itself.

However, the living body also perceives itself, not only in the midst of moving around but also in its own stillness, and in its inner movements as it cries, laughs, enjoys, gets angry, suffers, loves, imagines, thinks, and even also as it dreams. Certainly, to become aware of this type of feelings and processes in our body does not seem to be part of the normal somatic proprioceptive function that phenomenology and enactive cognitive approaches usually study. Rather, those feelings and emotions are usually thrown into the domain of non-physical introspection or seen as merely psychological. The cognitive process of introspection, on its part, has fallen in disgrace given its traditional association with mental content and a proneness to mislead due to its private and subjective nature. Introspection has been doubted as an embodied cognitive process ever since it acquired dualistic connotations within the History of Western

Philosophy. Introspection was usually understood as the mental faculty of “seeing” one’s own mental images, sensations and feelings in a way that could not be seen by any other means, separating them from the material, bodily realm.

Introspection, however, does not have to remain with such dualistic and representational implications. If mind-body dualism is false, then what was usually called “mental and psychological” objects are not anymore in ontological opposition to an entity called “the body”. I argue that to be aware of one’s own lived body as experiencing sadness, happiness, and other abstract feelings (perhaps even thoughts and other cognitive processes) is to have proprioceptive information, albeit a subtler layer of it that might not be reducible to sensorimotor, intentional, and kinesthetic movements of the physical body. At the same time, to be aware of one’s body position and interaction with the world is to have introspective access, even if it is just in a tacit, pre-reflective manner, of the affective dispositions that underlie those mechanisms.

This dissertation explores precisely that aspect of bodily self-awareness that deals with the body as the subject of different layers of awareness, some of which might have a “middle status”, being both neither purely mental or merely physical, and which might only be revealed when the focus of awareness is on the body as it is explicitly related to itself. Phenomenology, enactive cognitive studies and contemporary philosophy of mind are needed to frame the problem, but it is in the study of the body as has been done by Merleau Ponty’s phenomenology, the feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray and the somaesthetic approach of Richard Shusterman—on the Western side— and on the yoga philosophical tradition (which nurtures its most important arguments from the Indian philosophical schools of Saṁkhya-Yoga, Vedānta, Kaśmir Śaivism and other Tantric texts)—on the Eastern side—that I find important elements complementary to the phenomenology of bodily self-awareness.

A comparative approach is thus here undertaken, where the body is made the focus of its own attention, action, affection, and reflection, having as a consequence the expansion of the scope of proprioception, that is, of that sense by which we perceive the body's spatio-structural extension and receive feedback for its movement and action. If this project is successful, it will contribute to the field of philosophy of the body by arguing, in an East-West comparative philosophical way, against naturalizing reductions of embodiment, superficial comparisons between Western and Eastern models of the body, and also (and more importantly) by showing the significant influence that the conscious faculty of bodily self-awareness has in perceptual processes, not only at the sensorimotor level, but at the cognitive-emotional and ontological levels as well. I ultimately argue for a non reductionist theory of the body that takes embodiment as never just the anatomical and physiological, objective, living structure, nor the "mind" as just the realm of the abstract, subjective, conceptual and representational. The philosophical approach to bodily awareness encountered in feminist phenomenological, somaesthetic and Indian philosophical perspectives previously mentioned shows that whenever we become aware of our own bodies, we become aware of our self, and that being aware of our self is being aware of our body, not in a materialist or an idealist sense but in a phenomenological and non-dualist ontological way that accounts for the intersubjective-objective ambiguity of our bodies.

Chapter 1 is an inquiry into the notion of bodily self-awareness within the Western philosophical tradition. I present the contemporary view on it and go back to its own history in order to explain why the notion of bodily self-awareness, that is, the capacity that the body has of being attentive to itself, does not normally include in many contemporary philosophical discussions our ability to perceive our own emotions, feelings, and even thoughts. In other

words, chapter 1 explains why proprioception is usually considered as different, if not opposed to introspection.

Chapters 2 and 3 question the necessity of such assumption. Chapter 2 explores the notion of a bodily self-awareness that includes feelings, dispositions and emotionality as constitutive aspects of the perceptual system. This is done by analyzing the notion of bodily awareness found in the Indian philosophical schools of Sāṃkhya and Yoga through a close reading of the very important notion of *sūkṣma*, usually translated as “the subtle” within the *Sāṃkhya Kārikā* of Īśvarakṛṣṇa and the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali. A feminist phenomenological analysis of the notion of subtle is offered through a discussion of Merleau Ponty’s phenomenology of the body and Luce Irigaray’s criticism of it. This is done with the purpose of 1) criticizing the dualism present in these two Indian philosophical schools and 2) framing the main argument which is laid out in chapter 3.

Based on the yogic practice of paying attention to one’s breathing, the argument in chapter 3 attempts to show how the dichotomy between proprioceptive and introspective awareness is dissolved in the practice of bringing attention to one’s body. In this chapter I discuss current views on bodily sensations and proprioception in philosophy and embodied cognition and apply a “phenomenology of depth” to the philosophy of bodily awareness as developed within the Advaita Vedānta perspective, with an emphasis on the *Praśna* and *Taittiriya Upaniṣads*. I also turn to the *Yoga Vasīṣṭha* due to its monist perspective and present an original translation from a section in Book IV to show, through textual analysis, a notion of a self-aware and self-thinking body that is never just matter, or just mind, but something “in-between”, with multiple layers of subtle awareness.

Chapter 4 considers some of the possible objections to the main thesis of this dissertation: that since there is no duality between body and mind, to be aware of one's body proprioceptively is then also to be aware of it introspectively. In other words, to be aware of one's body is to be aware of the self. I will respond to objections on my use of the term "introspection" as I present a somaesthetic perspective on it in comparison with other contemporary models of introspection. Notions that are usually related to the "mental", such as intentionality, interiority and awareness are here discussed in the light of a somaesthetic understanding of self-reflexivity and its relation to sensori-motor mechanisms. Finally, within the same chapter I use a somaesthetic view of introspection as an interpretative framework to reading real life cases where the person has lost mobility but no sensation, or has lost sensation but no mobility with the purpose to show the non-pathological use of introspective proprioception and its relevance in configuring bodily self-awareness.

Chapter 5 is an attempt to bringing the discussion in previous chapters into a general theory of bodily self-awareness capable to account not only for practical sensori-motor mechanisms and emotional dispositions inherent in them, but also for self-creative processes inherent to a body with multiple layers of awareness. Through the analysis of bodily awareness found in the Tantric philosophy of Abhinavagupta I address the issue that self-delusional processes may pose to the notion of bodily self-awareness. Contrary to other schools, Abhinavagupta takes self-delusion not just as a problem, but as the very possibility of transformation and means for enlightenment. Abhinavagupta's yoga shows the indisociable role that imagination plays in perceiving our bodies and that the conscious cultivation of imagining our own bodies to be otherwise than how we have thoughtlessly got used to taking them has

transformational implications even when the image of it might be considered “just” a construction.

I conclude this dissertation with a discussion of the role that the imaginative construction of the body has in processes of bodily awareness and will emphasize the importance of the philosophical— rather than the philological, scientific, or esoteric—meaning of “subtle anatomical” terms such as *kuṇḍalinī*, *nāḍī*, and *cakra*. I have the hope that by doing this, further discussions, studies, and usages of these terms will begin to recognize the theoretical possibilities of these notions. Philosophically, they can help to expand the understanding of our bodies, minds, selves and others beyond the constraints that philological studies have established on them. When read in a phenomenological key, they present a challenge to materialist reductionism and offer even more theoretical possibilities than the superficial anatomical overlaps under which they are usually interpreted within the popular “spiritualist” realm.

Chapter 1

Philosophy of Mind as a Philosophy of the Body

1.1 The Cognitive Approach

When we think about Philosophy of Mind from a contemporary perspective, we find that the main focus is to understand the mental processes in light of the latest developments of cognitive science. Aspects of the mind— such as perceptual and sense contents (qualia), the experience of being conscious, or the awareness of “myself”, “Out of body experiences” OBE, etc. – are not anymore considered as part of a “mental” realm in opposition to the “physical”. Instead, the “mental” is approached from a view that takes it either as reducible to the functions of the main cognitive organ, i.e. the brain, or as something that has no more reality than its being a product or emergence of neural and biological processes.

This type of philosophy of mind could, indeed, be called a philosophy of the body, since it considers the questions and problems commonly related to an entity called “the mind” to really be issues about how to understand the functioning of the brain and its relation to the rest of the body. However, other contemporary non-reductionist philosophies of the mind¹ have criticized this approach and defended the view that certain mental processes cannot be identified or explained away by the mere functioning of the brain. They understand perception, knowledge, intentional mobility and awareness as embodied cognitive processes, that is, as openings into the world made possible not only by the type of body we have but also by the way we live our body in its constant intentional and interactive engagement with the environment.

¹ Merleau Ponty, James Gibson, Evan Thompson, David Chalmers, Francisco Varela, Jose Luis Bermúdez, Alva Noe.

1.2 The Phenomenological Approach

The mind/body dualism has been strongly criticized within the recent history of Philosophy. We cannot understand anymore the body as this “mindless” thing or the mind as this “disembodied” substance because, as the phenomenological analysis of the body has shown², we live an embodied mind and we experience a living intelligent body. This living conscious body is thus, not merely physiological or psychological.

In order to convey the sense of this body that is subject and object at the same time; that interacts with the world in a manner that is not just passive or active; and that is a unity of sense and intelligence, Merleau Ponty offered the term “flesh”. While this term has opened the way to the treatment of the body beyond reductionism, it is also true, as Drew Leder has pointed out, that most phenomenological treatments of embodiment as well as embodied cognitive approaches have focused primarily in experiences that have to do with perception and motility.³ Phenomenology has often left behind aspects of bodily experience that are most of the time lived “in the background” of other more evident functions such as seeing, touching, or moving our bodies to interact with the world. Leder refers to those receding bodily functions as characterized by their experiential absence: the embryonic body prior to birth, the autonomous rhythms of breathing and circulation, the stilled body of sleep, and in general, the visceral functioning of our bodies, which are always presupposed and taken for granted under normal circumstances and healthy moments. His phenomenological project is thus to understand how the body can recede from direct experience while at the same time being the very same ground of experience.

² Merleau Ponty, Drew Leder.

³ Leder, *The Absent Body*, p.2.

1.3 Awareness and Dysfunctionality of the Body

The most common example of the body as a self-effacing experience is that of the eye. We cannot see directly that with which we see. Leder expands this to the whole body and elevates it to a general principle: the organ through which we perceive necessarily recedes from the perceptual field that it discloses.⁴ Thus vital bodily processes are necessarily unavailable to ourselves as experience, for it is their disappearance which allows the attention of something beyond themselves. This inner visceral body comes to our awareness mostly in moments of pain or dysfunction, usually in disruptive and violent ways. The dysfunctionality of the body makes us self-aware whether of something that is going wrong in the body or that needs to be healed or corrected. At the same time, self-awareness can also bring dysfunctionality, for when we pay too much attention to what the body is doing, that very action becomes blocked or nullified. For example when playing the piano, if we become self-aware of the fingers and not of the piece itself, we may make mistakes; or when trying to walk by consciously intending to move all the proper muscles we may instead compromise the easiness and smoothness of the movement.

According to Leder, cases where we put attention to the body are not the primary way in which we live our body and can only become present in a non-dysfunctional way through “highly disciplined training”.⁵ But when we do that, we suspend the ordinary intentionality of the body directed away from itself, what he calls the “physical telos”. However I think that if we are going to take seriously the phenomenological idea that the body is an opening unto the world and its possibilities of experience, then we shouldn’t consider the ordinary experiences as those which are “primary” and then base upon that normality the status of embodied experiences that, although uncommon, constitute an intimate part of the body’s possibilities of perception,

⁴ Leder, *The Absent Body*, p.14.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.19 and p.105.

movement, and experience. It is also a natural experience to pay attention to the body itself when it is in a state of wellbeing. For example, when we feel warm and cozy, the pleasant sensation comes from attending to the overall wellness of the body, its position, temperature, and affective state. We realize in a leisurely moment how comfortable we are lying and relaxing on the couch, and how happy we feel that we finally have free time after a long day of work. The same can happen when we naturally start paying attention to the rhythm of our breath, as we hike, walk, or run, perhaps even to enhance our physical endurance or simply to enjoy the sensation of our lungs expanding as they fill up with fresh air. We then can notice a feeling of freedom partly because we have the tacit sensation that we could have breathed in so fully and deeply even at an earlier moment, but we did not. And it is precisely this self-bodily awareness of “I could have done otherwise” which appears to be at the heart of any introspective feeling of freedom. Non dysfunctional attention to one’s body can also happen in moments of excitement, where we naturally feel the emotions located in different parts of our body, as when there is a sensation of expansion in the chest for the happiness of encountering with an old friend or the love we feel for someone.

Those experiences could be considered contemplative or aesthetic, but it does not seem necessary that they be taken as derivative just because they are attending directly to bodily activity. A self-attentive, intransitive “telos” that directs the body to itself is also a constitutive aspect of embodiment.

1.4 A Mind that is Body, A Body that is Mind

It is precisely the bodily experiences and possibilities of experiences (not necessarily dysfunctional) which we become aware of by directly attending to the body itself that I am

interested in examining here. The reason for this is that the phenomenological nature of those experiences creates a clear rupture between some assumed dichotomies such as mind and body, inner and outer, conscious and extended, subjective and material, corporeal and psychic.

In directly attending to the body, two apparently opposed processes come together and merge: awareness, commonly understood as a mental faculty, does not grasp the object intellectually but becomes itself a felt process. And the body, which is usually taken as an object or an instrument of action, is now being the subject which reflects, attending towards itself. This immediate non-dysfunctional awareness of our own body could be studied by considering cases of “the middle”, that is, phenomena that cannot be understood neither purely as physical nor purely mental, such as conscious breathing, emotional and proprioceptive states, imagination, or dreams. None of these cases are dysfunctional, on the contrary, they are quite natural and very common experiences of bodily self-awareness. In fact, for example, letting the autonomous rhythms of breathing recede to the background or even repressing one’s emotions could be itself considered dysfunctional! Feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray⁶ reminds us that it was precisely breathing that first infused autonomy into our lives, and thus breathing just passively, weakly and in a bad manner becomes a sign of stress, constriction, dependence, and confusion. Breathing consciously, that is, attending to our body as it breathes or being aware of our breathing as the body attends to something else, caring about its rhythms and cultivating the vital flow that goes through them brings to the surface more than just the “depth of the viscera”. It makes present a corporeal dimensionality of affectivity, autonomy, communication, and connection with oneself, others and reality.

⁶ Luce Irigaray, *Between East and West*, p.74.

Defined in terms of immediate bodily awareness, cases like conscious breathing, where perceptual attention is drawn away from its normal sensorial objects and in towards some body part or bodily activity—as when attending to the chest to keep it up; feeling the ribs expanding to the sides with the inhalation, and the air flowing through the nostrils down to the bottom of the lungs—have been considered as “atypical” and unnatural⁷ examples of proprioception, that is, of the perception of bodily movement and spatial orientation. Normal proprioception is thought to be “attentively recessive” most of the time and practical rather than “inquisitive” in function. For example, when throwing a ball, we do not need to be immediately aware of the movements of our arm. The variety of proprioception that is of a purely inquisitive character, according to O’Shaughnessy, “draws its object out of its natural obscurity into the full light of awareness”.⁸ We would pay attention to the movement of our arm if, perhaps, it was hurting or we wanted to perceive some of the mechanical movements involved in the throwing motion in order to correct it or improve it. Because of the “involution” of the attention away from the outer objects and immediate turn towards a focal point in oneself, this variety of proprioception would seem to be “introspective”. But authors like O’Shaughnessy take special care in properly distinguishing introspective proprioception from the immediate attention that we may have of a sensation or any other psychological state, which is considered proper of introspection.

Yet, what I will try to defend in this dissertation is precisely the idea that experiences brought about by immediate awareness of the body unto itself, that is, by what O’Shaughnessy reticently calls “introspective proprioception”, can make present to our corporeal awareness not just limb presence, function and posture, but also sensations, feelings, emotions and, perhaps, even mental processes. Simply stated, the thesis of my dissertation is that to be aware of one’s body

⁷ O’Shaughnessy, “Proprioception and the Body Image”, in *The Body and the Self*, p.178.

⁸ O’Shaughnessy, “Proprioception and the Body Image”, in *The Body and the Self*, p.175.

proprioceptively is to be aware of it introspectively. In other words, that to be aware of one's own body is to be aware of one's self.

This last statement could raise at least two immediate objections:

1. The use of "is" as a term of identity requires a symmetric relation. This would imply that if awareness of the body "is" awareness of the self, I should then be prepared to defend the reverse: that awareness of the self is awareness of the body. But the sense of self, that is, the sense of identifying oneself as, say, a woman or a man, or a soul, or as agile, or ugly, or spiritual, etc. might not be in agreement with the experience of one's own body. And viceversa, to be aware of one's body as short, or incapable, or sick, or tired, or old, etc. does not seem to bare an immediate identification with our sense of self, which could feel exactly the opposite way.
2. Even if the identification between body and self could be maintained, how then would we avoid a physicalist monism or an idealist position? It seems that either of those positions would have to be taken if the relation body-self is defined as identity.

The first objection presupposes precisely the dichotomy between bodily sensations and psychological processes that I question. The experience of not recognizing one's self in one's body is only possible through the awareness of the body. Not recognizing one's self in the experience of one's body is available through the awareness of oneself as embodied. A radical example could be someone who feels herself as a woman but born in a male body. Although there seems to be a dissociation between herself and her body, it is precisely the experience of her body which gives the experience of herself as "not being it". She is not only aware of herself as a woman, but as a "woman trapped in a male body", that is, through the awareness of her

identity she has an awareness of her body as well. Later in the dissertation it will be shown that awareness of one's identity is not to be understood as a clear, receptive, observational stance of "what we are" but that it should be understood in its active and fundamentally creative aspect.

Another problematic dissociation between "body" and "self" could be illustrated by the experience of feeling agile and strong while not being able to lift oneself up from the floor without difficulty. A disparity between one's sense of self as young might go along with the awareness of one's body as old. But again, this apparent dichotomy between "body" and "self" is precisely the problem. The awareness of one's aging body is at the same time an awareness that oneself has changed. In this sense, thinking oneself as being young does not mean that one has a false idea of oneself, but an overall sensation of one's body as maintaining levels of enthusiasm that can be remembered as always having been there. On the other hand, there are cases where such dissociation might be just a matter of lack of awareness, for I might believe that I can do or am doing certain movements with my body when in fact I cannot or am not (like fully stretching one's arm). However, cases like this only show that our experience of the body as dissociated with the self does not have to be lived that way, for awareness of one's body, just as awareness of oneself, can be improved and is, in fact, an ever evolving and self-creative act.

I take the experience of dissociation between "self", "mind" and "body" as a sort of pathology and dysfunctionality that could only be avoided by fully understanding the sense in which they are not separate. Presupposing this dichotomy is what, I believe, causes many contemporary practices of care to treat many of the dysfunctionalities as "merely" physical or mental, without attending to both aspects at once, with the result that the embodied self never really gets fully taken care of.

The thesis that awareness of the body is awareness of the self does not have to presuppose an ontological identity and thus, the psychological does not have to be understood in merely physical terms, neither the physical body as purely mental representations. It is not my purpose to hold the view that the self is nothing more than the body, nor that the body is nothing more than an ideation of the self. The identity that I establish is in purely phenomenological and epistemological terms. What is it that we know when we are aware of the body? What is it that we know when we are aware of the self?

A thesis similar to mine was advanced by Jose Luis Bermudez in his book *The Paradox of Self-Consciousness* where he argues that, since the self is always embodied and somatic proprioception provides perceptions of bodily properties, then somatic proprioception is a form of self-perception and self-perception is a form of self-consciousness.⁹ Bermudez, however, does not include among somatic sensations any type of affective or abstract feelings, and thus, the lived aspect of the self that we can be aware in proprioception is limited, in his view, to the body understood under the framework of its sensorimotor activities. He thus subscribes to the common distinction between proprioception and introspection.

Like him, I want to recognize the body in its subjective as much as objective stance before the world but, unlike him, I contend that what we find when we cultivate somatic awareness of the self is at the same time a cultivation of awareness of psychological processes and viceversa. The phenomenological experience of the living body borders the limit of the body that the phenomenological body cannot know, that is, the body as a bare object just like others, material, inert, nonconscious, death. At the same time, awareness of the self touches the limit of a possibly infinite consciousness that the phenomenological mind can never reach either,

⁹ Jose Luis Bermudez, *The Paradox of Self-Consciousness*, p.135.

because awareness of the self, and therefore of the body, is never completely conscious. There is always something that transcends our own sense of self and that gives the possibility for the constant evolving of one's awareness. But here I am not interested in the nature of those limits, and therefore, I do not commit to any ontological view of ultimate reality as material or merely spiritual. Rather, I am interested in what lies in between, in the experience that manifests itself as body while being mental and as mental while being body. This realm is what Indian philosophy called "the subtle".

A metaphorical example could help (within its own limits, of course, since the phenomenological relation between body and self is obviously much more complex) to clarify the sort of identity that I am trying to establish. Just as when looking into a mirror we cannot be aware of one's image without being aware of the mirror reflecting it, in the same way we cannot be aware of the mirror without being aware of the images that it reflects. Of course, there are many gradients of awareness depending on where the point of focus is directed and there will be aspects of the reflection that will never be perceivable as we pay attention to one point. But whether the image reflected in the mirror is a product of something outside the mirror or just a holographic projection is something that is not asked here, although the very experience of the reflection in the mirror is taken as real in itself.

My thesis, thus, implies that what we normally consider to be purely psychological, traditionally taken as an object of mental introspection or intentionality, can be perceived through bodily awareness, and therefore, proprioceived. In other words, the distinction between an awareness proper of the body (proprioception) and an awareness proper of the mind (introspection) is questioned. To be aware of one's own lived body, especially as it experiences sadness, happiness, and other abstract feelings (perhaps even thoughts and other cognitive

processes) is to have proprioceptive information, albeit a subtler layer of it that might not be reducible to sensorimotor, intentional, and kinesthetic movements of the physical body. At the same time, to be aware of one's own movements and bodily position would entail awareness of one's mental dispositions, even if that awareness is not immediately available in a conscious way. As it will be shown in Chapters 2 and 3, there is an important way in which we can say that affective, emotive and thought processes are structurally involved in the perceptual mechanism of the body. If this is true, then it must be because those traditionally considered "mental entities" could actually be understood as pertaining to the corporeal dimensionality, that is, as standing within bodily spatiality which, in turn, cannot be understood just in physical-anatomical terms.

My initial question could then be formulated as this: "What is it to be aware of one's own body when it is not just taken in its merely physical, sensorimotor, and kinesthetic instrumental activities?" What type of bodily spatiality is that where the "mental" is supposed to reside without itself being reduced to a physical body part or a representation of a physiological mechanism, or a sheer psychological fact? Might this "proprioceptive" space not be itself a mental, imagined, symbolic projection? Wouldn't considering sensations, emotions, mental processes, etc. as bodily layers sacrifice its being psychological? If there are different layers of bodily awareness, who is then being aware of those layers?

1.5 The Feminist and Somaesthetic Approach

The project of understanding the body in non-reductionist ways has been fundamental for feminist philosophies. The acknowledgement that the body, although material, is never just biology and that our experience of it is always given within a certain perspective (mediated by

gender, society, and power mechanisms) contributed to the dissolution of the false dichotomy between corporality, usually associated with the feminine, and mind or rationality, commonly attributed to masculine virtues.

The feminist approach to the philosophy of the body is relevant for this dissertation because when dealing with bodily sensations, the particular knowledge obtained by the awareness of a female body can reveal aspects that have gone unnoticed in theories of proprioception born from a history of philosophy written mainly through masculine sensitivity. The feminist approach demands an awareness of the difference and the need for inclusivity, especially of voices that have mostly remained unheard. Thus, even though I am aware that the relation between gender and a particular bodily shape and biology does not constitute a necessary link, many of my examples focus on the experiences available as a woman and the initial relation that a human being establishes with her, that is, as a newborn. My perspective is inspired in many ways by the work of Luce Irigaray and her late reflections on Eastern practices of cultivation of the breath. This allowed me to approach the chosen texts from the Indian philosophical tradition, immersed in patriarchal structures just as much as the Western tradition, in a way that could speak also to the role of the feminine in the awareness of the body.

Bodily awareness should not be understood here as the way of perceiving one's body mediated by certain cultural representations, aesthetic values, or social domination. Although becoming aware of one's own body entails, phenomenologically, the awareness of one's situation as determined by historical values, norms and social manipulations, the sense in which I am using the term "bodily self-awareness" is more basic and closer to the way Richard Shusterman develops it in his book *Body Consciousness. A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics*. It is the capacity that a person (which is always situated within an environment)

has of directing their attention “towards examining and sharpening the consciousness of one’s actual bodily feelings and actions”¹⁰ and the listening “to what the body has to say about itself in terms of its self-conscious sensations, such as explicit kinaesthetic or proprioceptive”¹¹ and somaesthetic feelings. I acknowledge the inevitable influence that circumstance has on the individual and the role that social formation, language, representations, and power relations have upon bodily experience. I agree with many feminist philosophers of the body in that they (culture and nature) are in fact one.¹² However, by focusing on the intrinsic ability that any lived body has to know itself through its own immediate bodily sensations, I believe that a realist self-transcending ability of the body becomes available, and which is not limited or fully determined by history, representations, gender or external norms.

Shusterman shows in his book that improved body consciousness can help relieve pathological problems born from the fragmentation of body and self; and the dissociation between body and mind, (usually reproduced by dominant forms of social manipulation). I agree with him because, in my view, it is the cultivation of a non-fragmented bodily awareness that the practice and philosophy of yoga is all about. My dissertation, however, is not so much concerned with the issue of improving self-awareness but with understanding how, without assuming dualism or a physicalist/idealist monism, the body can be aware of itself and in what phenomenological and epistemological sense this bodily awareness can be self-transformative.

¹⁰ Robert Shusterman, *Body Consciousness. A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics*, p.6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹² See Gail Weiss, “The Body as a Narrative Horizon”, in *Thinking the Limits of the Body*, edited by Joe Jeffrey J. Cohen and Gail Weiss, p.25.

1.6 A Brief History of Bodily Self-Awareness in Western Philosophy

Western philosophy has had a tendency to overlook the significance of immediate bodily awareness. Up until recently, it was usually considered to appear as directly involved with dysfunctionality related to the practical use of our limbs or biological bodily functions. This limited account of bodily awareness was due to a specific understanding of self-awareness in which the body was not considered to be naturally self-reflective but rather, passive and instrumental.

1.6.1 The Greeks: Plato and Aristotle

For both Plato and Aristotle¹³ bodily awareness is given through the senses and the sensations that they provide which are primarily intended to promote the preservation of the animal organism. We become aware of the world around us and notice if an object is advantageous or disadvantageous through awareness of its effects in our body.

Plato was aware that, among the affections of the body (*pathe*), which are the effects caused by the contact between the body and an external object, some are perceived and some others are not. Those which are perceived become a sense perception which arises from the motion that the affection engenders in the body and from the cognition of that bodily affection which arises in the soul.¹⁴ According to Plato, the soul had an appetitive, “a-rational” part intimately connected to bodily affections and mere sensations, but the process of cognizing whether those affections are disruptive to the animal organism or not was considered by him to be something done by the soul and not by the body itself.

¹³ Plato, *Timaeus* (64a-68e) and Aristotle, *Sense and Sensibilia* (436b18-437a3).

¹⁴ Plato, *Ibid.* (64b).

The distinction between mere sensation or affection (*pathos*) and sense perception (*aesthesis*) makes it really hard to determine whether awareness of affections such as pain and pleasure is a proprioceptive or an introspective task. On the one hand, to feel pain or pleasure is to perceive something that is going on in the body; on the other, perceptions of an affection belong to the soul. In this sense, to be aware of one's affections would be closer to an act of introspection in that it gives immediate knowledge of a content of the soul. Yet intuitively we want to say that pain and pleasure are bodily affections and thus accessed proprioceptively or, more accurately said, interoceptively, which means that, they are perceived as immediate bodily sensations coming from certain physiological states of the body.

The body was considered by Platonists as an immediate object of perception in the sense that, as Plotinus¹⁵ later explained, a concomitant perception is present every time there is awareness of the changes undergone by the body as effects of its interaction with external objects. Pain and pleasure are different from sensations such as warmth, bitter, brightness, etc. in that they are necessarily perceived bodily affections whereas mere sensations can exist without being perceived. However, bodily awareness is also for Neo-Platonists carried out by the soul.¹⁶ Even for Aristotle, whose notion of the soul (*psyche*) incorporates the functions of the organic body (nutritive and appetitive), self-reflection is only possible as it is actualized by the *nous* or intellect, the corporeal status of which has been highly debatable.¹⁷

In *De Anima*, Aristotle considers whether affections like anger, courage, fear, excitement, appetite or sensation are proper of the body or the soul, and concludes that all

¹⁵ Plotinus, *Enneadas* (4.4.28-32).

¹⁶ Ganson, Todd Stuart, "The Platonic Approach to Sense-Perception", in *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, p.5.

¹⁷ Aristotle, *De Anima* (III 429b6, III 430a22-23).

affections of the soul involve concurrent affections of the body.¹⁸ This means that we cannot just say that the soul is angry, but better that the whole person is. However, the question about how we become aware of those affections and passions is not answered by determining their localization, even though their location might determine whether awareness of them is a proprioceptive or introspective task. Indeed, an affection might be located in the body, in the soul, or in both but not be an object of awareness until it is in some sense perceived.

The case of being aware of our own bodies is special because, if it is true that it is a perceptual process as it will be defended in this dissertation, then it requires an object of perception. However, in the case of bodily self-awareness, the object is not only external. In fact, if it were true that the only senses of perception are the traditional five senses accepted by Aristotle then, we would not have a proper perception of our body at all. Not only because we cannot directly perceive half of our own bodies but, unlike other objects, we cannot turn around it or turn it around to access the “hidden” parts. Even if we managed to be very flexible or use the sense of touch to perceive those inaccessible parts of our bodies the fact remains that our eyes cannot see themselves, nor our ears hear themselves, nor our nose smell itself, nor the touching touch itself, etc. Indeed, for Aristotle, the fact that we do not ever perceive a specific sense organ through that organ itself (i.e. the eye does not see itself)¹⁹ is a problem especially since, according to him, a sense organ contains the “same elements” of those external objects that such sense organ perceives (i.e. that which sees must be colored just as the colored objects it perceives).²⁰

¹⁸ Aristotle, *De Anima*, (II 403a 3-b21)

¹⁹ Aristotle, *De Anima*, II 417a2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, II 417a2, III 425b19.

Traditional interpretations of Aristotle read his solution to the problem as not allowing space for the perceiving organ to be an object of perception.²¹ According to this reading of Aristotle, since a sense organ is only actualized by an external object and the faculty of that sense belongs to itself, perception of it cannot occur. This implies that the way in which we are aware of our body and sense organs as they perceive does not count as perception²², at least not in the same way in which we perceive an object.²³ A second interpretation of Aristotle is that which reads him as arguing that all perception occurs by a central sense (*sensus communis*) and that it is this faculty which accounts for the *perceiving of perceiving*.²⁴ If this interpretation of Aristotle is right, we would have here a first case within Western philosophy of immediate bodily self-awareness.

In spite of this reading of Aristotle, the idea that the body can be “self-aware” or “self-attentive” received little philosophical back up in Western philosophy until recently because self-reflection had been understood primarily as an activity pertaining to the intellectual soul and about the contents of the soul even if these had been acquired by the medium of the body. Thus, self-reflection and self-knowledge were mainly taken as processes of introspection, i.e. as activities generating knowledge, judgment, or beliefs about one’s own personality and moral character as opposed to sensory processes which deliver information about outward events or non-mental aspects of the individual body.²⁵

²¹ See Hamlyn’s notes to *De Anima* II 417a2 in his translation to *Aristotle De Anima*, p.99.

²² See Hamlyn’s comments to *De Anima* II 417a2, p.100.

²³ Caston, “Aristotle on Consciousness”, *Mind*, p.786.

²⁴ Polansky, notes 1 and 2 to *De Anima* III 425b12-25, p.381-382.

²⁵ Schwitzgebel, Eric, "Introspection", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2014/entries/introspection/>>.

1.6.2 The Stoic School

The possibility of a self-aware body arises in the history of Western philosophy with the stoics for whom the soul, although distinguished from the body, is itself corporeal. According to the Stoic conception of reality, nothing can exist that is not a body. If human beings are composed by body (*soma*) and soul (*psyche*), then it must be the case that the soul is also a body, albeit a different kind of body. Everything, even a stone, is for the stoics a combination of matter (*hyle*) and god or spirit (*pneuma*). This corporeal soul, although completely blended with the body of flesh and bones, is characterized by psychic attributes that are responsible for the body's form and its vital functions. The corporeal stoic human soul is a rarefied body, this means that its *pneuma* is constituted by the most tenuous parts of the bodily substance or *hyle*. In this sense, affections that were considered *pathe* of the soul even for Aristotle such as anger, fear, etc. are, for the stoics, affections of the body in its most refined sense. The soul with its sensations and psychic attributes was, however, never reduced by the Stoics to a part of the flesh or a location/function of the body like the heart or the brain; it permeated the whole body-flesh. At the same time, the body-soul was distinguished from the body of flesh and bones for its functions and abilities of sentience (*aesthesis*), impression or capacity of receiving images (*phantasia*), and impulse or principle of locomotion (*ormê*).²⁶

Awareness of the body is thus, for the Stoics, a bodily process. The outermost parts of the body receive the affection from the external world, and these parts in their turn “press” against the layers within until the effect travels to the innermost part of the body, the “hegemonicon”, with the result of an apprehension (*enteleikia*) that takes notice of both the

²⁶ See A.A. Long, “Soul and Body in Stoicism”, *Phronesis*, 35-45.

effects in the body-flesh and the body-soul.²⁷ This is what we would here properly consider as a body being aware of itself. Hierocles goes as far as to say that this continuous self-bodily awareness is what primarily constitutes being an animal.²⁸ At the moment of birth the animal has its own constitution as primary object which is shown by the readiness of birds to fly, or the tortoises' efforts to turn themselves back in their feet, or children's attempt to stand. As Long explains, Hierocles sees in this not a desire to escape pain, but a desire to be in that state which the animal is conscious of as its own natural constitution. *Aesthesis* is thus not just for recognizing externals but for being aware of oneself.²⁹ The Stoics did mark off humans from animals, for animals are not rational beings. And unlike Plato and Aristotle, Stoics did not add a rational part to the soul but rather thought that all functions of the human body-soul are rational, that is, they have the *hegemonicon* as a substrate which develops and expresses as language (*logos*) in its activities of imaging, synthesizing, and desiring.

What derives from this scheme is a very interesting theory of the mind-body relation in which the human body-soul governs the body-flesh through language. Following the Greek tradition, Stoics describe affections as the result of the immediate and uncontrollable effects that the outside environment has upon the body. These effects create images (*phantasiae*) which are then judged by the mind (one of the functions of the body-soul) as good or bad. The Stoics believed that the human soul had the power to give (or not) a rational consent to the impact of those effects because it can decide "what description and value to give to its present, past, or future bodily states."³⁰ This means not only that, for the Stoics, nothing good or bad can really happen to the body-flesh but also that there is no causal necessity between bodily changes and

²⁷ Long, "Soul and Body in Stoicism", p.46.

²⁸ Hierocles, "Elements of Ethics", in *Hierocles the Stoic*, Ilaria Rameli and David Konstan (trans.), pp.5-11.

²⁹ Long, "Soul and Body in Stoicism", p.46.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.51.

the body-soul's reactions to them. The most common example of this being that of having an empty stomach. The human soul cannot avoid being aware of it and its related sensations, but this awareness need not trigger the reactions in the deeper levels of the body-soul such as a desire to eat or a feeling of unhappiness. The rational or "logical" –in the original sense of the term that derives from *logos*—ability to govern over the bodily reactions to the outside world was considered such a high virtue for the Stoics that they had the tendency to refer to the human self as a rational soul alone and to the wise person as she who does not let any bodily change affect her emotionally. Even more, a wise person is for the Stoics she who does not rationally consent herself to have emotions at all.

For a philosophy of bodily self-awareness like the one I am interested in developing, this last conceptual movement was unfortunate, for as much as it was gained by considering the soul both as corporeal and irreducibly mental, was later to be lost in the emphasis of the rational soul as the only source and locus of self-reflectivity.

1.6.3 Christian Philosophy: Augustine

Augustine restates the old Platonist idea that sensations are passive processes of the body which are noticed by the soul. This of course makes sense if we consider that the body as mere flesh or corpse, that is, the body without life, is incapable of sensing anything. But distancing itself from Platonist dualism, Christian philosophy, in the figures of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, thought that even though sensing is an activity more pertinent to the soul, this did not mean that sensation were not a bodily phenomenon. Augustine explains in *De Musica* (6.5.15) that sensing occurs because the soul sets up a "contrary motion" to that effected by the external

corporeal objects in the body.³¹ In other words, sensing a bodily event is, for Augustine, a counter-movement of the body initiated by a “soul-aware event”. In the case of pain, although there might be reason for the body to have it, in the absence of the soul’s provoked “counter-motion” then no pain-sensation is felt.

While some interpreters like Peter King emphasize that “sensing” is, for Augustine, a bodily event, there cannot be sense perception without a soul for this Christian philosopher.³² In *De Immortalitate animae* (16.25), Augustine describes the soul as being wholly present in the total mass of the body at the same time that it is wholly present in each separate part of it. If it were not like this, he thinks, our hand would not be able to reach immediately for our aching foot, nor we would be able to cry about it, or direct our eyes towards it as it is happening. This is only possible, according to him, because the whole soul is present in each and every part of the body, and in order for this to be possible, the soul must be immaterial.

In *De quantitate animae* (23.41) Augustine indicates that there are passive processes of the body which are noticed by the soul that are not sensations. For example, we are aware that our nails are growing even though we do not have a sensation of it; we actually can only infer it. Such bodily processes which our soul is aware of are not sensations because they are not given to the mind by a bodily sense itself but by something else, in this case by inference. This example expresses the well-known experience of our limitation to be aware of all and every single detail and processes going on in our own bodies, but it also points to another of the reasons why bodily-awareness could not be self-reflexive for many Western philosophers: not only do the

³¹ Peter King, “Why Isn’t the Mind-Body Problem Medieval?”, in *Forming the Mind. Essays on the Internal Senses and the Mind/Body Problem from Avicenna to the Medical Enlightenment*, p. 203.

³² Wolfskeel, C.W. (trans.), Introduction to *De Immortalitate animae* of Augustine, p.3.

senses (sense organs and sense faculties) appear unable to perceive themselves but even if they could, they would not provide awareness of the self.

The sharp distinction between bodily self-awareness and self-knowledge was clearly initiated by Augustine's method of "turning inwards" to find himself, for when he did that, he found the mind and its mental states, which he characterized as incorporeal and self-conscious. Self-knowledge is understood by Augustine in *De Trinitate* (10.4.6) as the capacity that human mind has of apprehending itself as a whole in a single act. This means that the mind or soul does not have to split into two, the observer and the observed, to be self-conscious, but that in one cognitive act the mind immediately knows itself as acting. That is the case with feeling, thinking, doubting, judging, etc. where the self-aware mind is identical with the cognitive acts of which it is aware. The mind can be erred in the content of its thoughts, or in the judgments of its feelings, it can even be mistaken in the knowledge about its own nature (as he shows in his exercise of self-scrutiny done in *Confessions*), but it can never be mistaken in the fact that it is doubting, thinking, feeling, etc. This is the origin of the famous Cartesian skeptic proof but, unlike Descartes, Augustine did not use this process of self-inquiry to found scientific knowledge. Instead, as Stern-Gillet shows, he used it as a criterion to guide his own mental states towards consciousness.³³

It is important for me to pause with Augustine because it is here where the process of self-knowledge clearly presents the features that will later characterize introspection in the West. Those features are: 1) a "turning inwards" of the mind/soul into itself, an inner eye as it were; 2) concentration upon inner states, and 3) privileged access to those states, that is, immediate access to one's inner states. This last feature is the one considered to provide indubitable knowledge of

³³ Suzanne Stern-Gillet, "Consciousness and Introspection in Plotinus and Augustine", *UBIR*, p.26.

the content of such reflection. However in the *Confessions*, Augustine clearly shows the difficulty of knowing oneself through the scrutiny of emotions, memories, desires, thoughts, judgments, both past and present. It would seem that in turning the sight inwards, all we find is a confusing mixture of inner states, with the impossibility of retrieving clear memories and being sure about one's own emotions. In fact, nothing like an indubitable content of self-knowledge seems to be found in that.

Stern-Gillet points out that, when comparing *Confessions* to the view of self-knowledge in *De Trinitate*, it would seem necessary to differentiate between self-conscious mental states, where the mind intuits its own activity in the immediacy of the cognitive act, and self-scrutiny, where the mind brings its own attention to the myriad of mental states that constitute our present and past individuality.³⁴ Stern-Gillet argues in her reading of Augustine that ever since Gilbert Ryle's criticism of Cartesianism in *The Concept of the Mind* went famous, the self-intimate transparent conception of the mental has constantly been mistaken with the type of introspection that Augustine makes use in *Confessions*: investigative or confessional introspection. As Ryle pointed out, one of the main difficulties with this type of introspective self-scrutiny is that in trying to recover one's own inner states, we can never grasp them as a whole but rather we recollect them through retrospection and as such, this method is fallible. The problem with Ryle's attack, according to Stern-Gillet is that his target, that is, the transparency theory of the mental, was never meant to be called "introspection" for it does not really require it. To say that "I am in pain", "I am thinking, or simply "I am" means in itself that "I am conscious that I am in pain", etc. This shows that mental states, when expressed in the first person singular are already self-revealing and there is no need for investigation or self-scrutiny.

³⁴ Stern-Gillet, "Consciousness and Introspection in...", p.25.

However, in the case of confessional introspection Augustine shows that a process of self-scrutiny cannot consist just in the reception by the mind of self-intimating data but in the recollection of the affective and psychological life of the self which extends to the past. In this sense, confessional introspection is retrospection, and the difficulties of it lie not in the fact that introspection was supposed to do something that it cannot (as Ryle thought) but rather in the nature of the human soul which, from Augustine's Christian point of view, hides itself due to its own sinful tendencies and finitude. Thus, for Augustine, introspection was originally never a foundational epistemological activity but a preliminary element in the spiritual quest for God, where arduous self-scrutiny and attention to the self brings humbleness, moral purification, and self-transformation to the point in which the soul, still in conjunction with the body, can rejoice in the contemplation within itself of a presence superior to itself.³⁵ At this point, Stern-Gillet remarks, introspection stops being reflective in order to be contemplative. The individual self is displaced from the focal position which is now occupied by God and contrary to what it would be expected from introspection, there is no "privileged access" to this peculiar object, for it is not "private" to the seeker, at least not in the same sense as Ryle had criticized.

1.6.4 The Distrust in Self-observation

a) Descartes in Brief

The distinction between self-scrutiny or self-reflection and the self-intimating character of first person mental states allows us to understand why "introspective proprioception" sounds like an oxymoron. Bodily awareness was not considered to be directly involved in the process of

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.28.

self-knowledge, for awareness of the body was most of the time thought to primarily convey information about the senses and the body in its relation to the world, while proper knowledge of the self was intimately connected with psychological processes, or the perceptive and cognitive activities of the soul. This would explain why knowledge of ourselves as body would only entail knowledge of its sensori-motor, kinesthetic mechanics, and physiological processes. Pain, pleasure, fear, anger, happiness and all other feelings and emotions that are part of our affective and psychological self, although inseparable from the body were not seen as corporeal, but as contents that the soul finds when it brings the attention to itself, that is, when it introspects.

The two different processes of inner or self-knowledge can also be found in Descartes. The clarity and distinctiveness of the *cogito* and the self-revealing aspect of private acts of consciousness appear only after several meditations where Descartes has engaged in a reflective type of introspection that reveals not only acts of intellection but also feelings, volitions, and sensations. As the Augustinian act of “turning in” shows, introspective attention cannot give us a grasp of our mind in a single act and thus, cannot give us an infallible self-knowledge. However, when discovering the *cogito*, Descartes identified the self with the conscious thinking mind and caused, perhaps inadvertently, the conflation of both processes: that by which the indubitability of first person singular mental states is achieved and the fallible, reflective process of becoming aware of the contents of the mind that involves both the past and the present. Introspection was then taken to be the foundation of scientific knowledge and the basic method to gain knowledge of the mind. But the project of founding knowledge in introspection was doomed to fail, for the process of introspective attention, as we saw with Augustine and will also see in some of the Indian philosophical schools that have made of it a practice, was never meant to provide indubitable knowledge of our mental states, but rather their transformation.

b) Kant

Self-scrutiny or self-reflection of the psyche upon its own contents was distrusted by Kant who says in the *Anthropology* section “On Self-observation” that to concern oneself with

the affected composition of an inner history of *involuntary* course of one’s thoughts and feelings...is the most direct path to illuminism or even terrorism, by way of a confusion in the mind of supposed higher inspirations and powers flowing into us, without our help, who knows from where. For without noticing it, we make supposed discoveries of what we ourselves have carried into ourselves.³⁶

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant defined the inner sense as the faculty by which we perceive our mental states, but he distrusted it as a method or practice of observing and determining oneself, because in order to claim knowledge of a sequence of experiences there needs to be knowledge of their corresponding objects. Using the inner sense alone to know ourselves would undermine the criteria by which we can determine that something is knowledge, and we could well be imagining and projecting everything we are perceiving of ourselves. Introspection in this sense constituted for Kant a “reversal of the natural order in the faculty of knowledge”,³⁷ i.e. a dysfunctionality of the principles of thought. If introspection has any place in Kantian philosophy at all would be that of apperception, that is, being conscious of the “I think” that accompanies all our experiences without knowing which of them determines one’s self.

It can be seen that without its “self-purifying” and transformative aspect, introspection turns into an epistemological tool that has to be itself purified from the undesirable subjective intervention in objective, scientific knowledge. And thus, we see later that Brentano carefully distinguished between active inner observation and inner perception. The first one does not really

³⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, p.22.

³⁷ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A23.

allow us to know our mental states as they appear in the psyche because, the moment we observe them, their first-order characteristic is gone. The second one does not actively focus on the mental events but rather notices them as they force themselves into our awareness.

Other psychologists such as Wilhelm Wundt considered introspection as a scientific means of knowledge precisely in the sense of being an “inner perception”, as Brentano had described it. Introspection understood thus, refers not to the active attention towards internal cognitive processes as if we had an “inner eye” observing them, but rather, to the immediate responses to a prompt that would express the inner and ongoing perceptive process without interfering with them. From here on, the discussion regarding introspection focused on the possibility of immediate, indubitable detection of one’s own mental states and the involvement of memory with it. Complex laboratory experiments were developed to prove the reliability of introspection by isolating its target (sensations, feelings, thoughts, volitions) and by trying to reproduce the results under controlled conditions.³⁸ However, interpretations on the outcomes of those experiments were so mixed that eventually these efforts led to the distrust of introspection as a reliable method to knowing one’s self as a conscious being. Then reductionist approaches to the mind like those of the behaviorists, materialists and eliminativists tried to give account of self-knowledge and psychological events without making use of an “inner eye” or any other metaphysically dubious processes. But, as we saw in the beginning of this chapter, reductionist approaches to the mind or the self, could not account for the more complex dynamics of an embodied mind and a body that interacts with the world not only mechanically, but affective and cognitively as well.

³⁸ William Lyons, *The Disappearance of Introspection*, p. 4-6.

1.6.5 Cartesian and Empiricist Influences in the Twentieth Century

Philosophers like William James and Bertrand Russell continued supporting introspection but only on the grounds that there were no intrinsic difference between matter and mind, and thus, no observation of objects intrinsically different from sensations. Russell³⁹ included bodily sensations, such as a toothache, in the type of objects that could be introspected, like pains, pleasures, desires, beliefs, and thoughts, and took the introspective process to be as fallible as sense perception. He however warned that consciousness of having a stomachache does not mean being introspective, and noted that the essential characteristic of introspective data was their peculiar localization of being neither in the body nor in the external world.⁴⁰ They could not be in the soul anymore, at least not for the type of empiricist philosophers who, like Hume, every time they looked within themselves all they found were sensations, their copies (which Russell calls images), and things derived from them (feelings, imaginations, thoughts). In Russell's *Analysis of the Mind*, he explains that "observation shows us nothing that is not composed of sensations and images and that images differ from sensations in their causal laws not intrinsically."⁴¹ Images, or the types of objects that we encounter in introspection, according to Russell, do not come from sense organs, rather they are copies of past sensations which are the ones that originate from the stimulus in the body caused by the contact with the outer world.

What Russell calls "sensations" stands for what the Western tradition had called affections (*pathe*) and their sense-perception (*aesthesis*), thus including both the physical as well as the psychological aspect of the process. At the same time, he notices that many of the things that we hear, see, etc. are actually produced by expectations, inference and habits, but that a pure

³⁹ Russell, *The Analysis of Mind*, p.121.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p.121.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.117.

sensation is the action of the outer world upon us without interpretation. Whether pure sensations in the empiricist sense are possible or not need not be addressed right now. The relevant thing here is that it was this empiricist presupposition which found its way into the neurological studies about bodily awareness. Pure sensations like smells, sights, sounds, etc. have an external physical object as a cause, otherwise they are called hallucinations. Sensations like pain, pleasure, itchiness, fear, emotions, etc. have a direct internal object as a cause and are private. From a scientific point of view, if they are to be called “sensations” then they at least need to refer to or be sensitive to a physical property. Whether these sensations—called *qualia* by modern philosophers of the mind— can themselves be reduced to physical properties is still under debate. But what this brief history of embodied introspection shows is the reason why the philosophical investigation on bodily sensations did not, and perhaps, could not include introspective proprioception at all. Descartes expressed it clearly in *The Passions of the Soul*: “we [western philosophers?] have no conception of the body as thinking in any way.”⁴²

Indeed, Descartes was the most influential philosopher who passed on the idea of the body as an automaton, a machine that does not need the soul to initiate its own movements but, like a clock, functions according to the constitution of its internal parts (in our case, he thought, constituted by nerves and a “very subtle air” that is produced in the brain and travels through them into the muscles⁴³) which are activated by the action of an external object. A body in this sense cannot feel joy, anger, and “other such sensations” for these are perceptions that he related to the soul. According to Descartes, only hunger, thirst, pain, heat and “the other affections which we perceive as though they were in our members” are perceptions related to our body,⁴⁴ to

⁴² Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, I.4 35. Phrase in brackets is mine.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, I.7 75.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, I.21 270 – I.22 280.

which we should add its parts, their position, and their movement. This is precisely the range of sensations that are currently referred to when talking about bodily awareness in its philosophical and scientific treatment.

1.6.6 Origins of the term “proprioception”

In 1906 neurophysiologist Sir Charles Sherrington introduced a classification of the senses in exteroceptive (cutaneous), interoceptive (visceral), and proprioceptive (deep).⁴⁵ The last two were distinguished from the first one in that their afferent pathways carry information to the brain directly from the body and indirectly from the environment. This distinction responded to the scientific interest in inwardly oriented senses and a traditional understanding of the senses as having a specific sense organ. Proprioception was originally discovered in the context of studies about muscular sensitivity and the diverse modalities of sensations provided by touch, such as movement and cutaneous sensitivity. By the end of the nineteenth century, the muscle sense was regarded as the “sixth sense” and proprioception as a legitimate mode of bodily perception, to which later the senses of interoception (comprising physiological states of the body restricted to the viscera such as the respiratory, gastrointestinal and cardiovascular systems) and vestibular (sense of balance) were added.⁴⁶

Ironically, it was the Cartesian dualist model, later manifested by the scientific quest for understanding the mechanisms of inner senses, which made possible a modern and peculiar notion of “bodily awareness” that was not dependent on the soul, or even rationality. The continuous bodily function of self-monitoring that transduces physical energy into nervous signals has been investigated in its relevance towards action but not so much in regards to self-

⁴⁵ S.C. Sherrington, *The Integrative Action of the Nervous System*, p.130-132.

⁴⁶ Maïke Storks, “Proprioception”, *Sixth Sense Abcedarium*.

understanding. And the reason for this is linked to the philosophical presuppositions that we have already encountered. Since most of the proprioceptive, interoceptive and vestibular senses work without us being reflectively conscious of them, the knowledge of their mechanism is not seen as giving us any knowledge of ourselves as other than a sensorimotor mechanism.

This neurophysiological model of bodily self-awareness runs into a problem that was also present with the Aristotelian account of perception. Once the body is affected and the percept sent to the *sense communis*, or in modern science, to the brain, it remains to be explained how the impression left by the object, or the coded message is “decoded” or interpreted. For example, the bodily sensation of pain is now known to be decoded in the brain, even though we are phenomenologically aware of it as being in a certain part of the body. But, what exactly happens when we become aware of that bodily sensation is not clear, for the detection of certain neurons being fired when this awareness happens does not explain how it is that we become aware of it. The image of neurons sensing the “pain” of another set of neurons seems as problematic as the metaphor of an inner eye. Moreover, supposing this issue can be figured out, the question as to how the sensation is lived by the person given her particular situation, not only spatial, but emotional and psychological as well, would have to be addressed. But it is usually not, because those matters are considered to be related to an introspective, rather than a proprioceptive mechanism.

In any case, awareness of one’s own itches, pains, warmth, fear, anxiety, excitement, pleasure, etc., can now be more easily understood as a process of a self-attentive body, rather than of a soul that has become aware of bodily affections. Still, the relation between emotions, feelings, and other images with bodily (interoceptive or proprioceptive) sensations is not clear and the positions go from a one to one correspondence to having none. A one to one

correspondence would reduce emotions to their affective aspect and leave their cognitive side unaccounted for. To suggest that there would be some basic emotions with correspondent interoceptive sensations would assume the unlikely possibility that there are pure bodily sensations with regards to affectivity. And to say that no emotion, feeling or image (in the Aristotelian sense of *phantasiai* later translated into *imagination*s and referring to the impressions that the sensations leave upon our body after the object is gone) can be properly considered a bodily sensation presupposes the belief that only our conscious experience of our physical bodies is perceptual while being aware of our emotional or cognitive attitudes towards our own bodies are not.⁴⁷

It will be shown in the forthcoming chapters the sense in which becoming aware of our emotions, feelings, thoughts, and other “images” is also a proprioceptive act, an act of bodily self-awareness where the body is not considered uniquely in its sensory-motor aspect. As it will be seen when discussing the theory of perception and the models of bodily self-awareness in several Indian philosophical systems, the border between introspective and non-introspective is blurry especially when dualist and also reductionist theoretical backgrounds are set aside. Experiences like feeling pain or pleasure, tiredness, excitement, or the functions of our body such as breathing, the beating of the heart, and even perceiving one’s “clumsiness”, or “agility”, etc. do not lend themselves to an easy tagging as proprioceptive or introspective, and this is because, as I will argue, states like these, which involve immediate attention to one’s own body, presuppose at once many layers of embodiment and self-understanding. This does not mean that introspective processes are simply to be reduced to non-introspective or vice versa, but only that the divisory line by which certain processes have been considered as only mental and not related

⁴⁷ J.B. Ritchie and P.Carruthers, *The Bodily Senses*, p.9-10.

to the outside world, or only corporeal and not related to the interiority of the living being, has to be nuanced. To talk about emotions and even thoughts as contents of proprioception would seem to be either a nonsense, a paradox or a reductionism, since studies on proprioception have been limited to references regarding sensorimotor mechanisms, somatic location and limb position, almost never related to psychological states, unless these ones are reduced to mere physiological or sensori-motor processes too. Yet, this dissertation will show the need to recognize emotional and psychological aspects in the study of proprioceptive processes of attention in order to be consistent with a non-dualist perspective in philosophy of the body/mind.

Chapter 2

Bodily Self-Awareness in Sāṃkhya and Yoga

The practice of self-observation or consciously attending to the physical movements of one's own body, its habitual patterns, as well as to the mental content of one's own experience has been essential to Indian, particularly yogic, philosophical schools. It is a common tenet among these philosophies that a life lived without becoming aware of the depths of our embodied dimension is a life of ignorance (*avidyā*). Ignorance of one's self is the main cause of confusion, suffering, and disease (both in its literal sense as sickness and in its mental sense of being not at "ease") primarily because, without being attentive to those dimensions and their functions, we tend to constantly misidentify what is real for what is not, both in ourselves and in others, as well as in the world. Awareness of the body, however, acquired a very particular meaning in Indian philosophy, especially in the philosophical traditions that I will be considering in this dissertation, all of which have had great influence in the development of what Stephen Phillips calls "yoga philosophy".⁴⁸

In spite of some variations, the core conception of "body" as understood in Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Advaita Vedānta, and Kaśmir Śaivism suggests that many of the characteristics that have been traditionally related to the soul or the mind in the West –such as inner, intellectual, rational, private, introspective, reflective –are actually considered to be characterizations of a body and vice versa. Qualities and essential properties of bodies according to Western philosophy – spatiality, materiality, extension, public, and mobility – are also attributed in these Indian schools

⁴⁸ Stephen Phillips, *Yoga, Karma, and Rebirth*, p.41.

to the mind or, more specifically, to what they call the “subtle body” (*sūkṣma śarīra/ liṅga śarīra*).

The meaning and function of a “subtle body”⁴⁹ within Indian philosophy can be found in the context of explaining the perceptual interaction between the body and the external world but also, and primarily, in the inquiry to finding the means of terminating existential suffering. All four of these philosophical schools agree that self-awareness or self-knowledge is the means to that goal. Although each of them considers the nature of that knowledge or awareness in different ways— as discriminative knowledge of the knower (*jñavijñāna*) for Sāṃkhya, direct perception of one’s own true form (*svarūpadārśana*) for Yoga, knowledge of the self (*ātmavidyā*) for Vedānta, and self-recognition (*ahampratyabhijñā*) for Kaśmir Śaivism— all of them explain the process of knowing oneself as a process involving awareness of one’s body. But what is it to know oneself in the process of knowing one’s body?

According to these schools, all knowledge of an object presupposes a valid means of knowing it, and all of them accept perception, inference, and testimony from authoritative sources as valid epistemological means. However, they differ among themselves in explaining certain aspects of the process of perception and awareness. In the next section I focus on Sāṃkhya and Yoga philosophies because they have important implications for the phenomenology of bodily self-awareness developed later in the non-dual systems of Vedānta and Kaśmir Śaivism.

⁴⁹ The translation of *sūkṣma* as “subtle” has recently been questioned by some scholars for its imprecise and inadequate rendering of the term. Dominic Wujastyk translates it as “minute” in his article “Interpreting the Image of the Human Body in Premodern India”. I will continue to use the term “subtle” since this is the most common way to find it in the literature and I will consider the adequacy of translating it as “minute” as well as the philosophical implications of doing so in chapter 4.

2.1 The Perceptual System in Sāṃkhya

Unlike traditional accounts of Western epistemology where the object, after coming into contact with the sense organ, produces an affection in it which is then transmitted to the cognitive centers (be it the soul or the brain), Sāṃkhyan theory of perception takes the sense organs to have an active rather than a passive role when coming into contact with the external object. An organ (*indriya*) is defined as that which reaches out towards its object and “grasps” it. For example, the eye “goes towards” that which shines or has a form, the ear “reaches out” towards that which sounds, the hand seizes that which is seizable, etc. Apart from the five sense organs (*buddhendriyas*): eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin, Sāṃkhya considers five action organs (*karmendriyas*): speech, hands, feet, excretory, and generative or sexual; and an internal organ which is called *manas*, usually translated as mind. The word “organ” might not be the best way to translate *indriya* not only because organs like the stomach, the heart, throat, and other internal parts of the body are not included in the concept, but also and primarily, because the notion of *indriya* does not quite refer to the eyes, ears, nose, hands, feet, etc. so much as bodily parts but as bodily faculties or capacities. Following Mikel Burley’s phenomenological reading⁵⁰ of the Sāṃkhya Kārika (SK 26-28)—text where the classical formulation of Sāṃkhyan thought is found—the sense organs in this tradition would be better understood as capacities of modes of awareness: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. The action organs would be more precisely called “agency capacities”: speaking, seizing, wandering, excreting, and sexual enjoyment.

This way of speaking about the *indriyas* stresses the characteristic intimately associated with them in the Sāṃkhyan system as being always “other-oriented”. And ties up immediately

⁵⁰ Mikel Burley, *Classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga*, p.115-116.

with the question about bodily self-awareness, for these awareness and action capacities apprehend their respective objects immediately but cannot apprehend themselves in their own acts. This is thought to be due not only to the physical fact that the eyes cannot turn around to see themselves, or the ear drum system cannot hear its own vibrations (and emissions) while hearing, or the finger cannot touch itself while touching, but to the cognitive structure of the sense-faculty itself. Even if the physical organs could “turn around” and see, hear, or touch themselves, the seeing, hearing, touching would not be able to see, hear, or touch itself. This is why most Indian philosophical schools consider the sense and agency capacities to be beyond the range of sense-perception.⁵¹ According to Sāṃkhya, the sense and action capacities, i.e. the *buddhendriyas* and *karmendriyas*, provide “mere awareness” (*alocanamātram*) in the act of perceiving. This means that the senses and action capacities by themselves do not discern what the felt object is (*SK 28*). It is only due to the function of the internal organ (*manas*) and other cognitive capacities that such awareness becomes a determinate cognition (*savikalpa*) at the same time that we become aware of the sensation as such.⁵²

Mikel Burley refers to the agency capacities as modes of proprioceptive or interoceptive awareness the coordination of which *manas*, the internal operative mind, is responsible for.⁵³ While I agree with him in that these capacities imply some degree of bodily awareness, especially since one of them was explicitly called the capacity for enjoyment, I differ in two ways. First because, for the Sāṃkhya system, any sense of bodily awareness implicit in those capacities do not pertain to them as such, but to the capacity of another instance that makes them and their phenomenal content manifest to consciousness itself. Second, because as this

⁵¹ Arindam Chakrabarti, “The Deities in our Bodies: Work-Culture and Making Sense of the Senses”, in *Work Culture and Efficiency*, p.10.

⁵² The proprioceptive nature of bodily sensations provided by these sense capacities will be examined in more detail in chapter 3.

⁵³ Burley, *Classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga*, p.116.

dissertation will try to show, the notion of proprioception, especially within these philosophical systems, could be applied not only to sensori-motor physical capacities, but to the whole range of cognitive, and emotive capacities as well.

Manas is defined in *SK 27* as a sensori-motor capacity. It is due to the action of this internal faculty that sensations are determined, distinguished, coordinated, and synthesized. *Manas* gathers the information coming from the senses (cognitive and practical) and guides the awareness capacities in their “going out” towards their object. Without the activity of *manas*, there would be no perception even if there were contact between the organ and the external object. Its function is meant to explain why a constant sound like that of the cars outside one’s room could go completely unheard while one is reading, or cooking or watching a movie. It is by directing its activity towards the senses that are put in contact with corresponding objects (e.g. a book, frying pans or TV) that *manas* is able to “grasp” the sentences in the book, the pans’ handle, or the images in the TV, without any focused activity or awareness being directed to the capacity of hearing the noise of the cars outside the window. In this sense, we could translate *manas* as the faculty of attention, whose directionality is usually geared towards something other than itself, just as the rest of the sense capacities (*indriyas*).

With an acute phenomenological methodology, Sāṃkhya philosophy shows that in the awareness of seeing a tree, speaking to a large public, walking around the park, hearing a bell, feeling pleasure (or pain), etc. a distinct cognitive activity is needed to manifest it as an experience belonging to oneself. This activity is done by the “ego-maker” or *ahamkāra* which is the capacity of self-assertion or self-conceit (*SK 24*). It is usually explained as the capacity that transforms the impersonal apprehensions of the object into personal experiences suffused with a

sense of egoity.⁵⁴ The Sāṃkhyan system, however, gives it a more radical role. It is due to this self-assertion or self-consciousness that the world of experience, both in its objective and subjective aspects, originates. The traditional interpretation of *ahamkāra* in the Sāṃkhyan system takes it as a subtle material element (*tattva*) from which the sense and action capacities, the internal organ (*manas*) and “subtle” objective elements (sound, tactile feeling, visual appearance, flavor, and odour) called “tanmātras”—which in turn will give rise to “gross” elements like ether, air, fire, water, and earth respectively—ontologically evolve. This interpretation has been reproduced commentator after commentator without really clarifying in what sense something that is objective, “materially dense”, experienced as independent from the mind can “evolve” from mental or subtle entities. Mikel Burley offers a convincing way of reinterpreting this issue within Sāṃkhyan philosophy by reading the cosmogonic causality through “Kantian” eyes. He suggests interpreting the Sāṃkhyan origination of objects and capacities from the ego-maker function not in the sense of a material ontological causation but as a transcendental condition of possibility for their experience. Indeed, without *ahamkāra*, i.e., the mental capacity of having a thought of oneself in the activity of perceiving, the impersonal apprehension of the senses and *manas* would not transform into a personal experience, or the experiential content would never be given by the bodily organs as “mine”. Even the very experience of our own perceptual and physical organs of action becomes possible as instruments of perception and interaction with the world because of the original sense of “myself” as being the experiencer for whom they are working.

⁵⁴Jadunath Sinha, *Indian Psychology: Perception*, p.120.

In terms of bodily awareness, as Battacharyya⁵⁵ explains, the perception of external objects necessarily refers to one's body. Their externality is experienced as being in space which is itself distinguished from the body that is felt as "mine". The function of the "ego-maker" or the sense of "I" is, in this sense, the condition of possibility for the awareness of our own sentient body (*manas* and sense capacities) and thus, of all our bodily sensations and feelings including pain and pleasure. In a very important way, it is this sense of "I" which makes the body an object of reflection, where "body" includes, besides the organs or capacities (*indriyas*), the mental functions of representing, synthesizing, and selective attention. Through *ahamkāra* the body-mind feels itself as feeling. In other words, the ego maker or the sense of "I" is the capacity that makes us say "I am seeing a dog running towards me", "I am feeling sad", "I am thinking", "I am acting", etc. Unlike Descartes, the Sāṃkhyan sense of "I" is not opposed to or even distinguished from a bodily capacity. And in this sense, we could think that there is a true notion of bodily self-awareness in Sāṃkhya. Moreover, even though awareness of the "ego-maker" requires a higher order capacity of the intellect (*buddhi*) in the form of "I am aware that "I" am seeing a dog", this capacity is also defined as a bodily function and not as a function of a soul, as we saw in many of the Western philosophical systems.

Unfortunately, Sāṃkhyan metaphysics might not be very helpful for understanding the sense in which self-awareness is fully embodied. According to Sāṃkhya, the appropriation of an experience as pertaining to "me" as an "I", that is, as a self, is the very foundation of ignorance. All experience is originated by the activity of the intellect (*buddhi*), the "ego maker" (*ahamkāra*), attention (*manas*) and the sensori-motor capacities, which work mechanically and automatically as a perceptual system. But whatever is perceived through this mechanism always

⁵⁵ Krishnachandra Battacharyya, *Studies in Philosophy*, p.158-159.

refers to other than itself (SK 17). This is because when the intellect (*buddhi*) exercises its function of self-assertion and identifies the experience with someone undergoing it, this “someone”, according to Sāṃkhya, must not be confused with the “real self”, which is independent of the experience even while making it conscious.

In the Sāṃkhyan theory of perception *buddhi* – usually translated as intellect but perhaps better understood as the capacity of reflection— is the mental process that brings completion to the perceptual act. It recollects memories, distinguishes the object from others, resolves what is to be done towards it, and makes a judgment about it.⁵⁶ *Buddhi* or the knowing reflective mind is the condition of possibility to be aware of the “ego-maker” as another component of our subjective body. *Buddhi* is, in this sense, the intentionality of consciousness, the function of referring to the world as a field of experience; a world that includes the objective as well as the subjective, the body as felt and as feeling, and the body as perceived and as perceiving. As reflective function of the perceptual system *buddhi*, however, cannot refer to itself either. All it does is make manifest the experience to consciousness (SK 37). Being the highest order capacity of the body that reflects upon its different functions, *buddhi* makes the body known not to itself but to something else, i.e. consciousness or *puruṣa*.

For Sāṃkhya, consciousness is the capacity to receive and contemplate the phenomenon previously “grasped” by the perceptual system or *kāraṇa*— that is, by the body as instrument of perception—and is not considered to be a function of the body itself. Thus, the body understood as a sensorimotor perceptual system is, for Sāṃkhya, not really self-aware (SK 20), although the very knowledge of this brings true self-awareness which is, in other words, awareness of the conscious self as distinct from the body and all its affections. The ultimate reflective act of

⁵⁶ Sinha, *Indian Psychology: Perception*, p.120.

buddhi encounters its paradoxical nature in the very act of bringing the body (of which it itself is a part) to awareness, because it entails making also manifest its nonconscious nature.

It can be seen then that, in this model, self-awareness entails bodily awareness, that is, the capacity of the body (understood as perceptual system and not as an entity in opposition to mind or soul) to attend towards itself through higher order cognitive activities. However, since this school of thought is dualist, bodily awareness cannot be strictly bodily self-awareness for the simple reason that knowing the body (including the mental activities) is not the same as knowing the self, even if this knowledge is attained through attending to the body (SK 64). The body in this model is a nonconscious, mechanical system that works only as an indicator (*liṅgam*) of something other than itself: the external object on one side, and consciousness on the other. It serves as an instrument (*kāraṇa*) for consciousness to witness the body undergoing pleasures and pains, vices and virtues, etc. But it is the mistaken idea that consciousness is the one undergoing those affections which generates suffering. It is not until consciousness manages to distinguish itself from the happenings of the body (through *buddhi*'s paradoxical reflective act) that it realizes itself as it is: pure awareness. At this point suffering ceases because there is no more association with sensations, conditions, motives, dispositions of pleasure and pain, virtue and vice, which are localized in the body, a body that has fulfilled its purpose as a “characteristic mark” (*liṅgam*) for identifying the true self.

The *Sāṃkhya Kārikā* explains this stage of bodily-awareness as a retraction or merging of the body back into its original source (SK 10), that is, into the unmanifested and nonconscious material principle (*pradhāna*) constituted by an undifferentiated manifold of forces (*guṇas*) that remain in equilibrium and in pure potentiality. Phenomenologically speaking, this moment would amount to the awareness of the body as a bare field for any possible experience. Without

a sense of self associated with the body, i.e. without any mark (*alīṅga*) of self-identification, the body merges into a nonconscious state of undifferentiated mass, a complete dissolution of the world into pure potentiality.

The Sāṃkhyan model of bodily awareness is tainted with metaphysical dualism and, as such, it cannot provide a consistent notion of bodily self-awareness. Nevertheless, it has been necessary to develop it here in detail for various reasons. First, because this is a model upon which the rest of the Indian philosophical schools considered in this dissertation either build upon or reject. Second because, even if worked out within a dualistic system, this model already outlines a very important point of bodily self-awareness that I will be defending throughout this dissertation. And this is that bodily awareness is an act of perception that attends towards a multilayered sensorimotor and dispositional system. In other words, the body that we can be aware of is not just the body that moves and interacts with an environment by walking around it, grasping it, building on it, or mingling with it, but also, and foremost, it is the body that feels the world, that loves (or hates) it, that imagines it, that thinks it, that contemplates it, that suffers and enjoys it. The phenomenological dimension in Sāṃkhyan philosophy is easier to grasp, I think, if we focus directly on the notions related to the body, which are also shared with the Classical Yoga philosophical system of Patañjali, as we will see next.

2.2 *Liṅga* and *Sūkṣma*: A Feminist Phenomenological Analysis of the Subtle in Classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga

The use of the term *liṅga* in the *Sāṃkhya Kārika* evokes the same ambiguity as the notion of “flesh” within Western phenomenology, i.e. that of being sensible and sentient at the same

time.⁵⁷ In *SK6*, *liṅga* is used as a mark or a sign of that which cannot be seen but only inferred. Within Sāṃkhya philosophy both *prakṛti*, the primordial nature, and *puruṣa*, the ultimate principle of consciousness, cannot be seen but only inferred. The first one is inferred by what is visible in this universe, which is thought to emerge necessarily from an unmanifested material substratum into which everything eventually returns. This material substratum is nonconscious; it does not share the qualities of the “seer” in any way. By definition, nature is that which is seen. However, as percipient embodied beings, we have the experience of “seeing”, so this conscious quality must come from somewhere other than our material nature. *Puruṣa* is the only conscious principle. Thus, from the Sāṃkhyan perspective, our capacity for consciousness must come from it. Since it is through the body that we become aware of the materiality of itself in contact with other objects, as well as of its sentiency through feeling, seeing, and touching those objects, the body becomes itself a mark, i.e. a *liṅga*, for both principles: the conscious and the material.⁵⁸

In Merleau Ponty’s philosophy of perception, vision appears when this two-dimensional body –not merely objective neither purely subjective— turns back upon the whole of the visible, the whole of the world upon which it is a part. Merleau Ponty perceives in the phenomenon of vision a fundamental act of narcissism because the seer gets caught up in its own act, seeing

⁵⁷ See Merleau Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 136 and “The Theory of the Body is Already a Theory of Perception”, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.235.

⁵⁸ “Characteristic mark” is another way of translating *liṅga* in the context of *SK 6* where the characteristic of the perceptual system is the middle term in an argument that concludes the existence of consciousness as distinct from matter. Gauḍapāda’s argument can be reconstructed like this: Only *puruṣa* is conscious. The perceptual system (*buddhi*, etc.) is caused by the characteristics of the material principle (*pradhāna*) which is unconscious but appears to be conscious. Thus, consciousness must come from another, i.e., *puruṣa*. (*Sāṃkhya Kārikā Gauḍapāda Bhāṣyam*, *SKGB 6*) This dualism is criticized in this dissertation.

itself in what it sees.⁵⁹ While this is also true for the Sāṃkhyan and Yoga models of perception, Merleau Ponty does not consider this to be a mistake or something that could somehow be transformed or reconfigured. For Sāṃkhya, however, as it was explained in the previous section, the very structure of narcissism underlies suffering. The continuous manifestation of this mechanism in every single experience—be it of joy or fear, of knowledge or delusion— must be ceased to give place to the true vision of consciousness, “the seer”.

In his reading of the notion of *liṅga* and *sūkṣma* in the Sāṃkhya philosophical school, Mikel Burley proposes a psychological and Kantian interpretation which is successful in its attempt to get rid of the metaphysical, cosmogonic, causal narrative present in this ontology. However, when applied to the interpretation of the notion of a "subtle body" it seems to set aside the very language in which the concepts related to embodiment are inscribed, that is, a language that suggests a cosmic and not necessarily metaphysical dimension. I agree with Burley in that leaving aside the metaphysical discussions about the ontological status of the seer and the essences of reality (*tattvas*) in Sāṃkhya can allow us to better understand them as constitutive features of experience rather than as questionable causal entities. But I will add that, preserving the cosmic dimension of the narrative through the lenses of feminist phenomenology, in particular that of Luce Irigaray, can help us see within Sāṃkhya and other Indian philosophical schools, the emergence of a dimension of the body that seems to be missing in Mikel Burley's analysis of Sāṃkhya and not completely developed in Merleau Ponty's account of the phenomenal body. This dimension places feelings, dispositions, and emotionality as primordial constituents of the perceptual system which is our embodiment.

⁵⁹ Merleau Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p.139. The “seeing itself as it sees” refers in Merleau Ponty to the fact that in perceiving any object and in interacting with the environment there is always already the mediation of our bodily experience: its position, its spatiality, its perspective.

In his commentary to the *SK 6* Gauḍapāda refers to the whole of the perceptual system as *liṅga* because it indicates the existence of a consciousness that is beyond the system itself. But in *SK 10* *liṅga* is also used with the sense of “that which merges” referring to both the manifest (*vyakta*) world and the body in its sentient and sensed aspects. Both will eventually merge back into the unmanifested source (*avyakta*) which is the material principle (*pradhāna*). At the same time in *SK 40*, the term *liṅga* is specifically used as a mark of the differentiation made in *SK 39* between the body born out of parents (*mātāpitṛjā*), i.e. the biological body, and a “subtle” (*sūkṣma*) body. In this particular verse, *liṅga* does not refer ambiguously to “that which merges”, but specifically to the sentient body, i.e. the perceptual system⁶⁰ constituted by the reflective mind (*buddhi*), the sense of I-am-ness (*ahamkāra*), an operative or attentive mind (*manas*), the ten capacities of sensation and action (*indriyas*), and the five subtle elements (*tanmātras*), also called “modes of sense content” by Mikel Burley in order to make sense of their phenomenal, rather than metaphysical aspect. The *tanmātras* could also be understood as constituting spheres of objective experience, each of them characterized by their specific but indeterminate general quality and material potency: all pervasive sound waves (*śabda*), movement and contact- sphere of tactile feeling (*sparsā*), color and luminosity-sphere of visual appearance (*rūpa*), liquidity-sphere of taste (*rasa*), solid particles-sphere of smell (*gandha*).⁶¹

In Classical Sāṃkhya (*SK 38*) each of these subtle modes of sense content is thought to be constituted by vibrating monads, infinitesimal minute atoms (*paramāṇu*) with a general quality that gives rise, through a complex process of aggregation, to “denser” and more determinate perceivable elements (*bhūtas*) respectively— ether (*akāśa*), air (*vāyu*), fire (*tejas*),

⁶⁰ See Gauḍapāda *SKbh* 40.

⁶¹ Vyāsa, *YSVbh* III.44 and Vācaspati Miśra, *Tattva Vāiśārādī (TV)* I.44.

water (*āp*), and earth (*pr̥thivi*).⁶² For example, the ether element, which is the subtlest element of all five, is composed only by the vibrating, all pervasive “atomic quality” of sound waves, which manifest through their audibility. Air, which is “less subtle” than ether, is composed by the minute atoms of both audibility and tactile feeling, and is identified through movement, impact and pressure. Fire will include the sense modes of audibility, tactile feeling and form/visible appearance, identifiable by its color and luminosity. Water will include these three “atom-qualities” plus the sense mode of taste, perceivable through liquidity. Finally earth, the most dense of them all, is thought to be composed of all five modes of sense content, with smell-ability included, and recognizable by its solid particles.

This process of evolution from the “subtle” to the “denser” consists in the development of the differentiated (*viśeṣa*) within the undifferentiated (*aviśeṣa*) and is triggered by the constant movement and combination of three basic material cosmic potential forces (*guṇas*)— the tendency to manifest and be intelligible (*sattva*), tendency to move or change (*rajas*), and tendency to remain stable, inert (*tamas*). The five cosmic elements (*bhūtas*) combine among themselves to form the rest of the individual substances in the world (minerals, plants, and animals), including the gross bodies born out of a mother and father.⁶³ The biological body is considered to be a dense body because it is already the product of the combination of multiple atoms and the predominance of the inert and stable, dull tendency (*tamas*) which manifests,

⁶² *YSVbh* II.19, *Yukti Dīpikā* 38 and Vācaspati Miśra, *Tattva Kaumudī* 38.

⁶³ The way in which the subtle elements combine to form the natural ones is thought to follow a process of quintuplication according to later commentarists and to Vedānta. The cosmogonic narrativity of this philosophical school varies from Sāṃkhya in the way the subtle body and the world are formed. But this will be discussed at the end of the next chapter.

according to the common representation of the body in the Ayurvedic tradition, through six main components or sheaths (*kośas*): hair, blood, flesh, sinews, bones and marrow.⁶⁴

Without taking this cosmogonic account in its literal, metaphysical and causal sense, what can be seen in regards to the distinction between the biological and the subtle body is that, in the gestation of a body— think, for example, in an unborn child, the intrauterine embryonic life— precisely what is not given by the mother or the father, that which is not passed down by genetics, is the cosmic elements and the modes in which they are sensed. Indeed, the color of the hair, the type of blood, the thickness of the bones, the length of the marrow, etcetera, might be determined by the parental genes. But the food (earth) that the mother eats and will nourish the unborn child; the liquidity (water) that surrounds the fetus; the warmth (fire) that comes from that other layer of skin; the breathing (air) that moves rhythmically in the womb, and the space that the unborn body pervades, these elements are not given by genes but by the cosmos or, in other words, the environment. The natural cosmic elements (*bhūta*), however, are not *sūkṣma* as such, but they presuppose a specific structured combination of the subtle qualitative particles according to the cosmogonic story told by Sāṃkhya and Yoga. But what does it mean phenomenologically to be constituted by subtle elements?

Merleau Ponty thought that the best way to refer to the “flesh”, term that he coined to express the bi-dimensionality of the body, was through the old notion of ‘element’ “in the sense that it was used to speak of water, air, earth and fire, that is, in the sense of a general thing, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea.”⁶⁵ In his phenomenology of the flesh, the elemental body is much more than a mere physical or biological fact, not in the sense

⁶⁴ See Gauḍapāda *SKbh* 39 and *Yoga Sūtras Vyāsa Bhaṣya (YSVbh)*, III.29.

⁶⁵ Merleau Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p.139-140.

of being composed by body and spirit; rather because of the possibility of the body—constituted by these elements—to make itself a seer.⁶⁶ Merleau Ponty explains this process with the famous idea of reversibility: the flesh is the visible body which can see itself in the act of making something else visible. He illustrates this with the famous example of the touching hand being touched by the other or the hand that shakes somebody else’s. In a way, the notion of “flesh” may involve the notion of bodily self-awareness. However, the sense of potentiality is underscored because reversibility is for Merleau Ponty a possibility, always imminent, as a sort of “pre-meditation in counterpoint in the embryonic development”, an “interiorly-worked out mass” for which he thought there was no name in any philosophy.⁶⁷ But there is, and it is *sūkṣma*.

In *SK* 40 it is said that the subtle body is that which “previously arises” (*pūrvotpannam*).⁶⁸ The Sanskrit word *pūrvam* means former, prior, preceding, earlier than, first; and *utpannam* means arisen, born, produced.⁶⁹ Metaphysical considerations take this pre-arising body as referring to the essential elements (*tattvas*) that constitute what I have called the perceptual system in Sāṃkhya which are, cosmogonically speaking, the first evolutes of the creative communion between consciousness (*puruṣa*) and primordial matter (*pradhāna*), out of which the whole world is thought to come into existence. Here, the sense of “first” (*pūrvam*) would indicate that this subtle body precedes manifestations of reality that are “denser”, “thicker”, “gross”, all appropriate words for *sthūla*, the opposite term of *sūkṣma*.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.146.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.147

⁶⁸ *pūrvotpannam asaktam niyatam mahadādisūkṣmaparyantam | saṃsarati nirupabhogam bhāvair adhvāsitam liṅgam* || 40

The *liṅga* is already existent, unrestricted, permanent, comprising ‘the great’ and the rest, down to the subtle; wandering without enjoyment, endowed with dispositions. (Mikel Burley’s translation).

⁶⁹ This phrase has been usually translated as “previously arisen” by Gerald Larson, *Classical Sāṃkhya*, p. 268; as “already existent” by Burley, *Classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga*, p.172; as “formed primevally” by Suryanarayana Sastri, *The Sāṃkhya-Kārikā of Śvara Kṛṣṇa*, p. 82.

I agree with Burley that the standard cosmogonic account fails to explain how mind independent entities such as the biological and elemental body of, say, an unborn child would “evolve” from mental ones like audibility, visual appearance, tactile feelings, taste, I-am-ness, attention, etc. In other words, how would the subtle elements and functions of the perceptual system pre-arise or pre-date the physical gestation of any particular life? Mikel Burley does not take the elements and “evolutes” as material items but rather as categories of experience. Thus, in his view, *liṅga* is not to be understood as referring to the psychological subject but to a “fluctuating experiential content of any individual conscious subject”⁷⁰ with *buddhi*, *ahamkāra*, *manas*, *indriyas* and *tanmātras* being the transcendental conditions of possibility for experience. This would be the only sense in which the subtle pre-arises according to Burley. With his reading, the term *sūksma* acquires an epistemological meaning like the one Vācaspati gives to it in the *Tattva Kaumudī* when commenting on *Kārikā* 7.⁷¹ Vācaspati refers to the difficulty of perceiving the minute atoms that compose the subtle elements even when the mind is concentrated. For Burley, however, something is subtle not because of its material constitution but only because of the degree of accessibility to a knower.⁷² Thus, the aspects of the psychosensory apparatus are subtle insofar as they remain hidden, elusive, and imperceptible to our distracted and outward directed mind.

Mikel Burley’s account fits perfectly with the eight-limbed method found in the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali—described later—which is designed to discipline and “purify” both the physical body and the perceptual system so that the body as a whole becomes able to perceive within itself that which usually remains difficult to see, veiled behind the torrent of thoughts,

⁷⁰ Burley, *Classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga*, p.130.

⁷¹ *atidūrāt sāmīpyāt indriyaghātān mano’navasthānāt | sauṣṣmyād vyavadhānāt abhibhavāt samānābhīhārāc ca || 7* || [Something may be imperceptible] due to: remoteness, closeness, sensory impairment, instability of mind, subtlety, obscuration, suppression, similarity with something else. (Burley’s trans. The underlining is mine.)

⁷² Burley, *Ibid.*, p.122.

memories, dreams, emotions, miscognitions, and desires. The problem with Burley's account, however, is that the subtle "psychosensory apparatus" as he calls it⁷³ cannot be understood as a mere transcendental system, empty, fixed, abstract. What the subtle is should not be confused with that which is difficult to conceptualize, neither should it be thought merely in terms of abstract epistemological categories.

In the oldest commentary of the *Sāmkhya Kārikā*, the *Yuktidīpikā*, it is said about the subtle that it can only be perceived by its effects (*YD 8*).⁷⁴ The sense organ (*indriya*) itself is given as an example. Why? Because:

"Whenever there is the perception of a sound, there is the capacity of hearing. This is also to be said of the others [sense capacities]. As well as for *manas*, *ahamkara*, and *buddhi*, it is said because of their capacity of apprehension. In this way, appearance of their mode of existence, of the capacity of hearing, etc. through the characteristic of that which covers their very appearance, makes the identity of the possessor of the cognition as well as the cognition known." (*YD 29*)

We see here the recognition of an implicit introspective and proprioceptive multi-dimensionality of the body present in every aspect of the perceptual system. This suggests that the sense in which the subtle body pre-arises to the physical should be explained in terms of an embodied dynamicity that moves indefinitely between abstract and concrete, particular and universal, private and shared, subjective and objective; as something that "makes room" for existence—as Jean-Luc Nancy beautifully says in his book *Corpus*—rather than being limited by a priori forms of intuition or a table of categories.⁷⁵

The subtle is also not concrete in the same way as other objects are. Merleau Ponty was right when he explained that ideas, i.e., the invisible, "could not be detached from the sensible

⁷³ Burley, *Ibidem*.

⁷⁴ Edeltraud, *Yuktidīpikā*, p.63.

⁷⁵ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, p.15.

appearances and be erected into a second positivity.”⁷⁶ Indeed, the subtle is not hidden like an object which will be eventually found or discovered once we have the proper tools or scientific devices. Merleau Ponty’s hidden invisible needs to remain hidden so that there is vision. As he explains, we do not see the ideas, do not hear them, not even with the mind’s eye do we see them, but they are there, behind the sounds or lights.⁷⁷ Within Sāṃkhya-Yoga philosophy, however, the invisible appears to our consciousness through that by which at the same time is covered. Awareness of this “invisible” appearance, however, requires the cultivation of a proper insight.

In the phenomenology of the unborn that is here being suggested, the subtle body pre-arises “in the heart of the visible”, using Merleau Ponty’s words. Even before there is experience of the eyes, the ears, the legs, and hands, there is indeed at least hearing, touching, seeing. It is now known⁷⁸ that intrauterine life feels and distinguishes between soothing or scary sounds; smooth or rough vibrations; dark or bright visual appearance, incorporating and configuring the sensations into itself as a dispositional and, literally, pre-meditated system.

Naturalistic minds will look for the causal explanation of the pre-arisen in the form of stages of neural development in the fetus. But for the phenomenologist such findings will only give us insight of the visible and non-reversible.⁷⁹ The unborn, which is here the invisible, does not normally see the visible that sees it and vice versa, the visible does not normally see the

⁷⁶ Merleau Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p.149-150.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.152.

⁷⁸ A variety of scientific studies on sensations and stimuli in the fetal stage have recently been conducted where they study the responses that the fetus reports at different stages of life when exposed to sound vibrations, lighting conditions, and even to maternal emotions.

⁷⁹ This remark is important because a phenomenological account of the unborn child could not and should not be used to determine whether aborting the “pre-arising” life would be acceptable or not. The implications of a phenomenology of the unborn have more to do—as will hopefully become clear in this section— with the already visible manifestations of a once inner and invisible unborn life, than with the exact “time” or moment in which the unborn child has first feelings and sensations. Phenomenologically, “unborn life” is not the same as “unborn child” although this is implicated and used as a powerful metaphor.

invisible that sees. Luce Irigaray's critic to Merleau Ponty's notion of invisible precisely points out to the non-reversibility of the unborn flesh.⁸⁰ Indeed, in the example of the fetus, the mother (visible) is not and cannot be seen by the fetus (invisible) while seeing (even through ultrasound). But this irreversibility applies as well to the hand that touches the other in a fist that punches, that grabs, ready to hurt, to torture; or as the hand that caresses to love just to find that it is not loved. Even in the hand that touches as being touched by the other in a handshake, the touch is not the same as when the hands are joined with palms together—known as Anjali mudra in Indian dance and usually associated in the West with a woman in prayer—because they presuppose different affective, cultural and dispositional states. Love, desire, hate, anger, faith, sincerity, delusion, etc., are phenomena that, although experienced through the visible, remain in the interior, in part perceptible only in their being unseen, pre-arisen, unborn. In the words of Irigaray: “There are not pure actual phenomena, pure pellicles that are graspable one by the other, even empathetically. They have their roots, which are not reducible to the visible moment.”⁸¹

For Luce Irigaray, Merleau Ponty's seer is in a prenatal situation, a state which, she thinks, characterizes all men in the West,⁸² (although I am afraid many women and people in the East would also have to be included). She argues that just as the mother “sees” the child in the uterine by foresight and by imagining it, the other (the child, the woman, the old and ill, the oppressed, or the lover) is not really seen by the seer when this one is seen in return. What this means is that Merleau Ponty's seer is not aware that the one being seen, is not like oneself but an invisible other, with different sex, different feelings, different dispositions, different memories,

⁸⁰ Luce Irigaray, “The Invisible of the Flesh”, in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, pp.154-160.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.160.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 168.

different past and present. The invisible is seen by the narcissist as imagined, covered by its own membrane of ideations or ideologies and not as it is in its own difference. In this sense we could say that vision or reversibility is never really born to this world. And this is why Irigaray says that Merleau Ponty's seer never "cuts" the umbilical cord.

The Sāṃkhya-Yoga seer is in a similar situation, except that these philosophical schools do offer a way to cut the cord. For Sāṃkhya-Yoga philosophy of perception, enrooted in each perceptual system or psychosensory apparatus are the *bhāvas* or dispositions (*SK* 40), and the *samskāras* or latent impressions (*YS* I.5). The moment that sensation arises, the system automatically configures and reconfigures itself in multiple ways mainly through binary psychic movements: afflictive (*kliṣṭa*) or non-afflictive (*akliṣṭa*) in Patāñjali's terms, or well-disposed (*dharma*), ill-disposed (*adharmā*), insightful (*jñāna*), non-insightful (*ajñāna*), non-attached (*vairagya*), attached (*avairagya*), empowered (*aiśvarya*), and disempowered (*anaiśvarya*) in Sāṃkhyan terms (*SK* 44). These qualities, mental traits, states of being or pre-conscious psychic traces⁸³ manifest in our attitudes, habits, patterns, actions, movements, and responses. They are at the root not only of the present moment, but also of the past and the future. These dispositions and impressions conform the "obverse" side of a body, as Merleau Ponty named it, that body which — being a perceptual system— configures itself as a unity of pre-arisen sensations, feelings, capacities, operations, pre-virtues, and pre-perceptions of the visible.

To avoid any metaphysical, cosmogonic interpretations of this account we need to further analyze *Sāṃkhya Kārikā* 39 where the difference between the visible biological (born) and the invisible subtle (pre-born) is expressed in terms of their temporal characteristics rather than their ontological constitution. The *Kārikā* says that the sentient, subtle body (*sūkṣma-*

⁸³ Burley, *Classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga*, p.111.

śarīra) remains, lasts, endures, while the body born out of parents perishes and gets destroyed. The subtle body, being a *liṅga*, merges back into primordial matter just as the natural elements but, somehow, it takes longer to disintegrate.

Traditional interpretations of the *Sāṃkhya Kārikā* like that of Gauḍapāda, Vacāspati Miśra and the *YuktiDīpikā* relate the “durability” of the subtle body to its characteristic of being that which “migrates” (*saṃsarati*) between one life and the other.⁸⁴ The postulation—as indeed Vacāspati Miśra calls it (*parikalpita*)—of a body that transmigrates in contrast to a body that perishes and merges back into the natural elements when it dies can give place to interesting metaphysical discussions about awareness beyond what is commonly understood as “death”, but do not really help us understand the nature of the subtle. An example of this can be found in Gauḍapāda, who tends to focus on the subtle body’s migrating constitution (whether formed by 13 or 18 elements) when commenting on the term *liṅga*. But nowhere in the commentary do we find an explanation of what exactly makes those elements “subtle”, nor is there a description of the way in which, being invisible, manifest at the same time in the experience of ourselves and of the world.⁸⁵

The characterization of the subtle as that which migrates, transmigrates, or wanders between one existence and another (*saṃsarati*) alludes to its lingering between that which is fixed (the given body) and that which is movable (another body, another life). In the *Yoga Sūtras* (II.12) the impressions (*samskāras*) of previous experiences are kept subconsciously

⁸⁴ See *SKGbh* 39, *TK* 39, and *YuktiDīpikā* on *SK* 39.

⁸⁵ According to Gauḍapāda’s reading of *SK* 40 *liṅga* would refer to 18 elements constituting the subtle body (*sūkṣma-śarīra*): intellect, sense of I, attentional mind, 10 sense and action capacities, and 5 subtle elements (*tanmātras*): sound, touch, form, taste and smell. But in *SK* 41 he takes *liṅga* as referring to 13 elements, by which he thinks the subtle body migrates, that is, the perceptual system minus the subtle elements. The *SK*, however, mentions as migrating the “mahadādisūkṣmaparyantam” which literally means: “from mahat (the intellect) and the rest down to the subtle”. Considering that the 5 *tanmātras* are classified as subtle, then it would be more proper to say that, for the Sāṃkhyan tradition, it is with 18 elements that the subtle body migrates.

latent in our memory and are said to be operative in the seen (*dr̥ṣṭa*) or the unseen (*adr̥ṣṭa*). The seen is that which is already born, and thus is interpreted as the present life. The unseen is classically taken to be a future life. From the point of view of the phenomenology of embodiment tried out here, the past impressions come to existence in the pre-born, that is, in the predispositions that will eventually manifest in the present life or a future moment. The fear that the intrauterine life felt while being submitted to a high pitch sound very close to it; or the loving touch that was felt between skins; the agitation of space in a threatening moment; and anything felt during that first event when the unborn was enveloped by a “tangible invisible”⁸⁶ will inevitably transmigrate to the visible in ways that will permeate its whole being even if unnoticed. The subtle body, unimpeded (*asaktam*) and constant (*niyatam*), incarnates in the born, visible physical body and will inevitably reincarnate in the next unseen moment when the physical body changes and, perhaps, even when the physical, biological body dies. Dispositions of insight or ignorance, attachment or detachment, empowerment or weakness, and impressions of love, fear, desire, anger, greed, or delusion might linger from body to body for generations. For Sāṃkhya-Yoga, the problem of vision is that it continues to be born. It is as if the pre-arisen could only give birth to a child with the umbilical cord around the neck, unable to breathe freely while alive. It does not matter if the disposition that taints the psychosensory system is positive or negative. As long as there is vision, there is suffering, strangling. That is why in Sāṃkhya and in Yoga, *liṅga* has to completely merge back into its opposite (*aliṅga*), into that which does not indicate and is not a mark of anything, and thus, unable to migrate, be born and suffer anymore.

⁸⁶ Irigaray, “The Invisible of the Flesh”, in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, p. 154.

Can there be a vision that is not born strangled? Can a reversible vision be born?

Perhaps only when the maternal-feminine is not forgotten, is Luce Irigaray's answer.⁸⁷ In the context of a comparative feminist phenomenology of bodily self-awareness, I take this to mean that a not strangled vision is possible only if we remember to see the cosmic without the metaphysics. In other words, when the body—and not merely a soul or a consciousness—be allowed to be aware of itself in *all its dimensions*.

Although the Sāṃkhyan notion of body recognizes its multi-dimensionality, it is not considered to be endowed with awareness of its own. As a nonconscious mechanism, the body is perceptible insofar as it is “observed” by consciousness. The body only provides experience for as long as the modes of sense content (sound, smell, tactile feeling, etc.) trigger in the psycho-sensory system lasting impressions and dispositions. Certainly, without hearing sounds, feeling warmth, seeing light, etc., there is no “child born”. In other words, there is no movement or expression of our bodies that is not endowed with or triggered by dispositions or impressions, with feelings or emotional states of being, whether afflictive or non-afflictive. But for Sāṃkhya, to think that this acting body is a conscious enjoyer of its own actions is product of a confused vision. In this system, real vision is like the one that happens (or should we better say: does not happen?) between an “unproductive elderly couple” (*SK* 66): there is no more offspring because there is no more motivation to “see”. Māṭhara, another important commentator of the *Sāṃkhya Kārika*, used this metaphor to explain the moment in which *puruṣa* recognizes itself as distinct to *prakṛti*. “I have seen her’, says the spectating one; ‘I have been seen’, says the other, desisting; although the two remain in conjunction, there is no initiation of [further] emergence.”⁸⁸

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁸⁸ Burley's translation, *Classical Sāṃkhya and Yoga*, p.178. *dr̥ṣṭā mayety upekṣaka eko dr̥ṣṭāhamity anyā| sati samyoge 'pi tayoh prayojanaṃ nāsti sargasya || 66 ||*

Enjoyment (*bhoga*)— another way to express “experience” or “vision” within the Sāṃkhya tradition—ceases when the theater show of the pretty dancer is over. The observer has been given what he paid for, just as the husband has been pleased with an offspring.

These metaphors do not seem to allow for a dancer that keeps enjoying her dance beyond theatrical performances, or for a wife that keeps enjoying with her husband in spite of not giving any more children. Is *puruṣa* not motivated anymore in “seeing her” because he cannot imagine *prakṛti* as an eternally beautiful dancer (SK 59)? Does *prakṛti* stop dancing because she has fulfilled her only role of pleasing “him”?

Sāṃkhyan vision keeps falling into metaphysics because its seer, the only enjoyer of the show, cannot recognize the dancing body of the cosmos as self-aware and self-enjoying. Perhaps if we read the distinction between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* without the metaphysics, while keeping the cosmic relevance of their inevitable union, Sāṃkhya would be able to offer a productive and reversible vision, where nature could keep dancing and enjoying herself even after having been observed by an external consciousness.

2.3 The Perfect Self-Aware Body in Classical Yoga Philosophy

It is now necessary to examine the notion of bodily self-awareness in Classical Yoga philosophy since it is here where a visible and reversible body can be born with “healthy” breathing. Although it follows Sāṃkhyan metaphysics, the *Yogasūtra* of Patāñjali (*YS*) does not rely on the enumeration of essential principles (*tattvas*) to understand the difference of consciousness with matter. It rather looks for ways to experience freedom and self-awareness given the productive interaction of both. Yoga tries to make visible the invisible subtle not by

reversing it or by using sophisticated devices that can perceive minute atoms and spaces, but by actually “becoming” it. Indeed, in Yoga the process of knowing something is a process of becoming that which is to be known. In the case of one’s own body, the process is described as a series of stages that bring attention to the body from its most evident functions to its less observable ones. It starts with the observation of our bodies and actions, both in the physical and moral sense, which translates into the practice of observing the truthfulness, kindness, integrity, continence, and generosity of our actions in relation to others (*yamas*, *YS II.30*), and the cleanliness, contentment, discipline, reflexivity, and surrender expressed by our bodily attitudes in relation to oneself (*niyamas*, *YS II.32*). This is followed by a practice of bodily stillness. Cultivating steadiness in the physical posture allows for the mental faculties to be focused despite distractions coming from opposite sensations (*YS II.46-48*). The yoga posture (*āsana*) within this context is understood as a position of the body that creates the conditions for a meditative state, characterized by the “single-pointedness” and self-absorption of awareness, where the “self” includes here the body in its innermost layers.

Keeping the physical body still and steady is an embodied way to become aware of other more subtle transformations that go unnoticed within the flesh— in its phenomenological sense— such as the constant movement of our breath. The aim is to achieve a moment of stillness and steadiness within the motions of inhalation and exhalation (*prāṇāyāma*) through which even subtler movements of one’s body become noticeable (*YS II.49-52*). Finer sensations may come to the forefront, but the tendency of the sense capacities to go after the sensation is also to be withdrawn (*pratyāhāra*) so that an even more refined awareness can arise (*YS II.54*). Having withdrawn the faculties of sensory perception from their corresponding external objects into a point of focus within one’s own body, the movements of the mind —*cittavṛtti*: perceptions,

thoughts (correct and incorrect), images, dreams, memories— become more evident. At this point, the process of self-awareness is supposed to follow the same structure.

Observing the movements of the mental content and detecting moments of cessation between them allow for those silent moments to become more evident than the moments which have a concrete object or idea as a point of focus. When there is a continuum of silent mental moments, a mental arrest (*nirodha*) is achieved. A distracted mind switches its point of focus continuously, but when the mind is placed in a point of focus (*dhāraṇā*, *YS III.1*); and this is maintained with a similar flow of ideas paying attention to the same object, then the mind enters into meditation (*dhyāna*, *YS III.2*). The continuous and steady practice of meditation gives place to *samādhi*, the yogic state of contemplation defined as the “shining forth of the object in the mind as if this one was empty of its own form (*YS III.3*).”

In *samādhi*, contrary to ordinary perception, any object towards which the mind focuses its attention (be it a physical object, a place in one’s body, a thought, an emotion, a sensation, or the mere sense of being oneself) is supposed to appear directly without the “grasping” motion of the cognitive faculties. In deeper levels of *samādhi* the object is considered to arise within the mental field without the mediation of any verbal or conceptual construction. At this level, even the sense of I-am-ness that accompanies every act of fixation and concentration is surrendered. With all the subjective and cognitive apparatus being arrested, one would suppose that all sense of awareness would completely black out. However, according to Patañjali, the state that remains is one of “arrestedness”, an experience characterized by surrendering the will to know or act on an object. With no more mutation or changing object to observe, even those arresting experiences vanish, leaving the self in a state of pure awareness where it realizes itself in its own

“form”, unmediated by the senses, thought, or words, distinguishing itself (*vivekhyāti*) from the intellect and the rest of the cognitive and sense capacities.

In a way, we see here reproduced the Sāṃkhyan idea that the perceptual system—and indeed, any body and material object—is nonconscious. Just as in Sāṃkhya, Yoga needs an ultimate instance to make “the visible” manifest to experience and this other instance is absolute consciousness, the real seer. In sutra *YS IV.19* Vyāsa argues that if the perceptual system were self-illuminating then it would not be perceivable by something else and makes the interesting analogy with space (*ākāśa*). We say that space is supported by itself because nothing else supports it. But in the case of the mind, its cognition becomes manifest through experiences such as “I am angry”, “I am afraid”, “It is pleasing to me”, etc. This means that there must be a seer that perceives both the mental content and the fact that it is being “I” who has it. In other words, the manifestation of our body-mind processes is supported by something other than themselves. In Yoga, as it has been explained, the only way to “see” the seer seeing itself is by silencing the perceptual system and stilling the body-mind movements. It could be said that in this process, the body becomes a space of pure silence where the totality of “outer directed” processes are put in hold. In this complete cessation of activity (*nirodha*) we would be able to experience— or better said to become— the ground that supports the whole system of perception. And in sutra *III.42* we can see that Vyāsa himself thinks that the body’s support is space (*ākāśa*). It is not insignificant that he had mentioned *ākāśa* as an example of self-support. If consciousness is self-illuminating because it is like space (*ākāśa*) in that there is nothing else that supports it for its own manifestation, then it is difficult to see why the body, which is experienced as pure self-sustaining space in the state of arrestedness (*nirodha*), would not be self-aware. Silencing the body-mind functions does not mean that the body vanishes. Rather, as

we saw with Sāṃkhya, the reflective function of *buddhi* along with the rest of cognitive functions merge into the background, becoming invisible, *as if* it were an empty field—empty space?— from which, like a cosmic womb, everything else is born. It seems then that, in the state of pure awareness, embodiment is experienced as pure space, in which case, the analogy between self-awareness and *akāśa* would also hold for the body, *pace* Vyāsa. Thus, if consciousness is self-conscious because it is self-supported, then the body, being self-supported, would also have to be self-aware.

Asamprajñāta Samādhi or a meditative state without object (YS I.18) is considered in the YS as the ultimate liberating state of self-awareness (*svapurūṣadarśana*). In the contemplative level of *samādhi* the mind is supposed to be so calm and “transparent”, purified from all its ideas, feelings, emotions, dreams, memories, pre-conceptions and further tendencies, that the only thing experienced is consciousness alone. This ultimate state in Yoga has many times been interpreted as exhibiting its dualist metaphysics because it is understood as a state of “aloneness” and “isolation” (*kaivalya*, YS IV.34) in which the “power of consciousness” (*citiśakti*) is established in its own form and the cosmic elements of creation merge back into their original state having fulfilled the seer’s purpose [that of seeing itself as distinct from the body of the world].”

The metaphysical interpretation has usually understood the “merging back” of the elements into their source as a movement without return, implying that once the body has given as a product not only experience of the world but discernment between this one and a free consciousness, the body would finalize its days just like a pot wheel, turning around due to the residue of the initial movement for the purpose of which it was first set up. Once the inertia has exhausted all its impetus, it will stop forever. The elemental and subtle bodies would dissolve, die, and never be born again. For philosopher Daya Krishna however, this reading of the YS, if

right, is not at all satisfactory. Why would the ultimate state of *samādhi* and its immediate consequence, liberation or *mokṣa*, have to be identified with a final moment of “no-return”?⁸⁹

I think Daya Krishna is right. Phenomenologically, even the most profound state of arrested achieved with the practice of Yoga could not be understood without the process of transformation that the psycho-sensory unit has to go through. And only within the lived-body could the experience of self-awareness be liberating, for it is within this embodiment that the self experiences the spontaneous exercise of its own will and, at the same time, the supreme power to withdraw it. For Daya Krishna, if the final stage in Yoga is freedom, then this one should include the capacity of consciousness to detach from the world as much as the capacity to get involved and enjoy it at will.

It seems to me that this double possibility of the power of consciousness (*citiśakti*) can be found in the *YS*. Unlike Sāṃkhya, where freedom and self-consciousness is achieved through a phenomenological paradoxical reflection that results in a vision that renounces to be born again, we see in Yoga a self-aware embodied freedom where true vision is accompanied by the beauty, charm, strength and adamantine robustness of a perfect body (*kāyasampat*, *YS* III.46).

The famous third book (*pāda*) of the *YS* enlists more than twenty perceptive powers (*vibhūti*) attained by the integrated cultivation of yogic concentration, meditation and contemplation. It is said that various forms of subtle knowledge such as reading other’s mind, understanding foreign languages, becoming invisible, levitating, etc. can be attained by applying these yogic techniques— which together are called *samyama*— on the corresponding object of meditation for each power. Moreover, the famous yogic powers are considered to be a natural consequence of becoming bodily self-aware and a sign of the yogic process of transformation of

⁸⁹ Daya Krishna, “The undeciphered text: anomalies, problems, and paradoxes in the *Yogasūtra*”, in Raveh’s, *Exploring the Yogasūtra*, p.98.

the mind towards liberation (YS I.35 and YS III.36). At the same time, in a commentary that immediately precedes the sūtra regarding the perfection of the body, Vyāsa explains that the powers attained by yogis with a perfected body include, paradoxically, the stronger power of not using them (YSVbh III.45). A yogi or yogini would not disturb the cosmic order of the universe even if it was within his or her power to do it. The further warning (YS III.51) to not indulge in celestial powers and the call to detach even from the subtle knowledge that consciousness and the world are distinct (YS III.50) can be read not as a call towards an ultimate point with no return, but as an awareness of the dual power of consciousness. In Raveh's words: "that nivr̥tti [total introversion of consciousness and stoppage of all vision] in Pātañjala-yoga is 'the self-consciousness of willing from within willing itself' and 'willing observed through the eye of willing'."⁹⁰ The perfect yogic body is thus, a self-aware body that respects otherness. Its freedom lies, thus in its being not bounded by the automatic necessities to will, to know and to act. In other words, it is a body that has cut the umbilical cord because it has become autonomous, self-conscious even of its own limits and free from getting caught in narcissistic projections on that which is seen. The yogic vision is an embodied self-awareness that can see what is distant, concealed, invisible, i.e. the subtle, by "placing light on that which is the source of its own emerging activity (*pravṛtti*, YS III.25)." Thus, for Yoga philosophy, it is only through the cultivation of bodily self-awareness that our being experiences the empowering transformation of itself and the real vision of the world.

The third book of the YS is the most difficult to understand in the light of modern science and contemporary beliefs about how our body and reality work, but the most important philosophical aspect of the section on powers (*siddhis*) lies in the assumption that by understanding and undergoing a transformation of one's own psycho-sensory system one can

⁹⁰ Raveh, *Exploring the Yogasūtra*, p.87.

understand and even “master” the transformations undergone by the elemental world, i.e., the environment (YS III.13). The term “mastery” (*aiśvarya* or *vaśikara*) should not be understood in the Western modern techno-scientific way of dominating nature, for here, “mastery of the elements” is taken in the ancient sense previously pointed out when discussing Merleau Ponty’s use of the word. Since the elements are not merely objects but experienced objects, the subjective experience of them is constitutive of their reality. This marks a significant difference with many models of normal perception, for in these ones, it is the observation of the environment and our reactions to it that tells us something about us; but in the *YS* it is the self-awareness about one’s body in all its layers that tells us about the world and guides us around it. In Yoga philosophy, a theory of the body is not only already a theory of perception, but a theory of the world, of the cosmos. This again, should not be understood in a metaphysical way, for the ontology of the body does not mean that the body is something given, at least not in the same sense in which “genes”, if at all, are. The ontology of the body refers to a process of self-cultivation through which the body “makes room” to experiences within its own existence.

The stages of the eightfold practice described in the *YS* to make the subtle the focus of awareness are not the steps to bring into light something that has a definite, objective and testable structure. Instead, they bring forth modes of bodily awareness by which the body becomes accessible to itself in the present, which is already the manifest form of the past and future of its own pre-arisen constitution. Recalling Augustine’s contemplative introspection in *De Trinitate*, the introspective task of knowing oneself is not the finding of an indubitable truth that founds the certainty of our existence, but rather the “remembering” of feelings, sensations, memories, and thoughts of the unborn, previous, past life. It is in the “pre-arisen” where the body creates itself even before it is born and it is in the proprioception of that bodily layer where

we can transform it. I am, of course, not just referring to an experiential return to the intrauterine moment, although I have taken Irigaray's use of this metaphor to convey the cosmic meaning of *sūkṣma* and *liṅga* in both Sāṃkhya and Yoga. What I have been calling the “unborn” is another way of referring to the affective experiences that are produced in the immediate interaction with the environment that surrounds us (as a womb) and that trigger in our system movements— internal motions— which might not become immediately visible (aware to us or others) in the sensorimotor dynamics of our eyes, hands, and feet. Instead, those minute, inner, subtle sensations, emotions, affections, impressions, and dispositions linger in the undergarment of our already born embodiment, conditioning our existence in its future perceptions and manifesting their quality (positive or negative) in our experiences even without us noticing.

In a way, for Yoga philosophy, the same deep breath that we had to take to start living outside of the womb, is the same depth of breath that we need to take in order to become aware of those inner dispositions and subtle layers of the perceptual system that manifest not only through our actions, habits, gestures and patterns, but through the very way in which we perceive the world. Unlike Sāṃkhya, where ultimate self-awareness of the body means that the body retracts from procreating any experiences, Yoga's bodily self-awareness allows for the body to be born anew, to create and recreate itself always in a conscious willful relation to the cosmos. A cosmic, non-metaphysical vision, and thus, a “healthier” theory of bodily self-awareness is possible for Yoga philosophy, because it can envision a cosmos that continues to dance in spite of being observed and a wise body able to take a deep breathe, to hold it for a moment, still and steady, to perceive itself in the pre-arisen affectivity of its relation to the world and willfully give birth to a reversible, non-narcissistic vision.

Chapter 3

Feeling the Breath, Living in the Breath-Body

The idea of the “subtle”, which I have reframed in the previous chapter as the “pre-arisen”, emphasizes the primordial role of the emotional and dispositional dimensions of the body in perceptive processes. The phenomenological language was useful to articulate the sense in which the “subtle”—the invisible, (among which emotions, dispositions, feelings, thoughts, and ideas are included)—is said to come first in the order of reality. So that one does not fall into the metaphysical trap of having to take this “comes first” as meaning causal priority, let me add a cautionary caveat here. I did not want to commit to the reading of the term “subtle” which implies that subtle modes of sensation such as hearing or grasping abilities, or the feelings of anxiety, surprise, or any other psychological state would “produce” or cause the corresponding material organs such as the ear or the hand, or a particular movement in the guts, or an electric impulse. The ablative case in “from the subtle psychological faculties come the comparatively more tangible sensible material elements” in the standard Sāmkhyā story of “evolution” need not be taken as a causal theory of emergence of matter, but could be interpreted phenomenologically.

Nevertheless, I do hold that those subtle elements or modes of sense content, *as experience*, arise before we have experience of our physical ears or hands, stomach, brain or heart. Indeed, for example, we all become aware of our grasping before we become aware of our hands that grasp. It is in this sense that the subtle gives place to the self-configuration of the body, determining its relationship with everything else, even if we are not aware of this

connection. This chapter is an attempt to more clearly render the relation between body, the pre-arisen, and self-awareness.

It was noted in the previous chapter that both Sāṃkhya and Yoga offer a path to become aware of such connection. Between these, it is within Yoga philosophy that a real notion of bodily self-awareness—and with that, a renewed vision of the world and “the other”—could be found if Yoga metaphysics is interpreted in a way that does not deny self-awareness to the body. Of course, the term “body”, has to be taken in a reasonably wide sense, in all its levels. However, it is still unclear what these levels are and the type of connection that there is between them –i.e. between the sensory and motor capacities, the emotional, the mental, the cognitive, and the dispositional layers. Although I have been insisting that the distinction between an awareness proper of the body (proprioception) and an awareness proper of the mind (introspection) can be questioned from a non-dualist and non-reductionist perspective of the body (or the mind), I still have not given an argument for it. Once such an argument is proposed, it should become clearer in what sense we can talk about “layers of the body”.

In this chapter I will offer such an argument by discussing somatic proprioception and interoceptive processes in relation to the experience of breathing. It is the breath and the various subtle practices of paying attention to it which best illustrate the previously developed notion of the “pre-arisen”, the double character of the body (as sensible and sentient) and the connection between motor movements, feelings, thoughts and self-awareness. Once the dichotomy between proprioception and introspection has been nuanced and smudged, I will use Luce Irigaray’s feminist phenomenology to develop the notions of “reversibility” and “depth” in the context of comparing the experience of breathing against the backgrounds of modern physiological discourses of the body and the “subtle body” map in Indian philosophy. I will then analyze the

way bodily self-awareness is understood within Advaita Vedānta, for it is in this school where a developed notion of breathing awareness appears as bodily self-awareness. Finally, I will offer a phenomenological and critical reading of this Indian philosophical school and conclude with a story from the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* in order to show the impossibility of reducing the notion of body to its material constitution and thus, the notion of proprioception to awareness of the spatiality of our limbs.

3.1 Bodily Sensations, Body Schema and Body Image

In his famous book *Bodily Sensations*, D.M. Armstrong said that one of the reasons we call a thing “one’s own body” is the fact that oneself feels sensations in that thing.⁹¹ He divided those sensations into sensible qualities—like colors, sounds, tastes, smells, or tactual feelings— and bodily sensations—like pains, itches, tickles, erotic sensations, body temperature, balance, position of limbs, heart beating, and “all other things that we discover about current state of the body without recourse to sight, hearing, smell, etc.”⁹² including bodily feelings such as feeling fresh, tired, sleepy, or sick. Armstrong also said that, except for heat and cold, all the properties of our body perceived by bodily sensations are purely spatial properties, and he attributed to that the general idea that we associate to bodies as being the paradigm of physical, material objects in general.

From the discussion on the bi-dimensionality of the body in chapter 2, it could be said that a theory of bodily self-awareness does not have to assume the body as a merely material

⁹¹ D.M Armstrong, *Bodily Sensations*, p.48.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 33.

object, but only as a distinctive something that is phenomenologically sentient, sensible, and aware of itself, without further metaphysical implications.

Contemporary discussions on bodily self-awareness usually emphasize the role of our body as a sensorimotor mechanism in the constitution of a primitive sense of “self-awareness” without which no creature would be able to distinguish itself from its environment.⁹³ As Gallagher has shown, experiments with newborn babies imitating faces suggest that there is an innate proprioceptive awareness allowing the baby to be aware of her own face without looking at it, at the same time that the baby distinguishes it from the face she is trying to match by visual input.⁹⁴ The proprioceptive information that the baby seems to obtain from her own face constitutes what Gallagher calls the “body schema”, which has been defined as “a system of motor capacities that function without the necessity of perceptual monitoring”.⁹⁵ It is a long-term, regularly updated, unconscious representation of the body’s extension and posture that enables movement, maintenance of posture, quick interaction with the environment, and effaces itself in normal activities geared into external goals.⁹⁶ As such, the body schema receives information from distinct modalities of bodily sensations which are worth describing here: proprioception, interoception, and vestibular.

Proprioception is the awareness that we have of our body as spatially extended. It includes the awareness of the position of our limbs, their movement, the state of muscles (whether tense or relaxed, contracted or extended), and the location of certain bodily sensations (pain, itch, tickles, temperature, friction, fatigue, pressure, etc.) in a particular part of the body.

⁹³ Jose Luis Bermudez, *The Paradox of Self-Consciousness*, p.164.

⁹⁴ Shaun Gallagher and Andrew N. Meltzoff, “The Earliest Sense of Self and Others: Merleau-Ponty and Recent Developmental Studies”, in *Philosophical Psychology*, p. 223.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.214.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.215.

Interoception tracks the functioning of many different internal organs through various types of interoceptors that detect specific physical properties of the body such as metabolic processes, hormonal and immune system activity, changes in temperature in skin and viscera, homeostasis, cellular chemical balance, changes in visceral muscle tension, or stretch and deformations of the vessel walls. These processes are mostly “silent” and respond only under very specific conditions, usually associated with disturbances or injury.

The vestibular sense is crucial for our sense of balance. It receives inputs from the inner ear that respond to displacement of the head, integrated with ocular motor processes, vision, and proprioception. It is through this sense that we can feel dizziness, vertigo, and sensations of floating, lightness, or flying.⁹⁷

According to Gallagher, it is mainly through proprioceptive sensations that the body schema is created, most of which remain unconscious. Proprioceptive information is not considered to be perceptual, but it is the basis for what Gallagher and others identify as bodily-awareness, that is, the capacity of consciously being aware of the bodily posture, limbs and movement. Conscious experience of our body position is taken as a perceptual, partial representation that helps constitute the body image, which is a system of perceptions, attitudes, concepts, and beliefs pertaining to one’s body.

The distinction between body schema and body image has been used to demarcate what is properly “proprioceptive” about our bodies and what is merely psychological. But even though the continuous mutual interaction and influence between both types of bodily awareness are acknowledged, it is only the sensorimotor aspect of the body image which is usually

⁹⁷ J. Brendan Ritchie and Peter Carruthers, “The Bodily Senses”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Perception*, pp. 353-368.

discussed when understanding that interaction. A famous example of this is the sensation of a phantom limb. Since the sensation of having the presence of a severed limb is given by perceptual awareness, it can be considered as part of the body image. But it is also part of the body schema because its sensation remains as unconscious activity, such as trying to lift something with the missing arm just to become aware again that it is not there. The conceptual, higher level representations of the body image have been considered as the “least interesting, both philosophically and scientifically” because, according to Jose Luis Bermudez,⁹⁸ they are not different from common sense beliefs about the physical and social world. In other words, the lack of importance given to emotions and psychological dispositions for a phenomenology of the body that takes the sensorimotor system as the most basic aspect of bodily self-awareness lies in the premise that only awareness of proprioceptive information and somatosensation is considered to be perceptual. Only awareness of the sensorimotor features of the body image could fit into those empirical constraints, while awareness of the affective and cognitive attitudes toward our own bodies could not. Thus, for Bermudez, it is only the consciousness of the motor somatic proprioception which would count as an introspective bodily sense-experience.⁹⁹ Emotions, dispositions, thoughts and beliefs about our own body would have to be considered as psychological properties since these are objects proper of introspection alone and as such would constitute another form of self-awareness, but not bodily self-awareness.

However, as shown in chapter 2, emotions, dispositions, and even thoughts and beliefs also constitute awareness of oneself as an embodied being, which will become clearer in this section. Most of the experiments and examples to support the theory of the body schema as the base for our sense of bodily self-awareness are based on motor activities in which the newborn

⁹⁸ Bermudez, “The Phenomenology of Bodily Awareness”, in *Phenomenology and Philosophy of the Mind*, p.304.

⁹⁹ Bermudez, *The Paradox of Self-Consciousness*, p. 137.

engages with the environment. But what would happen if we focused on the activities of the unborn and the very first minutes of its transitioning into the un-wombed life? There are good reasons to believe that the experience of being embodied might start before the baby is born. But those bodily sensations, instead of being primarily based on postural or motor activities, would be based on interoceptive information. Even within the very first minutes of life out of the womb, it is by means of interoceptive unconscious bodily sensations that the baby knows and communicates its immediate needs. For example, it is the change of temperature, the need for oxygen, and a change of pressure in the lungs that makes possible the first breath of the newborn. And it is within about 10 seconds after delivery that the baby will start crying if it is not immediately reunited with the mother. This simple adaptation would not be possible without an immediate bodily feeling that recognizes the lack of warmth and the need to secure its own survival— both physical, as well as emotional— through being fed and feeling embraced.

As new studies have shown,¹⁰⁰ humans perceive ‘feelings’ from the body that provide a sense of their physiological condition through interoceptive representation. And these feelings, as AD Craig states, “constitute emotions that reflect the survival needs of the body.”¹⁰¹ It is a common view to consider feelings of pain, touch or posture as related to an “exteroceptive” somatosensory system, whereas sensations such as hunger, thirst, or vasomotor activity, are taken as part of an “interoceptive” system. But this distinction does not seem to take into account the intimate interaction between autonomic control, interoceptive system, bodily feelings, sensorimotor skills and emotions. All of these processes, together with posture and movement, contribute to the sense of homeostasis, i.e. an optimal physiological balance in the body, which can be reflected through imaging in the direct activation of both the insula and the anterior

¹⁰⁰ A.D. Craig, “Interoception: The sense of the physiological condition of the body”, in *Current Opinion in Neurobiology*, p.500.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, p.502

cingulate cortex (ACC). This, according to Craig, corresponds with the simultaneous generation of both a sensation and a motivation, something that can be easily exemplified by the first breath and the first cry of any human's life.

Thus, just as the proprioceptive system constitutes the basis for the sensorimotor aspect of the body schema, it is the interoceptive unconscious sensations which provide the basis for its emotional aspect, with this one being even more basic for the constitution of bodily self-awareness. Interoceptive information is not considered perceptual. But it is precisely interoceptive awareness, i.e. the conscious experience of homeostatic feelings— engendered in the interoceptive and anterior insular cortex— what provides the image of the self as a feeling, sentient and emotional entity. Scientists like Craig or Damasio arrived to this conclusion based on the imaging studies on human emotions that show how the area of the brain called “right anterior insula”, an area associated with the homeostatic afferent path, is always activated when the individual pays attention to its own affective, motivational states.¹⁰²

From a phenomenological point of view, however, we do not need to localize a specific material base to explain the integration of our being as a feeling self, because the image of oneself as a material body among others— the living organism in the world, as Evan Thompson calls it¹⁰³— has the same phenomenological ground than the image of oneself as a sentient and thinking being—the lived subjective body. The materialist presupposition of a biological body as the basis for bodily-awareness is a methodological principle in all scientific study about the body. The study of sensations, emotions, motivations, thoughts, images, memories, etc. is undertaken as the investigation of the physiological and neuroanatomical mechanism underlying

¹⁰² *Ibidem.*

¹⁰³ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life*, p.237.

those experiences. However, as Wittgenstein¹⁰⁴ once warned us, from the fact that certain physiological mechanisms are going on when someone is having a certain experience, it cannot be inferred that those experiences are emergent representations of those facts. For even if it is true that there are scientific facts about our bodily sensations, it is not from those facts (which come to be known much later) that we understand statements such as “I have a pain in my chest”, “I am sad”, “I am happy”, “I cannot breathe”, “I am confused”, “I understand”, “I am alive”.

In other words, we do not need to presuppose a metaphysics (neither materialist, or dualist or idealist) underlying the mechanisms of bodily awareness, for all that is evident is the experience of being embodied, without further conceptualizations as to this body being material in the sense of something opposed to “mental”. This is why the distinction between body schema and body image is problematic; it creates an unnecessary gap between the sensorimotor skills and the motivational, affective and “introspective” awareness.

If, on the contrary, we depart from the phenomenological principle that the body is a common open ground which is living and lived at once, then the distinction between proprioception/interoception and introspection—biology and psychology— becomes more a matter of experiential perspective rather than a matter of a metaphysical causal explanation where one (the physical body as material mechanism) is the base or cause of the other (emotions or psychological states). For example, from a feminist phenomenological perspective, the first breath and the first cry is not just the effect of a series of biomechanical changes in the material body providing proprioceptive and interoceptive information to update it into motor action for the sake of its own biological survival. The first breathing is also the very first sign of the body being aware—even if pre-reflectively—of itself as a lived body. It is the first autonomous

¹⁰⁴ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* and “Notes for Lectures on ‘Private Experience’ and ‘Sense Data’ in *The Philosophical Review*.”

gesture of a human being, as Luce Irigaray reminds us¹⁰⁵, and as such, of a body that immediately knows how to procure its own needs (physical and emotional) to feel safe and cared for. This primitive simultaneity of biology-cognition-emotion-act is not to be understood as a mere “anatomical overlap” between neurobiological systems that interact in a reciprocal way between each other giving rise to “emergent global states”, as Evan Thompson very clearly explains.¹⁰⁶ Even a neurophenomenological approach such as his presupposes the relation between the subjective and the objective body as a relation between the nervous system and the rest of the biological organism. The double character of the body as sensible and sentient, as living and lived, cannot rely on such a distinction, for this already presupposes the material living body as causal explanation for the subjective experience. Thompson says that “life is not physical in the standard materialist sense of purely external structure and function. Life realizes a kind of interiority, the interiority of selfhood and sense-making.”¹⁰⁷ I agree with this statement except that from the point of view of a feminist and comparative phenomenology of bodily self-awareness such as the one proposed in this dissertation, the interiority of selfhood cannot just refer to the self-monitoring processes of the brain over itself and the general state of the organism-in-the-environment. The double character of the body, the double character of life is irreducible and has many experiential layers.

3.2 The Introspective Proprioception of Breathing

We are born when we take the first breath. After the first breath, life is infused to us through the inspiration and expiration of air. Inhalation and exhalation are the most direct link we have to communicate with that force that sustains us, for it is through our ability to breathe freely that we

¹⁰⁵ Luce Irigaray, “The Age of Breath”, in *Breathing with Luce Irigaray*, p.165.

¹⁰⁶ Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life*, p.371.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.238.

directly feel we are alive. We know, for example, that we would die if we were choked, strangled, or gagged.

The immediate connection between breath, air, and life has been recognized across cultures. The terms *ruah*, *pneuma*, *prāṇa*, or *ch'i* were associated with the vital functions of the body as well as with a life infusing universal force that was thought to be present in the power of the wind or the cosmic element of air. Both Hippocratic and Ayurvedic medicine understood diseases as imbalances of the winds within the body. Since the presence of wind was the principle empirical indicator of the existence of life in human beings, it is easy to understand how the wind-life link could be established.

Within philosophy, the convergence between the materiality of an element and the principle of life gave to these terms (*ruah*, *pneuma*, *prāṇa*, or *ch'i*) a mediating function for trying to understand the relation between the living and the non-living beings. The term *pneuma*, for example, which was used to translate the word *ruah*, is present in several attempts within Greek philosophy to bridge the gap between mind and body as they understood it. *Ruah* itself, as Maimonides explains,¹⁰⁸ is a term that encompasses within its meaning the notions of air, wind, breath, divine inspiration and will or intention. In order to explain how non-living matter could give rise to psychic functions, Aristotle thought that the semen carried within it the vital heat (*pneuma*) in which the soul or *psyche* is present. The Stoics, on the contrary, held that *pneuma* pervaded the whole cosmos and was that which keeps the unity of beings, both animate and inanimate, together in a dynamical internal tension.¹⁰⁹ In his commentary to the *Timeous* III 236.31, Proclo introduces the “pneumatic soul” as a mediation between the vegetative and rational souls, and describes it as the part of the soul where the functions of sense perception and

¹⁰⁸ Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, XL “On Ruah”.

¹⁰⁹ Geoffrey Lloyd, “Pneuma between body and soul”, in *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 140-142.

imagination have their place. Within Classical Sāṃkhya (SK 29) *prāṇa* is defined as the common function to all the cognitive and conative faculties of our bodies. And in the *Upaniṣads* it is seen as the very principle of life that pervades all the organism.

As it can be seen, our breath has a primary epistemological status by means of which we can come to know ourselves as a physiological and affective organism at once. Breathing has that double character of embodiment that manifests itself as a material, objective, external movement—what Luce Irigaray would call the natural breath— and as subjective, internal, sentient, more subtle breath— the one that can be cultivated and “spiritualized”.¹¹⁰

The natural breath is the one that remains largely unconscious throughout our lives. It is the breath perceptible through the bodily movements of the abdominal and thoracic area. It is the expelled air that can be felt by ourselves and others through tactual sensation, and through the interoceptive mechanism that detects the CO₂ rising in the blood, signaling the brain, sending an impulse to the phrenic nerve to contract the diaphragm and cause a thoracic and abdominal shape change to induce the adequate pressure for the intake of more air.

There is also the breath by which we become aware not only of the fact that we are alive, but of the very quality of our lives. We feel relief through a full, complete exhalation; anxiety or fear through an agitated, spasmodic breathing rhythm; hope, through a deep inhalation accompanied by a soft sigh; or frustration through the stoppage and forceful containment of the breath. Studies in embodied cognition have recognized the ways in which emotions are “embodied” and the various neural loop feedbacks involved in the realization of affective bodily states, many of which happen also below the threshold of our awareness. Our interaction with the environment requires such an automatism, because in the presence of an urgent situation— say an encounter with a bear— whether the emotion of fear is first and the bodily states that

¹¹⁰ Irigaray, “To Begin with Breathing Anew”, in *Breathing with Luce Irigaray*, p.218.

allow our body to run away are second or vice versa, does not really matter. Most probably, and according to a theory of the double character of the body, both experiences are being sensed at the same time; a proprioceptive, interoceptive and affective body schema are here at play. The most relevant thing about this mechanism, however, is that both aspects of the experience are mediated by the breath. It is through the quality of the breath where we can become aware of our own emotional states. Moreover, it is through the breath that both the bodily state and the emotion can be changed. Once one is safe from the bear, one can take deeper breaths and feel calmer.

Unfortunately, in many ways we not only remain largely unaware of the quality of our lives but of the intimate connection between this and the quality of our breath. For many people, the activity of breathing remains restricted to the level of the natural autonomic mechanism, the main purpose of which is maintenance and survival. Except for the Hesychast spiritual practices that included the “art of breathing” introduced in the Vth Century by Diadochus of Photice, a practice of “cultivating” our breath as a way to forge self-awareness has been almost non-existent in the West.¹¹¹ And for the most part, when the mechanisms of the body are understood under the framework of survival, bodily activities like breathing only tend to come to our awareness in moments when our biological life is threatened. Awareness of the breath is reduced to moments when there is lack of breath, or to feelings of discomfort in the chest, unnatural effort to breathe or air hunger (the feeling of not having enough oxygen). In other words, we live in a culture that does not recognize the value of its breath until it is threatened and perhaps, until it is too late.

¹¹¹ There has been knowledge of controlling the breath for practical purposes: singing, playing an instrument, swimming, free diving, speaking, but not as a practice of self-knowledge in and of itself. See Elemire Zolla, “The Art of Breathing in the West”, in *Studies in Comparative Religion*.

For Luce Irigaray, the forgetting of our own breath is equivalent to not taking charge of one's life and manifests in a lack of interiority and self-awareness. A person that is not aware of her own breath for example, cannot recognize the self-regulating power of her own body. And one of its multiple manifestations can be found in moments when we get overcome by anger or stress. It may also manifest in the need to talk a lot and not listen, or in us becoming dependent on others by "stealing their breath" to the point of being asphyxiating. Becoming aware of one's own breath as a felt breath represents being truly born, for awareness of one's breath happens by oneself and mostly as an act in solitude (just as the first breath). Breathing by oneself means "cutting the umbilical cord"¹¹², i.e. the emotional dependence upon others. Self-aware breathing is respecting and cultivating life for oneself, and only when that happens can we start taking care of others and sharing our breath, like the mother does to her own child. A conscious breath is a "spiritualized" autonomous breath, the obverse of which is the autonomic unconscious mechanism regulated by a chemical and neural system.

Thus, proprioceptive and interoceptive awareness of the breath is not just a process of paying attention to events occurring in the lungs, chest, and diaphragm, but also to affective, emotive rhythms. It is hard to see how one would ever perceive the sensorimotor sensations and series of airflow that are felt passing through the respiratory system as "one's own breath" if those sensations were not, at the same time experienced in their affective intimacy. In other words, following Armstrong's idea that the body is called one's own because one feels sensations in it, a breath is one's own breath because one feels emotions as much as sensations in and through it. And thus, becoming aware of one's breathing sensations is also, and at the same time, an introspective act.

¹¹² Emily A. Holmes, "The Gift of Breath: Towards a Maternal Pneumatology", *Breathing with Luce Irigaray*, p.37.

A common definition of somatic proprioception is the type of perception that offers an awareness of the body as a “spatially extended and bounded physical object that is distinctive in being responsive to the will.”¹¹³ Among the contents of somatic proprioception, Bermudez includes all bodily surfaces and extremities, and any bodily state felt at a particular location. But within the list of bodily states that feature in proprioception, Bermudez does not mention emotions or any affective feelings. Yet, if we followed his definition of somatic proprioception, emotive feelings would have to be included, since they are clearly (and phenomenologically) felt in particular locations of the body and can become responsive to the will through our breath. We can feel a heavy weight of sadness that obstructs the breathing at the chest; a load of worry in the shoulders and upper back that keeps the breathing shallow; a happy excitement in and around the belly with full inhalations and powerful exhalations; fear all around the body at the level of the skin and jerky breathing; etc. We could say, with Elemire Zolla, that “a feeling is a rhythm imparted to the lungs.”¹¹⁴

The rhythmic spatiality of our breath is intimately connected with the sensory-motor and homeostatic systems in a way that affects the body’s relation with the environment, sometimes even before the motor systems of position, limbs and extremities get involved in the action, especially when the body turns to pay attention to its breathing state. One can, for example, contain one’s breath to prevent oneself from saying something harmful, or restrain it forcefully to stop a burst of anger being expelled through the fists, or taking a deep breath to feel courageous and calm before performing in public. When attention to the breath is cultivated, the intimate, intentional breath of the lived body emerges as that which can be transformed and voluntarily controlled. In noticing one’s breathing, one can become aware of the possibility of

¹¹³ Jose Luis Bermudez, *The Paradox of Self-Consciousness*, p.149-150.

¹¹⁴ Elemire Zolla, “The Art of Breathing in the West”.

holding the breath in or out if one decided. One could also change the pace of the breathing by lengthening the inhalation or exhalation. Or one could simply observe its natural course.

Somatic proprioception of the breath is introspective proprioception because it has as its content the lived breath, which is the breathing that observes itself as an “I can” primarily through an interior rhythm that can be imparted to motor movements by higher level mechanisms of awareness. This sense of intimacy could not come from awareness of the sensori-motor or interoceptive systems alone, since these mechanical and physiological movements impose limits and conditions that are not reached by our will and consciousness. Someone like a competitive free diver, for example, who can train herself to hold the breath for more than 10 minutes, would eventually reach a point in which she would lose consciousness and die if it was taken beyond her bodily capacities. Yet, the will can go beyond the known limits of the physical and at the same time perceive itself in its corporeal determination even if that meant risking the biological life.

A physical explanation is of course expected and available for the understanding of the mechanism of suspending the breath, as for any other bodily action. But a conflict usually arises, as O’Shaughnessy admits,¹¹⁵ when trying to understand a bodily mechanism in the light of its experience as a willed action. O’Shaughnessy’s analysis of this problem offers very useful epistemological considerations that I will here apply to the case of holding the breath. To begin with, the action of holding the breath could be understood as comprising two events that happen in synchronicity: the first one affirmed as “I willed to hold my breath” and explained in terms of purpose and intention; and the second one by “My breath is suspended”, entirely explicable in causal physiological terms. But this analysis would not be able to offer a non-metaphysical reconciliation between the willing and the bodily movement. Instead, on O’Shaughnessy’s

¹¹⁵ Brian O’Shaughnessy, *The Will. A Dual Aspect Theory*, p.145.

view—compatible with a theory of the double character of the body endorsed in this dissertation—the same event is to be analyzed into a contextual distinction: conventional and scientific. Conventionally, we would not say that ‘certain nervous signals coming from the cortex into the brainstem and diaphragm muscle made my breath stop’, for even if that were true, people could falsely deduce, given speech conventions, that “she did not stop her breath’. Scientifically, holding the breath in is nothing but the mechanism by which certain chemical and nervous signals make the body resistant to the urge of getting oxygen. The physiological description leaves the question about agency pragmatically open. However, phenomenologically, it is certain that the physiological mechanism is, at the same time, lived as my willing to hold my breath. As O’Shaughnessy says, the diversity of speech (informal and scientific) only reflects a fundamental unity, rather than an opposition between subjectivity and objective matter.

The phenomenological approach of taking our bodily functions (such as breathing) as having a double character is fully compatible with O’Shaughnessy’s concept of “act-mechanism” for it does not oppose the efficacy of an agent and the physical means that this one employs.¹¹⁶ In other words, while it is true that holding the breath is possible because of the chemical receptivity adaptation and the nervous signals sent into the brainstem and diaphragm muscle, this does not make those signals the source of the holding *in opposition* to one’s own will. Even though the signals and motor mechanism allow the holding of the breath, they do not explain why someone holds their breath. “The concept of act-mechanism is such that act-mechanism and act-agent cannot be independent and mutually competing causal forces...Rather is it that the agent effects *through* the mechanism’s effecting. That is, a mechanism’s effecting something is

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.147.

an agent's effecting something, provided the mechanism's functioning stands in certain requisite relations to certain mental phenomena".¹¹⁷

In our account, the relation of the mechanism to "certain mental phenomena" is the relation that the body— understood thus far as an open ground of experience without assuming any materialistic or reductionist conception of the body— establishes with itself when it becomes aware of its own processes. In this case, a conscious breath is not anymore the normal breath but a breath that in self-observation gets itself transformed, becoming a unique point of convergence between perception, will, and autonomic-*autonomous* action. Within the Yoga philosophical tradition, this conscious breath is called: *prāṇāyāma*.

3.3 Respiratory Chiasm and Flows of Wind

Prāṇāyāma is a word composed by "prāṇa" and "āyāma" which literally means the "restraining and lengthening of prāṇa (life force)". In the *Yogasūtra* (YS II.49) of Patañjali, *prāṇāyāma* is defined as the cutting off of the flow or motion of inhalation and exhalation. Although it might sound contradictory to think about restraining the breath and lengthening it at the same time, what the terms are referring to is the mechanism of holding the external air in after inhalation or holding the air out after exhalation (YS II.50). The practice of holding the breath, which is known as *kumbhaka*, leads gradually to the lengthening of the interval between inhalation and exhalation, a chiasmic, spontaneous moment considered of extreme importance in the process of self-knowledge for classical yoga as well as for all *haṭhayoga* traditions which developed later.

The action of suspending the breath may initially provoke sensations of anxiety or air hunger, even fear and anguish, but constant practice (under normal circumstances) makes the

¹¹⁷ O'Shaughnessy, *The Will*, p.147.

emotions and thoughts begin to find their own suspension as well. The yogic suspension of the breath, whether internal or external, distinguishes itself from an athletic holding of a deep breath in that the purpose and awareness of the suspension is fully directed towards the bodily experience as such, without any further outward intention such as breaking records or winning a competition. *Kumbhaka* represents a moment of aware stillness that could not be fully understood in merely proprioceptive or interoceptive terms for various reasons.

First, because full and complete attention to the “respiratory chiasm”, i.e. the moment when the in-breath is becoming out-breath, but the out-breath is not there yet, is phenomenologically felt as a space of complete stillness. But complete physiological stillness would lead to organic death, so literally such stillness could not be experienced, for there is always something active in the body even during deep states of meditation. This state could also not be taken as a mere object of introspective awareness because part of the phenomenal experience is intimately related to the sensations of the expanded chest, lungs and thoracic area. At the same time, while the suspension of the breath is usually practiced when the bodily limbs are still and quiet, the “chiasmic” stillness is not necessarily referring to an experience that happens when the body is completely immobile, as in a sitting meditative pose, for awareness of that moment could also happen while moving. A sensation of being fully present, immersed in an infinite space as if pleasantly floating, could perhaps be explained by the interoception of the inherent subtle changes in the blood chemistry caused by hypoxia (reduction of oxygen on the organs), but the visceral changes by themselves do not explain the intimate feeling of being capable of inhabiting the paradoxical, reversible situation of infinite void and fullness of space, of waiting, and patiently remaining in a space that is in-between action, determined by one’s bodily capability and yet fully willed.

Traditional *haṭhayoga* texts emphasize doing the retention according to one's capacity (*yathāśaktiḥ*), gradually (*śanaiḥ śanaiḥ*), without forceful action or harm to the body.¹¹⁸ There is a clear paradoxical sensation of exerting effort while being "effortless". There should be no struggle in sustaining the breath, and thus no conscious motor effort. At the same time, there is a present awareness, felt as an emotional quiet enjoyment, a peculiar type of subtle movement that witnesses the precise moment when the holding needs to be released. Instructions on how to perform *prāṇāyama* insist in that it should be done just right (*yuktam yuktam*),¹¹⁹ for it was believed that an imbalance in the bodily winds would cause diseases in the vital organs, whereas the correct restraint of the movements of *prāṇa*, would prolong one's life. It appears thus, that only an introspective proprioception is able to consciously perceive what is "just right" in our bodies.

The logic behind the traditional practice considers that by suspending the breath in, the life force could be stabilized in the body, allowing it to live longer. When the inner air is stable, the mind is stable as well, and with that, "mastery" (*jaya*)¹²⁰ over the vital functions and cognitive organs would be achieved. From our phenomenological point of view, "mastery" over the body does not necessarily means that we could deliberately (and magically) exert desired changes over organs that otherwise would remain under involuntary control (even though there are plenty of examples where the limits of the will over our own physiology are not clearly delineated, like those imposed by extreme athletes or cases about yogis going under earth for hours). Instead, I interpret the term "mastery" as the result of cultivating introspective proprioception, whereby the habit of bringing awareness to one's bodily functions and movements builds up interiority and maturity of attention which would inevitably and constantly bring about to one's consciousness

¹¹⁸ See description of technique in *Dattātreyayogaśāstra* 3.1.3 and Svātmārāma's *Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā* (HYP), II.9.

¹¹⁹ HYP, II.18.

¹²⁰ See *Yoga Sūtra* III.39-40

bodily sensations and behaviors that otherwise would have remained covered, ignored and thus, not taken care of. For example, if someone is used to a fast paced life, constantly worried and with stress, the increasing of blood pressure, tightening in the shoulders, and common bursts of anger can happen completely beneath one's awareness, including the development of the first stages of a disease. The practice of *kumbhaka* as a proprioceptive moment of one's own respiratory movements is, at the same time, an introspective moment of one's own affective states, provided the attention be directed towards that bi-dimensionality. Attentive holding of the breath represents the possibility of becoming open for spaces in our breath, in our minds, in our behaviors, in our life, allowing with it the creation of new directionalities. The space in-between breaths is, thus, an embodied-psychic place where the "pre-arisen"— what I have been calling the affective dispositionality of the lived or subtle body— can "reincarnate" or be dissolved.

It is difficult for the Western mind to understand subtle body terminology such as *prāṇa* because physiologically it makes no sense to say that there is something that regulates the vital functions of the body beyond the physical mechanism in relation to the environment. Prolonged holding of the breath can be simply understood as the mere adaptive processes of the trained body to use the oxygen more efficiently.¹²¹ But this is where the modern discourse on the body as a scientific object of study meets its limits. Terms like *ruah*, *pneuma*, *ch'i*, or *prāṇa* refer to the body already in its double character; as the intertwining of matter and consciousness, as the very ground for the chiasm where interiority-exteriority, inspiration-expiration, vital force-vital functions, autonomy-autonomic, cognitive-conative, meet.

To restrain the *prāṇa* through *kumbhaka* is not the same as immobilizing airflow into the lungs, even if it is by means of this mechanism that manipulation of *prāṇa* can happen. To use

¹²¹ A. Ostrowski et.al. "The Role of Training in the Development of Adaptive Mechanisms in Freedivers", in *Journal of Human Kinetics*.

O’Shaughnessy’s terminology, *kumbhaka* is an “act-mechanism” word because, even though it is ruled by the laws of the physical body, as a physical action it is already “ontologically two-faced”.¹²² The action of holding the breath in is one of many possible ways of becoming aware of one’s own breathing, but the very act of making the function of breathing an object of awareness, makes the breath not any more mere breath, but *prāṇa*.

Traditionally, the description of *prāṇa* in Indian orthodox philosophy¹²³ involves several bodily functions that are classified into five main modalities: *Apāna*, which involves the functions of expelling urine, faeces and other secretions of the body; *samāna*, which involves the distribution of food and drink; *prāṇa*, which encompasses the functions of the ears, eyes, mouth, nose, and other bodily functions around the chest area such as lungs and heart; *udāna*, which is referred to as the “ascending” nerve and has to do with functions performed by the head, and *vyāna*, involving the regulating functions of the body as a whole. It could be said, in a sense, that *prāṇa* is the umbrella term that refers to all the physiological vital functions of the body, including belching, eye-lid movements, pupil dilation, sneezing, coughing, yawning, etc. But *prāṇa* also includes within its meaning a schematic proprioception of those functions: *apāna* is the vital force that is felt in sensations that go from the navel down to the feet; *samāna* is conceived as felt mainly around the navel, although other texts locate it especially in the middle of the heart¹²⁴; *prāṇa* concentrates the sensations in the face, chest and thoracic area; while the sensations of *udāna* start from the neck up to the top of the head; *vyāna* is the overall homeostatic feeling of the living body.

Prāṇa could thus be understood as a “somatosensory” term referring to the experience of being aware of bodily sensations that are objects of introspective proprioception. This is to say

¹²² O’Shaughnessy, *The Will*, p.157.

¹²³ See *Praśna Upaniṣad* or *Yoga Sūtra Vyāsa Bhāṣya* III.39.

¹²⁴ Abhinavagupta’s *Tantraloka*, book V, *Yuktidīpika* Karika 29.

that conscious attention to the body and its functions can reveal as bodily sensations not only bodily movements and physiological states but affective, emotional, and mental aspects co-present with them. It is in this sense that I think a technique dealing with “subtle” mechanisms of the body such as *prāṇāyāma* should be understood. While the practice of bodily self-awareness brings the attention to sensations coming from physiological functions of the organs and their inner rhythm (ruled by the autonomous system, lower and middle areas of the brain), the main purpose of breath control is to bring to our attention the psycho-spatial directionalities, traditionally called “flows of winds” (*vāyuvṛtti*), that move around, from and towards the body, especially as they become more responsive to the will.

It could be objected that, since this type of proprioception requires training and effort, it should be considered as “atypical” because our bodies, which are naturally “other oriented”, would not pay attention to the breath unless it is required to amend something, as many of the dysfunctionalities of our respiration show. This objection, however, ignores the fact that our bodies are constantly regulating themselves, both physiologically and emotionally as shown with our analysis of the first breath. And that it is precisely this continuous “self-regulation” which shows that the body naturally has an inner telos as much as it has an outer. It is for this reason that I contend that what philosophers call normal proprioception is at the same time introspective, for even while this “introspection” occurs pre-reflectively, there is a natural bodily self-reflexivity that refers not only to spatial position of limbs and the sensorimotor system, but also, *and as it does that*, to the affective, emotive dispositions of the body under the present circumstance. Just as attention to the body in its outer oriented mode can be improved, in that same way can the attention to the body in its inner orientation be refined. The only reason why

“introspective proprioception” is considered as “atypical” in my opinion is because the inner telos of our own bodies has been constantly ignored and despised in our culture.

3.4 Reversibility and the Depth of a Breath

3.4.1 Reversible Breath

Breathing is the best place to begin to dissolve the hard distinction between outer/physical and inner/mental. It is not fortuitous that the practice of *prāṇāyāma* along with other bodily positions and engagement of muscular tension became the main characteristic feature of early *haṭhayoga* traditions, schools of yoga that developed in medieval India (12th-15thCE) devoted to the embodied practice of dissolving the experience of duality.

When we breathe under normal circumstances, that is, through the nose, we make use of the same organ that is involved in the act of smelling. We need to inhale in order to smell something, yet inhaling and smelling are mechanisms that belong to different bodily functions and sensitive pathways. Sometimes, however, it is almost impossible to distinguish the smell from the intake of breath, as when there are intense odors, either pleasant or unpleasant, one of which might trigger us to inhale deeper while the other might make us hold the breath or even leave the place as fast as possible. Perception as an all embodied experience is now well understood within embodied cognitive studies, and especially within the theory of affordances. Bodily activities that are necessary for our minute to minute maintenance do not require our attention for them to act; that would take a lot of energy and would not allow for the organism to cope efficiently with other exigencies of the environment that it navigates. At the same time, information coming from the environment is inextricably combined with information about one’s

own possibilities for action and reaction given the properties that objects and surfaces have in relation to us. Without this self-specification, information about the environment would be of little use. And it is this duality of exteroceptive and proprioceptive information in perceptual experience that is recognized to be at the base of bodily self-awareness.¹²⁵

This bi-directionality has been widely developed by philosophers who have given thought to the experience of touch, particularly during exploratory haptic perception. Touching an unseen object gives awareness of its spatial and textural properties through awareness of the changing properties in one's hands and fingers. Touching an object involves the possibility of two types of awareness, or better said, of two attentive directionalities. On the one hand, we can focus the attention on the object and its properties; another attentional shift will reveal the properties and sensations proper of the hand. While one is the focus of awareness, the other becomes peripheral remaining only as a possibility of awareness.

Merleau Ponty identifies three dimensions of awareness related to touch: 1) Touching the object's properties such as roughness, sleekness, etc. 2) Touching of things as a passive sentiment of the body and the spatiality of the object. 3) Touching of the touch, as when the left hand touches the right hand touching things.¹²⁶ It is in this third dimension that reversibility is experienced, when the body reveals itself as phenomenal and objective at once.

In the Upaniṣadic and Sāṃkhyan traditions, an intimate connection between touch and breathing is recognized through the element of air. The self-reflexivity of touch, which distinguishes it from other senses, finds its exact counterpart in the reversibility of breath. Awareness of the breath is heightened in *kumbhaka* when the touch of the air passing through the nostrils is not felt anymore. And awareness of one's breath— through the improvement of

¹²⁵ Bermudez, *The Paradox of Self-Consciousness*, p.113 and Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, p.111.

¹²⁶ Merleau Ponty, "The Intertwining—The Chiasm" in *The Visible and the Invisible*, p.132.

prāṇāyama— deepens the tactile sensations involved in the inner and outer life-sustaining breathing movements. What was lived automatically and unconsciously is made conscious and controlled through the sensitivity of an inner touch. As the subtlety of this sense becomes more available to awareness, what was initially felt as “control” eases into a mere witnessing of spontaneous and normal self-aware, self-regulating breathing. Neither too light nor too deep, neither rushed nor slowed, “just right” for the appropriate moment. It is in the midst of reversibility that one enjoys one’s body both as the agent and patient of touching. And it is in the awareness of that self-reflexive touch that one controls one’s breathing through the attentive mind, as the mind is itself controlled through that attentive breathing: an effortless witnessing of one’s tactile-respiratory freedom, so to say.¹²⁷

Breathing remains in the periphery of our attention as long as it remains in its natural function. But it can become the focus of awareness under various circumstances: a sigh, a cough, hiccups, asthma, blowing a balloon, etc. However, the reversibility of breath seems to be found when the attention is to be brought to it voluntarily, because it is in the action of modifying what is automatic in us where the body reveals itself once again in its full bi-dimensionality and in-between-ness. In the experience of holding the breath, the respiratory chiasm becomes evident at the moment-space when the inhaled oxygenized air is at the same time the exhaled carbonized air; when the vital function of breathing becomes also an introspective/proprioceptive inner flow responsive to will. This dissolution of dualities becomes clearer in the practice, where a deeper, smoother (*sūkṣma*) breath is actually easier achieved if one aids it, as Vācaspati Mīśra suggests, with a “concentration of extreme subtle delicacy”¹²⁸ which can take the form of a visualization of flows and winds running through the body in different directions depending on the desired result.

¹²⁷ I thank my advisor Dr. Arindam Chakrabarti for making me notice the important connection between breathing, touch and air in Indian philosophy, and for suggesting ways to express it.

¹²⁸ Vācaspati Mīśra, *Tattva Vāiśārādī*, II.50.

One of the main traditional indications for the performance of *kumbhaka* involves the engagement of the muscles from the pelvic floor, because it is thought that by contracting the anus, rectum and navel in and up the “reversal” of the downward going wind (*āpana*) can be attained and the sensation of retention and stoppage intensified. The *haṭhayogic* texts¹²⁹ describe this technique as the merging of the *āpana* and the *prāṇa* wind-flows in the center of the thoracic area, causing the activation of the “digestive fire” and complete stoppage of the fluctuation of the “winds” in the body. This is supposed to create an inner vacuum which would eventually liberate a concentrated flow of *prāṇa* located at the base of the spine (famously known as the *kuṇḍalinī*), to ascend vertically through the middle of a channel called “*suṣumna nāḍī*” until it reaches a center of awareness in the head and finally provides the ecstatic experience of ultimate union.

This esoteric language comes from a complex representation of the subtle body that was developed in the Tantric traditions (which will be described in more detail in Chapter 5) and should be— in my opinion— subject to philosophical scrutiny if used as example of somatosensory experiences. We could very well say that, when perceiving bodily sensations, one is also subject to illusions, just as any other perceptual experience. So from the fact that someone says they feel a “flow” or “warming tingling” running up through their spine, or a “reversal” of a downward movement coming from around the navel, does not mean that there is actually some bodily mechanism that corresponds to those sensations. They could be imaginary feelings derived from constantly engaging the body in unnatural practices.

However, even though this could very well be the case, the fact that a whole tradition has shared throughout centuries a similar proprioceptive map of the body, where the somatic, affective, and mental dimensions are depicted at once, would require a more appropriate

¹²⁹ *Gorakṣa Śataka, Haṭhayogapradīpika, Siva Samhitā, Gherandha Samhitā..*

approach that analyzed first the way in which symbolic representations of the body interact with a particular experience of the body, and then establish the conditions under which the sensations described following such scheme would count as bodily illusions. Reversing the approach, that is, taking accounts of subtle body physiology, as mere products of imagination, would impose a conception of the body that in principle mismatches with the experiences described under the subtle body map, thus not allowing for a true comparative understanding of bodily sensations.

This methodological warning was necessary because evidently, even if the practice of holding and controlling the breath has been present in the West, no amount of breath-holding has been associated with an intense flow-like sensation that moves up through the center of the body up to the head. And this is because, as Gavin Flood has shown “there is a symbiotic relationship between lived body and symbolic representation which we can see particularly in relation to the breath”.¹³⁰ Understanding the notion of phenomenological reversibility would clarify, I think, the relation between modern discourses on the body and subtle body terminology because it would allow us to see that terms like *prāṇa*, *kuṇḍalinī*, *manas*, *ahamkara*, *buddhi*, etc. refer to bodily experiences which are not meant to be identified with the physical body even though they might be indiscernible with it. Indeed, all of these experiences can be localized within bodily areas and considered as representing functions and processes of the body. The representation of the “subtle” corresponds to the experience of the body as a lived body, and it relates with the living-biological body insofar as both representations emerge out of a common ground, i.e. the open ground of spatial experience. It is certainly true that holding the breath can induce theta waves in the brain, increase vagal tone, decrease sympathetic discharges, and build heat up around the system due to increased blood flow to vital organs.¹³¹ But it is also true, and perhaps

¹³⁰ Gavin Flood, “Body, Breath and Representation in Śaiva Tantrism” in *Images of the Body in India*, p.70.

¹³¹ Jerath, R. et. al. “Physiology of long pranayamic breathing”, in *Med Hypothesis*, p.567.

even more significant for the lived experience of our bodies, that *kumbhaka* can be felt as a space of autonomy, inner cultivation, and as an imminent possibility of breathing freely anew. I do not think a linear causal relationship could be established between one and the other. Rather, given the tenet of reversibility (that the body is both sensible and sentient at once and never merely sensible or merely sentient), it would seem more likely that the relationship between the subtle and the physical gross body is akin to the spatial dimensions on an ecological field: there are co-present implications that cover and uncover one another according to one's movement and shifts of attention.

3.4.2 The Depth of Perceptual Systems

We smell odors against the background of a situation that is near enough for us to notice it, but not so much that is impossible to bear. A simple movement away from that would reveal other set of experiences. Such movement depends on the system of possible actions that one is able to do and attend to, and the extent of that ability is, in many important ways, determined by the way we learn to use our perceptual systems.¹³² It is now well accepted that the traditional categorization of sensations into five modalities with outward directionality is inadequate because it fails to include many other kinds of experiences, precisely the ones that we have called modalities of proprioception and interoception. It should be noticed that while this realization in theories of perception happened in the West at the beginning of the 20th century, a theory of the double directionality of our perceptual systems was already well developed in orthodox Indian philosophy by the 10th century.

In his commentary to the *Yoga Sūtra* (III.39), Vācaspati Mīśra refers to two kinds of fluctuations (*vṛtti*) of the organs or sense faculties (*indriyas*): an inner (*antarī*) and an outer

¹³² Gibson, *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems*, p.5.

(*bahyā*). The outer one is distinguished by the awareness of sensations coming from the external environment: color, odors, textures, sounds, etc. The internal one was distinguished by a special effort of the body “that leads to the different activities of the winds which the body comprehends.” He associated such internal fluctuation with “life” (*jīvanam*). What is this “special effort” (*prayatnabhedah*) that constitutes the life of all the organs of our body?

An effort is a conscious presentation of one’s own will. It involves awareness of one’s bodily sensations carried by the sensory system, coming both from the environment and from the organs and tissues of our own bodies. But it also requires awareness of the bodily motor capacities as the effort is being executed. How is this possible? How can there be awareness of the outer (efferent) fluctuation when, by definition and functionality, motor capacities are not constituted by sensory pathways themselves?

At the core of a theory of the double fluctuation of the organs (of perception and action) lies the recognition of an intrinsic conscious sensitivity of the active body, i.e. its reversibility expressed in the possibility of the body to turn towards itself and perceive its mobility and intentionality. The capacity of “turning inwards”, however, does not pertain to the external physical apparatus—no one would hold that the physical eye can turn around and see itself as it blinks or that the hand can grasp itself as it grasps something else. But if it is true, as the example of holding our breath shows, that we can have a conscious presentation of volitional motor movements as such, then this means that even the motor capacities in their efferent activity (volitional or automatic) must themselves be sensitive. Thus, the body is aware of itself in the assimilation of food and water, in the muscles engaged with coughing, in the bowel movements, in the contraction, extension, or flexion of muscles, etc. because there is an effort

(even if automatic) accompanied by consciousness in all motor activities that maintain bodily homeostasis by the activity of *prāṇa*.¹³³

This double directionality refers to all organs of the body, both volitional and automatic, not as mere parts of a machine, but as perceptive capacities (which involve the functioning of the whole perceptual system as Gibson makes clear in his work) of a self-aware system. Machines move, but they do not have intentional movement and much less, a special effort that is capable of revealing depth. We can easily put all parts of the machine in one plane and put them back together again so that it keeps functioning, moving. The lived body, however, cannot be represented in all its parts at once neither be put back together after it has died. The special effort of the body that involves “looking” inwards uncovers aspects that were hidden, occluding others as it reveals them within time, space, and practice. Constitutional invisibility is at the heart of life and a phenomenology of bodily self-awareness is necessarily a hermeneutics of depth. Perhaps this is another reason why the element of air was intuitively associated with life; for wind, just as depth, is invisible.

Luce Irigaray reminds us of Heraclitus saying that Being likes to make itself invisible, and that Heidegger used to stress the fact that the disclosure proper of Being cannot happen without some veiling.¹³⁴ Our body is like that. The sensorimotor skills of our body engaged with the environment are usually most effective without paying attention to the limbs, or any other parts of the body that enable those movements. Yet, motor activities are not exhaustive of what the experience of bodily movements are. With special attention (that special inner effort that reveals we are alive!) we perceive the internal movements of our viscera: we can certainly feel

¹³³ This point will be developed in more detail in chapter 4. A very clear explanation of the problem of conscious effort in motor nerves within Indian Philosophy can be found in Brajendranath Seal, *The Positive Sciences of the Ancient Hindus*, Chapter VI on Hindu Biology and Physiology.

¹³⁴ Irigaray, “To Begin with Breathing Anew” in *Breathing with Luce Irigaray*, p.225.

our bowel and digestive movements; movements in the procreative system, the rhythm of the heart and the lungs. By the cultivation of the breath and drawing the attention inwards, more subtle movements can be noticed, movements that become evident even while the external or visceral movements vanish away from the focus point. But even while attending to the motor activities or the vital functions, there are movements that will always remain beyond our conscious awareness. As much cultivation of bodily awareness we may have, neural synapsis and muscular innervation will remain objective representations of a material body that we cannot experience. Yet, as unconscious as these basic systems are, we can be aware of something that sets the organs in motion.¹³⁵ And that is another way in which Indian philosophy defined *prāṇa*, “that which sets everything in motion” (*samīraṇa*)¹³⁶: including organs, emotions, and thoughts, which, just as wind, are invisible, but can be felt in the things they move.

Attention to the flow of movement in our bodies covers and uncovers ways to move. Just as a covered surface was seen to persist after being concealed, and the surface that was being uncovered was seen to pre-exist before being revealed,¹³⁷ in that same way the experience of *prāṇa* is taken as a subtle, pre-arisen reality. Representations of the subtle body, just as representations of the physiological one, are maps that portray the way our body can move, outwards and inwards. And the ability to attend to experiences in both types of flow is a skill that can be educated and refined. Taking a deep breath into *kumbhaka* is a way to learn how to move within, into one’s life, closer to one’s body and deeper into the depths of our perceptual system.

¹³⁵ It is not arbitrary that the central location of *prāṇa* was thought to be around the chest and the heart, rather than say, in the brain. It is now known that the heart emits more electrical power output than brain due to the scattered synapsis in this one.

¹³⁶ See *Hathayogapradīpika*, IV.22 and *Sāmkhya Kārika* 29.

¹³⁷ Sue Cataldie, *Emotion, Depth, and Flesh: A Study of Sensitive Space*, p.32.

Whatever and whoever does not withdraw within the self cannot appear, at least in faithfulness to one's being- or Being. Now, what ensures our first and last withdrawal within ourselves depends on the existence of our breathing. Hence, the significance of a cultivation of breathing that is not limited to guaranteeing good physical health and increasing our performance in work, but aims at gaining an autonomous interiority, one could say a soul of our own.¹³⁸

When commenting on the *Yoga Sūtras*, Vyāsa defined *prāṇāyāma* as the best bodily observance (*tapas*) in yoga because it removes impurities and makes the light of knowledge shine (*YBh* II.52). I think this is because *prāṇāyāma*, more than other practices of introspective proprioception, reveals the evolving process of covering and uncovering bodily sensations, as it cultivates the conscious experience of reversibility through the chiasms available during breath-holding. Only under a certain background can layers of depth be perceived. Feminist phenomenology and yoga philosophy show us that the felt body is a body with depth, for its different layers and dimensions can only become the focus of perception under a certain background. In the last section of this chapter I will show how this background is necessarily spatial and self-aware, albeit not necessarily felt as explicitly conscious.

3.5 Advaita Vedānta and the Dimensions of Bodily Self-Awareness

A reversible theory of the body is not an exclusive creation of Classical Yoga philosophy. We find one of its first articulations back in the *Upaniṣads* (800 BCE). The *Taittiriya Upaniṣad*, in particular, states it like this: “Do not despise food (*annam*). That shall be thy vow. *Prāṇa* is food. The body (*śarīram*) is the eater of food. The body is established in *prāṇa*. *Prāṇa* is established in the body. The food is established in food. He who knows that food is fixed in food, he is established. He becomes made of food and the eater of food.”¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Irigaray, “To Begin with Breathing Anew”, in *Breathing with Luce Irigaray*, p.224.

¹³⁹ *Taittiriya Upaniṣad. Bṛigu Valli* III.7.

I take the term “śarīra” here to be analogous to the notion of “flesh” in Merleau Ponty’s phenomenology.¹⁴⁰ And thus, if my suggested reading is applied to Śaṅkara’s commentary¹⁴¹ on this verse, we can clearly see how the concept of “body” (*śarīra*) within Indian orthodox philosophy emerges as a notion with depth. Śaṅkara comments that:

“*Prāna* is food” because *Prāna* is within the body (*śarīra*) and because that which is within another is said to be the food of the other. And in the body is established the *Prāna*. Therefore, *Prāna* is food, and body the eater of food. Similarly, the body is food and *Prāna* is the eater of food. Why is the body established in *Prāna*? Because the existence of the body is dependent upon it. Therefore, both these, the body and *Prāna*, are food and food-eater. Since each is established in the other, therefore each is food; since each is the support of the other, each is the food-eater.¹⁴²

We see here a reversibility of dimensions characteristic of depth, which is the property of a body that is sensible (food) and sentient (food-eater) at once. Furthermore, in taking food as the paradigm for the materiality of the body, Vedāntic thought links bodily existence with its maternal cosmic origins. It is from the food eaten by the mother that we receive our bodies.¹⁴³ From the subtlest parts of solid food taken by the mother develops the reflective mind (*buddhi*), the operative or attentive mind (*manas*), and the five capacities of sensation (*jñānendriyas*). From the subtle “watery” particles of food would develop the five winds or *prāṇas*. From the “fiery” aspect of the food the five capacities of action (*karmendriyas*) would follow. And from the less subtle parts, those made of earth, would come the blood, marrow, muscles; the bones, dung and urine created from the grossest part of food.¹⁴⁴

There are some differences in the cosmogonic narrativity between Sāṃkhya and Vedānta. The five modes of sense content or spheres of objective experience (*tanmātras*), i.e. all pervasive

¹⁴⁰ See Chapter 2.

¹⁴¹ Śaṅkara (700-800CE) was the most important exponent of the non-dualist school of the Vedānta tradition which bases its philosophy on the systematization of ideas presented in the *Upaniṣads*, *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *Vedānta Sūtras*.

¹⁴² Śaṅkara, *The Aitareya and Taittiriya Upanishads and Sri Sankara’s Commentary*, p.179.

¹⁴³ *Taittiriya Up, Ananda Valli* II.1 (10) , p. 372-373.

¹⁴⁴ *Taittirīya Upanishad with the commentaries of Shankarāchārya, Suresvarācharya and Sāyana (Vidyāranya)*, p.373.

sound waves, luminosity, liquidity, etc. are here the cosmic qualities actualized by the food and maternal body. The sense of I (*ahamkara*) is not included in the elements of the body given by birth under this model. The reason is that, according to the vedāntic genealogical model of the body, what is not given by the mother's body through food, is given directly from the basis of existence itself, which is *brahman*. This term is the analogous for the Sāṃkhyan *puruṣa*, but while the latter could not be conceived *in any way* as identifying with the perceptual system (for this one is ultimately insentient), the former one has an ambiguous relation with embodiment. In one sense, *brahman* is food and body because these are the “universal self becoming limited in the subtle matter of the universe” which is manifested through the combination of the subtle cosmic elements (*sūkṣmabhūtas*).¹⁴⁵ On the other, *brahman* is not the body, but the innermost self covered by “layers” or “sheaths” that make it look *as if* consciousness were limited and individual.

As a phenomenology of depth, the Vedāntic notion of the body also acknowledges a double fluctuation of the perceptual system. It refers to the other-orientedness of externality as the “power of action” (*kriyā śakti*) and to introspective proprioception as the “power of knowledge” (*viññāna śakti*). It is precisely in the experience of active-relatedness to the objects that the body is experienced as active and subjective. The body is “here”, while other objects are “there”. Since the body is relatively more subjective than the other objects, it is reasonable to

¹⁴⁵ The Vedāntic view does not consider any material element as independent to the conscious principle as *prakṛti* is for the Sāṃkhyan system. In Vedānta, the one and only principle of reality is *brahman* which just seems to be limited through a veiling cosmic force called *māyā*. It is this veiling force which makes consciousness seem as if it were individual, when in fact it is not. Hence the “ego-sense” cannot be considered as a real element constitutive of the universe, even though it is through this process of self-alienation that the limited conscious experiences such as the ones provided by the *tanmātras* are actualized and manifested. Each mode of sense experience constitutes a subtle element as its vehicle, a very subtle and pure form of ether, air, fire, water and earth, but it is only through the quintuplication of these elements that the qualities of the *tanmātras* are actualized. This creative process is called *pañcikaṛaṇa* where all the subtle elements are present as ingredients in a proportion of 1/8th each with 4/8th constituting the characteristic of the main gross atom or *mahabhūta*. For example, the element of water will have 1/4 of ether, 1/4 of air, 1/4 of light, and 1/4 of earth, with 4/8 of itself; air would have half of its own elemental characteristic, and so on. The combination of these elements in different proportions is what constitutes the variety of observable bodies. See Śaṅkara's *Pañcikaṛaṇam* with Sureśvara's commentary.

consider one's body and senses as one's self-identity. The sense of identity established in the active, physical body is called by the Vedāntic tradition the "body of food" or *annamayātman*. However, bodily self-identification doesn't end here.

The moment this identity is recognized, it becomes a point of focus towards which both outer and inner oriented powers are operating. Thus, the Upaniṣadic logic applies the same reflective mechanism that was active when the focus of attention was outside of the body. The act of attending is called "upāsana" and refers to the state of "being engaged in", "having the intent on", "meditating". When our attendance is towards the objects of the world, our identity is the body, particularly, in its sensorimotor aspects. But what happens when there is a shift of intent? What happens to the feeling of identity when we attend to our limbs, and external organs? Who is the "me" that is observing them?

As we saw in the previous section, the practice of focusing on one's bodily sense faculties as touching, seeing, hearing, walking, digesting, breathing, etc. reveals the phenomenological dimension of being a sentient, affective, and emotional being. To be engaged in this individual dimension of the body, which can be schematized as rhythms and flows in the body, is to live in what the Upaniṣadic tradition called the prānic body or *prāṇamayātman*, literally: the self pervaded by *prāṇa*. Thus, awareness on the physical body and its vital functions presents itself to consciousness as a breathing self. Now, breathing is not a cognitive faculty per se and, although some voluntary sensorimotor activities are included, it is not considered a conative faculty (*karmendriya*) either. This leaves the action of breathing as a point of inward focusing on its own, making it, at the same time, a mediating, reversible point between the awareness of motor and visceral action (proprioceptive and interoceptive) and the awareness of one's own affective, emotional states (introspective).

In Vedantic epistemology, every case of perception requires that the perceiver be distinct from the thing perceived. Since the prānic-breathing body can become an object of awareness, then there must be something else observing it. To be engaged in the act of attending to the breath reveals a mental self called *manomayātman*, literally: the self pervaded by mind. Earlier we saw the connection between rhythms of the breath and emotional states. Paying attention to those states manifests to our consciousness in the form of “I am angry”, “I am happy”, “I am in pain”, “I am cold”, etc. In this level of attention the sense of self is identified with a mental activity (“I perceive X”) which presents itself to consciousness not only as attentive monitoring of bodily sensations but also as volition. This is because, to recognize and be aware of emotions and bodily feelings is the initial step for its regulation, as some recent studies on neuroanatomy corroborate.¹⁴⁶ At the same time, it is possible to make the object of awareness other mental states related to the ones that are perceived as sensations, emotions, or feelings. The thinking subject can become conscious of its own cognitive states such as thinking, doubting, perceiving, imagining, believing, daring, etc.

The Cartesian “I think” is for Advaita Vedānta a dimension of self-awareness that is not the ultimate instance of our self-identity. The fact that we can be engaged in the act of attending to our own cognitive states means that there is an even more subjective dimension capable of directing its attention towards those states. This “higher” dimension ascertains facts about the world and judges what is true or false. The sense of self is thus identified with the body pervaded by intelligence (*viññānamayātman*) and it determines the beliefs we have about the world, others, and our own bodies. Here again, we can focus on what our beliefs are. We can engage in the act of attending to our goals, our personality, our view of the world, or the way we approach certain situations. In doing this, a sense of being the experiencing subject arises.

¹⁴⁶ Uwe Herwig et.al. “Self related awareness and emotional regulation” in *NeuroImage*, p.735.

According to Advaita Vedānta this is the self pervaded by bliss (*anandamayātman*) and describes it as the bare feeling of happiness that results from embodied experience as such, which includes thought, memories, innermost desires, and action.¹⁴⁷ This sense of self arises, Śaṅkara explains, in experiences like hearing music, where the sensation is perceived in all its presence and only the consciousness of enjoying the experience is present to the self. “I am enjoying” is the ultimate sense of being a lived body. Within the Advaita system, the notion of “sūkṣma” only applies to the three middle bodies: the one pervaded by the life breath, by mind, and by intelligence. The subtle body is thus, “in-between” the body of food and the body of bliss, the first called “sthūla” or dense, and the latter one called “karaṇa” or causal body. Why the body of bliss is called “causal” will become clearer in the next section when I introduce the notion of bodily self-awareness in the *Yoga Vasiṣṭha* through the story of the “Bodily Self-Aware Brahmā”.

For now, it can be seen with this that the phenomenological method of dis-covering the self in Advaita Vedānta, involves primarily the functions of the subtle body. It is through the body of vital motions, attentive mind, and intelligence that the processes of proprioception, interoception, and introspection bring into focus of attention aspects of the embodied self unattended while engaged with the “outer” world. For this school of thought, just as for Yoga, the purpose of engaging in ever more internally oriented movements of attention toward one’s body (*upāsana*) is to find “face to face” the innermost self hidden beneath all the layers (both physical and subtle) of bodily awareness.

Similarly to Sāṃkhya, we have here a philosophy of bodily awareness that recognizes the body in all its dimensions (not separating unnecessarily body from mind or viceversa) and yet does not conceive the body as self-aware. Advaita Vedānta considers that as long as awareness

¹⁴⁷ *Taittirīya Upanishad with the commentaries of Shankarāchārya...*, Ananda-Valli, II.5, p.474.

is expressed in the form “I am x”, whether proprioceptive or introspective (“I am acting”, “I am breathing”, “I am happy”, “I am perceiving”, “I am thinking”, “I am in pain/joy”), there will be a reference to something that lies beyond the body, precisely that which is being aware of it. Only consciousness (*brahman*) can be aware of something, and since Advaita is a non-dual system, there cannot be anything other than consciousness to be aware of. Only consciousness can be aware of itself because self-awareness is necessarily an act of immediacy and, as such, non-relational. If the embodied being (*jīva*) experiences itself to be self-aware, it is only because consciousness is knowing itself. But this knowledge cannot be an act of proprioception or introspection, that is, a cognitive act mediated by an object.

To perceive a series of airflow as “my breathing”, or a mental state as “I am angry”, “I believe that X”, etc. would require that I know it is me to whom that breath, feeling or belief belongs. This means that I would already have to have self-knowledge, and this would need to be self-evident and non-observational in order for it not to fall into an infinite regress. So if the body can be in any way aware of itself it would have to be in virtue of the self-luminosity of consciousness manifesting itself through it—albeit in a limited form. Furthermore, if bodily awareness entails awareness of the self it is only because the self, that is, consciousness, is the only thing that there is to be known and the body—just as any other object of knowledge—is but a product of a limited process of knowing that incorrectly ascribes to one’s body the notion of “self” to what is in reality an ephemeral construct (*māyā*).

Self-awareness is for Advaita Vedāntins immediate knowledge, and as such, purely based on consciousness. This is modalized by the external and internal fluctuations (*vṛttis*) of organs and perceptual systems through which consciousness is manifest and reflected in different ways. The perceptual system, which is called the *antaḥkaraṇa* (internal organ) in this school, is a

limited aspect of consciousness, just as anything else, but it has more capability of reflecting the “light” of consciousness than other objects. The light of consciousness “moves out” to the object through the channel of the sense organs (cognitive and conative) and then assumes the form of the object being apprehended, perceiving itself directly through that mode, enacting the double fluctuation characteristic of the sentient body: active and outwardly oriented (*kriya*) and cognitive and inwardly oriented (*viññāna*). To perceive, say a jar, is to make consciousness aware of itself in the form of a jar. Similarly, to perceive one’s body (in all its objectifiable forms: as physical, visceral, emotional, cognitive, sentient) is to make consciousness aware of itself in those diverse modes. The problem is that, in the process of becoming aware of itself *as something*, assertions such as “this is a jar” or “this is me” or “this is painful”, etc. are basically projections or illusions because, from the ultimate point of view, there is no jar or “me” or any internal sensation different from each other or from consciousness itself. Not realizing this, is to be obscured by nescience (*ajñāna*), causing us to superimpose into consciousness what is not really there, for self-consciousness is pure being, without reference to any knower or any object to be known.¹⁴⁸

Śaṅkara interpreted the different dimensions by which consciousness becomes aware of itself through the body as being “layers”, and thus when commenting upon the Upaniṣadic *pañcamaya* model of interrelated dimensions of the body he referred to them as “kośas”. However, in doing this, Śaṅkara and later commentaries created an unnecessary sense of separation and occlusion between self and body. Literally *kośa* means sheath, vessel, cover. But these connotations are very different from the original term *maya*, which means “pervading” or “being made of”. “Kośa” implies that there is something to be removed or vanished, while

¹⁴⁸ Jadunath Sinha, *Indian Psychology Perception*, p.128-132. See also Bina Gupta, *Perceiving in Advaita Vedānta. Epistemological Analysis and Interpretation*.

“maya” conveys the sense of each dimension pervading and co-existing integrally within each other. In Śaṅkara’s view, the layers obstruct the pure reflection of the luminescence of consciousness, the true self and ground of all things.¹⁴⁹ One has to draw the attention inwards at each of its levels of focus so that one detaches from the objectified level and finds the true self “hidden within the cavity” of the heart. Identifying with any of those layers as the self is to remain in ignorance, and thus, since every layer of the body is experienced as a self without in reality being so, the body is said to have its origin in delusion and ignorance (*ajñāna*).

Vedānta’s non-dualism however, could not avoid falling into the trap of its own metaphors, for by characterizing the experience of self-awareness as self-luminosity it irremediably failed to see that the “cavity” where the self is hidden is precisely the darkest place. If it is true that the self is hidden in the heart, and the heart is like a cave, then going inside that cave will be going into the most inner place. That which is closest to us is the depth without distance from a point, i.e. the body, that is experienced as “here”. It is an absolute space, like the one experienced in darkness, in the night. As Sue Cataldie beautifully shows in her book *Emotion, Depth and Flesh* quoting Eugene Minkowski: “The depth of darkness is not perceived at a distance. It is perceived as a sort of density, a sort of materiality, tangibility, more personal, more mine. This space has no besides, no distance, no surface of extension, but it will have depth with one dimension, like an opaque sphere wherein all radii are the same...black, mysterious.”¹⁵⁰

We saw in the previous chapter that Vyāsa criticized the vedāntic comparison of consciousness with light, and he proceeded to compare its self-luminosity to space, *akāśa*, because of its being self-supported. However, Vyāsa just as the Advaitin philosophers, did not

¹⁴⁹ *Taittirīya Upanishad with the commentaries of Shankarāchārya...*, Ananda Valli II.2 p.398

¹⁵⁰ Cataldie, *Emotion, Depth and Flesh*, p.48.

realize that in the experience of pure awareness, the perfected self-aware yogic body is experienced as absolute space, that is, precisely as the space where the Advaitin self is hidden. The darkest space in the cavity of the heart is the “space of the body seeing itself from within, seeing (without being born) from within the mother’s womb, or seeing itself as its own matrix, with neither mother or father, the pure darkness of autofiliation”, just as Jean-Luc Nancy observes within the context of Christianity.¹⁵¹

The phenomenology of depth takes us then to this conclusion: that to feel the external and internal dimensions of our own depth is a journey into the attentional levels of the lived body which reaches deep into the experience of one’s own self, an already and always self-reflexive bodily space.

3.6 Spatial Self-awareness in the *Yoga Vāsistha*

A body with depth can be found in both Sāṃkhyan dualism and Advaita Vedānta monism because both schools of thought are aware of the different levels that arise in the exercise of bringing attention to the body. However, none of them arrives to the full notion of bodily self-awareness. Sāṃkhyan dualism places the body as metaphysically opposed to pure consciousness, and thus perceives the whole of the perceptual system as devoid of awareness by itself. Advaita Vedānta monism poses consciousness as the only principle of reality, and leaves the status of the body in an ambiguous situation, neither different to consciousness, nor conscious by itself. And since the body results from a limited perception of the self, it is the product of ignorance, and thus, a delusion.

¹⁵¹ Nancy, *Corpus*, p.67.

On the other hand, the neuro-phenomenological notion of the body as self-aware, conceives it only in the sense that the brain becomes aware of the processes undergone by the rest of the organism in interaction with the environment. This body would be however, if interpreted in a purely materialistic sense, a body without depth, because the process of self-knowledge could, at least in principle, be reduced to the functioning of the parts, like a machine, albeit a very special and complex one.

A feminist phenomenology applied to Yoga philosophy has taken us to the possibility of considering the body in a non-reductionist way, as a living-lived spatiality with multiple levels of awareness, and as such, intrinsically self-aware. A self-aware spatiality is described in the story of Akāśaja found in the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* (III.2.1-44) a unique text that receives intellectual influence from Vedānta, Yoga, Buddhism, and Kaśmir Saivism, dated *c.a.* VI C.E. and which gathers the yogic teachings of sage Vāsiṣṭha to a young and dejected Rāma after having realized how much suffering there is in the world.

The story of “The Brāhmana who was Born of Space” narrates of a sage who, while absorbed in deep meditation, was visited by Death. To the surprise of this one, the brāhmana remained untouched and unaffected. When inquiring to Yama, the Lord of the Departed, why Death could not take the brāhmana with him, Yama responded that whoever is made of space alone, that person is pure as ether (*vyoma eva amalam*) and is not bounded by actions. This person remains constantly established in its own clear spatial form (*viśadākāśarūpinī svakāraṇe sthito nityaḥ*), which is no other than the shape of consciousness (*cidrupa eva*). Only that person who thinks she is made of earth and the rest of the material elements can be overtaken by Death. But those who remain conscious of their self-aware spatiality (*cidākāśa*) cannot be reached by it. Then Death, realizing the fruitless task of grasping the empty space, returned to his abode.

Vāsiṣṭha, who is narrating this story to Rāma so that he understands the nature of reality and his own self, clarifies (YV III.3.6) that an “ākāśaja” is a person who does not identify with a material body (*adhibhautika*) but with a body given by one’s own consciousness (*svayambhuvah*); a body that is “swifter than the wind” (*ativāhika*).

To identify oneself with a body born out of one’s own consciousness means, in the context of the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*, that one has finally understood the nature of reality as being a self-creative consciousness that brings into existence whatever thought is entertained in the mind. For Vāsiṣṭha the body, just as any other object in the universe, has the status of a mental creation in the same way as the dreams that appear while we sleep (YV III.3.17-18). The *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* shares with Advaita Vedānta the idea that everything is ultimately consciousness but, unlike Śankara’s conscious self-luminosity which does not admit reference to itself either as a knower nor a known, Vāsiṣṭha’s transcendental consciousness is self-reflective as much as self-reflexive. It is by reflection that it becomes conscious of itself. The reflectivity of consciousness consists in making explicit what is implicit, making an object appear before oneself as if it were different from itself. But this duality is just an appearance, for in reality, there is nothing but reflexive awareness, that is, an awareness that is conscious of itself in its own creative power.¹⁵²

At first glance, bodily self-awareness within this type of idealism would seem impossible, because the material body, being an illusion, would not have the capacity to give us self-knowledge. In fact, several passages within the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* insist that we should reject the idea that we are our body, for the body (*deha*) is created by ignorance, and has no intelligence on its own; it is insensible (*jaḍa*), dull and dumb (YV VI.6.8), a gross mass of vile matter, ignorant of itself and its own welfare, ungrateful to the soul that makes it sensible (YV VI.1.93). The body

¹⁵² Sibajiban Bhattacharyya, “Some Indian Theories of the Body”, in *Freedom, Transcendence and Identity*, p.206-207. According to Bhattacharyya’s description of the different theories of the body in India, the one found in the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* would correspond to what this author calls the Tantric theory.

understood in this sense is seen as having no relation to the self and thus, in the process of acquiring self-awareness and self-knowledge, we would have to dissociate our selves from all bodily form.

An extreme expression of taking the material body or gross body (*sthūla śarīra*) as something to be rejected can be found in early Buddhist meditations on corpses. The idea of visualizing one's body as a bag of bones, flesh, tendons, and in various stages of decomposition had the purpose of generating disgust towards one's body. Once the feeling of disgust towards the body was established in one's practice, it would create detachment from all worldly things including personal desires. Cultivating a sense of repulsiveness towards the body by meditating on each of its parts and their disgusting, decaying qualities, as recommended by the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhānasuttam*, one of the most important manuals of Buddhist mindfulness meditation, would leave the person without a stable and cherished idea of a "self". Here the logic behind this particular Buddhist meditation is based on the identification of our body with pure matter. If the body is this decaying disgusting matter, then my body, yours and the body of all living beings cannot hold identity, for it is ultimately impermanent. The realization of impermanence of any sort of identity and with that, the experience of non-self is considered within Buddhism to be the direct step towards liberation from suffering and from the cycle of birth and rebirth. Through a practice called "ānāpānasati" –consisting in the continuous watching of one's breathing in and out without deliberate regulation (unlike Yoga) while contemplating one's movements, feelings, thoughts and other objects in the world— one is to realize the body *as* body, the feelings *as* feelings, the mind *as* mind, and the objects *as* objects and not as belonging to someone, as an underlying self. Body, feelings, mind and objects are

seen as impermanent, as the momentary appearance of an atom, and with that, the realization that there is no body, no “myself”, no “thing” is to arise.

Coming back to Akāśaja’s story in the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*, the logic behind the story is not so much to deny the reality of the body but rather to reject the very notion of a sheer material body posed as something substantially opposite and independent to the creative power of consciousness and at the same time something with which we could identify. Since the felt body does not and cannot exist as pure matter thus, there cannot be cultivation of repulsiveness towards something that is not. What can be found throughout the more than seventy stories narrated in this book is an argument against the very possibility of identifying ourselves with dull matter and deriving our sense of embodiment from it. This argument, which is part of a longer argument against naïve realism or the idea that the world and objects exist independently of consciousness, could be formulated as a *reductio ad absurdum*:

Suppose that the living body is material (*bhautika*). If the body (*deha*) were purely material, that is, merely composed by flesh (*māmsa*) and bones (*sthita*), then the living conscious essence (*ātman*) would not be in any way related to it,¹⁵³ for they both would be opposed in nature, one being dull (*jaḍa*) and the other intelligent (*cetasā*). But we do have experience of an intelligent body and the power of sentience dwelling within our limbs. (YV III.10.42 and YV III.61.20) Thus, the dualism between consciousness and body is false. Whoever conceive their body as constituted by inert, sheer matter will be veiled by ignorance and indeed, subject to death. Only a corpse could be conceived in that way, and even then, our notion of a corpse would be dependent on us conceiving it. Moreover, while it is true that we die and the material body disintegrates back into its elements, there is nothing within the death matter that can grasp upon

¹⁵³ See for example YV I.18, where the opposition between self and body is clearly stated when this is understood as a mere pile of flesh and bones. YV V.71: The body is no thing. Since there is no material body and no relation with the soul. Nothing is gained by denying it.

the identity of oneself. In other words, there is simply no way of identifying ourselves with a corpse, because if that were indeed possible, we would not be that body anymore.¹⁵⁴ All ideas about the body coming from an understanding of the corpse will be constructions regarding a non-felt body. Indeed, that is what the material body taken in its merely anatomical and physiological aspects is: a theoretical construction, for there is no way of experiencing the brain, or the bones, or the muscles or any part of our living body in its sheer materiality without it being purely objectified (like brains in the lab or in the neurosurgeon's table).¹⁵⁵

We can only identify with the body that we feel. Akāśaja cannot identify himself with a material body (*bhautika deha*) precisely because he knows we do not have experience of that. The body we are aware of is the body of sensations, feelings, internal rhythms, thoughts, memories, desires, imaginations, and dreams, precisely that which the Indian tradition called “subtle body”. Akāśaja's body is “swifter than the wind” (*ativāhika*) because it is a body capable of shifting focus within the background of its own spatiality, a body aware of its own depths. Of course, there is a lived sense of finitude in such an awareness. There are spaces and movements within our body that we simply cannot become aware of in spite of the attention that we may pay to them, like the growing of nails, hair, and other many internal processes, both organic and cognitive. The most dramatic way to frame such incapability is the limit that the notion of a material body itself imposes on us, and that manifests in illness, aging and death. In its most strict definition (both in Western and Indian tradition), the material is that which is

¹⁵⁴ There are tantric practices that consist in visualizing one's own violent death in the most horrible way possible. Then serving one's body-corpse as a feast to everybody in a charnel ground. The purpose of this visualization in Buddhism is to transcend all opposites and realize that nothing has an inherent nature. By transforming the disgusting into attractive, the practitioner is supposed to realize the intrinsic emptiness of everything and eradicate suffering. This visualization is not based in a mere identification with the material object, but a vivification of a mental creation for the purpose of transcending one's experience of all duality.

¹⁵⁵ This objectification of the body might indeed be useful to perform medical interventions in the body. Without this alienation of the body, the doctor or nurse, being too identified with the felt body, would not be able to handle it properly. Perhaps this inability to fully objectify the body is behind the uneasiness and feeling of nausea and vanishing that many of us experience while seeing blood or viscera.

unintelligible, that which is incapable of receiving the light of consciousness. But since dualism is false, sheer matter must be non-existent and the material body just an illusion of a self that alienates itself into complete otherness.

It is a common accepted idea in Western philosophical thought that our sense of finitude is marked by death. It is only in “being-towards-death” that we come to understand our own human life according to Heidegger.¹⁵⁶ In this sense, authentic self-awareness lies in the perception and assumption of our own limited potentialities. For Sāmkhyan, Yogic, Vedāntic, and Tantric¹⁵⁷ philosophies however, we are also “beings-toward-liberation”. Our lives are the manifestation of the “pre-arisen” which, moved by invisible continuous desires (*vāsanās*), cannot cease until those mental impressions do. Death is considered to be but an intermediate state where, as in a long dream, our subtle bodies project their insatiable thoughts, emotions and desires before they get to be experienced and fulfilled in the vigil of a new born life. Philosophically, however, to say that “I” die or that “I” do not die when the material body stops working presupposes the egotistical idea that “I” have absolute knowledge of what I am. But the subject, as we have seen with the impossibility of the senses sensing themselves, is precisely the unknowable, and this by definition cannot die (as Akaśa knows), for there was never a time when it came to be, since its coming into being depends on its being known. Only the body as known, that is, as object, can be conceived as mortal and finite; but the lived-body is a subject, that is, a knower as well. Enlightenment, liberation or immortality consists of understanding that, in a very literal way, the living being is standing “under” a knower that cannot be known and “over” an object that it cannot make intelligible, and thus, inexistent.

¹⁵⁶ *Being and Time*.

¹⁵⁷ More on this in the fifth chapter.

It can be seen then that the felt body is neither pure matter (*na jaḍam*) nor pure subject (*na cetanam*) (YV III.96.64). What we learn from philosophies like Sāmkhya, Vedānta, Yoga and Tantra is that our embodied lives find their place (their breath and breadth) precisely between the unintelligible (*jaḍa*) and the unknowable (*ajaḍa*), between pure matter and a pure conscious self, between death and immortality, between inhalation and exhalation, between the finite and the infinite. And it is this “in-between-ness” that characterizes the subtle body (*sūkṣma śarīra*) as much as its ability to be self-aware. Given the nature of our felt bodies as bodies with depth (essential characteristic of the “subtle body” in Indian philosophy), it is impossible to reduce our bodies to their material properties or functioning. In this sense, being aware of the felt body proprioceptively is already, intrinsically, an introspective act because we cannot move our limbs or sense other organic functions without, at the same time, there being an appropriate movement in our thoughts, images, or emotions.

3.6.1 The Bodily Self-Aware Brahmā

The bodily self-aware Brahmā—as I have called it—¹⁵⁸ is a story narrated by Vāsiṣṭha to a still dualist-minded Rāma when this one asked how it was possible that the soul, whose uninterrupted vital breathe is given by the infinite awareness (*ātman*) could come to be encased within the pile of bones that comprises this body (YV IV.44.1). Vāsiṣṭha then recounts the cosmogonic story—so well known to Indian philosophers since the Upaniṣads and its later classical elaboration in the Sāmkhyan tradition. In Vāsiṣṭha’s world, everything starts and ends with self-reflexivity. Unlike Sāmkhya, this cosmogony does not start with the assumption that the subject and the object are opposite in nature. Since everything is constituted by a reflexive

¹⁵⁸ My own translation. The original title is: “The teaching on how the descending [of the infinite soul] into the cycle of death and life is produced.”

self-awareness, there is no need to postulate an independent material principle such as *prakṛti* nor a mediating force that explains the false limitation of consciousness, such as *māyā*. Instead, the self-reflexive awareness turns into itself and that movement creates a vibrating motion that desires to be exteriorized. It is through this spontaneous pulsing that the motion transforms the light of awareness into different forms.

Brahmā took on a body (*vapu*) effortlessly in space and time by his own will (*svāśakti*) and playfulness (*līla*) (IV.44.15). His vibrating, expanding, and dancing mind looked upon itself and, self-absorbed with its own desires, wanted to come to be at once (16). Then Brahmā looked up and heard the fine particle of seed of sound (*śabdabīja*) within the clear vision of his own space (*ākāśa*). Uninterrupted sequential pulsations within his mind caused the particles of sound to condense into a vibrating cloud of wind – *anilaspanda* (17-18). Brahmā, looking into the essence of his own wind-like mind, felt the seed particle of touch (*sparśabīja*). From the conjunction of both audible and tactile forms, beheld by the mental eye on account of the invisibility of its ethereal and windy essences, the element of air (*analah*) was born (19). And having attained a state of compactness, his mind became space and wind at once. Seeing this (20), the sense of spotless vision became manifest as light and his mind acquired a fiery refulgent quality (*tejas*). Feeling the ethereal, windy and fiery essences within himself, Brahmā found a liquid essence (*rasa*) which immediately made him aware of the coolness of fresh water (*āp*). Thus, the ethereal, windy, fiery, and liquid essences came to be in him simultaneously and his body acquired a thick scent (*gandha*) by which an earthy musk-like smell arose (22). In this way, imbued with the four essential elements (or sense modes – *tanmātra*) his body-mind assumed the denser form of earth (*mahī*).

He saw his body in the atmosphere palpitating as a spark of fire, joined as a material particle with a sense of individuality (*ahamkāra*) fully endowed with the seed of intelligence. This bodily unit, constituted by the five elemental essences (*bhūtanmātra*), the mind (*manas*), the ego-sense, and intelligence (*buddhi*), is called the “city of eight members” (*puryaṣṭaka*) and inhabits within the heart like a humming bee in the lotus flower. Brahmā’s body (*vapuḥ*), shining brilliantly like the sun, came into existence from an inner intense agitation (24).

The mind-body hardens as it matures just as the fruit of the wood-apple. The dense bodily unit glitters in the stainless space of the mental sky just as metal looks golden when heated in the furnace (25). The warm furnace receives any material introduced in it, and this warmth in turn pervades and shapes the mass of matter from within. In the same way, the vital energy of Brahmā’s mind permeates the aggregate mass of body which shines within his mental space (26) and this energy distributes determinate rays of abundant thoughts that spread through the mental-sky in different directions: upwards producing the head, downwards producing the feet (27); right and left creating both arms; in towards the middle designing the interior parts such as the womb and belly, and outward thoughts shooting nails from the fingers, toes from the feet, breasts from the chest, and hairs from the top. Like a child, Brahmā adorned his body with garlands of flaming thoughts excreting all different substances out from it (28). In this way, experiencing joy in his heart, he obtained this body out of pure will and stayed in it. Indeed, Brahmā is known as the one who is moved by the inward impulse of the mind and whose body-parts were made from gathering intense attention on the feelings and impressions (*vāsana*) in his mind alone (29).

Just as each season makes things grow and achieve fruition according to their own nature, with time the perfect body (*amala-vigraha*) becomes manifest (30). Abiding with power, with knowledge, with strong will, and pure intelligence, the lord Brahmā alone is the great father of

the whole universe. The world exists within the supreme space of consciousness appearing as a golden sparkling being just as any other luminous body in the sky (32). Sometimes by his own play of consciousness, Brahmā remains deluded about his own self, as if it was merely space without consciousness (33). Sometimes it appears to himself as the night without beginning, middle or end and some others as a bright egg, a flame of fire lasting a whole Era (*kalpa*). In some occasions, Brahmā imagines himself as a dark forest covering the earth, and at another time as a lotus bud. This powerful being has created and destroyed many many many other forms (35). Multiple beings have been produced out of him by his own will at different stages, and he was the first one among them (36).

He descended into creation through self-veiling which was a state of sweet forgetfulness. But when removed from his sleep in the womb, his body saw the light of the world (37). He then undertook the activity of inspiration and expiration, and the body seemed to be created by the five material elements. It was covered with pores; it had holes to be filled with thirty two teeth (38); sustained by three pillars (two thighs and spine) and five vital breaths; provided with two feet below; divided by five sections (arms, legs, head, chest and belly), endowed with nine doors (eyes, ears, nostrils, mouth, anus and urethra), coated by skin all over (39), ten fingers and ten toes with their appropriate nails; two arms, two nipples, two eyes and many other paired structures (ears, kidneys, lungs, etc.).

This body is the nest of the bird which is the mind (*citta*) and a nesting place where passion can be enjoyed. It is the abode inhabited by an insatiable demoness but it is also a cave-like refuge for the one that is wise in life (41). It is the post to which the elephant of self-conceit is tied. Having reflected upon his body as a splendid lake of joy, Brahmā adored it, for it was so beautiful (42). While drunk in sweetness like a honey bee, seeing clearly the three times (past,

present and future) through a small window in the space of his consciousness, Brahmā thought (43): “What was there first in this space that extends far into the unseen?” Pondering on this, Brahmā immediately acquired a clear vision about himself (44). He saw multiple creations going and passing by several times, and recollected all classes of beliefs and memories developed gradually along the stages (45). He gathered the knowledge of sacred texts, such as the Vedas, just as flowers are gathered in Spring and creatures were produced like pictures as he ideated them by his playful power (46). Various rules and practices were created in this imaginary city for the purpose of attaining wealth, joy, righteousness and liberation (47). He saw that the eternal intelligence came also to be manifested in this earth, oh Rāmā, through ideating infinite varieties of sacred texts (48). Indeed, oh son of Raghu, this world of beautiful things comes to existence by manifesting the variety of gestures and graceful activities that Brahmā, the one whose form is that of the lotus-born, makes with his mind alone (49).

Chapter 4

Somaesthetic Considerations on Introspection

The story of the “Bodily Self-Aware Brahmā”, included in the last part of the previous chapter, depicts a self-aware creative cosmic body that enjoys itself in every new bodily sensation. Each new spark of a sensation that he enjoys, he wills to repeat. The will congeals into a new element. Thus, self-enjoyment of the cosmic sensorium translates into creation of a world, sector by sector. Brahmā hears the particles of sounds within his own embodiment as they make him draw his attention back to his mind, which is at the same time the space where those particles coagulate to form the next bodily sensation: “touch”, made of windy vibrations, which will manifest the next body made of air. The whole story follows the same logic: creation through self-enjoyment even when Brahmā falls into a deep state of unconsciousness right before he is born into a womb (sometimes described as the womb of the sacred Word, or speech-potentials that manifest their form as things are named/thought). After Brahmā is “born”, that is, after he starts breathing, his own body continues to expand as the expression of a self-creative body-mind unity, but now the world appears to be “outside” of himself. Each of his body parts is, at the same time, the expression of his own mental activity: the right arm - “right side” thought, left arm - “left side” thought; head - “top, upward” thought, etc. Each and every part of the body represents— or, better said, *enacts*— the idea of itself. As he goes deeper in this exercise of introspective proprioception, he finds his memories, beliefs, feelings and dreams in the form of his scriptural body. In other words, he finds within himself the body of sound (the speech) that narrates the creation of the universe and the ways to recognize and re-member itself, closing with this the infinite circle of the desire to manifest his own self.

This story is embedded in the context of what has been called the “absolute idealism”¹⁵⁹ of the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* (according to which nothing exists external to consciousness; the external world does not have a separate existence since it derives directly from the transformation of consciousness itself). In my opinion, a better term for the metaphysics of this text is “embodied idealism”, a label that will, hopefully, gain meaning by the end of this chapter. I have translated and included this story because it incorporates, in a beautiful metaphor, what I consider to be the most important elements to answer the question about what it is for one’s body to be aware of itself. In trying to develop a comparative, non-reductionist account of bodily self-awareness, it seems appropriate to conclude from the discussion in the previous chapters that being aware of one’s body is being aware of it as emotionally dispositioned— affectively constituted by pleasure, pain and inertia— (*Sāmkhya*); as a self-aware spatiality (*Yoga Sūtras* and *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*); as a body (understood in a non-dual way, that is, as not different from mind) with depth, otherwise called “subtle body” (*Advaita Vedānta*); and (an element that will become more relevant in the last chapter) as self- creative (*Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* and *Kaśmir Śaivism*).

Throughout this discussion and in the light of these elements, I have argued that being aware of one’s body proprioceptively should entail being aware of it introspectively. The strategy I used to show this was through arguing for a sense of self that is immediately felt both as sentient and sensible (recall the discussion developed from the example of the first breath) and that, precisely because of this, awareness of oneself as embodied requires intrinsic (immediate and always present) awareness of our emotional and dispositional states as much as— or even in a more “primordial” way than— spatial awareness of limbs and motor movements.

Admittedly, this claim is controversial. But why does it appear so counter-intuitive in the first place? Because, as explained in the introductory chapter, 1) treatments of proprioception do

¹⁵⁹ Francois Chenet, *Psychogenèse et cosmogonie selon le Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha*, vol.II, p.504.

not usually include the mental aspects of bodily awareness and 2) treatments of introspection in Western philosophy do not usually touch upon the bodily aspects of self-awareness. The main reason for number 1) is that focusing on the mental aspects would seem to require an introspective stance that is unavoidably intentional, making objects out of its content. But ordinary proprioception is immediate and gives us awareness of the body as subject without having to think about it and thus objectify it. In this sense, to argue for a proprioceptive awareness of the body that is at the same time introspective would seem to fall into the problem of taking the felt body as an object mediated by mental states, in which case, such proprioception would not be an immediate awareness. While I have shown the importance of introspective bodily awareness for the enhancement of our breath-alertness and transformation of mental states, the objection would say, it still remains unclear in what way introspective proprioception can be awareness of one's embodied self *as subject* and not as an object of a willful effort.

The main reason for number 2) is that introspective awareness usually accounts for the way we are aware of our subjective, mental states as pertaining to oneself. While personal bodily states are experienced as belonging to "myself", such bodily awareness are not usually taken as saying anything about the self that is in possession of such a state. And, although there are sensory accounts of introspection¹⁶⁰ which consider self-awareness as awareness of oneself, in the sense that it is physically located in space and time, any information about one's body and its actions is introspective insofar as it is consciously attributed to oneself. To argue for an introspective awareness implicit in ordinary proprioception would imply a contradiction: that there are self-ascribed unconscious states. But if I can ascribe a state as belonging to myself, it must be in virtue of myself being conscious of that state.

¹⁶⁰ See for example, Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference* and Jose Luis Bermudez, *The Paradox of Self-Consciousness*.

These are indeed pressing objections to the way I am understanding introspective proprioception, that is, the continuous ability of the body to pay attention to its own states, including the ones we usually call “psychological”. In this chapter, I will embark on an attempt to respond to these objections before I can safely continue to develop the last of the elements which I think are important for a notion of bodily self-awareness: that of the awareness of the body as self-creative. The first part of this section will address the first objection by focusing on the problem of mental states as representational, for it seems to be this mark which makes the introspective view upon something objectifying. Since I believe that there is an implicit sense in which introspective proprioception is always present in the experience of being embodied, I will explain why an introspective awareness does not necessarily imply an objectifying stance. The second part of the chapter will tackle the issue of “self-ascribed unconscious states”, if that even exists. This will require a more detailed account on the role of attention with respect to conscious and unconscious states, and a brief discussion on whether self-awareness requires always the conscious idea of “I”. Since I believe that there is a non-objectifying way in which we are always acquainted with our own states, I will explain in what sense proprioceptive awareness does not necessarily require conscious self-attribution of its mental states to be introspective.

4.1 The Mark of the Mental

One of the first objections to the idea of somatic proprioception being itself introspective comes from phenomenology. As seen in the first chapter, ordinary proprioception is for Merleau Ponty, Drew Leder, Gallagher, and O’Shaughnessy, essentially transparent and attentively recessive. Only as a background do we have experience of our body as subject. This proprioceptive

awareness, contrary to introspective awareness, is non-reflective, non-observational and non-perceptual. According to them, the characterization of normal proprioception as introspective would go against the ordinary experience of our bodies because normal proprioception does not present our body as object whereas introspective proprioception does so by bringing a perceptual and conscious awareness to it under atypical circumstances.¹⁶¹ For example, suppose that you are hastily walking to meet a friend, you are excited and happy to see her. Just as you do not have to track the excited movements of your body walking towards your friend, your emotional state does not present itself as the focus of attention but rather as a “mode of seeing” that frames the experience. Since the felt emotion is not being consciously attended to, we cannot call this introspective awareness. In this view, proprioception could only be introspective if there were an observational quality of attention making the bodily sensation— my feet touching the floor, my arms moving, my heart pumping fast, etc.— an object of awareness.

This objection depends on the definitions of proprioception and introspection common to the philosophical and neuroscientist literature which understands the first one as the unconscious ability to detect limb position, bodily posture, and organic functions from the inside; and the second one as the conscious ability to attend towards one’s own mental states. A response to this objection could focus on arguing that ordinary proprioception, although unconscious, is itself perceptual. Indeed, as Ellen Fridland points out,¹⁶² we now know that the sense of proprioception has its corresponding sense organs (muscle spindles and Golgi tendon receptors) and that, just as there are cases of non-conscious perception (such as blindsight, subliminal perception, auditory perception of a second channel, peripheral objects, etc.), ordinary proprioception could well be a case of unconscious bodily perceptual awareness. Thus, if

¹⁶¹See Gallagher, “Bodily self-awareness and object perception” in *Theoria et Historia Scientiarum*.

¹⁶² Ellen Fridland, “The Case for Proprioception”, p.525.

perception necessarily implies an observational stance, and this one does not imply necessarily an objectifying conscious process, then the fact that introspective awareness is observational, does not have to imply it being objectifying either. But arguing this way would seem to commit us to a perceptual model of introspection. However, an observational stance does not necessarily mean that it is perceptual, as will be shown later in this chapter, neither does it have to be necessarily unconscious in order for the cognition not to be objectifying.

Introspective awareness is considered to be a conscious cognition by definition and, as Jesse Butler puts it, introspection inherently involves a meta-representation. Unlike proprioception, introspection is not only about mental states, but is itself a mental state.¹⁶³ Yet, the claim that mental states are phenomenologically distinct from bodily states is exactly the position that I have tried to avoid. Thus, in order for me to explain in what sense introspective awareness is not necessarily objectifying I need to question its being defined as “mental” and with this, the exact mark that is thought to do the job of distinguishing the mental from the corporeal.

4.1.1 Mental States and Bodily Sensations Inside-Out

It is my contention that the introspective stance is not intrinsically objectifying because the very mark of that which makes it mental is itself dependent on somaesthetic awareness. If it can be shown that introspective awareness is itself based on somaesthetic proprioception, then it will be clear that even while remaining in the background, we have intrinsic basic awareness of our mental life.

¹⁶³ Jesse Butler, *Rethinking Introspection*, p.80.

a) “My” body, “my” mind.

Etymologically, introspection means “to look within” and proprioception is “perceiving one’s own movement from the inside”. Certainly, the very thing that we immediately experience as one’s own is one’s body. This does not seem to happen with our mind for we could entertain ideas, beliefs, or even emotions that are not ours, as when we feel empathetic for someone else’s suffering. But, don’t we also experience bodies that are not our own? The famous rubber hand illusion shows how we can feel the stroking sensation happening in the rubber hand as if it were our real hand, giving the illusion that the rubber hand is part of one’s own body. On the other hand, couldn’t we say that we have ideas, beliefs, and emotions of our own? While our minds change, just as our bodies do, we can certainly identify when we really believe something or when we are faking it. Otherwise words such as “lying”, “pretending”, “faking” would simply not make sense. The opposite can also happen, that we do not recognize a part of our body as our own, like in cases where one brain hemisphere is injured leaving the opposite side of the visually unperceived body completely unattended; or conscious cases where the person does not recognize perceived parts of their own body and in fact denies them as theirs.¹⁶⁴ But it can also be the case that we might have some emotions, beliefs, ideas or even memories that we do not recognize as our own, even if we actually have them, as when we feel jealous of a person but cannot acknowledge it by ourselves.

What this brief detour shows is that the distinction between introspective and proprioceptive awareness cannot be based on the ownership relation because this can describe the relationship we have to both the mental and the physical. Indeed, it was the mark of

¹⁶⁴ See Gazzaniga, “The Split Brain Revisited” in *Scientific American* and Oliver Sacks, “The Man who Fell Out of Bed” in *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*.

ownership which defined the relation of embodiment (“X is the body of”)¹⁶⁵ for Yoga philosophy when it called the body (in both its mental and physical aspects) as the “owned” and the self (*puruṣa*) as the “owner” (*svāmī*).¹⁶⁶ So if both mental states and bodily sensations can be “looked at” as one’s own (or not), then the literal meaning of proprioception cannot justify its use exclusively to bodily sensations. The thing that we “look at” in introspection must have another relevant mark that distinguishes it from proprioception if the objection against proprioception being itself introspective holds.

b) Intentionality

Since Descartes, it became common in Western philosophy to establish the mark of the mental according to the way things appear to our awareness. Bodily states appear to our consciousness as spatial and extended, while mental objects appear to us as internal and with intentionality, i.e. with the feature of “being about” something. Bodily states are unique in that, while being sensory processes, they are distinguished from sensible qualities in virtue of their coming “from the inside” as opposed to “from the outside”. But the inside-outside relation becomes blurry when empirical philosophers (Locke, Hume, and Berkeley) realize that everything that appears to consciousness appears directly as a mental representation. If everything is internal, then the mental-corporeal distinction— along with all the ones that tend to come with it: concept-perception, hallucination-reality, self-world— must have an internal structure that distinguishes between them. In spite of the different ways in which such distinction has been established— intensity of impression (Hume), levels of syntactical unity and forms of intuition (Kant), subjection to different causal laws (Russell), etcetera, representational

¹⁶⁵ Chakrabarti, “The Deadly *mama*, The Perils of Possession”, in *Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences*, p.231.

¹⁶⁶ YS II.23 More on the relation of the self and body later in this chapter.

theories of the mind continued to hold the mark of intentionality for the mental. We have ideas of, memories of, desires of, images of, feelings of, concepts of, beliefs of something. And this mental representations differ from their objects in that they operate as “pictures” or “copies” of that which they are about. The type of interiorization of experience executed by Kant, Hegel, Fichte and the rest of Western idealism still demanded that consciousness had an object, even if that object could never be known in itself, or were only really to be known in its not being an “other”. On the other hand, realistic philosophies (early Wittgenstein, Vienna Circle, Fodor) preserved the mark of intentionality for the mental while considering the object of its reference as part of an independent world “outside” consciousness.

Non-representational theories of the mind denied the idea of the mind as a “mirror” reflecting objects. Nietzsche, Foucault, Levinas, the late Wittgenstein, and others, doubted the power of interiority to give meaning to our mental life. Instead, they gave privilege to the outside. Concepts, words, beliefs, feelings are not the product of an interiority, neither do they originate in an “internal” mental realm. Rather they are created in the “face-to-face” relation with the world, with others, and most importantly, in the activity of the body engaged with the environment. This is also the principle of embodied cognition and of much current neuroscience research¹⁶⁷ according to which concepts, ideas, and other “mental” states are grounded in embodied action, understood as the sensorimotor aspect of experience.¹⁶⁸ However, since the neuroscientist needs to give account of the relation between organism and environment in terms of the organism’s operations, an observational perspective that objectifies such relation is necessarily assumed in order to understand how the information received by the organism’s body gets codified. In order to do this the scientist uses terms such as “neural maps”, “retinal maps”,

¹⁶⁷ Such as the work of Antonio Damasio, V.S. Ramachandra, Evan Thompson, Francisco Varela, Mark Johnson.

¹⁶⁸ Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body*, p.120.

“sensorimotor maps”, etc. According to Mark Johnson, this is not to be confused with representationalism because when the scientists use these terms they are doing it from the standpoint of observers and theorists who “can see mappings and isomorphisms between the neural patterns and their own [the organisms’] experience of the “external world”.¹⁶⁹ But, Johnson explains, from the point of view of the organism, the map is the external world itself. He clarifies: “We could call [the neural map] ‘representation’ in the sense that something ‘in the brain’ appears to correlate structurally with patterns of the ‘external environment’, even though this one is not independent of the organism.”¹⁷⁰ And later on in his book he makes sure to avoid the equation between brain and mind, for the mind encompasses the “entire pattern of embodied organism –environment interaction.”¹⁷¹

In spite of Johnson’s non-representational view, we need to recognize that objectification necessarily implies intentionality, and in the case of “neural maps”, it is precisely their “aboutness” to the environment which makes them meaningful for the scientist interested in understanding the mind. When Gallagher, Leder and O’Shaughnessy differentiate introspective awareness from proprioception, they do it on the basis of the objectifying nature of the “observational stance” which is implicit in intentionality. Since typical proprioceptive awareness is not in an intentional relation with bodily sensations, it does not objectify them. But introspective awareness seems to inherently imply intentionality.

Intentionality might be the mark of the mental, and introspection might be defined in terms of an observational and objectifying stance implied in “looking at” as if there were an “inner eye” which directs its attention towards an “internal” something. However, there is a deeper layer of meaning in both notions of “intentionality” and “introspection”. How do we

¹⁶⁹ Johnson, p.131

¹⁷⁰ *Ibidem*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.* p. 175.

know that we are looking at something “within” ourselves? How do we know that we are looking at something “from within”? *Proprio*-ception and *intro*-spection presuppose already the distinction between inside and outside, and with that, a certain directionality (*intentio*-nality), an “orientation towards”. But how do we get to posit the difference between in and out in the first place? Is it by perception, by inference, by abstraction, by schematization? How can this duality be established even before the distinction between the “mental” and the “corporeal” arises?

From Wittgenstein we know that the words “inside” or “outside” cannot have a denotational meaning, for that would imply a private language unable to provide the sense of relationality implicit in those terms. Embodied cognitive studies would say that the mark of the mental is the sensorimotor ability of the organism to interact with the world in relevant and meaningful ways. We learn terms such as “in” and “out” in situations when we, for example, need to “go out” from home or “come in” to someone’s house. A stronger stance would say that there is nothing but exteriority. Thought, knowledge and even the self are the effect of exterior forces at play, the product of historical and cultural constructions. What we have called “interiority” would be nothing but the manifestation of invisible power structures that dominate and discipline our bodies through external images, discourses, techniques, and practices.¹⁷² And yet, we seem to have experience of an inner life.

c) Somaesthetic Directionalities of the Inner Life

In his essay “Inside and Outside”, Galen Johnson¹⁷³ explains that Merleau Ponty came to realize that the intentionality of consciousness, whether thetic or operative, could not provide a complete or exhaustive account of consciousness and self-consciousness for three reasons: First,

¹⁷² G. A. Johnson, “Inside and outside: Ontological considerations” in *Merleau-Ponty, Interiority, and Exteriority: Psychic Life and the World*, p.27.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.28.

because intentionality presupposes the duality “inside-outside” as given. Second, because consciousness has a blindspot in principle when we reflect on our experience or on ourselves. And third, because the horizontal directionality implicit in “intentionality” is too limited to embrace “those overpowering experiences of transcendence and trans-descendence or vertical time, in which it is no longer we who have thoughts or speech but there is a Thought and a Speech that has us.”¹⁷⁴ Thus, a two dimensional directionality (in-out) conceived in terms of Euclidean space is incomplete when trying to give an account of experiences that occur “beneath” and “beyond” the horizontality of surfaces. Certainly, Merleau Ponty’s ontology of the invisible (in-the-visible) steps away from the meaning of the word “in” that designates the space contained in a jar or a pot, for to be “in-the-world” is rather a matter of being “included”, “integrated”, “inhabiting” as an “intrinsic” part of a whole. I am in-the-world in the same sense as “health is in someone’s body”, or “philosophy is in her blood”, or “She is in the family”.¹⁷⁵

Cognitive studies have been considered as a complement for phenomenology because it is through them that we can approach bodily processes that typically operate on the “blindspot of consciousness”, i.e., beneath the level of conscious awareness. Mark Johnson offers an outstanding non-reductionist analysis of all the different directionalities that are embedded in the organism as fundamental structures of perception, object manipulation, thought, conceptualization and bodily movement. Right and left projections, front and back, near and far, focus and background, center and periphery, up and down, balance, among others, are called “scalar vectors” that apply to every aspect of our qualitative experience.¹⁷⁶ Yet, when Mark Johnson explains the inside/outside relation, he does it based on the “container schema”: “We

¹⁷⁴ *Ibidem*

¹⁷⁵ G. A. Johnson, “Inside and Outside”, p.29.

¹⁷⁶ Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body*, p.136.

know, in a bodily way, that something that is inside a container is not outside it.”¹⁷⁷ He completes this informal phenomenological analysis with a more sophisticated one based on embodied cognition that recognizes the schemas operating beneath the level of conscious awareness as “sensorimotor patterns of experience that are instantiated in and coordinated by neural maps.”¹⁷⁸

There are two problems with this account however. First, even when not interpreted in a representational way, it is not clear how brain topology can account for the non-Euclidean topology of our inner lives. Second, one of the main reasons why embodied cognitive studies reject the representationalist approach is because this theory supposes a center in the mind that does the thinking, while empirical evidence in neuroscience suggests that there isn't one. Yet, the neuroscientist perspective focuses on the mind and its operations understood as sensorimotor patterns structured within the central and peripheral nervous system. However, if thinking or any other mental process involves the whole organism, why then aren't all the systems of the organism taken into account as well? As I have tried to argue in this dissertation, our embodied experience shows that it is not just the sensorimotor patterns that are involved in sensing ourselves but the homeostatic patterns that include them along with the rest of the physiological systems in the body. When considering the sort of comprehensive bodily instantiation that could give us the experience and understanding of a proper inside/outside “image schema”, as Mark Johnson calls it, capable of grounding its meaning both phenomenologically and cognitively, there does not seem to be a better bodily process than the continuous, autonomous, and automatic process of breathing.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.138.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.143.

Encoded already in the respiratory organic pattern are the directionalities of the “in” and “out”, but they are not the only ones. Intentionality as the mark of the mental is insufficient to understand the nature of consciousness precisely because the directionalities implicit in our organic self are multiple, as the somaesthetic exploration of our breathing shows. Each breath alone encompasses horizontal, vertical, circular, spiraling, alternating, crisscrossing, and other forces that carry with them the mark of our mental lives. One in-breath— yogis called this movement *pūraka*— suffices to put into motion an upward flow into the nostrils and down to the lungs, front into the chest and sideways into the ribcage, (hopefully) back deep into the kidneys, and further down into the compressed diaphragm. A breath-out – *recaka*— will reverse the motions. As these movements occur on the surface, subtler directionalities are being sensed deeper in the system: inhibitory closings, diffusing openings, back and forth circuits, as well as alternating dilations and constrictions in the nostrils depending on the “dominance” of a certain flow that crosses laterally according to ultradian rhythms – this is known as the nasal cycle, only discovered until 1895 in the West, while yogis have been aware of it for centuries.

Physiologically, these motions usually remain unconscious because most of them are directly controlled by the lower and middle parts of the brain, only reaching the cortex under special circumstances such as a strong pain, or during practices of bodily attention (athletes, yogis). The extent to which these motor functions can be made aware through attentive practices is debatable, but the fact that the body requires a constant self-monitoring of these motions to remain under suitable ranges, that is, to maintain homeostasis, reveals a level of bodily awareness that does not depend only on the superior functions of the brain. That there must be an awareness of how those motions are going was discussed in the previous chapter when talking

about the first breath, for without such awareness, there would be no impulse to move into the first actions to keep the wellbeing of our lives (both in the physical and the affective aspects).

It is not surprising then, that for Indian Philosophy the true mark of the mental is a “directed motion”, an activity that is sensed within the whole organism as much as it is felt in—and in a sense is even prior to—its relation to the environment. A mental state is defined as a turning (*vr̥tti*), revolving, vibrating (*spanda*) movement, the directionality of which is given by the life force (*prāṇa*), which manifests in all vital functions. It is a common association in the Indian yogic and philosophical systems that mind cannot be without the life force, and the life force cannot be without the mind. Like the moon and the sun, they are an original pair (*mithunam*), says the *Praśna Upaniṣad* (I.7), using a logic of equivalences that makes them both form and formless, visible and invisible, food and food-eater, body and consciousness at the same time. It is only in the heart of this atypical logic that a notion of somatic introspective awareness can make sense.

The mind is body (*śarīra*) (recall Chapter 3). Both, gross and subtle bodies are the food, the moon: the object to be “eaten”, to be seen and illumined by the sun of the conscious day. The sun is the force of life (*prāṇa*) and both are born from the lord of creation (*prajāpati*) who sees, “eats”, and is pure awareness. Śaṅkara, the non-dualist advaitin, remarks: “All of this, gross and subtle, is indeed in one aspect food, [and] both having form and formless [aspects], are food and the eater of the food.”¹⁷⁹ The Lord of creation cannot be other than its own creation: sun and moon, food and food-eater, all the bodies—subtle and gross— all the objects (I.7). Prajāpati, the seer, the subject, is itself food because the food that the mother eats creates the body of the being in her womb, itself a gestation of the mixing of the female and male reproductive substances (*rajas-retas*) produced by the food that the parents eat, brought down

¹⁷⁹ Praśna Up. with Śaṅkara’s commenatry (I.5), p.115.

from the mouth to the place of coupling by the descending motion of the life-mind force (I.14). Food is, thus, the Lord of Creation. Not only do we see here a symbolical cosmogonic language that homologizes the principle of creation with creation itself, but a theory of self-awareness where awareness of oneself (Prajāpati) is simultaneously embodied awareness of oneself as subject (food-eater) and self-conscious experience of oneself as object (food). The ontological identification of the food and the food eater is not metaphysical in the sense that the subject is in reality the object or viceversa, but a phenomenological account (expressed through the symbolism of the moon and the sun, the womb and the parents) of an awareness that reveals the body when it looks within its own subjectivity and that reveals the self when it looks at its own objective embodiment.

The observational stance involved in such a self-aware body cannot thus, be understood under the limited directionality of the notion of intentionality, for if it is true that the very sense of this notion has its basis on a somatic understanding of directionalities, a somatic model that detects more than a straight line between “in-out” would render a much different notion of observational stance. Thus we can see that the body envisioned by the *Praśna Upaniṣad* has hundreds of branches and sub-branches of veins and channels (*nāḍis*) stemming out from the heart. Certainly, these directionalities would not make sense without a point of reference. Up, down, left, right, back and forth, in and out, only get their meaning from a subjective *a priori* condition, as Kant showed in the *First Critique*.¹⁸⁰ The *Praśna Upaniṣad* calls this point of reference “the ātman in the heart” and, as it was elucidated in chapter 3, this is no other than the body felt in its nearest, darkest proximity, the cave, the night from which everything dawns. Śaṅkara agrees with this in his commentary: “in the space of the heart, enclosed within a lump of

¹⁸⁰ Kant, “Transcendental Aesthetic”, A47-A49.

flesh of the form of a lotus, is this *ātman*, [and in this heart made of food]¹⁸¹ the subtle body is connected with the self (*ātman*) (III.6).

We are dealing here with a paradigm that considers the heart, the physical fleshy heart—and not the brain—, as the orientation center of the body. But the subtle body—that is, the felt body— is neither the fleshy heart nor the self; it is something “in-between” them. As any good phenomenology of depth, Upaniṣadic thought does not reduce the experience to the function. We find this confusion very often in reductionist statements of the body coming from an unreflective reception of neuroscientific studies when the experiential status of a sensation is assumed to be nothing else but the activation “in the brain”, when all that is in the brain is the processing of that sensation. Our self might be “in” the heart (*Upaniṣads*) just as the spatiality of bodies might be processed and created “in” the brain (Neuroscience). But this is true only in the sense that such relation of “insideness” is not taken as a container/contained schema, but as a part/whole relationship designating an encompassing or inclusive relation.¹⁸² It could be said that the directionalities acting between the self and the movements of the body among other bodies are in a middle area that “connects” (*samyuktah*) the brain with the “stuff” that it encodes, and the self with the cosmos where it moves. But this middle area, between consciousness and space, is neither inside nor outside. Or, if we follow the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*, it is always inside and outside with respect to a point of reference that posits itself in relation to its own experience. If we were to describe the directionality that characterizes any intentional relation (thought-object, body-environment) within the body schema provided by Vasiṣṭha in the stories narrated to Rāma, such as the “Self-aware Brahmā”, we would have to draw a line that emerges vibrating out from within the heart, coming back up in a loop towards itself in a sort of “up and down” direction that

¹⁸¹ Words in brackets are my addition to try to convey the meaning of the phrase: *anna-asmin-hṛdaya-* left untranslated in the original version.

¹⁸² Galen Johnson, “Inside and Outside”, p.29.

returns towards the inner heart to observe its own desires, emotions, sensations, only to come out towards an object that mirrors back immediately. That is, in the non-dualist systems of Vedānta and Tantra, the observational stance is never just depicted as unidirectional in a relation between conscious cognition- object, or active body-environment. There is a previous movement involved which always comes “into” itself before it “goes” out. Awareness of one’s body as subject inherently implies self-reflexivity, i.e., awareness of one’s bodily “pre-arisen” activities.

To use the previous example where someone walks hastily to meet a dear friend; the implicit proprioception that allows one’s legs to walk without tumbling down or the arms without doing random movements is simultaneously accompanied with the implicit awareness of the belief that the person one is running towards is a good friend, and the certitude that one loves her, and the felt desire to see her and hug her. In fact, one’s bodily movements would not make sense without such previous “inner”, “mental”, “self-reflexive” movements. There does not seem to be the need for conscious and deliberate self-ascribed cognitions such as “I see my friend”, “I love her”, “I am excited that she is here”, and yet those thoughts and desires and dispositions should be phenomenally there. One is aware of one’s friendly heart “pumping” just as much as of one’s fleshy heart.

d) Isomorphisms

To establish isomorphisms is inevitable when trying to understand the relation between the organism and the world. In fact, they are at the core of unconscious cognitive processes. The sensorimotor map of the body is one of those isomorphic neural maps where different areas of the cortex are sensitive to particular body sensations. Perhaps one of the most impressive isomorphic relations in the body is the one executed by the eye. Not only is there an isomorphic

area in the primary visual cortex that preserves the physical location reflected in the retina based on the topography of receptive fields, but now scientists know that different neurons respond to specific orientations – vertical stimuli will activate neurons with a vertical receptive field, and so on. In a sense, the Upaniṣadic isomorphic bodily map works with a similar logic: different parts of the body have distinct receptive fields according to their function.

Isomorphisms established by yogic philosophies are always between cosmic subtle objects and bodily functions. The schema varies from text to text but the logic is similar. In the *Praśna Upaniṣad* and Sankara’s commentary on it (*PU*, III.7-10) we find that the eye is activated by the sun; the mind by the moon; the excretory functions by the goddess Earth; the digestive and assimilative functions by the ether; the circulatory system by the wind; the upper senses in the head by the fire. These Upaniṣadic isomorphisms are even more explicit in the *Pañcikaraṇa*, a later advaita text (9th CE) where Sureśvara, one of Śankara’s disciples, elaborates on the elements of the subtle body. In this text, each one of the organs of cognition and conation is presided by a particular deity. Hearing is activated by the Devas; touch by Vāyu, the god of the wind; vision by Aditi, the Sun God; taste by Varuna, the lord of water; smell by the goddess Earth; speech by Agni, the god of fire; the grasping hands by Indra, the chief of the gods; the moving feet by Viśnu, the protector; excreting functions by the god of Death; and the generative organs by Prajapati, the lord of Creation. Even mental functions have a particular deity associated with them: ego maker is presided by Rudra, the lord of destruction; intellect by Bṛhaspati, the lord of sacrifice; the will by Kṣetrajña, the knower of the field, and nescience by Ísvarah, the supreme god.

The divinities are there to provide the stimuli and they are also the faculties that put the organs to work. In a sense, they are the “food” as well as the “food-eater”. We do not perceive

the deities in our sensations, but we postulate them as the cosmic powers that bring our senses into life. There is a similar logic in modern isomorphic explanations. The brain does not know anything about the world except from the measurements that it executes based on the information taken by the sensory receptors. The brain infers what stimuli are likely to have caused the resulting neural activity patterns.¹⁸³ This idea is precisely the basis behind the reductionist position that everything is “in the brain”, but as it was discussed in the earlier pages, this view relies on the questionable container/contained schema.

With regards to directionality and spatial location, the brain also needs to use a reference point, particularly that of the eye, the ears and the position of body. The brain must combine the different stimuli received by visual, auditory, vestibular, and proprioceptive sensors into a percept of a world that, some would say (including advaitins), is not actually “there”. Our experience of the body-in-this-world is indeed the product of an activity of the mind (*manodhikṛta*), as we see stated in the *Praśna Upanisad* and the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*. The Upaniṣadic view takes a realist position in that such a mental activity is precisely the motion that the life force (*prāna*) infuses into our bodies (*UP*, III.3). *Vāsiṣṭha*’s idealist position relies on the active perceptual nature of our bodies. Our sense organs are not just passive receptive fields but active projective forces that objectivize the mental activity and exteriorize it. We do not perceive objects “inside” the brain but at a distance in space. At the same time, we do not experience them “objectively” but charged with our “pre-arisen” dispositions.¹⁸⁴ Visual stimuli, which are transported via neurons to the visual cortex, are somehow projected (in a way that neuroscientists have not quite figured out yet), objectivized, exteriorized, “outpictured”. Our mental activity

¹⁸³ See Jennifer M. Groh, *Making Space. How the Brain Knows Where Things Are*.

¹⁸⁴ For an example based on a scientific experiment showing how our perception of color varies according to our emotional disposition see: Adam K. Fetterman, Michael D. Robinson, et. al. “Anger as Seeing Red: Perceptual Sources of Evidence” in *Soc Psychol Personal Sci*. 2011 May; 2(3): 311-316.

experiences itself in its own objective “ideation”. Science and the embodied idealism of the *Yoga Vasiṣṭha* illustrated with the story of the “Self-Aware Brahmā” seem to meet here.

However, such mental activity (*vr̥tti*) is not to be reduced to the activity of the body or the brain alone, for this one is already a product of the motion that comes from the cosmos, the “devas”, the environment, and the world “in” which both the body and the brain exist. In this way, the “aboutness” of the mental cannot just be a “going towards”, for it is already a “coming in” (from the cosmos, the environment) which will be a “going out” (with subtle dispositions) in order to “come back” (just like our breathing). The now common idea of the “extended” mind illustrates this point nicely when it demonstrates that our thoughts, memories, cognitive process are not only “inside our brains” but “outside” in our notes, books, telephones, ipads, computers and recorders.¹⁸⁵ Mental activity, intrinsically self-reflexive, can establish an observational stance that is not necessarily objectifying but somatically self-reflective, i.e. awareness of one’s own processes as objectified, exteriorized and re-interiorized.

What we learn from comparing embodied cognitive studies with somaesthetics based on Indian philosophy is that the mental cannot be understood as that which is happening “inside” the body, for our body itself could be considered as being “inside” (in the sense of being an inhabitant) of that which is supposed to be the mark of the mental—i.e., the interrelationality of mind-environment, for embodied cognition; or brain activities, for reductionist cognitive science; or cosmic directed motions, for Indian cosmogonical narratives. If this is true, then the very act of sensing our body in its interaction with the environment would be introspective, for the outwardly oriented attention would be simultaneously “looking inside” towards our own mind. In other words, introspective awareness viewed under the criticism of the notion of intentionality would do away with the idea that introspecting is to have a cognitive activity in relation to

¹⁸⁵ Andy Clark and David J. Chalmers, “The Extended Mind” in *The Philosophers Annual*, vol.XXI.

another cognition. Instead, to cognize our beliefs, thoughts, emotions, and mental activities is intrinsically a somatic activity; and it is through this very somatic sense that we distinguish between the “mental” and the “non-mental”.

4.2 Consciousness, Attention and Self-Awareness

The notion of introspective proprioception requires a somaesthetic model of Introspection. It is based on the principle that proprioceptive awareness is always more than implicit awareness of one’s own bodily movements and position of the limbs.¹⁸⁶ It argues that implicit, ordinary awareness of our body as subject, must involve implicit awareness of our mental states because the only difference between the mind and the body is found in the directionalities that the life activity (*prāṇa*) takes, and those are felt somatically. For Phenomenology, the only observational stance with regards to a non-objectifying relation with our own bodies is that in which awareness of our basic corporeal intentionality (body-towards-world) remains in the background. Since this stance is unconscious and immediate, it does not require the mediation of representations. However, the basic intentionality implied here is that of the sensorimotor capacities of the body which involve a limited “in-out”, “here-there” directionality. One of the things that explicit proprioceptive awareness of our body—specifically of our breath— reveals is that there are many other basic somatic directionalities that the body establishes with the world which pre-arise to the one established in terms of “inside-outside”; precisely the ones that the body establishes with itself as a sentient, affective, emotionally dispositioned being.

At this point the second objection to my thesis can be raised. While it is true that we are emotional dispositional beings, merely *being* in that state does not imply in any sense to be conscious of it. If we do not attribute it consciously to ourselves through the conceptual

¹⁸⁶ Shusterman, Richard, *Body Consciousness. A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics*, Preface, x.

categorization of it as an emotion, a belief or a mere thought, then this “basic mental dispositional” cannot be called introspective, as somatic as it may be. In the rest of this chapter I will respond to this objection by arguing that, while it is true that explicit introspective consciousness requires the relevant subject to be consciously aware of its own mental states, it is also true that there is a non-objectifying self-aware stance of our mental life that reveals itself in the experience while remaining in the background.

4.2.1 Consciousness

Current discussions on self-awareness and introspection debate over the mechanism(s) by which we come to know that “I believe X”, or “I feel X”, or “I desire X”. Higher order model theories (HOT)¹⁸⁷ consider that in order for a mental state to be introspected there needs to be a cognition extrinsic to it for which the first order mental state is available to be ascribed to the relevant agent. If the mental state cannot be made the object of another cognitive state that would make it experientially conscious as a belief, emotion, or desire, etc. to the relevant subject, then it is not introspectively accessible. This means that having a conscious state (e.g. feeling happy to see my friend) does not entail by itself being in an introspective relation with it, let alone when it is an unconscious, unavailable state such as the speed of the blood running through one’s veins pumped by an excited heart. HOT models of introspection are representational because mental states are treated as objects that are represented through concepts as specific experiential content towards which the subject can reflect upon. According to this view, we become aware of our individual attitudes not by perceiving qualitative properties, but by the application of diverse attentional high level cognitive agencies. Christopher Hill, for example, denies the possibility of being able to distinguish between the state of judging with full

¹⁸⁷ See David M. Rosenthal, *Consciousness and Mind*.

confidence and the state of judging with moderate confidence based on their distinct phenomenal qualities. He asks: “Does “wishing” have a set of qualia?”¹⁸⁸ His response is that neither he nor others are able to answer it or “feel” the difference. Thus, in view of this he deduces that “introspective awareness of occurring attitudes is not grounded in perceptual awareness of qualia.”¹⁸⁹

Evidently, the fact that Hill and his friends cannot distinguish between moderate and full confidence on the base of “feeling” does not speak to the weakness of the theories that subscribe to the “attitude qualia” view, as he calls them, but to different ways of applying our attentional devices. His objection targets theories of introspection that believe such distinction is made through an “inner eye” that perceives the qualitative properties of our mental states. The somaesthetic model of introspection does not fall into that problem because it does not rely on the metaphor of the “inner eye” but on a common somatic sensitivity that we experience ordinarily in proprioception. Even Mark Johnson, who does not believe phenomenology is enough to settle the bodily basis of meaning and thought, remarks that our most abstract conceptual and logical analytical tools have a peculiar felt quality and that “because most of us are not in the habit of attending to these subtle, nuanced feelings of direction and relation in our thinking, we are inclined to deny that they play no serious role in logic... however...once you start to pay attention to how you feel as you think, you will notice an entire submerged continent of feeling that supports, is part of, your thoughts.”¹⁹⁰

The problem with HOT model is that, even if the representational content is located within the mental state itself, as Brentano wanted it to be, this observational stance results in the objectification of the first order state. In other words, it renders impossible to be introspectively

¹⁸⁸ Christopher Hill, *Consciousness*, p.230.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

¹⁹⁰ Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body*, p.97.

aware of one's subjective experience without posing it as objective, for as Hill himself recognizes: "It is impossible to have a meta-cognitive propositional attitude in mind at the same time as one is entertaining an occurrent attitude to which the first attitude refers."¹⁹¹ I agree with him. Explicit introspective awareness is generally retrospective, especially the one understood in a non-trivial way, i.e. the one that has as aim self-knowledge— knowledge of one's character, one's values, one's abilities, aptitudes, one's emotions, one's ways to be happy, etc.— and not just the foundational epistemic worry to determine how it is that we self-ascribe a propositional attitude.¹⁹²

The problem with explicit introspection is that, since it seems to inevitably require an objectifying conscious stance, then it can never give awareness of oneself as a subject. Moreover, if the only way to explain basic introspective access to our mental life is through higher level cognitions, then this means that we can never be self-aware as we go through our present experiences. But if we are not self-aware in our present mental life experience, then how can we remember our mental states in order to introspect on them? Representational theories of introspection do not really answer the question as to what makes a mental state available for our consciousness, they have to presuppose the mental state as conscious. On our account, if a state is available for introspection it is because it is already self-aware. We can be aware of our own thoughts or emotions as we are undergoing them, even if there is no explicit linguistic expression attaching that state to a conscious "I". This is possible because our thoughts, emotions and beliefs are not just abstract categorizations, but embodied fields of experiences immediately available in virtue of their somatic ground.

¹⁹¹ Hill, *Consciousness*, p.242.

¹⁹² The distinction between trivial and non-trivial ways of understanding introspection is taken from Quassim Cassam, *Self-knowledge for Humans*.

One level accounts of introspection do not rely on representations to explain conscious mental states. As Husserl and Sartre have argued, the feature in virtue of which a mental state is conscious is located within the state itself, it is an intrinsic property of those mental states.¹⁹³ This means that an experience involving certain body-mind states does not have to be objectified in order for the subject to know that it is experiencing it. This pre-reflective self-consciousness is not thematic or attentive, or voluntarily brought about. An experience is conscious of itself without being an intentional object, that is, without being the object of a cognitive act that represents it, judges it, or directs its attention towards it. This is precisely the type of self-awareness implicit in ordinary proprioception as understood by Merleau Ponty, Gallagher, and O'Shaughnessy.

In a sense, both higher order theories and one level theories of introspection agree that explicit introspection is objectifying because focusing the attention to a particular mental state establishes an intentional relation that splits the experience into subject and object. The difference between these two models is that while higher order theories think there is no other way to account for self-awareness than reflectively, the phenomenological one level model thinks that self-reflexivity is possible, that is, self-awareness does not necessarily require a process of objectification.

The somaesthetic model of introspection that I endorse pairs up with the phenomenological account on self-reflexivity but distances from it in the assumption that focused attention is necessarily objectifying. As it has been defined previously in this dissertation, bodily self-awareness is the capacity that the body has of paying attention to itself, but this capacity of paying attention to itself is not something that only occurs voluntarily and on exceptional occasions. It was explained in the third chapter that the homeostatic mechanisms of the body are

¹⁹³ Zahavi, "Two Takes on a One Level Account of Consciousness", in *Psyche*, p.5.

ways in which the body monitors itself to remain under certain ranges of self-maintenance. And that this homeostatic sense is as much physical as it is mental. My conclusion was that the body (which is neither purely objective nor purely subjective) is always self-aware both proprioceptively and introspectively. This however could give the impression that I am taking the introspective stance to be perceptual. But if this is so I would have to explain what exactly is the sense organ of this self-monitoring activity.

Some theories of introspection acquired the form of an “inner sense” model because they saw a similarity between the observational stance in perception and the observational stance with respect to one’s own mental states. Since the first one is possible through the sense organs, the second one should also be possible through an inner mechanism that works as a “sense” and gives us special access to the phenomenal quality of our own mental life; a type of access that nobody else has. One of the main objections encountered by this theory is that there does not seem to be anything identifiable in our physiology that works as the “sense organ” of introspection. It is clear that we see through our eyes, hear through our ears, touch through our skin, but with what do we introspect through? David Armstrong responded to this objection by denying the need for a specific inner sense organ in introspection. Instead he¹⁹⁴ thought that proprioception was the “outer sense” closest in formal resemblance with introspection because proprioceptive awareness gives access to one’s own body in a way nobody else can; it has limited powers; it is subject to illusion (we can be mistaken about what we feel in our bodies); and while proprioception does not give awareness of all our current bodily states at once, we are usually aware of our body as a unity. Comparing introspection with proprioception would, according to Armstrong, demystify and naturalize what we understand by “inner sense”. Indeed,

¹⁹⁴ David Armstrong, “Three types of consciousness” in *Brain and Mind*, p.238.

understood as a sort of scanning function performed by the brain upon brain states, without any specificity of brain regions, the inner sense would stop being considered as an “inner eye”.

As it is to be expected, his view has been strongly criticized not only because there does not seem to be any identifiable areas in the brain or nervous tissue that do the specific work of monitoring other brain states, but more importantly, because if it were true that there is an introspective faculty of perceiving mental states/activities and these are nothing but electrochemical events, then in no way would we perceive them, for we do not perceive brain states at all. And even if we did, then this would suppose a mechanism that translates the brain input into something that does not resemble the brain processes in any way.¹⁹⁵

Although I appreciate Armstrong’s analogy between proprioception and introspection, his is a metaphysical view which thinks that in order for introspection to be a real faculty it needs to correspond to a certain materialistic idea of what sense and function is. The somaesthetic perspective does not have that issue. It is not that introspection resembles proprioception because it assumes a similar observational stance with our mental activities to the one we establish with our bodily states. Rather, according to the somaesthetic view of introspection that I have tried to develop, it is the felt body itself that, in being aware of its own states, is itself introspective. There is no need to find a “special” faculty or a special representation, rather, there is the need to understand how bodily self-awareness works as a whole, and not just as a system reduced to a sensorimotor mechanism.

This is why it is relevant turning to philosophical thought like the one found in Sāmkhya, Yoga, Vedānta Advaita, and Tantra (developed in the last chapter). From the outset, they take the body as a perceptual system with depth as it was previously shown.

¹⁹⁵ Jesse Butler, *Rethinking Introspection*, p.17-22.

4.2.2 Attention, *Manas*, and Sense Withdrawal

A powerful objection to the perceptual model of introspection is that the fact that we can become aware of our own mental states and activities does not mean that we are in a perceptual relation to them. There is indeed a sense of the word “perception” which can be applied to one who understands a truth or contemplates a thought, but in this case, the sense of “perception” is different than “sense-perception”. In the broad sense of the term, perception is simply a *noticing*.¹⁹⁶ But obviously “noticing” is something we also do when we imagine, remember, speak our thoughts, make mistakes and even when dreaming. Śāṅkara will even say that there is a “noticing” of the dreamless state, for if there were not, we would not be able to report how good (or bad) our sleep was. As long as there is mental activity, there will be directionality, and such directionality is essentially characterized by being attentive. Whether the mental activity is restless, stupefied, distracted, one-pointed, or even in a state of arrest, Vyāsa says (*YSbh* I.1), there is attentiveness (*samādhi*). Attentiveness is defined by Patañjali as the state of sustained focus where the object appears (in the mind) *as if* this (the mind) was empty of its own form (*YS* III.3).

It is important to note that neither in Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Advaita Vedānta nor Vāsiṣṭha’s yoga is attention defined as a faculty. Instead, Vyāsa considers it as an essential feature (*dharma*) of the mind (*YSbh* 1.1). The degree, quality, and reach of conscious attention varies depending the state of the mind, but Vyāsa’s position is so radical as to consider states such as dullness, drunkenness, and even faintness as attentive, even if this is attentiveness of nothing at all. That the mind could be attentive even in cases that seem unconscious for our normal conception of attention would only be possible if it is true that there is a non-objectifying self-aware observational stance. How could this even be possible if the very notion of “attention” implies

¹⁹⁶ Brian O’Shaughnessy, *Consciousness and the World*, p.275.

directionality? And how can there be directionality if there is no explicit subject in a relation with its object of attention?

It is key to understand attention not as a mental faculty but rather as a feature of the mental. In this sense, it could not be that the mind is attentive sometimes or under certain circumstances and not attentive under others. The difference between being awake or asleep would then be not in that the mind is attentive in one and not attentive in the other, but rather in the place of focus that the mind holds. That the mind can focus (or not) is a necessary property of the depth of our felt body. And the recognition of such depth is expressed by Vyāsa’s explanation of “focus” or “concentration” (*dhāraṇa*, *YSbh* III.1): “Concentration consists in holding or fixing the mind on the navel circle, or on the lotus of the heart, or on the effulgent center of the head, or on the tip of the nose or of the tongue, or on such like spots in the body, or on any external object, by means of the modifications of the mind.” Notice that the first part of the definition gives examples of explicit introspective proprioception and it ends by saying that the mind can also focus on *any other external object*. That Vyāsa mentions here the focus on “external objects” is intriguing considering that *dhāraṇa* is one of the three “internal” elements of the practice towards yogic self-knowledge, and comes right after the exercise of withdrawing the attention of the sense faculties from their corresponding objects (*pratyāhāra*). If you close your eyes while I ask you to focus on the tree that was right in front of you, are you focusing on the tree-in front-of-you or on the image of the tree-in front-of-you? Even if we do not assume a representationalist view, a common criterion to determine the “external” from the “internal” is marked by that liminal space of contact between our sense organs and an object. Whatever it is on the “other side” of the sense-contact will be considered, even if just conventionally, external. This creates the idea—and the experience—that whatever is beyond our body is outside and whatever is on “this” side

of our skin is “inside”. Initially, this is what we see in the *Yoga Sūtras*, for which the “external” elements of the practice of self-knowledge are those which have to do with the body and the senses in contact with the “outside”: whether it is moral (*yamas*), personal (*niyamas*), functional and physiological (*āsanas* and *prāṇayama*) externality. The practices become “internal” when the active contact between sense organ and object is arrested (*pratyāhara*). Why is Vyāsa referring to an external object in the context of a practice that is supposed to work with internal ones?

This ambiguity is necessary for a philosophy of depth. Of course the mind focuses when it attends towards objects that are in contact with our senses and can have “external” objects as the focus of “internal” processes of inference and memory. The very activities of focusing, maintaining the focus, and contemplating on a particular object (whether internal or external) are themselves considered by the Yoga system to be “external” with respect to the type of contemplation that has no object to focus on. If this is the case, then a most precise feature of the “external” is not that which is defined by the contact between body and environment, but rather by that which holds a place of “here” with respect to “there”. As we saw previously, the only place that can hold the label “here” is our own bodies, but the felt body is much more than a bunch of sensorimotor limbs. So when Vyāsa talks about the ability of focusing in terms of “holding the mind on external objects by means of the modifications of the mind”, he is labeling those objects as “external” from the only point of view which can count as “here”. We attend, focus, concentrate, meditate, and contemplate with our felt body, but not just the body felt as pervaded by sense organs, but the body pervaded by mind (*manomayātma*). It is not the body as that whose specific mental faculty of attending focuses on objects, but the body as a felt mind, a mind-full body.

In Yoga, Advaita Vedānta and the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*, *manas* is called the internal organ, “antahkaraṇa”, commonly translated as “inner sense” or “inner functional mechanism”.¹⁹⁷ It is usually read as a faculty or as part of the body with a specific epistemic function. In my view, this is not accurate enough because it gives the idea that *manas* is something localizable in the brain. But the very characteristic of *manas* is its pervasiveness. As we have seen in this dissertation, it is a common view derived from neuroscientific studies to identify all our epistemic functions with the brain or nervous system. And some scholars, trying to read with fresh eyes Indian philosophical terminology, make extra efforts to identify its concepts with neuroscientific accounts. From the perspective of a somaesthetic model of introspection, if we consider seriously the characterization of *manas* as all pervasive, then its identification merely with the nervous system is not possible. If our criticism of intentionality holds and it is true that the mental life is marked by its multiple directionalities, then the capacity to attend, focus, concentrate, meditate, and contemplate is not something that is done from the “here” of the brain to the “there” of an internal object, but from the “here” of every single cell and minute movement of our felt body. Perhaps Dominik Wujastik is right in calling “minute” the subtle body, but he follows the common identification of it with the nervous system based on several modern commentaries of Tantric and Yogic descriptions of the body.¹⁹⁸ The body with depth is a subtle body not in virtue of a metaphysical identification with some material, organic structure, as minute as it may be (such as the firing neurons or cells of internal organs), but in virtue of its being “pre-arisen”, never just a material something that can be objectified, neither a fully mental (“astral”) substance that is pure thought.

¹⁹⁷ See Ram-Prasad Chakravarthi, *Indian Philosophy and the Consequences of Knowledge*.

¹⁹⁸ Dominik Wujastik, “Interpreting the image of the human body in pre-modern India”, p.22

A perception of sound, light, vibration, etc. presupposes hearing, seeing, touching, etc. And at the same time, hearing, seeing, touching, presuppose the capacity of attending to that which is heard, seen, touched, etc. The capacity of attending to a sensation presupposes the experience of someone who is attending, and the sense of being someone having certain sensations presupposes the experience of someone, somebody that is being intellectually and emotionally affected. The mental, the intellectual, and the self-reflective capacities are only possible in a felt-body as a whole, not just in one part of it.

It is the effect of the pre-arisen that can become an object of focused attention. Since the attentive body can become aware of the mental states as “external”, this presupposes a place from which the focusing on mental states can be established, and this is the body pervaded by intellect. For example, if I am undergoing an experience of anger, this means that there is a mental attentiveness, an “I” to which that experience belongs to, a set of pre-judgments that taint my actions, decisions and reactions, and someone who is experientially affected by the effect. But it is only when my body as felt-mind establishes a focus directionality towards the anger in my body that I can become consciously aware of being angry. I could make this cognition the object of a further act of focused attention by becoming— by-coming-into— an intellectual stance before the state: “I am angry” and judge that “I do not like to be angry”. In Yogic philosophy, there is even a deeper act of attending which makes oneself aware of the feeling of “I-am-being-the-doer” in the experience of being angry and disliking it, by be-come-in(g) the body that can focus on the experience of “I-am-judging”. The importance of the distinction given by Yoga philosophy between focused attention (*dhāraṇa*), maintained or meditative awareness (*dhyāna*) and natural attentiveness (*samādhi*) is twofold. First it shows that introspection does not work within a rigid “inside/outside” framework; that to “look within” is

actually always a “looking outside” from within our felt-mind, felt-intellect, and felt-emotional bodies. Many times their particular states only become conscious when their activity is reflected in a diary, in a talk with a friend, with a teacher (*guru*) or the psychoanalyst. Second, and the most relevant for my notion of bodily self-awareness, the fact that we are not focusing all the time in our mental states does not mean that we (as bodies) are not aware of them. This idea was masterfully expressed in the book *The Thinking Body* where we learn that one does not need to be conscious of how angry one is for the body to grip the muscles, to shorten and fasten the breath, or for the sympathetic nervous system to send hormones and message the signal “fight” response.¹⁹⁹ In other words, our homeostatic system is ordinarily “looking” at its own mental states, just as the sensorimotor system is ordinarily aware of the position of its limbs.

Only a body with depth can become consciously aware of something because it is a body that can “come in” from “outside” and be “here” in a reflective (*pratisamvedī*) observational stance (whether perceptive or not) that “holds” (*dhāraṭi*) the object attended. But the condition of possibility for focused self-reflective attention is self-reflexive attentiveness, because only self-awareness can provide a “living psychic space” for the object to appear.

As an “internal instrument” (*antahkarana*), the subtle body can only become consciously aware of its activity by reflection, and this is why explicit introspective proprioception seems objectifying: the object attended to, whether physical or mental, will always be external with respect to “here”. Yogic and Vedāntic philosophy agrees with phenomenology in that conscious introspective self-awareness cannot give awareness of oneself as a subject, for any aspect of the felt body, as long as it is attended will become the object of awareness. Yet, it is through explicit introspective proprioception that Yoga and Vedāntic philosophy show that there must be a non-objectifying self-aware observational stance present in any intentional relation. In order to

¹⁹⁹ Mabel E. Todd, *The Thinking Body*, 1937.

attend to an object *as* something: as a belief, a bodily state, an emotion, a desire, a perception, etc. there needs to be awareness of its appearance in the first place. For something to “appear” means that it needs to be located within the psychic space of attention. However, some things may appear without us noticing them, perhaps because we are distracted or because the scene is so busy that another thing appearing does not make a difference. How can we become aware of the appearing of the appearance? As we saw in the second chapter, Yoga thinks this is possible by ceasing the directionality of our minds towards multiple distractions and by transforming it into a one-pointed stance through the eight elements described above (*yamas, niyamas, etc.*). The practice of introspective proprioception is the way in which Yoga, as praxis, prepares the mind to be able to focus on a non-object. What Yoga calls *asamprajñata samādhi* or contemplation without support is actually the focusing on a non-object that appears only in the moment between the appearance of an object and another one.²⁰⁰ The “in-between” non-appearances—otherwise called the *pratyayas* of arrest (*YS I.18*)— are nothing but the mind in its purely being an attentive “here”, an attentive conscious psychic living space. The “non-object” that appears is the mind itself in its being attentive, the psychic space holding the space for itself. This is no other than the self-aware “perfect body” we talked about in chapter 2. Only by isolating (*kaivalya*) the appearance of the appearing can the non-objectifying self-aware stance become explicitly evident and reveal thus the intrinsic introspective nature of our own body, for it is precisely this stance which makes the mind naturally attentive and without which it would not be possible to become aware of its own states.

From this we can see that, while explicit introspective awareness cannot give awareness of oneself except as an object, it is through the deepening of our introspective proprioception that

²⁰⁰ This practice is also included as one of the 112 concentration exercises enumerated in the *Vijñānabhairava Tantra*, 61, 62. “Having meditated on the cognition of two ideas, or perceptions, dwell in the middle, between them. Having cast them both aside, in that gap the real appears”. (My translation).

we arrive to the explicit awareness of a self-aware non-objectifying stance. Contrary to the idea that introspective proprioception is necessarily objectifying, Classical Yoga Philosophy and the philosophy of depth present in Vedānta show an intrinsically self-aware, introspective body. But this requires a practice of explicit introspective awareness capable of revealing its implicit non-objectifying and contemplative presence in our bodily being. Moreover, somaesthetic introspection itself involves the absence of the body as subject precisely because in the very structure of intentionality, the appearance of an object (of perception, of inference, of memory, of imagination, of dreams, of stupefaction, of faintness, etc.) involves the self-effacing of the attentive self-luminous consciousness into the absolute darkness of the “here”.

4.2.3 Self-awareness

One last thing must be considered if we do not want my objector to make a rejoinder about me not showing in what way this non-objectifying self-aware stance does the job of implicitly ascribing the mental state, say the emotion of anger, to the subject who is supposed to be introspectively aware of it without the explicit proposition “I am angry”. It seems that as much as it could be true that a non-objectifying self-aware stance is present in all our activities and emotional engagements with the world, it does not seem to account for the feeling of those activities (bodily movements, emotional dispositions, mental states, etc.) as belonging to oneself. My objector might now be in a position to understand that self-awareness is non-objectifying in virtue of its contemplative nature which lets the object appear without establishing a directionality towards it. But it is not clear then in which sense this self-awareness is introspective. For there to be “implicit” introspective awareness, this would have to involve an intrinsic, non-thetic sense of “I” that anchored the bodily sensations, emotions, thoughts, etc. to

the subject that is sensing, feeling, thinking. In other words, how can this contemplative awareness account for an introspective grasp of ourselves as having certain emotions without conscious ascription of “I” thoughts?

It is true that non-objectifying attentiveness (or seedless *samādhi*) becomes explicit only after isolating it from other type of mental activity. A sort of “uncovering” from the layers of objects that distract our attention has to be pursued with effort and some would say, rather artificially. Once there, in the pure space of attentiveness, it seems hard to find any relation back to the possible objects of introspection, or proprioception or perception. Hence the dualism that I criticized in the view of *pūruṣa* in Sāmkhya, the seer in Yoga, as well as the dismissal of the body for the *brahman* in Vedānta. Vāsiṣṭha criticizes the yogic notion of *samādhi* precisely on the grounds that it seems to require a secluded, quietist separation from daily activities; only available to those who perform meditation in *padmāsana* (a seated yoga position of the body) and renounce into the forest life (*YV*, V.62.5). But if it is true that attentive self-awareness is the natural state of our mind, it would have to be accessible all the time. In this sense, it would not have to be dissociated from our daily and bodily activities. Of course, self-aware attentiveness is only “pure” when it is isolated, but we do not have pure bodies, not even when they are perfect (in the yogic sense). Moreover, such awareness would not be “pure” without a body undergoing introspective proprioception and could not call itself “self-aware” without re-cognizing itself in every conscious state. In a very fundamental way, *this* impure, ordinary observational stance is *that* pure observational stance, where “this” is the implicit awareness of one’s own body as subject (both proprioceptively and introspectively), as “here”, as “I”. “I”, that is, my felt body, is “that”, which is the absolute “here”.

This strange formulation reveals something that Shoemaker had already stated in his criticism to the observational models of introspection.²⁰¹ We can only know through introspection that the “thing” whose mental state is introspected is identical to the thing doing the introspecting (“my felt body” is “I”), but this does not imply that I am that thing. In other words, from the tautological truth that “I” is “my body” I cannot deduce that I *am* my body. Yet, there is a sense of being myself in all my interactions (physical and mental) with other bodies even if I do not exactly know what it is that I am. This sense of self that is inbuilt in the functionality of our sense organs and reinforced in the interaction between mind and body, inside and outside, is the *ahamkara* or ego-maker and it is the source of a major confusion in our lives as explained in all Indian philosophies. Since awareness of one’s body is basically indiscernible from the awareness of oneself, we tend to assume that when we say “I” and ascribe states to it, we are knowing who that I is. But this is, as we saw with Sāṃkhya, Yoga, and Vedānta, a mistake, and one that causes a lot of suffering. We self-identify with the “I” that is suffering, or that is confused, or that, even if happy, will eventually be unsettled again in the future. Without the explicit experience of a non-objectifying self-awareness, our use of “I” will always be subject to error through misidentification. This last statement supposes that there is a use of self-ascription thoughts that would be immune to error through misidentification. In the Hindu orthodox tradition, this use is expressed in the ones that match “I” with the true self, such as the great Vedic proposition: “I am *brahman*”, where self identity is understood in its most universal sense. But while this reveals an identity possible for a pure contemplative stance, it does not account for how it is possible to discriminate oneself from others, which is needed in our moral, social and even most intimate interactions. The problem of seeing the contemplative stance as an “absolute here” is that, in its pure isolation, it is only “that”, and never really a “here”. For “that” to be a

²⁰¹ Sydney Shoemaker, “Self-reference and Self-awareness”, in *Journal of Philosophy* 65, p. 562-563.

“here” needs to be someone’s body, and this is another of the elements of self-awareness illustrated in the “Self-Aware Brahmā” story of the *Yoga Vāsishtha*.

a) “I” and “mine” thoughts

According to Gareth Evans, “I” thoughts involve knowing which person one is thinking about, but subject self-awareness is so pure that achieving it does not really tell us anything about oneself, meaning the situated, historical subject. Self-awareness must include the ability to distinguish oneself from others and for that, Evans says, it should give us awareness of a situated subject, an agent as well as a physical object, spatially located and persisting through time.²⁰² This awareness should consist of “I” judgements that are appropriately controlled by certain sources and allow oneself to act on information coming from introspection, proprioception, external perception and memory. He thinks that proprioception, for example, gives the sense of “mineness” from a disposition to act in a certain way given certain information— as when a subject feels an itch in a way that it makes her very much want to scratch it in the perceived area where the itch is felt. Such information is enough for one to have an “I-idea” without the need of identifying who that “I” is. So in Evans account, self-awareness does not require immunity to error through misidentification, because all self-specifying information, although accessible in a special and direct way by the subject through its own dispositions to act, are corrigible. Although I agree with Evans in this point, Bermudez’s account seems more pertinent regarding self-ascription of mental states. He says that “I-ideas” is something that only rational beings can do and only after they have learned to use the pronoun “I”. Since we are aware of one’s own body as ours before we learn to speak, there must be a more primitive self-awareness constructible through sensory and somatic experiences that can be observed in infants and even

²⁰² Evans, *The Variety of References*, p. 220

in animals. However, as we saw earlier, Bermudez explains our sense of bodily self-awareness through the sensorimotor account, and thus for him, it is by the creature's movements through space, sensory, and somatic experiences that it differentiates her space "here" from the space "there".

As expressed at the beginning of this dissertation, my view on bodily self-awareness is very similar to Bermudez's account except that mine takes more seriously the place that emotionality and the "pre-arisen" mental life have in our sense of self. Bodily self-awareness is not merely awareness of the body but awareness of *being body* and being a body presupposes not only motor movements but emotional dispositions as well. Thus, that which gives us a sense of self should be as much mental as it is physical. In my view, sensory spatial and ordinary proprioceptive information is not enough to explain the sense of "mineness" in our felt body because it is not just any movements that make us feel the relation of possession. In the famous rubber hand illusion, for example, it is not just the fact that I am seeing a rubber hand in continuity with my arm and being tickled simultaneously in the real hidden hand while I see it being done in the fake one in front of me, that I feel such hand as mine. It is also the fact that during the motor process, my attention is involved in the relevant action not indifferently, but with a certain disposition. This can be seen when suddenly, the input changes from a simple tickle in both hands, to the threat of being stamped by a hammer in the fake hand. We naturally get scared because besides establishing the sensorimotor input, a feeling of "intimacy" towards that object has already arisen.

Arindam Chakrabarti explains this primitive sense of "mineness" using his two year old daughter as example.²⁰³ As Bermudez would expect from any account of self-awareness, Chakrabarti shows the involvement of social, linguistic, perceptual and somatic interactions as

²⁰³ Arindam Chakrabarti, "The Deadly 'mama', the Perils of Possession", in *Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences*, p.72-73.

conditions for the emergence of a sense of possession. But he talks about something else: that there is a certain “pride” in our primitive use of the word “mine” that starts off, he thinks, as a “warmth of feeling and protective fondness for the object”. Chakrabarti detects in the possession-relation the emotional level that is lacking in Bermudez account. Another important thing about self-awareness that explicit introspection reveals is that the experience of myself as an “I” possessing an experience (bodily or mental state) can only manifest when the attentive stance is focusing on an object from the perspective of the body that “enjoys” it. This body was called in Vedānta the *anandamayātma*, the body pervaded by bliss, because when one experiences it with contemplative observation, a blissful sense of being embodied arises. I call this the somaesthetic feeling of homeostasis, and consider it as fundamental for the implicit introspective sense of “I-am-being-this-body” and the phenomenological base of the non-objectifying stance.

We regard one’s body and its sensations as “mine” because, in the most basic, even biological, sense of bodily self-awareness, being embodied, living “here” in this body, is a joy, and this is another important truth expressed in the story of the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* that I have translated as “the Self-Aware Brahmā”. Of course, this “here” is always situated, and the experiences that come from the environment shape our body-mind feelings not always in a blissful way. But it is precisely the “coming out” or “going into” that personal space of joy the disposition that pre-arises to all our experiences. After all, the word for experience in Sanskrit is *bhoga* which is intimately connected with the ideas of enjoyment, eating, perceiving, feeling, and possessing. This explains why in the Vedāntic tradition the body of bliss is also called “the causal” (*karaṇaśarīra*), for it is at the deepest level of the *sva* –which, as Chakrabarti noted,

stands for “property-as-wealth” as well as for “self”²⁰⁴ — that our identity (together with its fantasies) is established. How each of us enjoys, can enjoy, should enjoy, or is allowed to enjoy their own body will determine an array of pleasures, sufferings, privileges, constraints, moral or legal dilemmas and other issues that we cannot go into right now.

It will, however help to close this chapter to show the non-objectifying stance in operation with two real life cases where there has been loss of proprioception. Through them, I also want to show that introspective proprioception, even when explicit and objectifying, can enhance, enrich, and create a “eu-functional”, rather than dys-functional relation to one’s own body.

4.3 Loss of proprioception and subtle bodily awareness

4.3.1 Sensation but No Movement

Matthew Sanford was paralyzed at the age of thirteen and is now an accomplished paralyzed yoga asana teacher in the tradition of Iyengar yoga.²⁰⁵ A spinal cord injury from T4 down made half of his torso and both legs insensitive to touch and unable to move. In neurological terms, if the sensorimotor system is damaged, it means that there cannot be proprioceptive awareness in those parts of the body and the mental command to move them is not listened by the limbs and organs anymore. He uses explicit introspective proprioception to describe the feelings of his paralyzed body right after he came out of the coma from the accident that caused it: “When I turn my focus inward my paralyzed body, I feel no inside, no connection, nothing. There is no evidence that I am “in” there at all”. It’s so different from when I look at my hand. In my hand, there is a sense of immediate presence.”²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.57.

²⁰⁵ Iyengar Yoga is a contemporary yoga style characterized by the precision and alignment in the physical postures and for the rigor of its standards for certifying yoga teachers.

²⁰⁶ Mathew Sanford, *Waking. A Memoir of Trauma and Transcendence*, p.59

The paralyzed body appears as an absence, not the absent body that remains healthily in the background. Indeed, Leder is right, this extraordinary circumstance forcefully brings to one's conscious awareness a body that is objectified in the presence of its absence; "a form of silence" as Sanford explains, that festers "between mind and body".²⁰⁷ Sanford narrates how the silence initially became a source of dislocation between mind and body that only worsened as the doctors said there was no way to "reconnect" them. At first, such degree of disconnection allowed him to "disappear" when the pain of his multiple surgeries was unbearable – a common phenomenon in traumatic experiences when people manage to dissociate the bodily sensation from their awareness of being "there". That it might be impossible to keep a sense of identity with one's body in the face of excruciating pain shows an intimate connection between the capacity to "enjoy" one's embodiment in the quality of agent and the ability to consider it one's own. As Sanford's body slowly healed in the hospital, even though he could not feel the warmth of his legs, or the weight of the sheet over him, he started feeling something in his legs: "tingles, surges, even mild burning". But the neurologist explained away these sensations as "phantom feelings", or imaginary sensations that the brain retains in the memory of the once mobile body. Sanford, then a thirteen year old child, was convinced by the doctors that the sensations were not real; until his body started "speaking" again twelve years later.

At this point, Sanford had seen different body workers to alleviate various problems in his body. One day someone recommended he worked with a yoga teacher. Initially the idea was to alleviate certain bodily tension, improve his upper spine position and make his paraplegic body more bearable. What happened in the first session however, changed the whole plan. Out of the wheelchair and down on the matted yoga floor, the yoga teacher asked him to open his legs wide like a big V. This was the first time in over twelve years that Sanford had his legs wide apart.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, Introduction, ix.

Never before after the accident did it occur to him nor to anyone to position them in that way; what for? But as he was performing this pose with his paraplegic body he realized how much time he had lost, for immediately after he got his legs open, the silence between his immobile body and his inward sensory awareness started to break, not in the sense that he felt he could move his legs again, but in the realization that consciousness really never left his lower body.²⁰⁸ I take this as him experiencing explicitly for the first time after the accident a non-objectifying self-aware observational stance in relation to his body. The positioning of his body as a unit allowed him to see his legs not anymore as a part of his body that could not move anymore— the objectifying stance— but as the subjective body that is beyond the sensorimotor level, even in the light of an explicit introspective awareness.

As he continued the *yoga-āsana* practice, several subtle sensations started appearing, the first ones being what he calls “bodily memories”. It was as if the new bodily positions were bringing back the sensations that his awareness could not stand during the accident while the body was going through extreme pain. He started remembering exactly how the accident felt (feeling of falling, a collision with something, a jarring twist, etc.), and the past pain of his body during the first days of hospitalization (clammy sweats, shortness of breath, dizziness) was brought to his present consciousness.

Specific bodily positions can trigger emotions or memories as if they were waiting “behind the skin”. This is a common experience in people who suffer from PTSD. Many people relate this type of emotional or thoughtful releases when they start a practice of yoga postures. The connection between body, memory, and suffering is hinted at in the *Yoga Sūtras* (II.10-12) with the notion of residual impressions (*samskāras*) and unconscious afflictive dispositions (*kliṣṭa*). According to Patañjala yoga, these afflictive impressions can be completely resolved or healed

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.158.

through a discipline that involves awareness of the breath, self-knowledge (including bodily knowledge), and surrender— key elements of what is classically called kriya yoga (YS II.1).

Neurologically it is known that there is an overlap between sensorimotor areas in the brain and memory.²⁰⁹ This is the basis for techniques of memorization that use spatial relations to place the information. The idea is that by looking at or walking through the locations where the cognitions were imaginary “placed”, they would be easier remembered. The “release” of memories during certain yoga positions might be explained because of the similarity of the yoga position and the one in which the traumatic experience was received. Still, Sanford’s case is very interesting since more than half of his body is disconnected neurologically from the brain. Would bodily memories be “released” just by looking at the position of the body or by feeling the weight and balance related to the pose? After all, bodily proprioception is multimodal, it receives input not only from the sensorimotor system but from the visual and vestibular systems as well. And yet, it is the bodily feelings which seemed to be the relevant factor here. Why would the memories be triggered if he does not feel the position in the lower parts of his body? As someone who learned to play the piano from childhood, I know by experience that I cannot remember how to play an old learned song unless I feel the immediate touch of my fingers against the keyboard, merely looking at my fingers in relation to the piano will not suffice, not even just placing them above the keys. Whatever the neurophysiological explanation might be, what seems philosophically relevant for me about Sanford’s example, is that even when there is no ordinary proprioception of the body, there is implicit awareness of bodily sensations not as “physical sensations” but as memories. This means that not only did the body have a proprioceptive awareness of the event, but an emotional and mental awareness even while unconscious. That we only become conscious of the mental aspect of our body — a certain

²⁰⁹ Jennifer Groh, *Making Space*, p. 196, 200-201.

disposition, a belief driving our actions, a mental state— when we direct our attention to the motor activity does not make normal proprioception less introspective, or our motor activities less mental, even in the midst of immobility.

Sanford began noticing other types of sensation with the practice of yoga-asana: a sense of weight coming from the legs, a distribution of gravity along the lower spine down to the sitting bones, a sense of integration between upper and lower body, and some form of tingling, inner motion that feels as a flow and directionality of the physical movements in the pose. It is this ability to “feel” the inner motions, to know the intelligence of the pose in his own body that makes it possible for him to teach yoga postures to walking students. Through the practice of explicit introspective proprioception in the form of yoga postures Sanford was able to “de-objectify” his body. In other words, it was through introspective proprioception that he could feel his paralyzed body as an integrated part of himself; to bridge the gap between the silence of his paralyzed body and the voice of his mind. He interprets his own experience as this:

The mind is not strictly confined to a neurophysiological connection with the body. If I listen inwardly to my whole experience (both my mind’s and my body’s), my mind can feel into my legs.²¹⁰ When I look at my legs, when I truly listen, I hear what exists before movement. Through paralysis, the outer layer of my legs and torso have been stripped away. What remains is what’s present before I enter the world through effort and action, before I engage my will... a heart that presents itself first as silence.²¹¹

We encounter here once again the same “heart” that the Upaniṣads make an anchoring point for the directionalities of motions that can be felt through the body without reducing them to motility. Here the skeptic could doubt whether Sanford’s sensations are real or merely imagined. He could be creating the “new age” incepted idea that there is a “flow of energy” running through his legs as he performs the poses.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.198.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.199.

From the perspective of a somaesthetic model of introspection like the one I am proposing, whether Sanford's sensations are real or not cannot be established merely by the scientific test that would look for the impulses in his brain relating to the sensorimotor connection.²¹² The criteria for a false perception, as the embodied cognition perspective acknowledges, is not merely determined by what is inside the brain— for this one reacts the same to a percept than to an hallucination— or by what is outside as a fixed referent, but by the interactive connection established with the whole body-mind unit in relation to the world. There might not be a sensation coming from the contact between sensorimotor organs and the muscles in Sanford's case, but this does not preclude the intuition of subtler states that can only make sense under a broader notion of what the mental body—i.e. the mind-full, thinking, and enjoying body— is. Most importantly, that the introspective awareness of those states is not perceptual is actually irrelevant for the function they play in bodily-self awareness. Even though there is no sensory pathway being stimulated nor motor power to effect the pose, Sanford's bodily/mental states do establish the sense of connection and identity between the subject that Sanford is and his own body. The function of these subtle sensations, thus, seems to be that of reconstructing, recognizing, de-objectifying, and recreating Sanford's own bodily self-identity. It is in this sense that they properly receive the name of "subtle", for the "subtle body", apart from being a body with depth, emotionally dispositioned, and an attentive space, is self-creative.

²¹² Recent studies on Sanford conducted by a neuroscientific team at Rutgers University seem to offer "unexpected" evidence of activity in the sensory-motor cortex and other motor related areas in the brain from the bodily areas below Sanford's lesion. (From personal email correspondence with Matthew J. Taylor, one of the researchers in this study.)

4.3.2 Movement but No Sensation

The case of Ian Waterman was made famous by the BBC in a documentary entitled “The Man Who Lost his Body”. Waterman lost his sense of proprioception at the age of 19 when he was attacked by a virus that damaged the peripheral nerve fibers below the neck. The result was that he had no sense of touch and bodily movements or limbs position from beneath the neck down to the rest of his body, although he could still feel temperature, pain, and muscle fatigue. The efferent pathway was left intact which meant that his limbs could in principle move, but people with this condition usually struggle to learn to move their bodies again without spatial sensitivity, and thus, of the few cases with this affection that exist in the world, only Ian and another patient talked about by Oliver Sacks as the “Disembodied Lady” managed to move and walk again. Ian’s case is special because in the course of two years of rehabilitation, and in spite of an initial diagnosis that he would have to use a wheelchair for the rest of his life, he gained motor control to the point of being able to drive a car again. He narrates how frightened and angry he felt over his situation. He could not sit up, or stand or move his limbs at all in any way, but the idea of ending up in a wheelchair was something he could not accept at all. He decided to relearn every single move he made by breaking it up in small movements that had to be carefully planned and visually measured. Today his bodily movements look almost normal except for the fact that he needs to employ an enormous amount of focus and concentration into the movements of his limbs, and he does that by keeping track of them visually all the time. If he cannot see his limbs, he falls away, and so he needs to actively avoid distractions while walking (like turning to see a pretty girl on the street).

Neuroscientist Jonathan Cole²¹³ and philosopher Shaun Gallagher²¹⁴ have written extensively about this case explaining how it was possible for Ian to regain mastery over his movements both neurologically and phenomenologically. They discuss the results of several lab experiments made on him to understand the mechanisms by which vision alone can control ongoing movement without proprioceptive feedback. One of the salient features of Ian's movement control is his gesticulation, for it looks so natural that it is hard to believe that he needs to control it with his vision at all. The experiments showed that he can expressively move his hands while talking even without looking at them, although the accuracy and precision of the movements certainly diminish. Cole explains that Ian has been able to regain mobility through a phenomenon called neuroplasticity by which a missing input is replaced using the action of an alternative pathway, in this case that of vision and the vestibular system. Although it is unknown the exact way in which vision alone can provide all the information necessary to initiate the movement, it is interesting to consider philosophical implications of the mechanism that might be involved.

To make a single movement, Ian has to look at the part of the body he needs to move and the place where he has to move it to. In doing that, his eyes move. The movement of the eyes is a proprioceptive sensorimotor loop in which having received the visual input, the brain then sends a command to the eye to move in a specific direction keeping at the same time a copy of the corollary discharge. The brain makes an efferent copy that allows to measure the accuracy of the eye movements and with that the distance between the visual snapshots (i.e., the position of the body limb and the place where it has to go). The coordination of sensory input and motor output

²¹³ Jonathan Cole, *Pride and a Daily Marathon*, 1995.

²¹⁴ Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind*, 2005.

is possible because of the capability of the brain to monitor its own commands!²¹⁵ This is a process that happens effortlessly both in Ian and normal people, the difference is that Ian has to pay attention and consciously get involved in the very movements of his eyes. Gallagher explains that by this “abnormal” explicit proprioception Ian is capable of substituting a missing bodily schema for a virtual one. According to Gallagher, motor control does not directly “travel” from body image to body schema in normal proprioception except when it becomes introspective. As we saw earlier, in Gallagher’s view introspective proprioception always involves objectification of the body and a representational image that in ordinary cases might interfere with the normal movements. However, in Ian’s case, he has to use that image daily and at every single moment to willfully accomplish the movements and thus, for him performing an action coincides with imagining it.²¹⁶

This confirms Gallagher’s thesis that less attention in movements involves more ease and naturality, while the more attention one needs to pay to one’s proprioceptive mechanism the more of a “disease of consciousness” it becomes.²¹⁷ However, this conclusion does not allow him to see the positive role that introspective proprioception has in our lives. As Gallagher himself recognizes, it was precisely the use of explicit attention to Ian’s own limbs and, I would add, implicit introspection of Ian’s mental life that brought back his sense of agency. Experiments showed that awareness of the willful command of a movement was so clear for him that he could distinguish his own generated command to move a thumb from the movement generated by a magnetic stimulation superimposed on the analogous motor region in his brain.

²¹⁵ Neither Cole nor Gallagher explain in detail this process. “His conscious effort in moving essentially consists of a set of motor images and judgments; he then monitors the movement with vision and uses the visual feedback to maintain movement and to stay on target.” in Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind*, p.52. A more detailed account on how it is possible to monitor movement with vision can be found in J. Groh, *Making Space*.

²¹⁶ Gallagher, *Ibid.*, p.49.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.58.

During a test using Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation, he was asked to imagine a movement in the thumb while the stimulation was provided leading to an actual movement. If he had no visual access to the movement, he did not know it had actually happened, since he has no sensation of the movement. But when he was given visual access to it, he was surprised at the movement and reported not having done it himself. Gallagher takes these results as showing that the sense of agency is not “specifically tied to proprioceptive feedback” since the sense that “I am generating the action” can be traced to processes that precede intention and performance. What are these “preceding” processes? They are the ones that pre-arise in-between the sensory input (absent in Ian’s case) and the motor action: visual sensory processing, awareness of directionality and motor commands, imagination, planning, memory, judging, disposition and willing; precisely the processes that are proper of the subtle body.

Loss of proprioception is accompanied with alienation from one’s body not just because one loses control over the body’s movements but because there is an intimate connection between bodily sensations and our ability to will. If bodily alienation could only be overcome by the fulfillment of the motor commands, then Mathew Sanford and with him many other paraplegics or even quadriplegics would not be able to recover a sense of agency over their body. In associating the sense of body ownership with fulfilled intentional willed action, Gallagher forgets the other part of the equation: the enjoyment of sensations. If the link between sensations and will is broken, then no amount of fulfilled intentional action will help to regain a sense of agency. This can be seen in the case of the “Disembodied Lady” who, at the time Sacks writes about her²¹⁸, she had regained control over her bodily movements, but unlike Ian, her body remained with a sense of “unpossessedness”, devaluing her sense of self. Gallagher attributes the difference between these two cases to the hypothesis that Ian’s body image was left intact by

²¹⁸ Oliver Sacks, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, p. 43-52.

the illness, while hers was deeply disturbed. He, however, does not elaborate on the fact that the emotional disposition is one of the basic ways in which the bodily image is affected and that this is directly related to the way in which one feels, experiences and “enjoys” the body, whether we can move it or not. Both Sanford and Ian regained connection between bodily sensation and will because they were able to identify subtle bodily sensations through “atypical” effortful introspective proprioception. For Sanford, the connection between bodily sensation and will was re-established through the awareness that he could “feel” his legs again, only in a different –non-motor— way. For Ian, such link was established with the central aid of vision and a clear introspective awareness of his efferent commands.

In many ways, scientists do not understand what exactly the neurological process is that enables Ian to use his imagination to bypass the neurological damage system. And doctors did not understand how it was possible for Sanford to have sensations in his legs after the accident. While there might be a scientific explanation for these phenomena that has not yet been discovered, what is philosophically interesting from the somaesthetic view of introspection is the reconnection of the sensory-motor link by means of the mental life (*prāṇa*- vital functions, *manas*- synthesis and attention, *buddhi*-intellect, *citta*- imagination, inference, memory and will). Not only do these functions mediate between the sensory cognition and the efferent action, the cognitive (*jñāna*) and the conative (*karma*), but that *in doing that* they also mediate between the gross (*sthūla*), which includes the body pervaded by food (*annamayātma*) made of the five elements, and the causal (*karaṇa*), i.e. the body constituted by the ego sense and the body of bliss (*anandamayātma*). It is in virtue of this immediate “middleness” that the mental life is called “sūkṣma”, the subtle and, *pace* Wujastyk’s philological remarks, not the “minute”. For it is not the dimensional smallness of the atoms, or the minute firing of the neurons alone that makes the

phenomenal connection, but the strands of affective motions that run through the whole body— Sāmkhya called these “guṇas”— in subtle self-monitored vibrating directionalities that can be perceived in the basic homeostatic play between physical and emotional rest (*tamas*), activity (*rajas*) and balance (*sattva*). In view of this, explicit introspective proprioception is more than the expression of an “atypical” objectifying observational stance that might lead to or be itself a “dys-function”. It is rather a necessary practice not only to maintain, enhance, and/or re-achieve ease and “eu-functionality” in our lives, but also to reconnect with the implicit non-objectifying stance that supports and anchors the “enjoying” subject.

The difference between Ian and the “Disembodied Lady” is that the first one really never lost the implicit introspective awareness of self-resilience. Just a vibrant subtle sensation manifested explicitly as an “I will change my situation”²¹⁹ was enough to make him find the way back to his body, and thus, to his self. The disembodied lady lost that vibrancy in the past of her sportive, active, dancing, and motherly life. Perhaps if we understood that the sense of self is not only attached to a sense of “doing” but also to a sense of “creative receptivity”— as the non-objectifying self-aware stance that lets the object appear within the psychic space found between two possible thoughts or the silent space between two breaths— we would appreciate more the role of introspective proprioception in bodily self-awareness. When Vyāsa gives as example of focused attention places of the body such as “the circle of the navel”, “the lotus of the heart”, “the effulgent center of the head”, and “such like spots” he is taking those bodily places already as places of a body with depth. This means that these are not just the physical anatomical places, but vibrating subtle places: effulgent, circling, beautiful (like a lotus). These are already sensations that can only be perceived (in the broader sense of the word: which includes images, memories, thoughts, emotions) with a non-objectifying observational stance, for they are not

²¹⁹ See Documentary “The Man Who Lost His Body”, min.

sensations that drive actions, but threads of directionalities that somatically lead to the anchoring self (through their enjoyment), previous to any motor activity. Obviously, these are not sensations in the narrow sense of the word (contact between sense organ and object). Rather, even while imagined, they have the power to bring awareness into new, unattended vibrating directionalities that stem out from the pulsating heart. These “imagined” sensations are the missing link in the modern rehabilitation rooms of our health system because it is through them that the sensory-self-awareness-motor connection is established at the core.

Ian Waterman worked with them implicitly through his strong determination and somatic introspective feeling of “I can do otherwise”. Sanford re-discovered them 12 years after his accident with the help of a yoga-āsana teacher who didn’t dismiss them (like the doctors did) as unreal in virtue of their being “imagined”. It was the explicit experience of the subtle vibration of his immobile legs and the visual experience of his body in new positions that Sanford could “inhabit” his body in new ways that allowed him to re-create himself as the unimaginable: an āsana yoga teacher.

The stories of Sanford, Ian and the “Disembodied lady” make explicit what is happening in us all the time: a continuous, albeit, unconscious bodily self-awareness of enjoyed sensations that nurture our ego before this sends commands to act. When the sensory path is not altered, its being in immediate touch to our mental life provides an implicit (and uncontrolled) mixture of images, memories, judgments that “pre-dispose” us to act in one way or another according to the degree in which we feel we can “enjoy” this body. This implicit somaesthetic process is simultaneously self— or perhaps we should better say— ego-creative and can lead to suffering or happiness depending on how the “pre-arisen” sensations are led to manifest in action. Since it is through an implicit mechanism of introspective proprioception that our felt body is linked to

the environment, others and ourselves, it is difficult to become aware of it while engaging with the world of affairs. But explicit introspective proprioception shows that we can access and transform the pre-arisen (to the extent in which it is a continuous, corrigible, and never ending task) precisely because this process is implicit in the creation of our body image and sense of self. Thus, a practice of sense-withdrawal remains relevant because the capacity for consciously accessing a space of non-objectifying stance allows for the contemplation of new experiences, which can give a new sense of self- enjoyment and with that a different action command.

We usually experience a natural “sense-withdrawal” in unplanned occasions of bodily error-correction, where after several frustrated attempts felt as an implicit “no, not that way”, our bodily senses take a pause and try a different way of approaching the task, until finally the motion, intention, directionality, and a felt sense of “that’s it!”, click together. Our felt body reveals itself thus, as a self-aware attentive space mediating between the external object and our most intimate unknowable subjectivity.

In summary, objections to the idea that somatic sensations are mental and self-aware are based on the presupposition that “paying attention” to the body is a mental faculty that necessarily establishes an intentional relation with an object. However, when examining the classical way of understanding the mark of “the mental”, that is, intentionality, it was found that this very notion is based on a limited recognition of proprioceptive directionalities represented under the “in-out” container schema. By attending to the somaesthetic sensations that are behind the “in-out” schema, particularly those which are felt through the natural function of breathing and the homeostatic sensations that accompany it, a whole variety of directionalities open up to our proprioceptive awareness, revealing, at the same time, dispositional and affective motions that cannot be accounted for by the traditional directionality presupposed in the intentional

relation between “mind-object”. A body schema that recognizes the complexity of motions that characterize our inner, emotional and dispositional life brings into light an introspective non-objectifying observational stance as the very condition of possibility for any awareness of the body.

That this non-objectifying observational stance is introspective at the same time that it is a bodily awareness was shown through the analysis of a somaesthetic model of introspection for which the capacity to be aware of something is not considered to be a “faculty” of the mind but the felt aspect of our being embodied. Thus, it is not the case that the mind is attentive only when this function is “activated”. Rather, self-aware attentiveness is the very nature of the mind without which no object would be able to appear. Since the lived body is a body of depth, attention can assume different “places” in relation to which the focus appears as an object that is “there”. But the only place that can count as “here” is the felt body, not a “mind”, or the nervous system, not even the “subject”. And it is in virtue of this immediate “in-between-ness” (subject-object) that the felt body is called a subtle body, i.e. a body with gross, subtle, and causal depth.

Thus, not paying conscious attention to a bodily state does not mean that the body is not aware of it at some level. In fact, it is this implicit bodily awareness which lies at the bottom of the experience of our body as the body that one “enjoys” (without a conscious ascription of an “I-thought”). And it is precisely the implicit way in which the body is “enjoyed” where the possibility for bodily self-creativity emerges.

Chapter 5

Bodily Self-Awareness in Kaśmir Śaivism and Tantra

5.1 Self-ignorance, self-delusion and self-knowledge

Lived bodies are notorious for their meager and fallible knowledge of themselves. Perhaps one of the most pressing problems for a theory of bodily self-awareness is presented by the fact that the lived body, even while understood as being intrinsically aware of itself and increasingly able to improve its capacity of attention and self-knowledge, has a limited scope of observation, rendering it prone to error. Not only does this limitation appear, as mentioned earlier, in the fact that the bodily organs cannot sense themselves while sensing (except perhaps out skin), but it also—and primarily—manifests in cases where, while being aware of itself, the lived body mistakes, misrepresents, or misinterprets the very way in which it “grasps” itself. Examples of this include cases where one might be aware of oneself as fat, when in fact one is skinny; one might think one has a good sitting posture, when in fact one is hunched; or feel sensations in the limbs, when they are phantom projections. One might even think that one is not angry, while in fact one’s tendency to yell shows the contrary; or one might feel fine, when in fact one is sick (or viceversa), etc. Bodily self-delusions happen across all dimensions present in a body (including the cultural, political, psychological, etc.). At the ontological level, some would say that we might even feel as having an interiority when in fact it is just an illusion created by the discursivity on the body’s external surfaces.²²⁰

Given the numerous possibilities of self-delusion, how could one distinguish between authentic and non-authentic bodily self-awareness? As discussed in previous chapters, for

²²⁰ Whether it is possible to be totally and radically mistaken about having an interiority at all, whether the body actually has no felt inside whatsoever, remains a major question. But can a stone, which has no inner life, think mistakenly that it does have an inner life? (I thank Arindam Chakrabarti for this insight.)

phenomenology and feminism alike, the main problem with introspective proprioception is this very impossibility to render awareness of oneself as subject. Focused attention to one's bodily experience is thought to invariably turn oneself into a mere object of scrutiny, with the added risk of contributing to the reproduction of oppressive and unhelpful patterns that come with the instrumentalization and objectification of the body.²²¹ If it is impossible for one's subjectivity to succeed in a reflexive self-attention without objectification, how then could the felt physical body turn its attention to itself without reducing itself to mere objectivity or making a commodity out of itself?

A similar concern, although within a completely different context, is shared by the Indian philosophies here studied for whom the most important problem of self-awareness and self-knowledge lies precisely in the constant confusion between the subject and the object: taking the self as if it were an object, and the object as if it were the self. Abhinavagupta, the famous 10th century Kaśmir Śaiva philosopher, summarizes the variety of forms this confusion can take with regards to ourselves in his *Paramārthasāra* K32: "How astonishing it is that one envelops one's Self with notions such as the body (*deha*), or the vital breaths (*prāṇa*), or with concepts belonging rather to the intellect (*dhījñāna*), or with the expanse of the Void (*nabha*)— just as the silkworm does with its cocoon!"

He is referring to the series of misidentifications that are considered expressions of ignorance (*avidyā*) within the different Indian philosophical schools, such as notions of oneself in the bodily form of "I am slim, fat, beautiful, etc."; in the "prāṇic" form as "I am hungry, thirsty, etc."; in the mental form as "I am happy, sad, etc."; in the intellectual form as "I am this, or that". Even the notion of oneself as a "void" is for Abhinavagupta an incorrect self-assertion,

²²¹ See Shusterman, *Body Consciousness*, p.98. and Iris Young, "Throwing Like a Girl" in *Human Studies*.

for the only way to correctly “grasp” ourselves is as consciousness (*cit*), i.e. as a subject.²²² We see then that for the absolute but dynamic non-dualism of Abhinavagupta, awareness of oneself in the form of anything— be it body, emotions, thoughts, beliefs, dispositions or emptiness— is already a form of self-delusion. In perceiving oneself as a body with certain dispositions one is already objectifying that which, by principle, cannot be objectified. Moreover, for Abhinavagupta, defining one’s subjectivity as delimited by senses, vital functions, dispositions, thoughts, etc., in other words, as a subtle body, causes to see oneself as separate from the multiplicity of appearances in the world, when in fact, for a truly self-aware subject to be so, there would be no real difference between cognized and cognizer, body and world, subject and object.

In a very direct sense, Abhinavagupta’s philosophy, just as Sāmkhya, Classical Yoga, Vāsiṣṭha’s Yoga, and Advaita Vedānta, would object to a thesis like the one I have defended in this dissertation: that to be aware of one’s own body is to be aware of the self (since to be aware of the body proprioceptively is to be aware of it introspectively as well). According to all these philosophies and their traditional interpretations, to identify oneself as body, be it material or subtle, is itself the enactment of or ensnarement by ignorance (or attachment), which is the main cause of human existential suffering. Yet, the special significance of Abhinavagupta’s theory of self-delusion lies in the positive content that he gives to ignorance. He agrees with the Sāmkhyan (*SK* 64) and Patāñjala (*YS* 2.4-5) notion of ignorance as the lack of discernment between the subject (*puruṣa*) and the object (*prakṛti*). And he also assumes Advaita Vedānta’s characterization of ignorance (*Vedāntasāra* 51) as having two aspects: a cosmic one that veils the unity of consciousness and the empirical one that distorts the view of reality in the individual.

²²² See Yogarāja’s commentary on the *Paramārthasāra* K32 and Bhāskara’s commentary on the *Íśvarapratyabhijñāvimarśinī* (*IPV*), 1.6.4-5, p.90-91.

Yet, unlike Sāmkhya and Advaita Vedānta, Abhinavagupta's notion of ignorance (*avidyā*) is actually defined in terms of knowledge (*jñāna*). Following the definition of ignorance that appears in the *Śiva Sūtras* (3.2): “knowledge is bondage” (*jñānam bandhaḥ*), Abhinavagupta considers ignorance as the cause (*hetu*) of the unfoldment of the universe and defines it in his *Tantrāloka* (1.22-26) as a “knowledge that does not illuminate the reality of that which is to be known in its totality.” Thus, for Abhinavagupta, ignorance is in reality limited knowledge, and as such, it has the power to manifest the diversity of objects that we perceive at the same time that it “covers” ourselves under the disguise of a limited knower.²²³

In this sense, to be aware of one's own body is in some way to misapprehend one's self due to introspective and proprioceptive processes that inevitably delimit who we think we are. Yet, at the same time, in being aware of oneself as a lived body, we are apprehending our “self”, for what else could one apprehend if not the very subjectivity rendering itself invisible behind its own power to know. It is precisely this power to “reveal as it veils” intrinsic to self-awareness that I want to examine in this last chapter. It seems to me that by understanding the ontological mechanisms of self-delusion as expounded in Abhinavagupta's tantric philosophy, we can then complete a theory of bodily self-awareness that accounts for the self-creative processes (proprioceptive and introspective) inherent to bodies with depth and that had already been hinted at with the story of the “Self-Aware Brāhma” found in the *Yoga Vāsistha*.²²⁴ Kaśmir Śaivism does not fall into the Sāmkhyan dualist problem of “otherness” or in the non-dualist Vedantic ultimate negation of the body even though it embraces and integrates those systems into its own metaphysics.

²²³ This is connected to Abhinavagupta's theory of error-as-imperfect knowledge (*apūrṇakhyāti*). See Navjivan Rastogi, “Theory of Error According to Abhinavagupta”, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 14 (1): 1-33 (1986).

²²⁴ See section 6.1 of chapter 3.

In this last chapter I attempt to show how, for Abhinavagupta, self-delusion is not just a mistaken cognition of oneself without acknowledgment. It is also the expression of a self-aware body manifesting its own power to enact and to know itself. The identification of processes of self-delusion represents the very means to understanding the creative power of consciousness and the possibility of self-transcendence or liberation. To recognize the processes behind self-delusion as bodily processes of self-creativity rather than as symptoms of faulty bodily patterns, mistaken cognitions, or signs of mental disease, could open—indeed had opened—avenues of bodily discourses that step outside of constraining and oppressive binaries (political, social, psychological, medical, etc.)

5.1.1 Abhinavagupta's notion of bodily self-awareness

The authentic experience of bodily self-awareness is for Abhinavagupta necessarily an immediate and direct (*sākṣāt*) act of consciousness (*TA* 1.139). As such, there is really no process, no method, no practice, no ritual, not even an act of initiation (*dīkṣā*) that can remove the ignorance of ourselves without being accompanied or preceded by an intellectual cognition of oneself (*bauddhavijñāna*, *TA* 1.45). In the first Ahnika of the *Tantrāloka*, Abhinavagupta describes (*TA*, 1.52) the “content” (*jñeya*) of such cognition as being Siva itself, i.e. the essential element of reality (*param tattvam*) which is pure luminescence and awareness (*prakāśa*). In the awareness of such awareness there is nothing but the affirmation of oneself in the act of knowing oneself, which, as shown in the previous chapter, appears necessarily as a non-objectifying stance and manifests phenomenologically as the feeling of “I-am-ness”. Abhinavagupta calls this realization an inner judgment of being “I” (*ahamparāmarśa*) which is nothing but the

shining of awareness in the “mirror” of what it itself is. This inner self affirmation (*ahampratyayavamarśaḥ*) has the nature of “recollection” or “recognition” (*vimarśa*) without which awareness (*prakaśa*) would not be able to appear as such. Abhinavagupta further characterizes this cognitive act as an affirmation of freedom (*svātantrya*, *TA*, 67-68) because self-awareness is an inner movement of consciousness that has the very power to manifest any object imaginable (*IPV*, 1.6.11). The luminescence (*prakaśa*) of consciousness thus, recognizes itself in its own power to manifest, to create or emanate (*śṛṣṭi*) objective appearances and in the recollective or recognitive act to reflect those objects as known.

Although this description might sound very abstract, I agree with Kerry Skora in that Abhinavagupta actually takes the lived body to be the primary locus for this realization, both in its epistemological and ontological senses.²²⁵ In fact, every empirical instance offers for Abhinavagupta a possibility to have this immediate understanding. Each and every experience, even if it is the experience of absence, appears as such because of its being within consciousness (*samvit*). To see the color blue, smell a sandal perfume, listen to a melodious chant (*TA*, 3.208-210); to see a jar or not to see the jar but a cloth in place of the expected jar (*IPV*, 1.6.2), to distinguish gems from each other (like an amateur jeweler, *TA*, 1.229); or to feel oneself as running, standing, etc. (*IPV*, 1.5.19), to feel tired or hungry; to be happy or sad; or to perceive oneself as fat or thin, etc. (*IPV*, 1.6.3-5) – in brief, all transactions with oneself in relation to the universe are based on the capacity to determine (*niścaya*) and differentiate (*apohana*). These capacities are possible through the cognitive act of creating images (*vikalpas*), which are conceptual and linguistic determinations able to make something appear as “this” or “not-this” (*IPV*, 1.6.3). Without this activity of consciousness everything would remain in a state of

²²⁵ Kerry Skora, “The Pulsating Heart and its Divine Sense Energies: Body and Touch in Abhinavagupta’s Trika Śaivism”, in *Numen*, p.422.

undifferentiation (*nirvikalpa*), in complete unity with a consciousness that embraces the experience without determining it. Indeed, at the base of every initial encounter with an object its indefinite and general form is grasped (*TA*, 1.246), but to remain in such indeterminate state would be “of no use in practical life”, as Bhāskara appropriately comments.²²⁶ The power to cause the division of experience and the beginning of several processes of distinction arises within the undifferentiated consciousness itself out of its own desire to act upon that which it knows.

Following Bhāskara’s commentary on the *IPV* (1.5.19), this process can be seen in the child’s first transaction with the world. Initially, the world is perceived at the level of undifferentiation. But the initial distinction appears at the level of “I-consciousness” even if the child is unable to emit the word “I”. This activity has for Abhinavagupta (*IPV*, 1.5.20) a linguistic, almost transcendental and “logistical”²²⁷ nature, in the sense that without this activity pre-arising as an inner affirmation of the “I-consciousness” (*vimarśa*), there would be no possibility of apprehending anything as “this” or “not-this”.²²⁸ Thus, in the child who first encounters an object indeterminately, it is this essential “I-consciousness” which allows her to understand the intentionality of words that she hears every time another person points at the object. The process of differentiation and determination, i.e., the construction of images (*vikalpas*), is loaded with spatial and temporal conventions that consolidate through repeated associations that the child is able to remember and understand in an act of cognitive unification within her consciousness, which is also referred to as the heart (*hṛdi*). But it is within the

²²⁶ Bhāskara’s commentary to the *Īśvarapratyabhijñānavimarśini* is called the *Bhāskarī*. Here he is commenting on section 1.6.3.

²²⁷ I take the idea from David Lawrence’s *Rediscovering God with Transcendental Argument* where he compares the Christian philosophical theology of the *logos* with the philosophy of recognition in Abhinavagupta.

²²⁸ Compare with Meltzoff and Moore’s experiment with newborns imitating adult facial gestures. They showed that the capacity to imitate faces in newborns depends on a “primitive” representation of their own bodies which allows them to recognize that the other face is “like me”. See “Infants’ Understanding of People and Things: From Body Imitation to Folk Psychology”, in *The Body and the Self*.

undivided awareness (*paramarśa*) that they all – the consciousness of undifferentiated experience, labeled with words, images and oppositions, and the “I-consciousness” that recognizes them as pertaining to the same thing— “shine” (*parisphurate*) as a unitary experience. The determination of the experience is reflected upon one’s consciousness as an object known by a subject (*pramātr*) able to act upon it. We can see this happening in the ability— and desire— of the child to understand and act upon hearing phrases like “bring the jar” or “carry it”, etc.

Abhinavagupta thus argues that the very distinction between subject and object is a product of conceptual constructions (*vikalpa*). Furthermore, the very ability to determine, differentiate and form images is for him the result of a self-affirming activity of consciousness that appears as a free (*svātantrya*) and undetermined “inner speech”, just like the very spontaneous sounds (cries, shouts, sighs, laughs, etc.) that the baby does before it can even pronounce any word, or the vocal gestures of pleasure, awe and even terror that emerge during very intense experiences before we can even enunciate something about them. This very interesting connection between the undivided awareness of “I-am-ness” (*aham-parāmarśa*) and an un-emitted “inner word” (*vāk*) allows Abhinavagupta to develop a theory of self-reflection (*bimbapratibimba*) that follows a mechanism similar to the reverberation of a sound within a cave— i.e. echo (*TA*, 3.22-44)— to explain the unfoldment of the universe.

Just as an echo is nothing but the reflection of a sound emitted from oneself, sounding as if someone else had produced it, in that same way all the objects in the universe, including the universe itself as an object to be known and talked about, appear as if they were different to the consciousness that perceives them having first emitted them through its self-affirming act of knowledge. Since there is nowhere else than consciousness itself to emit that sound, it is within

its own conscious space, its own “cave” where all objects resonate, or, if following the mirror metaphor, where all objects appear as reflections (*ābhāsa*).

In the case of one’s own body, knowledge of the body parts, their function, their role within conventions, etc. appear in the determination of consciousness through language and social interactions. However, as seen in chapter 2, various vague bodily experiences pre-arise from the very moment the perceptual being is in the womb. Even then, sense impressions such as touch, sound, light, etc. already appear as reflected within consciousness. As Abhinavagupta explains, following a tradition that goes back to Sāmkhya: there cannot be a sensation— a flavor, a touch, the smell of perfume, etc. without there being already a sense faculty that reflects it (*TA*, 3.37-43). Consciousness is seen as a mirror where the sensation rests as the reflection of an awareness that is “faced” towards it. However, already in the reflection of a vague sensation there is distinction, which can be felt in the general form of a smell, light, taste, etc. Undivided, universal awareness finds itself fragmented as a universe in the experience of perceiving, which is nothing but the free act of “facing” or getting in “touch” with itself. This pre-arisen play of reflections reproduces itself at every point where consciousness, facing the sensations, finds within itself dispositions (*bhāvas*) that manifest as “bodily enjoyments”, i.e. emotions of pleasure or pain. These reflect themselves back into consciousness appearing as physiological movements that reflect into physical actions, which reflect themselves back into consciousness as judgments and impressions that determine the experience in temporal, spatial and formal limitations (*IPV*, 1.6.6). Thus, for Abhinavagupta, the experience of our own body in all its dimensions comes out of an intricate play of reflections— the mental body is as it were a hall of mirrors—, which are nothing but undivided awareness being affected by the original “touch” of its own free power of determination (*vikalpa*) in the act of knowing itself.

Thus we could say that, for Abhinavagupta, to have an authentic experience of one's own body is to experience it as a series of reflections. This means that to be aware of one's own body is, in a sense, to be aware of a distortion. Yet, in another sense, in the most fundamental phenomenological sense, there is really nothing that it is the distortion of, for there is no "real" body as the cause of the reflection, but only an undivided consciousness affirming itself in its creative, emanative power, that reproduces and sustains itself through multiple created images (*vikalpas*) while remaining free and independent from them.

5.1.2 Self-knowledge and Abhinavagupta's criticism to yogic practices

In the absence of an original image, how is it possible for a reflection to exist? [The response is that the existence of the reflection] is a fact of experience. So why can't we call that the original image? We can't, because it does not have the characteristics of an original image, which requires that it is not mixed with other things, that it is autonomous, independent, existing in and by itself, just as the face [with regards to its image in the mirror]. That which is proper to the reflection is to resemble another thing which, while being reflected, does not abandon its own form (*TA*, 3.52-57)

The law of reflection, as assumed by Abhinavagupta (and by common sense), requires a reflecting surface, the original object being reflected, and an observer facing towards the reflecting surface. In the case of our own bodies, where do we look for the original form of our body? Where or how do we look to experience the real, perfect body? In the measurements of its limbs? In the sensations transmitted through the nervous system? In the anatomical and physiological depictions of its organs? In the atoms that constitute them? In the phenomenal sensations, emotions, feelings? In scientific interpretations or religious beliefs about the body? If we attend to Abhinavagupta's philosophy, every single attempt to find the "real" image of our

bodies will already be a “reflection in the mirror”, for it always appears as an object determined, differentiated, and constructed (*kalpita*) in such and such ways.

Having abandoned the unity of consciousness (*cittattvam*) by its own power of illusion (*māyā*), that which is undivided shines distinctly in the body, the intellect, the vital air, or in the imagined ether. Due to its being different from others, the “I-consciousness” (*aham*) sees itself as a subject (*pramātr*), and that which appears in opposition to another is called a conceptual construction (*vikalpa*). (*IPV*, 1.6.4-5)

The “original” is the pure, undivided consciousness. The mirror is the conscious space where its powers of self-knowledge (*vidyā*), will (*icchā*), and action (*kriyā*) are enacted in a self-affirming movement that manifests diverse aspects of itself. The reflection in the mirror is the very same consciousness which “returns” to itself manifested as if it was other, diverse and limited, just like the echo of our own voice reflected back from the cave seems as if it was another voice, with a different quality and texture. In awareness of its own diversity, the now apparently divided, fragmented consciousness, returns upon itself as the observer that reflects the universe with its senses, intellect, vital airs, and ethereal spaces. The subject, that is, the lived body, becomes then a reflecting mirror of the universe, which is, in reality, a fragmented appearance of the self. Thus, in every cognitive experience of the first person such as “I hear sounds”, etc. the pure, universal consciousness is implicitly apprehended. “The self becomes manifest in the mirror of the intellect by securing a basis in external objects” (*PS*, K8). However, just as the clarity of any reflection depends on the quality of the surface where it is being reflected, the purity of the self— “the capacity of showing itself as identical to that which it seems to be separated from without losing its own luminosity” (*TA*, 1.4)— finds itself limited, obscured, and hidden behind the dispositions of the subject.

Yet, even in emotional experiences tainted by dispositions such as anger, fear, love, etc., there is the possibility of becoming explicitly aware of one’s own self. This is because the

process of self-delusion develops, for Abhinavagupta, as an expression of the freedom and the creative power of consciousness. And the person who is able to understand this process and identify the forces of its manifestation within her own being can then liberate herself from the constraining effects that the ignorance of this impinges on her. Thus, we could say that for Abhinavagupta, our lived bodies are already the manifestation of implicit proprioceptive and introspective movements of consciousness. The conscious self, in the impetus to know itself, creates an inner resonance (*aham*), an inner self-reflection (*prakaśa*), and an inner felt touch (*vimarśa*) that immediately diversifies in the shining of its own undivided thought (*dhī*).

This is the “compenetration” proper of the intelligent heart (*cetas*) which reveals itself as intelligence (*dhī*), attention (*manas*) and “I-sense” (*ahamkṛti*). It is experienced in its differentiated state (*vikalpa*) due to the power of delusion (*māyā*), but it is in reality will (*icchā*). (TA, 1.214)

Abhinavagupta stresses the fact that this realization is not accessed by a constant effort to understand it, or by concentrating upon it with a technique of meditation. In direct criticism of those— in reference to the “yogis” of his times— who thought that there could be a specific action or set of actions that would render immediate access to this truth, Abhinavagupta argues that it is not possible to concentrate oneself in that which is undivided plenitude, because concentration is a limited act that requires an object to fix upon. But the fixation upon an object is delimited and determinate, thus, linked to division and, as such, incapable of rendering the vision of something that is by definition unlimited and undifferentiated (*akalpita*) (TA, 1.12-15). Yogic attention as described in the *Yoga Sūtra* was considered for him an objectifying practice, not able to grant immediate access to pure, authentic self-awareness. Although his interpretation of the Patañjala system would need to be further examined to see if his criticism really holds; his concern with yogic practices as “objectifying” the body might have had more to do with the use

of concentration techniques that haṭha and tantric yogis were practicing at that time for the attainment of self-bodily mastery.

Tantric yogic practices of bodily self-awareness focused in mastering the body through *prāṇāyama*, i.e. breath control. They shared the Sāmkhyān and Upanisadic model of the body as moved by *prāṇa*, vital force. As mentioned in chapter 3, *prāṇa* was understood by these schools as the internal “wind-flow” that circulates all around the body, causing the senses and internal faculties of perception and action to apprehend their respective organs. As such, *prāṇa* was seen as intimately connected with the mind (*manas*), not only in virtue of “activating” the sensori-motor mechanisms of the body, but also because of its irremediable connection to dispositions and emotional forces (*bhāvas*).²²⁹ Since the goal of the tantric yogin was to completely identify with Shiva— and this meant attaining an absolute state of mental absorption— it was believed that by manipulating the circulation of the *prāṇa*, one could control and eventually stop the activity of the mind, and with this, the body (YV, 92.26).

Stories of advanced yogis in the *Yoga Vasiṣṭha* and Tantric Yoga manuals like the *Mālinīvijayottara Tantra* describe the yogic mastery of manipulating the vital force to the degree that practitioners can acquire the power to abandon their body (*utkranti*) if they so desired (YV, V.84-85, 88). This practice, however, was usually seen by monist philosophies as reproducing the false duality between body and self. We see, for example, that in the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*, while narrating without condemnation various stories of masterful yogis that have left their bodies, it also presents what seems to be the very problem of these types of “objectifying” techniques. In a dialogue between Vishnu and one of these yogis, the god scolds the latter for wanting to leave his body: “Whence does this false thought rise in your mind, that you belong to the body, and are

²²⁹ A very good description of how haṭha yoga practices were considered from an external perspective before and around the time of Abhinavagupta is found in the *Yoga Vasiṣṭha*, V.36.12, V.71-35, V.78.

an embodied being, and that you come to take, retain, and quiet this mortal frame at different times?”²³⁰ The monist reasoning is, as seen with Abhinavagupta, that since the world does not exist as different from consciousness, then it is incorrect to think that we are somehow associated with a material body, which the yogi feels entitled to treat as if it were at his disposal. This complete objectification of the body means that, as seen in chapter 3, the body conceived in its pure material form is insensible, like a corpse, external to and independent from consciousness. But there is nothing external to consciousness, so “leaving” the body in order to enter into absolute consciousness would imply that the yogi is retaining a dualistic trace (*vāsana*) in his mind, thinking that he needs to release his body to attain the blissful self. Thus, instead of attaining Shivahood, the yogi runs the risk of getting stuck in the absorption of subconscious states of mind that seem “superior” because of their blissfulness, but that are still tainted with *vikalpa*, i.e. dualistic distinctions.

The problem of remaining in the means while thinking that one has attained the end was also adverted by Vyāsa in his commentary to the *Yoga Sūtra* (1.19) where he distinguishes between the yogis that decide to remain in the state of *prakṛtilaya*, i.e. dissolution in nature, rather than going straight to the state of illumination or *kaivalya*, which literally means “isolation of consciousness”. Vyāsa considered that the first ones remain deluded as to what authentic self-awareness means because they are unable to discern (*vivekakhyati*) between matter/nature and pure consciousness. So even within the dualist background of classical Sāmkhya, yoga practices were not enough to attain the ultimate state of awareness (*YSBh*, 2.28). They were just a means to bring about the most crucial element for liberation, namely, intellectual discernment (*prasamkhyāna*).

²³⁰ YV V.40.12 Prahlada’s story.

In the *Yoga Vasiṣṭha* the suspension of the prāṇic movements (*prāṇasamrodhaḥ*) is called “yoga” (YV, 6.1.13.4-6) and it is considered as a technique capable of producing ultimate liberation just as much as the more “introspective” means called *ātmajñāna*, “knowledge of the self”. However, while Vasiṣṭha admits that some people consider the first one more difficult than the second one and viceversa, he recognizes an important advantage of those who choose knowledge of the self over restraining their breath. This one depends on conditions such as concentration, posture and appropriate place and thus cannot be practiced all the time, whereas the other one bestows knowledge that remains present even while asleep (YV, 6.1.13.10-12). Still, within Vāsiṣṭha’s yoga, obtaining the knowledge of the course of breathing (*prāṇāpanānusaraṇa bodha*) seems to work in mutual support with *jñāna*.

For Abhinavagupta it is primarily by means of knowledge (*jñāna*) that one can authentically and directly know oneself. No effortful yoga practices or ritual acts by themselves can liberate us from the original delusion because even if they granted us the immediate undifferentiated experience of our authentic self and, with that, the glimpse of highest spiritual knowledge (*vijñānapauruṣam*), without incessant analysis of all dichotomies (*tarka*), the yogin or practitioner would fall back into delusion while alive.²³¹ The primordial and active role given to non-dual reasoning (*sattarka*)²³² in the process of self-knowledge is precisely what sets Abhinavagupta’s Śaiva yoga apart from the previous methods mentioned and also from dualist Śaiva practices. It is through the constant practice of this “purifying awareness” that the creative powers (*śaktis*) of consciousness are revealed (TA, 1.106-107) to and within oneself. The very

²³¹ Paul Muller Ortega, “*Tarko yogāṅgam uttamam*’: On Subtle Knowledge and the Refinement of Thought in Abhinavagupta’s Liberative Tantric Method”, in *Theory and Practice of Yoga*, p.196.

²³² *Sattarka* has been translated as “judgement” (Somadeva Vasudeva, *The Yoga of the Mālinīvijayottaratantra: Chapters 1-4, 7-11, 11-17*, p.420.), “good reasoning” (Arindam Chakrabarti, “Worshipping the Twelve Kali-s Through Reasoning Yoga: *Yaga, Yoga and Yajana*”, unpublished), “perfected reasoning” (Muller Ortega, “*Tarko yogāṅgam uttamam*”, p.184).

process by which Abhinavagupta explains this gradual unfoldment of ever more internal and unified states of consciousness (*parāmarśa*) within one’s experience through reasoning or *tarka* (*TA*, 4.86) is worth analyzing here because it represents a fascinating model of non-dual self-knowledge and self-transformation where every act of self-cognition (if authentic) involves at the same time a self-aware bodily act. In other words, Abhinavagupta’s yoga and philosophy offers a model of bodily self-awareness in which introspective awareness of oneself is at the same time—and in many ways “pre-arises” to—a proprioceptive awareness of the body.

5.2 Subtle knowledge and the creativity of an imagined-imagining body

Abhinavagupta’s philosophy of self-recognition is based on the principle that the fundamental constitution of reality is the unity of a self-aware creative consciousness. Within Abhinava’s tradition it is considered that only few can understand this statement immediately, without the need to be proved with reasons, arguments or examples. Those few do not require to follow any means because their awareness remains immediately and constantly absorbed in the consciousness of self-aware bliss which does not differentiate between good or bad or pain or anguish, or any dichotomizing constructions. Abhinavagupta refers to this type of awareness as the Bhairava consciousness (*TA*, 2.7) and considers it as the parameter for all the means towards the full realization of self-awareness (*TA*, 2.11). In fact, it is this type of awareness that is expected from gurus, i.e. spiritual teachers, and it is from that awareness that they are supposed to transmit their message (through grace and initiation) to others. Yet, this “nonmeans” (*anupāya*), although highest in hierarchy, is not available to most people. The rest of us require much more elaboration to accept and eventually experience the self-creativity of our

consciousness. Abhinavagupta's philosophy does precisely that: it offers an elaborate system of philosophical arguments that, if understood and accepted, are meant to be a means for the experience of self-recognition.²³³

In the *Tantrāloka*, he categorized a whole array of means recognized by the Śaiva tradition to which he belonged, the Trika, and synthesized them in a fourfold structure using elements from the Kaula, Krama and Spanda traditions as well.²³⁴ He distinguishes four types of means toward the manifestation of pure consciousness (*samvid*) in our inner awareness (*antarī pratibhā*): 1) “Nonmeans” or *anupāya*, which is the direct absorption into ultimate reality; 2) The means of Śambhu (another name for Śiva) or *śambhopāya*, which emphasizes the identification of the practitioner with the power of will (*icchā*); 3) The means of Śakti or *śaktopāya*, which focuses on the purification of images (*vikalpas*) and the attainment of pure knowledge (*jñāna*); 4) The means of the individual or *aṇupāya*, which makes use of images (*vikalpas*) to bring about the awareness of pure consciousness within the limited actions (*kriya*) of the subject. These three “lower” types of means are correlated with symbolic triads, common to the Trika system, that convey their level of internality and non-objectification. Thus, they correspond to the levels of the Goddess as supreme (*Parā*), supreme-non-supreme (*Parāparā*), and non-supreme (*Aparā*); and to the level of unity present in awareness: unity (*abheda*), unity and difference (*bhedābheda*), and difference (*bheda*). The superior means of “nonmeans” corresponds to the fourth and ultimate state of awareness: *turīya*. Although this typology presumes a hierarchy among the means, when looking at the procedures that Abhinavagupta

²³³ These arguments can be found especially in the *Īśvarapratyabhijñānavimarśinī*. See David Lawrence, *Rediscovering God with Transcendental Argument* p.58.

²³⁴ Trika is a Shaiva school that has its origins in the Kula, a type of ritual that involves tantric elements in the worshipping of three goddesses: Parā, Parāpara, and Aparā, such as the recitation of mantras and the consumption of alcohol, meat and sexual practices. Abhinavagupta considered the *Mālinīvijayottara Tantra* to be the root text for this tradition and wrote a commentary on it with Trika interpretation in the *Tantrāloka*. The Spanda tradition originates in the Kali oriented Krama and Mata traditions found in the Yamala Tantras of the Vidyapitha and on the *Shiva Sutras* of Vasugupta.

describes for each of them, it can be seen that all of them are equally effective in bringing about the realization of oneself as Śiva, i.e. authentic self-awareness. This is due not only to the role that the creative power (*Śakti*) plays in all of them, as Lawrence points out,²³⁵ but also, and most importantly, to the fact that all of them make explicit the non-objectifying introspective stance that is at the base of our embodiment.

5.2.1 Pure knowledge (*śuddhavidyā*)

The means of Śambhu appears as superior to the means of Śakti and that of the individual because it requires the understanding of the very subtle processes of consciousness that create the original delusion. In the chapter dedicated to this *upāya*, Abhinavagupta describes step by step the internal movements that consciousness undergoes before the universe appears as an objective realm. The practitioner is supposed to identify within her own consciousness the powers of knowledge and activity that emerge from the depth of consciousness's will (*icchā*).

Abhinavagupta, following the principles of Bhartṛhari's philosophy of language, meticulously delineates each step of the process and homologizes it with each of the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet, which gives a linguistic character to each cognitive activity even before the articulation of any word. Thus, the first movement of consciousness towards self-objectification is that of emanation (*śrṣṭi*). To this corresponds the first letter of the Sanskrit alphabet which is "A" but augmented, that is "Ā", expressing with it the initial vibration (*spanda*) of expansion of consciousness which in its very first moment remains as pure "A", a nameless (*anakhya*), unpronounced, unemitted sound. It is the self-affirmative movement represented by the re-statement of "A" that gives the long sound "Ā" (*TA*, 3.68-71). Like this, to each of the creative steps involved in each stage of self-objectification, i.e. emanation, maintenance (*sthiti*), and

²³⁵ Lawrence, *Rediscovering God with Transcendental Argument*, p.58.

dissolution (*samhāra*), correspond their own syllable or consonant. And thus, the whole of creation is seen as manifested by and encompassed within the Sanskrit alphabet that starts with A and ends with HA.

Once consciousness has undergone the process of self-objectification, it then knows itself as a cosmic body (*svam vapuḥ*) which is the reflection of its diversification within her own conscious space. The recognition of this, which is already in the form of limited knowledge, is symbolized with the sound-letter “M”, and the final resonance of its sound is graphically represented with a dot (*bindu*) (*TA*, 4.110). Explicitly, however, the knowledge of this process only occurs when the sound of creation is pronounced. The sounds of emanation, maintenance and dissolution together emit “AHAM” which is the Sanskrit word for “I”. In consciously vocalizing this sound from the heart (engaging it introspectively and proprioceptively), the practitioner internally reproduces the whole self-creative process of consciousness within herself. By fully absorbing herself in the resonance (*nāda*) of this sound, the practitioner attains the purified, illuminated knowledge (*śuddhavidyā*) that allows to see herself as non-distinct from pure consciousness. Having recognized the reflection of itself through the “echo” of its own subjective voice, consciousness realizes herself (*prakaśa*) through the supreme recollection (*vimarśa*) in the form of the confirmatory knowledge stated as “I am” (*ahamparamarśa*).

Through the means of Śambhu, the practitioner is supposed to understand in a non-discursive, albeit still linguistic, way (*avikalpajñānena*) that the creative power of consciousness is the expression of the pure will (*icchā*) to emanate (*visarga*), which is essentially a sort of “inner agitation” (*kṣobha*). The first vibrating movement of consciousness is called “parakaulikī” (*TA*, 3.136). In its emanative form becomes “kaulikī”, which emerges in creation as “śaktikuṇḍalinī”; manifests as “prāṇakuṇḍalinī” and reabsorbs itself into the origin where it

rests as one with consciousness in its “parākuṇḍalinī” form (TA, 3.137-141). In naming it like this, Abhinavagupta recognizes that even in the highest means for liberating understanding, an embodied process is entailed, one that involves, as Skora shows, a “bodily felt awareness of Śiva”, for *kuṇḍalinī* refers to a felt inner vibration moving swiftly along the body in an ascending path following the direction of the spine upwards. Thus, not only do the steps in this path of self-knowledge involve the recognition of gradual introspective implicit statements of awareness that become explicit in their pronunciation through the Sanskrit syllables, but also the experience of different “vibrational” qualities felt within the body (through the different forms of *kuṇḍalinī*) as the introspective sound is enunciated. Abhinavagupta ends the explanation of this path by insisting that the recognition of the creative power of consciousness can be realized in every experience by relating to each aspect of the world in its undetermined state. If the practitioner can experience the immediateness of an object (a pot, earth, water, a sound, etc.) without determination (*nirvikalpa*), then she can discern within her reflecting consciousness the very cognitive processes by which the object eventually appears as distinct, limited, and different from oneself. “This is produced from me, this is reflected within me, this is not different from me (TA, 3.280)”. The relation established with the object in a “non-objectifying” manner is said to be the characteristic of a “bhairava-like” awareness, because Bhairava represents for Śaiva schools the luminous consciousness who in being self-aware of its own reflection within its own space recognizes, in full ecstasy, how “amazing” (*camatkāra*) that unity is.

5.2.2 Good reasoning (*sattarka*)

The path of Śambhu is difficult to understand because it requires us to assume a continuous non-objectifying stance that involves not just the ability to suspend all mental constructions in the

encounter with the object but also the very desire/will to do it. This, however, requires a certain predisposition, a purification of the mind (*vikalpa-samskr̥ta*), or at least the capacity to understand that such an encounter is possible, makes sense, and is worth pursuing.

Abhinavagupta begins the first part of the means of Śakti with a question that a doubtful mind could pose: How is it possible for a self-aware consciousness (*samvitparāmr̥ṣṭrī*) to become the object of reference (*parāmarśyā*) of its own awareness (*parāmarśamayī*) (TA, 4.8)? Does it not presuppose an initial duality, or the implication that consciousness itself can be something non-conscious (*jaḍa*)?

Abhinavagupta's response to this question is found in his philosophy of self-recognition, fully developed in the *Īśvarapratyabhijñā-vimarśini*, where he argues for the idea that there is nothing external to consciousness, and that objects are real— they are not mere illusion— insofar as they appear (*abhāsa*) and can only appear within consciousness (otherwise they would be inexistent) (IPVI.7). That objects seem as if they were external and different to consciousness is due, according to this monist philosophy, to the differentiating thought that splits between subject and object. But it is particular of Abhinavagupta's yoga and philosophy to remark that the illusion of multiplicity is created by the limiting creative power of consciousness (*māyā*) out of its own will and independence.

The means of Śakti was described precisely to understand the self-veiling process of consciousness. In order to recognize that there is a creative consciousness behind duality, good reasoning (*sattarka*) is needed. But “reasoning” was not usually considered one of the yogic ancillaries (*yogaṅga*) in the classical yoga traditions (Patāñjala or Haṭha), at least not the most important one. Even for the *Mālinīvijayottara Tantra*, the text upon which Abhinavagupta comments in his *Tantrāloka*, yoga and knowledge support each other in such a way that

knowledge is seen as a pre-requisite to the yoga practices of focus (*dhyāna*), contemplation (*samādhi*) and final absorption (*pratyāhara*).²³⁶ Abhinavagupta, however, makes of “good reasoning” (*sattarka*) the very means by which the realization of self-aware non-dual absorption is attained (*TA*, 1.106, 4.86). This is because, if it is true that the root of duality is one’s own non-fragmented consciousness, then there is no better means to realize it than the constant act of dissolving dualities the very moment they are identified. Good reasoning is precisely the tool that, like an axe, “cuts the tree of dichotomies” (*TA*, 4.13) by discerning between that which has to be avoided (limited-limiting constructs) and that which is to be sought after, i.e., the purification of knowledge or *śuddhavidyā* (*TA*, 4.15).

Through good reasoning the practitioner is supposed to purify her mind with increasing sharpness, capable to penetrate beyond any duality, whether it is in regards to the object of knowledge, the knower or the means of knowing. Abhinavagupta distinguishes four degrees of duality in each one of them according to the creative phases of consciousness: 1) emanation, 2) maintenance, 3) dissolution, 4) nameless (previous to emanation). The practice then consists in dissolving the dualities of that which is being considered from the way it presents itself as created, as maintained, dissolved and completely merged within consciousness (*TA*, 4.125-131). This means that there are at least twelve stages at which *tarka* can penetrate the experience of anything that presents itself as an object, that is, as different from consciousness. And considering that the cognizing body can pay attention to itself in different layers of objectivity, as we have seen before with the Sāmkhya and Vedānta systems— i.e. five sense faculties, five action faculties, attention, sense of ego, and intellect— each of them can be penetrated by *tarka* at twelve distinct levels. Thus, the possibility of “cutting” through the tree of experiential

²³⁶ See Somadeva Vasudeva, note to the *Mālinīvijayottara Tantra* 4.4-8.

dichotomies within our own bodies involves hundreds of “self-inwardizing” movements within consciousness.²³⁷

This however does not mean that the practice of “good reasoning” is only an intellectual endeavor where one decides to focus upon an object and “reasons with oneself, examining options, following the logical sequence of ideas and clarifying doubts step by step”.²³⁸ If it is true what I have been holding in this dissertation, that there is really no ontological distinction between introspective and proprioceptive bodily awareness, then to each of this “inwardizing” acts of consciousness must correspond an embodied expression, even if unconscious and imperceptible.

This is what we find in the full explanation of this path by Abhinavagupta, who compared the Śaktopāya with the very enactment of worshipping a deity (*pūja*). For this tantric philosopher, the essential nature of the act of worshipping is to connect and bring together the multitude of objects, subjective dispositions and dividing constructs with the conscious self which is free, pure plenitude, and self-luminous (*TA* 4.121). The very act of “connecting” the manifold with the emanating principle is played out in the sexual metaphor of intercourse (*mithuna*) between the feminine creative power of division (*māyā*) symbolized by the vagina, and the emanating principle of consciousness, symbolized by the penis (*liṅgam*). Whether the tantric ritual involved actual sexual practices as part of the worshipping of the deities is not as relevant for this description as the idea that to each introspective “duality-dissolving” act of consciousness corresponds an embodied act of ever more intense bliss. Interiorized consciousness is also interiorized bodily feelings, which, as shown in this dissertation, are intrinsically connected with the quality of our breath.

²³⁷ Chakrabarti, “Worshipping the Twelve Kali-s”, unpublished.

²³⁸ Chakrabarti, “Worshipping the Twelve Kali-s”, unpublished.

As an act of purification needed for proper worshipping, Abhinavagupta also shows how good reasoning (*sattarka*) is accompanied by a quality of breath that honors the deity in each of the aspects that become unveiled through the twelve phases of non dual introspection. These twelve aspects of the deity are represented by a different manifestation of the Goddess “Kālī”, because Abhinavagupta is following the characterization of them found in the Krama worshipping tradition where Kālī is taken as the supreme consciousness. After describing each Kālī as a specific aspect of cognitive dissolution of duality, Abhinavagupta goes on to explain that the act of dissolving one duality to uncover the next one is only completed when, together with the “cutting axe” of reason, there is the breathing movement that always accompanies it. And as Abhinavagupta explains, such breathing is the one that sounds as “ham” during inhalation, and as “sah” during exhalation, the esoteric meaning of which is “That, I am” from the Sanskrit *saḥ-aham* (TA.135-136).²³⁹ At any cognizing moment, the breathing subject, which is no other than the conscious self, has the introspective and proprioceptive possibility to make explicit the meaning of its own relation with the object: that of ontological identity.

The realization that the object, appearing as external and opposed to the consciousness that observes it, is actually consciousness observing itself through a limited form that it has willed to create is described as a blissful experience (*ānanda*). The experience of bliss reproduces itself at a small scale in the experience of dissolution of duality at each of the twelve “Kālī-s” for each of the possible objects of contemplation which are symbolized by “cakras”, i.e. circles of energy or objective realms, each of which is mapped both at the level of the universe and at the level of the individual body. This means that there are hundreds and hundreds of blissful “little” experiences in the process of knowing the self. This is why good reasoning is so important. If it weren’t for its cunning activity, we would remain attached to our little, but still

²³⁹ See Silburn’s commentary to these verses based on Jajaratha in her edition of the *Tantrāloka*.

dualistic, blissful moments without ever moving on to the next one. This is exactly what characterizes unenlightened self-delusion. And this is, I think, what explains the difficulty of becoming explicitly self-aware. While experiencing non-duality might be blissful in itself, it is not always so blissful to recognize that what we thought we were is actually not so. The movement to a deeper level of non-duality and re-identification requires constant vigilance and enough courage to continuously break old, stiff, and dichotomizing constructions of the self.

In the context of the path of the capable, powerful mind, as Chakrabarti calls the means of Śakti, self-awareness is only fully explicitly achieved when the mind has purified itself from mental constructs (*vikalpas*) of differentiation and established the pure mental and embodied image under the implicit statement “All this I am”.²⁴⁰ The practitioner then experiences the truly non-dual bliss of authentic self-awareness (*svasamvit*) that dissolves the universe within one’s heart (*TA*, 4.181).

That the deepest layer of self-awareness occurs within the “heart” (*hṛdaye*) is an idea that we saw appearing in the *Upaniṣads*. But Abhinavagupta emphasizes the embodied component of that experience when he describes it as *svavimarśa* (*TA*, 4.182), usually translated as “self-recollection” or “self-recognition”. As Skora has noted,²⁴¹ the root of the word *vimarśa* is *mṛś*, “to touch”. It is in the feeling of the inner touch of breathing that consciousness can recognize itself in every experience. Indeed, the use of good reasoning is at the same time the use of good breathing. The introspective act characteristic of the means of Śakti is at the same time the proprioceptive awareness of an overflowing ecstatic gesture (*udrikta-bhairavīya-mudrā*, *TA*, 4.200) that is spontaneously assumed when duality is intellectually dissolved.

²⁴⁰ See Muller Ortega, “*Tarka yogāṅgam uttamam*”, p.198. (*TA*, 4.104-114)

²⁴¹ Skora, “The Pulsating Heart...”, p.422.

5.2.3 Creative insight (*bhāvana*)

The embodied aspect of good reasoning²⁴² becomes more evident in the third and “lower” method of self-awareness called “the means of the individual” (*āṇavopāya*), which makes use of the experience of limitation itself (represented by our very breathing bodies) to access non-dual consciousness. This path is the most relevant for a philosophy of bodily self-awareness because it is based on the idea that to know the self requires the knowledge of that into which the self comes-to-be, that is, a body. Although Abhinavagupta subscribes to the metaphysical principle shared by all Indian philosophies that the conscious self is not the body, this Kaśmir Śaiva philosopher emphasized their inseparability (*TA*, 5.12). This implies that, while consciousness is not “just” body, the body is just consciousness becoming. Thus, if one is to “become” aware of oneself, one must attain the explicit awareness of the body that consciousness has become. Making one’s body the object of awareness is precisely the method used in the means of the individual.

The word in Sanskrit for “becoming” is *bhāvanā* which derives from the verb root “bhū”, to be or exist. As Francois Chenet notes, unlike the other root for the verb “to be” in Sanskrit (“as”) which denotes “being” in its pure existence without reference to time, *bhū* refers to existence in its process of production and creation.²⁴³ *Bhāvanā* is the present participle of *bhū*, giving the sense of continuous activity and it has been used in the yoga texts to denote any mental activity by which an internal transformation is effected. For example, when negative thoughts are present in one’s mind, contrary ones are to be produced or cultivated (*pratipakṣa-bhāvanā*, *YS* 2.33). It has also been used in the sense of deep concentration or continuous

²⁴² In *TA* IV.13-14 *sattarka* is defined in terms of *bhāvana*, this very important term has been translated as creative intuition (Chenet, “Bhāvana et Créativité de la Conscience”), intuitive reason (Silburn, *Kundalini, The Energy of the Depths*), insight contemplation (Somadeva, *The Yoga of the Mālinīvijayottaratantra*).

²⁴³ Francois Chenet, “Bhāvana et Créativité de la Conscience”, in *Numen* 34 (1), p.47.

contemplation as when one recites uninterruptedly the sound OM (*tajjapas tadartha-bhāvanam* YS, 1.28). In Tantric practices, *bhāvana* refers to the visualization of Goddesses or meaningful symbols in different parts of the body as a way to become absorbed into their contemplated qualities.²⁴⁴ Its meaning encompasses a sense of “realization” and an understanding by “coming-to-be” the object beheld in the mind. The idea that one becomes that which one contemplates is the leitmotif in the *Yoga Vāsiṣṭha* where, as seen in chapter 3, the creation of the universe is described as the product of Brahmā’s mind contemplating its own feelings and desires.

The question, however, could arise: If one is already a body, what would one “become” by contemplating on it? How could one “become” consciousness alone by contemplating precisely that which it supposedly is not, a limited body?

It is this radical paradox at the heart of the means of the individual that makes it, for me, the most powerful of the paths towards self-realization because it is within this level of the practice that the two complete opposites, the ultimate duality— subject as pure consciousness and body as pure objectivity— must dissolve. And precisely the way to accomplish this is by becoming (*bhāvana*) a body! There is here a profound recognition that the lived, personal body is never really experienced as something that “has become”, in the real sense of the word. In the experience of most human beings, the body is something that is given, the conditions and circumstances of which are felt as imposed or, in the best of circumstances, as comfortably unquestioned. Subject to diseases, dysfunctions, imbalances, disgusts, etc., the body is seldom lived as a place of freedom. And even for those who have had it easy, who have been able to enjoy their bodies as a place of happiness, the body is nevertheless experienced as a place of “pathos”. A symbol of passivity, dullness, instrumentality, oppression, repression, depression,

²⁴⁴ See Sthaneshwar Timalsina, *Tantric Visual Culture*, for an excellent embodied cognitive approach to tantric contemplative methods.

uncontrollable impulses, unconscious instincts, the body is usually an introjected product of political, cultural, medical, and all sorts of external discourses.

The means of the individual in Abhinavagupta's yoga consists in contemplating the body as a place of freedom, where the object is not opposed to the subject or the subject is not imposed to the object. Instead, the body is "recreated" as a place where "the sun, the moon, and the fire are unified and offered to the great sacrificial pit of the heart where the intense light of Bhairava ecstatically consumes the oblation for as long as the friction of the two contemplative wood-sticks continues to exist" (TA 5.22-23). Using esoteric language common to the tradition, Abhinavagupta means by "sun" the cognizing subject, by "moon" the object cognized, and by "fire" the means of cognizing. The heart appears here, once again, as a metaphor of the lived body in its deepest sense, as a point of self-reference, as a grounding place, and as a space of rest for the faculties of cognition and action which are so used to be outwardly oriented. The light of Bhairava is the authentic bliss experienced in the dissolution of duality. And the "two contemplative wood-sticks that are in continuous friction (*kṣobha*)" refers to the flow of breath which is suspended in a vibrating equilibrium (*kṣobha*) at the heart. This last metaphor is a direct reference to *kumbhaka*²⁴⁵ and presupposes a mechanism of visualization of the wind-flows (*prāṇa*) moving through the body in a particular way.

This path begins thus, with appeasing the outwardly oriented functions of the body and freely deploys the inner faculties to visualize the body "from the inside" making it, more than an object of perception, an object of imagination. As such, the means of the individual uses mental images (*vikalpas*) to get rid of limiting and dualistic constructions of the body, which are images themselves. It is in this sense that *bhāvana* is akin to *sattarka* (TA, 4.14), for both work as purifying cognitive functions dedicated to the dissolution of all duality. But while the latter

²⁴⁵ See chapter 3

focuses on unveiling deeper levels of non-dual cognition by means of analysis, the former constructs (and deconstructs) images reproducing the way in which consciousness itself “becomes”.

Just as in the path of the capable mind the practitioner must meditate on the twelve stages of non-dual “Kālīs”, in the means of the individual the practitioner should focus on the different levels of the body through the images of the “sun”, the “moon”, and “fire” which encompass the totality of the lived body as an objective realm (*cakra*). The body as an objective realm is differentiated from consciousness, in all its aspects: as a cognizing subject, an object of cognition, and as means of knowing. This multileveled objective realm should be contemplated as emanating from, manifested within, and absorbed back into one’s heart (*TA*, 5.27-29), which stands both for the physical piece of flesh inside the chest as well as for the lived heart which is felt as the point of reference for one’s identity and as a rhythmic pulse that reflects the experience of the world.²⁴⁶ It is its felt aspect which should be meditated upon as the blissful resting place where the inhaled air (*apāna*) is directed as if having grasped the object of knowledge, and from where the exhaled air (*prāṇa*) is expelled as if “filled” with the subjective impression of the known objects, “reaching out” twelve fingers away from the nose (a measure known in yogic language as *dvadaśanta*). The empty space of the heart should then be contemplated as the ever more blissful place where all objects of knowledge are absorbed into one’s consciousness with each breath at the very moment where inhalation and exhalation find their equilibrium (*samāna*). Then, when objective and subjective impressions are fused, and their delimitations as “object” and “subject” are vanished, the “fire” of the heart blissfully ignites and sends the inner breath up in an ascending motion (*udāna*). This movement is interpreted by

²⁴⁶ A similar meditation is given in the *Yoga Vasistha* VI.2.136. In the YV, the heart is defined as both personal and cosmic. The first one being the internal organ of the heart, and the second one referring to the heart of intelligence which is both internal and external, and neither internal nor external (V.78.33-36).

Jayaratha, the commentator of the *Tantrāloka* (TA 5.46-48), to be the ascending *kunḍalinī*, which is visualized as been struck by a forceful motion coming down from the heart into the base of the spine at a point called *mūlādhāra*, where it stimulates the “dormant” *prāṇa* of the *kunḍalinī* making it raise up and enter into a subtle channel within the spine called the *susūmna*, as it “devours” all duality in its path towards the upper centers (*cakras*) of the body up to the top of the head, known as the *brahmarandra*. When the duality between the body that is being contemplated and the consciousness that contemplates is completely blurred, the “great penetration” (*samaveśa*) happens and the winds diffuse (*vyāna*) all around the body, which is visualized as encompassing the sun, the moon, the fire, and the whole universe. At this point, the lived body is not anymore conceived as a limited, personal body, but the body of consciousness, identical to the universe itself. “Sun”, “moon” and “fire” are thrown into the “sacrificial pit” of the heart, which is pure consciousness itself “shining” in the perfect bliss of non-dual awareness (*cidānanda*).

The practice of *bhāvana* or creative insight in the context of Abhinavagupta’s yoga culminates in an intense transformative experience that could well be called mystical and that is known in haṭha and tantra yoga as the ascension (*uccāraṇa*) of the *kunḍalinī*. Unlike haṭha yoga practices, Abhinavagupta’s description of the “ascension” of *prāṇa* is not made through effortful physical manipulation of the wind-flows. Instead, the movement of *prāṇa* is a function of the cognitive dissolution of duality enacted by the visualization of the object being “carried” by the flow of the breath into the empty space of the heart. This means that the proprioceptive awareness of the breath is preceded and, even more, made possible, by the introspective awareness of inner movements of consciousness.

The visualization of the cosmic body, which is a direct product of imagination, should however not be perceived as mere fantasy, because the production of images in *bhāvana* has as an aim the transcendence of all images, and with that, the liberation of any limited sense of embodiment, which is not necessarily true from fantasy or other illusions. It is not just about becoming any body, like imagining myself as a dog, or a star, a rock, or another human body. Such is a function of *vikalpa*. Rather, imagining (*kalpana*) in the context of this practice is about becoming the very “body of imagination”, which means that one must become the body that has been imagined, reflected by the initial act of the manifesting consciousness. In a sense, it is a “going back” to the pre-arising moment of sensing the cosmic elements through the womb. This is a body imagining itself in its fundamental relation to being, embedded in the inner texture of a consciousness that knows itself by becoming a body. The images produced by *bhāvana* follow a logic of “duality-dissolution” in accordance with a “prāṇic” body schema that encompasses different stages of subjective and objective identification. These images are not just “mental” ideations but movements accompanied by breathing sensations, that is, by intense emotional experiences (*bhāva*) engaging the body both at the level of the sensori-motor/homeostatic schemas (manifested in the quality of the pulsations of the heart and rhythm of breath) and at the level of the phenomenological flesh (manifested in the transformational, post-meditative impact over one’s notions of the body, i.e. body image, and its relation with everything and everyone else).

Just as in the Śaktopāya a different Kālī is unveiled at each stage of duality-dissolution, in the path of the individual, each stage of non-dual image is marked by a movement of the breath, a quality of bliss (*ānanda*),²⁴⁷ and a particular rhythmic pulse of the heart which

²⁴⁷ Each stage is defined by a particular type of bliss: 1) Purificatory bliss (*nijānanada*) when the object is “inhaled” into the heart and “exhaled” from it; 2) Indescribable bliss (*nirānanda*), when both breaths balance in the heart; 3)

eventually manifests spontaneously as a sound (*mantra*). *Bhāvana* applied to the body produces the experience of the body not only as imagined— as visualized through imaginary symbols, places, wind-flows, feelings or sounds— but also as an imagining subject. The visualization of one’s body as a cosmos enacts the original act of “becoming” a body by constructing an image with which we are to be identified. This psychological-metaphorical and somaesthetic identification, if “real”, in the sense of being authentically enacted— a successful “self-delusion”, a mimicry as it were— has as an effect the shattering of a body that has been imagined as a fixed material object, attached to a fixed psychological limited identity. The body is here encountered in its permeable, pervasive, multidimensional and also malleable constitution. And it is in the very capacity of imagining that the body becomes the de-objectified subject and feels, breaths— has proprioceptive awareness of— its own freedom.

5.3 Imagination, Dreams and the Anatomy of Subtle Bodies

5.3.1 Imagined Bodies Are Real

Although immersed in a particular esoteric tradition, Abhinavagupta’s account of “becoming a body” shows that imagination is needed to become aware of one’s body. This is true not only in the usual sense in which we *have* to imagine parts of our body that we cannot see by imagining the percipient being placed in a different position, for our body— just as any other solid object—

Supreme bliss (*parānanda*) when both inhalation and exhalation are suspended within the heart; 4) Infinite bliss (*brahmānanda*) when objective and subjective impressions are fused and the *prāṇa* is directed down towards the spine with a striking force; 5) Greatest bliss (*mahānanda*), when the objects are dissolved in the fire of the heart as the *kuṇḍalinī* ascends; 6) Self-aware bliss (*cidānanda*) when body-consciousness complete interpenetration occurs; 7) Universal bliss (*jagadānanda*) when the whole universe is contemplated as one’s body and one’s breath and heart fuse with the cosmic one. (TA, 43-53).

is only half-perceived, as Bhattacharyya reminds us in his book *Subject as Freedom*.²⁴⁸ But it is also the case that the perceivable parts appear already as a manifestation of a process of mental construction, differentiation and distinction, as parts embedded in a field of significations that were given to us as ways to imagine ourselves, through images inscribed within us, constituted through affective and grammatical interactions with others as well as with the environment.

We do not tend to see the experience of our body as an instance of imagining because, having inherited an empiricist tradition, many continue to think of imagination only as a faculty of creating mental images at will. Certainly, our body schema and body image are not felt as something that can be manipulated freely. I cannot *choose* to see my hand attached to my wrist. That is just the way it appears to my senses. And that which passively appears to one's consciousness through the senses is taken as the material for perception. Even if I happened to see or feel my hand attached to my shoulder, that would still be considered to be a perception because, although a spontaneous creation of images is presenting something to my awareness *that is not really there*, it is something that I am unable to change just by willing it. A perception that unwillingly presents something that is "not really there" is called a hallucination or an illusion.²⁴⁹ Some philosophers with a neuroscientific perspective consider our ordinary waking experience of reality to be itself a hallucination because it is the presentation of a world that is in reality constructed and projected (unwillingly) by the brain. "An ordinary wake state is a kind of 'online' dream"²⁵⁰ only differentiated from sleep states in that one receives information flow from the sense organs while the other has no constraint imposed by an "external world".

²⁴⁸ K. Bhattacharyya, *Subject as Freedom*, p. 93.

²⁴⁹ Evan Thompson, *Waking, Dreaming, Being*, p.179.

²⁵⁰ See Thomas Metzinger and Jennifer Michelle Windt, "The Philosophy of Dreaming and Self-Consciousness: What Happens to the Experiential Subject to the Experiential Subject during the Dream State", in *The New Science of Dreaming*, p.196.

However, while it is true that dreams and waking states are present to us in the same phenomenological manner, the neuroscientific perspective does not fully assume the implications of this, for it presupposes that previous to experience (awake or asleep), there is a sensation and that this makes the difference with what is unreal or illusory. However as Merleau Ponty incessantly argued, if things appear to us as they do in a dream; if we can withdraw from the world of waking perception without knowing it, then nothing proves that we are ever in it. And thus, given that the difference between waking state and dream state is not absolute, then “one is justified in counting them both among ‘our experiences’, and it is above perception itself that we must seek the guarantee and the sense of its ontological function”.²⁵¹

Merleau Ponty understands experience as previous to every opinion of real or unreal and thus, he does not deduce an illusory status of existence and our bodies from the phenomenological fact that dream and waking states are alike. The reality of experience cannot be reduced to sensation because, as Merleau Ponty says, in inhabiting a world by our body, our primordial status is that of being open to it and this “openness” upon the world does not arise out of the need to distinguish between that which appears and the truth, but out of affective interactions that arise always already as meaningful, that is, as embedded within subjectivity. Experience has an ambiguous status because it can never be absolutely divided between the imaginary and nonimaginary, the active and the passive.²⁵² In Merleau Ponty’s view, at the bottom of our perceptual experiences is not knowledge but faith, not in the blind fanatical religious way, but as trust in the possibilities— uncertain as they are—that the world presents before us.²⁵³ The world is that which we take for granted and the boundaries that control the real

²⁵¹ Merleau Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p.6.

²⁵² James Morley, “The Texture of the Real: Merleau Ponty, Imagination and Psychopathology”, in *Imagination and its Pathologies*, pp. 100-103.

²⁵³ Merleau Ponty, *The Visible and The Invisible*, p.28.

from the illusory become necessary only in moments of empirical reflection. Empirical illusions dissipate to give place to other appearances that take up the ontological strength that we gave to the previous ones. Merleau Ponty's example: "I thought I saw on the sand a piece of wood polished by the sea, and it was a clayey rock"²⁵⁴ reminds us of the famous Advaita Vedānta *leitmotif*: "I thought I saw a snake, but it was a rope".

The individual life is imagined (*vikalpita*) first, then the different objects, External and internal, they are known as they are remembered. Just as in the darkness a rope that is not perceived distinctly is imagined as a snake or something else, in that same way the self (*ātman*) is imagined to be many things. When the rope is distinctly perceived, then it is finally recognized: "This is just a rope". In that same way, when the self is distinctly perceived, it is known as being one alone and without distinctions (*advaita*). The self is imagined as being many things: *prāṇa*, mind, body, etc., but this is due to the divine power of *māyā*, with which the self deludes itself.²⁵⁵

Gauḍapāḍa and later his disciple Śaṅkarācārya consider the common "dis-illusion" of an object that has been taken for another as an analogy of what happens when we finally "see" our "real" self. Unlike the states available within conventional and empirical reality (*vyāvahārita*), among which fictional (*pratibhāsika*) experiences occur, Advaita Vedānta takes ultimate reality (*paramārthika*) as that experience which cannot be cancelled by any other experience. For this philosophical school, being aware of ourselves, i.e. imagining ourselves as embodied beings, is like seeing a snake when in reality there is a rope. Once we realize that we are nothing but a conscious self, advaitins think that we will stop imagining ourselves as bodies, just as we stop imagining the illusory snake when we finally see that it is a rope.

Although Advaitin philosophers agree with Abhinavagupta and Merleau Ponty in that imagination "weaves into" the experience of ourselves and the world, non-dualist Vedānta philosophy falls into the same reductionist problem that we find in neuroscience: they ultimately

²⁵⁴ Merleau Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p.40.

²⁵⁵ Gauḍapada's commentary to *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā*, 2.16-19 (my translation).

conflate the imaginary (fictions, hallucinations) with the imagined (waking state and dreams) and then oppose them to the real. Yet, as Henry Corbin study of imaginal worlds has convincingly shown,²⁵⁶ an imaginary body is not the same as an imagined (or imaginal) one, for this one is not opposed to reality, but rather, is a door or vehicle to realities that otherwise would remain hidden and unavailable to experience. It is in this sense that our bodies are instances of imagining. As seen along this dissertation, there is always an experience that “pre-arises” to the concrete determination of our bodies. An emotion, a feeling, a subtle sensation, an idea, a memory, they are but images that configure our identity (as seen in the Mathew Sanford and Ian Waterman cases) and through them, our interaction with the world. But, as shown with Abhinavagupta’s account of the body, these are not images understood as representations of “the real” or as mere illusions or phantasies emerging out of our desires, but the mental-affective-embodied-linguistic constructions that sediment at the bottom of what we trust, believe, and ultimately consent to call, “reality”.

5.3.2 Lucid Bodies Know that They Dream

There is a very interesting experiment within the new science of dreaming that suggests an implicit “willed” assumption of the difference between real and illusory, perception and imagination. In this experiment researchers track the tip of the subjects’ fingers moving slowly left to right during four conditions: 1) Awake with eyes open; 2) Awake with eyes closed (imagined); 3) Lucid dreaming with eyes open; 4) Lucid dreaming with eyes closed (imagined). The experiment is based on the fact that people who can become aware that they are dreaming while they dream (lucid dreamers) can also remember to perform predetermined actions that can

²⁵⁶ Corbin, Henry, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, Prelude to the second edition.

be used as a signal for the laboratory indicating the moment when the lucid dream starts and the moment when the dreamer decides to imagine closing the eyes, thus making it possible to measure brain and other bodily activities. The experiment showed that the eyes movement in 1) and 3) was smooth, whereas in 2) and 4) was saccadic. The scientific team concluded: “this strongly supports the hypothesis that as far as the visual vividness dimension is concerned, dreaming consciousness is *nearly identical* to waking perceptual consciousness, and just as distinct from imagination as imagination distinct from perception.”²⁵⁷

The difference in sensation between the movement of the eyes following the perceived finger and the movement of the eyes closed while imagining them following a finger has to do with the presence of stimulation of the vestibulo-ocular-reflex in the first case and its absence in the second one. It is astonishing that the same result in the eyes movement can be attained while dreaming that the eyes are following the finger! This means not only that the experience of perceiving is identical in waking life and dreams, but also and most importantly, that the very differentiation between imagination and perception within the dream is not based on the fact that one is more vivid than the other or that there is something “real” stimulating the eye. Rather, what we take as “imagined” seems to have more to do with an implicit assenting attitude, a pre-arisen acceptance that what is to be seen with “open” eyes is “more real” than what is to be seen with them “closed”. The criterion for that which is imagined and that which is perceived is, as Merleau Ponty had argued, “above” perception itself, but not above imagination! The distinction that the lucid dreamer does in the dream between an imagined and a perceived act reveals itself thus, as an instance of imitation (which shares the same root than the words “image” and “imagining”), not a simulation but a mimicry of an experience— not of objects— that is lived in

²⁵⁷ Stephen La Berge, “Lucid Dreaming”, in Deirdre and McNamara, *The New Science of Dreaming*, Vol. 2, pp. 318-320. Cursives are mine.

the waking state as an unambiguous truth (“The imaginary is not real”) but that first appears in its undetermined, uncertain openness of possibilities (like the unclearly perceived rope that could be a snake or a line of water, etc.). Waking non-lucid reality appears identical to a non-lucid dream, but only “nearly identical” to a lucid one because, while imagining and perceiving are as distinct to each other whether awake or asleep, the self-aware dreaming body awakens to the delusion of which it is made of: a forgotten free act of imitation.

We have forgotten in the waking state that our bodies are imagining bodies and it is through dreams and imagination itself that we can remember it. As Isabelle Ratié remarks in her presentation of Abhinavagupta’s notion of freedom: “When we perceive we do not experience freedom, we are rather affected by something that we experience as being alien to us and that imposes its presence. We are not creators. So how can Abhinavagupta present consciousness’s free creation of the perceived universe as the most immediate of experiences?”²⁵⁸ The response, she explains, is that for Abhinavagupta we experience passivity only insofar as we “agree to be passive”, just as we agree to believe in the “reality” of a theatre play. Without rendering enough belief to the experience, we would remain untouched, unmoved, and indifferent to it. On the other hand, without remaining aware of it as the imitative fiction that it is we would be so absorbed that the play would be destroyed, the spectator would take it as the way and only way things are, while the actor would stop enjoying its role, becoming fully immersed on it without the possibility of overcoming it and performing something else.

Imagination and perception have been usually distinguished in terms of pure activity and pure passivity.²⁵⁹ But it is easier to understand now, perhaps more than ever in the history of Western Philosophy, that perception is not a passive experience, and that active imagination is

²⁵⁸ Isabelle Ratié, “The Dreamer and the Yogin” in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, p.464.

²⁵⁹ Two clear examples of the opposition between perception and imagination in terms of passivity and activity are Berkeley in the *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* and Sartre in *The Imagination*.

necessary not only to create fancies, myths, or poetry, but also to transcend our own immediate situation, to purify our minds, to grasp moral truths and, in many ways, to heal from disease.

From the realization that reality has an “imaginary texture”, as Merleau Ponty calls it, does not follow that any imaginative projection of the mind is false, as Advaita Vedānta philosophy concludes. The vedantic non-dualist thought aims towards the revelation of the ontological deceit in order to destroy it. An advaitin lucid dream would vanish the dreams within the undifferentiated light of the awakened consciousness. From a tantric non dual perspective, however, the lucidity consists not to awaken *from* the dream but *within* it. The dreaming body thus becomes aware of itself as a dreamer, and the dream — as any of the other movements of consciousness— passes from being an automatic, spontaneous connection of ideas guided by underlying emotions to the explicit creative modulation of images.

The “contemporary theory of dreaming”²⁶⁰ considers that one of the main functions of dreams is the regulation of emotions through realistic simulation of character-self interactions. The socio-emotional concerns of the individual are reflected in the dream in such a way that the intensity of the experiences lived within the dream measures the power of the underlying emotion. According to this theory, by staging situations that might be fearsome, sad, scary, etc., the dream “prepares” us for similar situations we might confront in the waking stage. Since our moral filters, rational mind, and other critical tools are “loosened” when asleep, the images in the dream can make associations more broadly, avoiding “tightly structured, overlearned

²⁶⁰ See Ernest Hartman, “The Nature and Functions of Dreams”, in Deirdre and McNamara, *The New Science of Dreaming*, Vol.3, p. 171 and Tore Nielsen and Jessica Lara-Carrasco, “Nightmares, Dreaming and Emotion Regulation: A Review”, in *Ibid.*, Vol.2, p.263.

material”.²⁶¹ And this, in turn, can be useful to making decisions or finding a different perspective in issues that are troubling us during waking life.

In view of this natural way of emotional self-regulation a question might arise concerning the role of lucid dreams. Wouldn't objectifying the dream and manipulating the images at will interfere with the free and spontaneous connections that are made precisely due to the absence of self-awareness?²⁶² The phenomenological worry of objectification appears legitimately also at the level of dream bodily self-awareness. After all, the world of imagination is effective and most powerful upon our psyche precisely because of its allusiveness. And this applies to our bodies as well. Think for example in the mirror devised by neuroscientist V.S. Ramachandra to treat a case of phantom limb painful sensations. It was not by holding up the mirror for the patient to see that there was no hand that Ramachandra created a change in his patient's painful sensations. Instead he produced a fake image of a hand by superimposing the reflection of the real one on the felt location of the other so that the patient could get a vivid impression of moving both hands when in fact he was only moving one. The indirect reflection of the hand and the illusion that he could move his absent hand made the painful paralyzed sensations go away.²⁶³ Similarly, it is not simply by holding a mirror in front of an anorexic's body that her body image will change. It requires a creative “staging” that would make her feel— not just see or represent— her embodiment in a different way.

²⁶¹ Ernest Hartman, “The Nature and Functions of Dreams”, in Deirdre and McNamara, *The New Science of Dreaming*, Vol.3, p.185

²⁶² Evan Thompson asks this question in the context of a workshop on lucid dreaming guided by Allan Wallace. See “Waking, Dreaming, Being”, p. 197-202. He narrates that during the workshop he asked Wallace whether it was better to have lucid dreams than non-lucid ones. Allan Wallace, a Buddhist teacher, responded that it is always better to be lucid in dreams just as it is always better to be mindful when awake. Thompson was not convinced by that answer because he thinks that non-lucidity has a natural purpose in the cycle of being awake-dreaming-awake. Thompson leaves the question open as to whether lucid dreaming would affect other important functions of dreams, like the ability to learn and acquire new memories.

²⁶³ Ramachandra says that later his patient came back feeling not pain in the phantom arm but his fingers on the shoulder!

If lucid dreaming breaks the spell of the stage then how would dreams continue to do their work? Yet, at this point of the dissertation, the answer should be expected: bodily self-awareness is not necessarily objectifying and is, in fact, a necessary element for self-transformation. A lucid dream is like a pause in the continuous flow of automatic dreams. Like a “*kumbhaka*” of dreams, a lucid dream suspends the spontaneous flow of memory and emotions to redirect them in new, fresh ways. This does not mean that the suspension of the normal flow of dreams is to be made the norm of our sleeping life, just as suspending the breath in *prāṇāyama* is not exactly done to replace breathing. The explicit introspective stance has as its main purpose the revelation of an underlying creative awareness that is never explicitly known, but it is always enacted. By becoming aware that we are dreaming we can modify the images within the dream and by doing this we become an imagining imagined body. In the lucid dream we perfectly enact the experience of the bodily self-aware Brāhma who sees reality appearing before him as he thinks it, at the same time that he maintains the knowledge that it is himself who creates it. Lucidity allows us to play with unusual situations, find new patterns of behavior, explore multiple possibilities of movement, discover the malleability of our personality, etc. Like an indirect mirror, lucid dreams show us— by making us feel it— the creative nature of our beings.

It is not easy to see in waking life how self-aware and creative our body always is, especially because during this state of consciousness, which Advaita and Kaśmir Śaivism call *jāgrat*—where the universe manifests through the sense organs and the cognitive faculties of the individual (*viśva*)— we are constantly feeling constrained by situations, actions, and external inputs. It takes a science of dreams to show us how the images that we see and experience are always being influenced by our emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Indeed during this stage

known as *svapna*, the world appears in the light of one's internal milieu (*taijasa*- "from light"), which manifests the world accordingly. Interestingly Sāmkhya, Classical Yoga philosophy and Advaita Vedānta do not talk much about this stage neither do they mention, to my knowledge, the experience of lucid dreams. They rather prefer to focus on the dreamless sleep stage (*susupti*), for it is this stage that appears closer to that in which all delusion is gone, since one lies in the implicit self-affirming knowledge (*prajñā*) of pure bliss. They emphasize the experience of self-awareness as a stage that transcends all others and as a liberation *from* all delusion. Tantra, on the other hand, while fully aware of that transcendent dimension, recovers the experience of transcendence within the body deploying the stage of dreams as a medium of liberation *within* and *through* the delusion itself, for it works like a mirror that can show us—indirectly, but most effectively because of that— the freedom of consciousness in all acts. Of course, in order for the dream to be effective, it has to become lucid, that is, explicitly self-aware, for it is only when the dreamer can decide what should happen in her dreams that she becomes the "master", rather than the victim, of her own imagination.

The lucid dream becomes, thus, the model of living liberation within non-dualist Tantric schools, for it contains within itself the truth of what consciousness is: the freedom to take this or any other desired form, including the absence of all forms, while remaining aware of itself as the enjoyer.²⁶⁴

5.3.3 *Nādīs* and "Nervures" Within the Uncoiling Being

In the lucid dream the imagining body becomes one with consciousness itself at the same time that consciousness— or Being, for that matters— reveals itself as self-imagining. James B.

²⁶⁴ See Abhinavagupta, *Paramārthasāra*, K 33-35.

Steeves was right when concluding that, “a philosophy of the imagining body leads to a philosophy of imagining Being”.²⁶⁵ The act of imagining is an act of transcendence. Through it the self externalizes itself and becomes visible, while the visible is at the same time taken back to the interiority of consciousness in the self-awareness of its being imagined. The imagining Being is flesh pregnant of possibles.²⁶⁶ In describing the notion of transcendence in Merleau Ponty, Steeves says that “flesh itself is structured like a series of currents that coil over each other, allowing Being to radiate from within in the form of rays of Being”²⁶⁷ and then relates those rays with what Merleau Ponty called “nervures”: “as the nervure bears the leaf from within, from the depths of its flesh, the ideas are the texture of experience, its style, first mute, then uttered.”²⁶⁸

It seems inevitable that in doing a philosophy of the imagining flesh, a subtle anatomical language starts to appear. In Indian philosophy, those “nervures” were called the *nāḍīs*. Indeed, as the *Manasollasa* describes them, they are woven like threads (*sirā*) through the internal body of attention, thinking, and feeling capacities (*antah-karaṇa*). The question usually emerges as to whether the models of subtle anatomy in India were referring to the nerves, veins, and other physical tubular structures of the body when they talked about *nāḍīs*. Especially since the texts not only describe two main channels— *ida* and *pīṅgala* –emerging from the bottom of the spine in the place called *muladhāra* and running along the left and right sides of the center channel called *suṣumnā*, but they also talk about “nervures” that run from the navel to the eyes, to the nose, to the point between the eyebrows, to the tip of the tongue (for speech), around the stomach (for digestion), to the throat (for drinking water and sneezing); from the navel downwards

²⁶⁵ James B. Steeves, *Imagining Bodies with Merleau Ponty*, p. 178.

²⁶⁶ Steeves, *Imagining Bodies with Merleau-Ponty*, p. 196.

²⁶⁷ *Ibidem*

²⁶⁸ Merleau Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p.119.

excreting semen, urine, and dung; and from the navel taking food all the way to the head where it is supposed to transform into nectar (*amṛtam*).²⁶⁹

Without suggesting that Merleau Ponty's notion of "nervures" is comparable in any relevant way to the *nāḍīs* of Indian subtle anatomy I, nevertheless, believe that his philosophy allows us to understand the phenomenological and non-reductionist dimensions of the subtle body as depicted in tantric systems. This means that, as discussed at length in chapter 3 with the notion of *prāṇa*, any anatomy describing the body in its phenomenological depth invariably refers to it as a sensible object as well as a sentient subject. Thus, while the *nāḍīs* are structures that could be traced to the anatomy and physiology of the body as physical object, their meaning is not exhausted by that just as the meaning of the heart, the eye, the breath, the hand, the lips, etc., while having definite anatomical and physiological functions, are not reducible to them as the following examples show: "I love you with all my heart", "Rotate the images with the eye of your mind", "Please lend us a hand", etc. At the same time, this should not be understood as implying that the non-reducible meaning of a subtle anatomy of the body is only metaphorical, for this would misunderstand the deep intertwining between the physical and the subtle realms. The "eye" of the mind would not be called such if we did not feel like "seeing" our ideas; or we would not refer to the "heart" when we love if its palpitations were not intensely felt in love.

Similarly, the subtle anatomical structures described in tantric and Indian philosophy in general are not random metaphors or merely imaginary meanings added to the physical anatomy, but regions of experience that take part of its meaning and logic from an embodied structure in which they are embedded. Thus we see that *ida* and *pīṅgalā*²⁷⁰ are intimately connected with the breathing flows of the left and right nostrils respectively, involving an ultradian alternating cycle

²⁶⁹ Sureśvara, *Manasollasa*, chapter IV. 14-22.

²⁷⁰ (Include figure)

where one breathing nostril is more open than the other one at once. Yogis thought that such alternation could be balanced, and designed breathing exercises to attain such equilibrium of flow. These breathing cycles are also understood as having lunar (cooling) and solar (heating) qualities and only by bringing them into a state of non-duality (mainly through *kumbhaka*) internal conditions in the body would create a vacuum able to open the bottom orifice of the central channel (*suṣumnā*), which is considered to be naturally blocked.

There are many models of subtle anatomy across the different tantric (and non-tantric) traditions. While all of them share the basic anatomy of the *nāḍīs* and the process of opening the central channel, descriptions vary regarding the purpose of that mechanism. In some texts, the vacuum is created in order to stop a substance stored in the center of the head charged with creative power (*bindu*) from falling down past the throat to avoid its being digested by the fire in the stomach, or from being discharged through the semen.²⁷¹ Other models, such as the ones found in Abhinavagupta and the *Yoga Vasiṣṭha*, understand the vacuum as happening in the heart where the inhaled *apāna* and the exhaled *prāṇa* are brought to meet in suspension and an embodied non-dual awareness is realized within a universal, cosmic heart.²⁷² A tantric Buddhist manual of yoga called “The Six Yogas of Naropa”, also makes the *prāṇa* (or “winds” as they are called in Buddhism) dissolve at the center of the heart but only after having caused internal heat at the navel wheel center and having circulated the *kuṇḍalinī* from the navel to the head and back until it has “melt” the “subtle drops” accumulated at each of the wheel centers located along the *suṣumnā*, commonly referred as *cakras*.²⁷³

The system of *cakras* is another common tantric structure of the subtle anatomy that varies from system to system, numbering five, six, seven and up to twelve circular regions

²⁷¹ See *Dattātreya yogaśāstra*.

²⁷² See YV V.78.

²⁷³ See *The Six Yogas of Naropa*, translated by Glenn H. Mullin.

located along the central channel (usually at the anus, genitals, navel, center of the chest, throat, between eyebrows, and top of the head). They are depicted with high symbolism as circles surrounded by petals with a Sanskrit letter inscribed in each of them and the association with an animal, color, a goddess or a god-goddess couple in each one.

According to some of the haṭha yoga texts²⁷⁴, once an internal balance of energies has been created within the body through the suspension of the breath (*kumbhaka*), the pressure is so intense that energy (*prāṇa*) moves down to the bottom of the spine where it “awakens” the energy stored at the bottom of the spine, called *kuṇḍalinī prāṇa* causing it to uncoil and ascend through the middle channel that serves as a “highway” for it to reach the top of the head at a point called the *brahmarandhra*.

Even within the tantric *kuṇḍalinī* models, the description of what is supposed to happen when this energy ascends through the middle channel varies. In the *Gorakṣa Śataka*, for example, *kuṇḍalinī* is made to ascend passing through three main obstructing knots until it reaches the top of the head where it merges with the cosmic energy above.²⁷⁵ In the *Khecarīvidyā*, however, *kuṇḍalinī* ascends through six *cakras* or wheels “devouring” the body in its way up to the head and “replacing” it with the body of the goddess Kuṇḍalī on its way down.²⁷⁶ A similar process is found in the *Śiva Samhitā* but, instead of devouring the body, it flows upwards activating sensations in each of the wheel centers and flooding the body with nectar (*amṛt*) after having activated a center in the middle of the head.²⁷⁷ Finally, in texts such as the *Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā* and the *Gherandha Samhitā*²⁷⁸ the *kuṇḍalinī* awakening is understood as the meeting

²⁷⁴ See *Haṭhayogapradīpikā*, Chapfīr II,44-45.

²⁷⁵ James Mallinson, “The Original Gorakṣaśataka”, in *Yoga in Practice*.

²⁷⁶ James Mallinson, *Khecarīvidyā*. Perhaps one of the most dramatic and beautiful descriptions of a similar process is poetically described by Jñānadeva in his commentary to chapter 6 of the *Bhagavad Gītā*.

²⁷⁷ *Śiva Samhitā*, chapter II.

²⁷⁸ *Gheranda Samhitā*, chapter 6.

of the goddess Kuṇḍalī with Śiva. Nevertheless, all Śaiva tantric traditions take this uncoiling *prāṇa* to be the supreme creative energy of the universe, inseparable from consciousness, laying in the “dormant” state of individual creation, coiled up, as if forgotten, away from the bodily center in which consciousness resides (i.e. the head or the heart, depending on the subtle anatomy model).

As seen above in Abhinavagupta’s account of bodily self-awareness, the raising of the *kuṇḍalinī* and its complete immersion within non-dual consciousness emerge in the enactment of a creative insight (*bhāvana*) in which the body imagines itself becoming a cosmic body. Unlike other free and imaginary creations of the mind, the imaginal self-aware process of becoming a “lucid body”, as it were, is inscribed in a system of “profound semiotic complexity”, as David Shulman clearly remarks when explaining the practice of yogic *bhāvana*.²⁷⁹ Its meaning is to be decoded within specific traditions of practices that address “therapeutically our normative lack of focus, our continuous distraction, and the consequent siphoning off of our deeper powers”.²⁸⁰ The yoga of imagination brings to the forth the self-creative nature of our bodies. When the *kuṇḍalinī* is “dormant”, which I take to mean: when the self-aware introspective processes of the body remain implicit, the body is like a non-lucid dreamer, a subject continuously creating images of itself and of the world without realizing that it does, reproducing with it old patterns, habits, and unconscious behavioral iterations. When the *kuṇḍalinī* “awakens”, the body then can tap into a self-aware fountain of creativity that opens up new possibilities both of movements and understanding.

The awakening of the *kuṇḍalinī* through active imagination, that is, through the visualization of certain wind-flows circulating throughout the body following a system of self-

²⁷⁹ David Shulman, *More than Real: A History of the Imagination in South India*, p.131.

²⁸⁰ Shulman, *More than Real*, p.143.

understanding that merges the imagining body with consciousness imagining itself represents, for me, one of the most coherent ways of elaborating the idea of a self-aware body. Not only does this structure show the intimate relation between thought and emotion in regards to bodily movements (the *kuṇḍalinī* moves according to the background of beliefs that sustain how the union body-consciousness is to be made explicit), but it also acknowledges that the bodily movements and sensations carry within them an understanding of their own aim (the stages of awakening express deeper levels of bliss as non-dual awareness becomes more and more explicit).

Gavin Flood has argued that “visualizing the body as being mapped with these subtle centers is clearly an entextualization of the body...Indeed, to seek to understand the *cakras* [and the *kuṇḍalinī*] outside of its context as if they are intended as extra-textual, ontological structures is incoherent”.²⁸¹ If we followed his premise, then we would also have to consider the Western way of visualizing and objectifying the body as a product of entextualization, only to be understood within its own practices of constructing the body embedded in “tradition-specific ways to attain tradition-specific goals.”²⁸² But of course, the Western anatomical and physiological map of the body has been adopted— or shall we better say, made to be adopted— by Eastern cultures as it continues to be developed by both. So why would we not be able to find a universal meaning to the model of the body found in other traditions? In his suspicion that *kuṇḍalinī* is not likely to be found in different cultural locations, Flood misses the philosophical implications of his own philological/ethnographical thesis and reduces a phenomenology of the body to a merely ritualistic act embedded within what would seem to be, under his description, a parochial tradition. Understanding models of the body within their own structures of inscription

²⁸¹ Gavin Flood, *The Tantric Body*, p.162.

²⁸² *Ibidem*

does not entail that the experiences involved in the conceptions of the body are unique to that culture. What is unique to a specific tradition can, nevertheless, help to inspire ways of dealing with issues that are proper to other contexts. This is what is happening with the use of the subtle body terminology as it is being adopted— and inevitably reinterpreted— in different therapeutic techniques in the West. Thus, even if taken within their own context, the *kuṇḍalinī*-based models of subtle anatomy offer a phenomenology of the body that recognizes embodiment as the lived expression of deep imaginative movements. This idea offers a therapeutic possibility for cultures infected with a recalcitrant dualism which renders them unable to recognize, or shall we better say, remember— for there was also a rich tradition of active imagination in the West before modernity imposed itself— the pregnant images within their own bodies.

The conscious imaginative visualization of one's body has transformational impact. And while this truth has been enacted in India with different aims, such as experiencing a cosmic body (as in *tantric* and *haṭha yoga* traditions), becoming one with the Goddess (as in the devotional traditions of South India), merging with the infinite (as in Advaita), creating illusory bodies to help humanity (as in Tibetan Buddhism), etc., its use in contemporary Western context might inevitably have to be for the creation of healthy mind-bodies. This does not entail that the comparative discourse on subtle body anatomies is to be reduced to its possible uses in Western “therapy” and the possible ways of mapping it into the Western anatomical science of the body. A more interesting philosophical lesson is to be derived from these models of subtle anatomy when attention is paid to the phenomenological language within which they are embedded, as I have tried to do in this dissertation. In most of the tantric models, the awakening of the *kuṇḍalinī* only arises when the wind-flows of *prāṇa* and *apāna* stop and meet at the heart. The phenomenological implications of this point will bring this dissertation to its conclusion.

5.4 The “Chiasmic” Heart

If you bring the back of the hand close to your nose and take a deep breath, you will feel the subtle tingling sensations that your outbreath produces as it touches your hand. If your inhalation and exhalation are deep enough, you might be able to feel those sensations in the hand even when it is not that close to the nose. The point where you cannot feel the touch of your vital breath efflux anymore might be as far down as the center of your chest, the yogis calculated it at a distance of about 12 fingers (*dvadaśanta*, *YV VI.25*). Now, if you take another deep breath and hold it in for as long as you comfortably can, you will notice that the area where the inbreath seems to concentrate is precisely the center of the chest, the heart-lotus wheeling area or *hṛdaya-cakra* as the yogis called it. Some yogic traditions like the Tibetan and other Hindu non-tantric ones, make the winds mix at the navel (*nabhi-cakra*). But whether this happens in the area of the physical navel or in the middle of the chest (the schematic area for the heart in these traditions) all of them admit that this mixing occurs in the midst of the area where the wind-flow called *sāmana* settles.

The functions of *sāmana* are related to the distribution of food and drink around the body²⁸³ and schematically, it is said to move between the spaces where *apāna* and *prāṇa* settle down themselves, that is, above the first and below the second, i.e. between the navel and the heart. However, in the philosophical commentary to the *Sāmkhya Kārikas*, the not so well known *Yukti Dīpika*,²⁸⁴ *samāna* is not only located in the heart, as it is also for Abhinavagupta, but its function (*vṛtti*) is also associated with emotions and dispositions (*bhāva*) whether of enjoyment or aversion to others (*bhūteṣu dvandvārāmatā*). In its external form, *samāna* is the heart (*hṛdi*) shared with others such as when gathering with friends and family; or with the community in

²⁸³ *Praśna Up*, III.8, *YSbh*, III.39.

²⁸⁴ Author unknown but probably written around 800 C.E. around the time when Tantric texts started to appear.

acts of worship, hardship, or endurance. Of all the texts describing the *prāṇas* that I have consulted for this dissertation, this is the only one that adds an intersubjective dimension to them.²⁸⁵ But out of all the main five *prāṇas*, *samāna* is the only one which involves the act of sharing. How much the subtle language of the body is related to its gross functions becomes evident when we consider that among the most important and meaningful tangible things shared with others is food and drink, precisely the physiological functions associated with this vital breath.

In her call to cultivate our breath and natural energy, not only for therapeutic purposes but for enabling an ethical coexistence with the other, Luce Irigaray invokes the god of Eros rather than Dionisos or Apollo, paradigms of free wild instincts and formal artificial beauty respectively. According to her, Eros recovers our vital relational energy in a way that takes into account our differences. For Irigaray, to recognize the inherent difference implied by our being sexuated is a requisite for attaining an energy born out of desire rather than out of need. The desire represented by Eros is necessary for us to become ourselves “as perfectly as possible”, without masks or finery, for it motivates us to blossom and be faithful to whom and what we are. Irigaray reads the energy of Eros as a shared desire, not a solipsistic or selfish one; rather, a desire that is manifest in the touch of self-affection, a caress, and an embrace. It cultivates our individuality in the desire to embrace the other “as a desire to transcend ourselves without reducing this desire to a need.”²⁸⁶

It is possible to embrace without sharing, just as it is possible to raise the *kuṇḍalinī* without achieving enlightenment. But if Abhinavagupta and Luce Irigaray are right, there is something in the understanding of the place where energies meet and mingle that provides the

²⁸⁵ *Yuktidīpikā*, Commentary to Kārika 29. Intersubjective functions are

²⁸⁶ Luce Irigaray, “Perhaps cultivating Touch can still save us”, in *SubStance*, p.136.

criteria for an authentic bodily self-awareness. This place is considered to be “inside”, as a piece of muscular flesh, and “outside”, as the space where one’s own breath meets the breath of the other. At the same time it is not “inside”, for the heart is not just a piece of flesh, neither “outside”, for the conscious heart encompasses not just another individual but the whole world, of which I am a part (YV, V 78.33-36). This place where the personal breath merges with the cosmic one and *prāṇa* becomes *samāna*— the breath of conjunction, equity, sharing, gathering—is the chiasmic heart. Like a dance of breaths, they can only really meet when there is mutual recognition of the different dispositions that pre-arise to each breath. The heart is then not only the place where the self knows itself in an inner touching, but where the self and the other, *as other*, warmly touch.

Tibetan yogic esoteric language refers to the meeting of the downward and upward flowing winds in the navel as the action that “brings them to a kiss”, as a prelude to the ever more profound and delightful stages that culminate with the “embrace” of method and wisdom.²⁸⁷ The ascending of the *kuṇḍalinī* in Śaiva yoga culminates with the embrace between Śiva and Śakti. In the *Vijñānabhairava Tantra* is said that the Goddess asked Śiva to give her the conscious experience of what she already implicitly knew (that they were one and the same), to which Śiva responded with 169 methods of bodily self-awareness. After having practiced them, the Goddess thanks the God and merges back with Śiva in the form of an embrace. Still it is the case that traditions depict the *kuṇḍalinī* as unconscious, as if its consciousness only really emerged when it “reaches” Śiva. But this is just the way dualistic thoughts infiltrate within wisdom, for as argued throughout this dissertation, it is not coherent to think the bodily processes as dull, dumb, or mindless. Śakti embraces Śiva out of her own will and because she is already

²⁸⁷ *The Six Yogas of Naropa*, p.215.

aware of itself. Only a distrust in the body makes dealing with its energies— affective and passionate as they are— a dangerous ordeal, opposed to thought, reality and self-transcendence.

Tantric Śakti is not like the Sāmkhyan *prakṛti* that we found in the second chapter. Kuṇḍalī is also a dancer but, unlike *prakṛti*, her power and desire to dance does not depend on someone else observing her. On the contrary, Śakti is fully aware of her own power, and can decide to retreat herself from the inquisitive gaze of the objectifying stance while remaining, albeit implicitly, conscious of herself. The “unthinking” lived experience of the default attentiveness of a cooking-while- breast-feeding mother towards a suckling baby can well show the being of a self-aware body in its self-forgetfulness.

Subtle body physiologies describe the cognitive senses “withdrawing” into their common life-force (*prāṇa*) away from physical objects when the body goes to sleep. In that same way, *kuṇḍalinī prāṇa* withdraws into the heart when it gets tired of dreaming, remaining immersed within itself in the pure bliss of possibilities. Advaita and Sāmkhyan philosophical texts argue against identifying *prāṇa* with *ātman/puruṣa*, i.e. energy with consciousness, passive matter with active conscious spirit, illusory with the real. Tantric thought, however, transcends this dichotomy in the gesture of the Śiva-Śakti embrace and provides what Luce Irigaray calls the “first gesture” towards understanding our human identity by “leaving a world which functions starting from pairs of opposites”.²⁸⁸

The symbolism of Śiva and Śakti helps to recognize in ourselves a desiring-affective, erotic nature that can only meet authentically with the other when that other is recognized in its difference at the same time that it is held in unison within one’s heart, as an autonomous and unobjectifiable subject such as oneself. The Śiva-Śakti relationality shows that this recognition is only possible in the authentic experience of the body as self-aware, because it is only when the

²⁸⁸ Irigaray, “Perhaps Touching Can Still Save Us”, p.133.

implicit self-aware processes of our bodies become explicit, that we can understand the mechanisms underlying the constructions of images that divide and determine our reality, causing us to fall in our own delusion without acknowledging it, just like non-lucid dreamers do. The Śaiva practice of becoming aware of one's body, however, does not look towards the complete destruction of delusion, but towards its transformation within the delusion itself, for the lived body/ the living self is unavoidably a distortion, dancing always between the mirrors of unlimited reflections. This is why becoming aware of one's own body requires the realization of oneself in its multiplicity of dimensions without reducing one to the other (physical, physiological, mental, emotional, intellectual) and acknowledging the variable perspectives of the bodily depths (introspective and proprioceptive). The process of becoming aware of one's body by imagining that one becomes a new body (illustrated in the practices of raising the *kuṇḍalinī*) explains, perhaps in one of the most exalting ways possible, why paying attention to one's own body is transformative and non-objectifying at once. Attention is not a spotlight-like mental function that just makes the object appear in focus. Rather, it is the conscious-spatial field within which different perspectives open up at various levels. Paying explicit attention to one's body, as it moves, as it breathes, as it feels, as it thinks, and most importantly, as it imagines itself, brings the perspective of our body back to the heart, the place from which the conscious self continuously declares: *aham raktam, aham māmsam, aham sthini, aham vapuḥ*—“I am blood, I am flesh, I am bones, I am this body!”²⁸⁹— as it imparts creative rhythms and motions felt within the breath. Then, the self-attentiveness of our sensory breath-world reveals itself as “breath-takingly” beautiful.

²⁸⁹ YV, VI, 1.11.53-59.

CONCLUSION

It is common to think that knowing ourselves, our emotions, our thoughts and beliefs is something that we do with the mind— even if understood in its most materialistic sense as the higher cortical brain functions— and not with the body, which is usually considered as perceiving only what pertains to its sensorial and motor capacities. The point of this dissertation has been to show that the distinction between an awareness proper of the mind (introspection) and an awareness proper of the body (proprioception) is based on a false dichotomy between bodily sensations and psychological processes. Yet, from a phenomenological approach, dissolving such dichotomy does not entail committing oneself to monistic metaphysics, either materialist or idealist. Instead, it involves the broadening of the traditional notion of “body” from a non-thinking, material, mechanistic, objective substance, to a living embodiment capable of self-reflexive sensation and attention.

Far from being secondary and atypical, bodily self-awareness or the capacity of the body to pay attention to itself, is intrinsic and natural, underlying each and every one of our experiences, even when we do not explicitly recognize it. Consciousness of bodily movements or sensations usually becomes explicit in atypical cases such as disease, injury, or dysfunction. But those are not the only occasions of introspective proprioception, nor the most important ones. The capacity of the body to consciously and continuously pay attention to its states is primordial to the well-being of the organism. However, introspective proprioception is not reducible to the explicit attention to position and/or movement of its limbs and organs; it also includes a non-objectifying observational stance, i.e. implicit attentiveness of one’s feelings, emotions, dispositions, and thoughts that, in one way or another, underlie all of our movements, as shown in the analysis of bodily awareness implicit in one’s breath. To think that proprioception is a

default awareness pertaining to unconscious bodily processes while introspection is conscious awareness of mental states perpetuates the discredited dualist perspective, not consistent with contemporary attempts to dissolve metaphysical oppositions between the body and the mind, the flesh and the psyche. A more satisfactory notion of bodily self-awareness is found when the body is considered as an open, self-aware field for the experiences of a living self, understood both as an object and subject, never just one or the other. It was seen in this dissertation that a feminist reading of Merleau Ponty's notions of "flesh" and "felt body", wedded to the concept of a "subtle body" (*sūkṣma śarīra*) in Indian philosophies such as Sāmkhya, Patāñjala and Vasiṣṭha's Yoga, Advaita Vedānta and Abhinavagupta's Kāśmir Śaivism offer this non-reductionist understanding of the body.

A non-reductionist philosophy of the body implies a non-reductionist philosophy of the mind and with it, a non-narcissistic view of the other. Understanding the lived body is to recognize the world of affectivity, which reveals the continuity between sensori-motor processes and implicit layers of "pre-arisen" sensations, dispositions, drives, emotions, beliefs, thoughts, memories, and dreams. This multidimensional continuity demands for a theory of the mind that accounts for its somaesthetic quality, i.e. for the bodily felt mechanism by which such "mental states" are expressed and made meaningful. I have argued this point focusing on processes implicit in breathing, and showed the interpretative power of this approach with two real life cases where sensation or mobility are compromised. I believe that the notion of introspective proprioception here developed, along with the somaesthetic theory of introspection that it presupposes, could open new avenues of thought and pragmatological approaches to real life cases where the body schema, body image, and proprioceptive processes are affected. There are in my mind two other famous cases made known by science journalist Anil Ananthaswami in his book

“The Man Who Wasn’t There”. One about a man with Body Integrity Identity Disorder who believed his left leg was alien to his body to the point that he wanted it— and indeed was— amputated; and the other where people have the conviction that they are dead (Cotard Syndrome). I am inclined to think and to argue that something would change if this type of patients were exposed to a practice of conscious introspective proprioception and were guided through creative visualization (*bhāvana*) of their own bodies.

Although I have expressed a critical view against metaphysical presuppositions present in neuro-phenomenological methodologies that try to look for a physiological location of every phenomenal event in the lived body, I do not dismiss the important role that these theories play in elucidating the unconscious mechanisms of the body while it feels, thinks, and wills. I acknowledge that many of the ideas exposed in these dissertation might remain obscure for someone trying to find such exact correspondence between phenomenology and neuroscience or cognitive psychology. Indeed, the crux of my argument tries precisely to avoid the question about the correspondence between a metaphysical entity (an organ in the body) and a phenomenal quality.

Consider the simple case of feeling a stomach-ache, or a terrible impulse to raise the arm to scratch the back of your head (which you do not do, so the impulse remains unobservable by another person). Are the feeling and the impulse physical or mental? Certainly there is a detailed, experimentally verified neuro-scientific explanation of what happens in the nervous system while having the feeling or the impulse. But being aware of that feeling and impulse in oneself does not require to be aware of what exactly happens in the physiological processes between the stomach, the back of one’s head, and the brain. The bodily feeling remains directly accessible to one’s own awareness in a way that is not accessible to anyone else; it is irreducibly

introspective. Thus, although we could say something like: “No, it is not a stomach-ache, or an unstoppable desire to scratch your head, it is a disturbance in this particular area of your nervous system”, statements like this do not say anything about the introspective knowledge that one has with respect to one’s own feelings and sensations. We are aware of our sensations of pain, tickles, etc. as being in one’s own body and we do know about them because the body knows them. Yet this knowledge is not publicly observable as a property of the brain, because no trace detected by the MRI or CT scan will show the awareness we have of those particular sensations and feelings. From this it can be seen that, while feelings and sensations have bodily features, they also show features of an unsharably private consciousness. Thus, when I claim that the distinction between proprioception and introspection is based in a false dichotomy between bodily sensations and psychological process I do not mean to reduce the former to physical bodily events or the other way around. Rather, in this dissertation I have argued that such feelings and impulses and a whole range of similar and dissimilar “inner yet bodily feelings and motor impulses” theoretically demand an ontological middle status, precisely the one accounted by the notion of subtle body, which is a self-aware thinking body.

I also showed how the dichotomy between somatic proprioception and introspection can be dissolved by analyzing the experience of paying attention to one’s breathing. A bodily sensation or feeling is not only introspective because it is privately and directly self-abscribed, but also because when conscious attention is paid to it, other layers of somatic sensation may become evident, such as the emotional dispositions, patterns of behavior and thought, as well as one’s decisions associated with it. In line with a philosophy of mindfulness and somaesthetics as understood by Richard Shusterman, this dissertation has offered further arguments to the claim that “body consciousness is always more than consciousness of one’s own physical body alone.”

The life of the mind could then be called the function of the subtle body (*sūkṣma śarīra*), while the completely corporeal life of muscles and bones, viscera and blood, be called the function of the food-self (*annamayātman*).

Of course, many questions could still be asked: Ultimately, what does “subtle” mean according to the re-interpretation of the Indian traditions here suggested? If the functions of the mind are not only *in* the body but are *a* body themselves (part of the subtle body), does that mean the ego-sense (*ahaṃkāra*), the intellect (*buddhi*), attention (*manas*) and other mental faculties are located in space? Are they located in one part of the body or all over? If the subtle body is different from the physical, can the subtle leave the physical location of my body and travel outside? Does the subtle body remain after the physical one dies and can it re-assume another physical body? Is the subtle body gendered?

Although strange for modern philosophies of the body, I do not think these questions are irrelevant. However, in order for them to make sense, a broader notion of the body such as the one elaborated in this dissertation, is required. I cannot give a definitive answer to them, but it is clear to me that many of the analytical discussions about the body still presuppose a Euclidean notion of spatiality that includes as a corollary the “in-out” schema criticized in this dissertation. As discussed in chapter 4, to think of the life of the mind only in terms of “faculties” instantiated by the nervous system tends to obscure the nature of psychophysical processes that involve all layers of the body. I have argued that a possible way of understanding those “layers” can be elucidated through the phenomenological interpretation of the classical Indian notion of the five bodies of the self (*pancamaya-atman*). In this sense, a “going out” of one’s body would not be interpreted metaphysically, but as a particular perspective assumed within one’s own embodied

field, without necessarily reducing this phenomena to their neurological or spatially objective correlations.

The phenomenological nature of the inquiry about the “subtle” has perhaps left unclear what is its ontological constitution. This has been in part due to the position taken in this dissertation of not reducing the felt experience to its metaphysical correlates. In this sense, I have criticized attempts (traditional and modern) to understand the subtle as “atomic”, “sub-atomic” or that which is extremely minute, for this would just account for its objective aspect and never for the subjective (and most relevant) one. Perhaps, if pushed to give an alternative definition of the subtle, I would prefer to characterize it as that which is difficult to grasp, not in virtue of its minuteness, but in virtue of its swiftness and nearness to the self. This “nearness”, however, should not be understood in the sense in which two solid objects are next to each other. Rather, it refers to the pervasiveness of the embodied field, in such as way that, knowing one’s own lived body is at the same time knowing one’s living self, without this meaning that body and the self are the same thing.

I have tried to avoid metaphysical interpretations of subtle terms such as *prāṇa*, *kuṇḍalinī*, *nāḍī* and *cakra* and focus on their phenomenological import. Yet, answering questions in regards to how these concepts could be applied in contemporary discussions about processes such as attention, awareness, consciousness, memories, or “I-thoughts” requires a more detailed and thorough treatment engaging analytical philosophy than the one offered here. The dialogue between Indian philosophy and the philosophical analytical tradition is relevant and needed given that it is mostly in that idiom that topics of introspection are currently being debated. This entails the challenge of mastering both languages and finding a way to argue that makes sense to both. I do not claim this dissertation has achieved that level of comparison, but

has at least advanced an argument that could eventually be strengthened and elaborated into a comparative philosophy of the body that incorporates non-dual elements coming from the Indian orthodox and Tantric traditions.

I did not consider scenarios where no bodily awareness seems to be present at any level, such as cases of coma or anesthesia, because I wanted to emphasize the inquiry about bodily-awareness in the context of maintaining one's well-being. However, if the argument in this dissertation is correct, a body is intrinsically self-aware as long as a first person— and communicable— perspective on that body is available. The more an objectifying view on that body is needed to determine its state of being, the less self-attentive that body becomes. Attentiveness, whether implicit or explicit, is a property of the lived/subtle body. I have shown that, as a feature of the lived body, implicit attention is non-objectifying, it constantly attends to itself configuring the field where things appear as experiences pertaining to oneself. Explicit attention, on the other hand, has an objectifying function, but I argued that more than a “spotlight” function that reveals determinate objects making us think that they were already there as they appeared, it actually involves a creative process which, even if inaccurate, is the principle by which transformation of oneself can take place.

There are still epistemological details to be worked out regarding implicit and explicit awareness, particularly in a comparative way, but any non-reductionist account on the matter would have to take into consideration that what is usually understood as “conscious” in Western philosophy represents a very small part of what “awareness” means for Indian philosophy. Just this topic could deserve another dissertation. My hope is that I have been able to show the non-dual and non-reductionistic relation between mind, body and self by addressing the philosophical aspects— and not only the religious, therapeutic, or scientific— of the Indian notion of “subtle

body” (*sūkṣma śarīra*). I would be satisfied if, having deployed the epistemology implicit in subtle body terminology, the relevance of a somaesthetic theory of introspection is recognized as necessary to account for the self-creative processes involved in knowing oneself, which involves both implicit and explicit attentiveness to one’s own body, that is, introspective proprioception.

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