Perceiving the Divine through the Human Body
Perceiving the Divine through the Human Body

Mystical Sensuality

Edited by Thomas Cattoi and June McDaniel
## Contents

Acknowledgments vii

The Mysticism Group of the American Academy of Religion viii

List of Illustrations ix

Introduction: Spiritual Body, Spiritual Senses, Past and Present 1

*June McDaniel*

1 A Hindu Monk’s Appreciation of Eastern Orthodoxy’s Jesus Prayer: The “Inner Senses” of Hearing, Seeing, and Feeling in Comparative Perspective 17

*Joseph Molleur*

2 Indo-Tibetan Tantrism as Spirit Marriage 29

*Stuart Ray Sarbacker*

3 Experiencing the Single Savior: Divinizing the Body and the Senses in Tantric Buddhist Meditation 45

*David Gray*

4 The Daoist Mystical Body 67

*Louis Komjathy*

5 Daoist Mysticism: Embodiment, Eudaimonia, and Flow 105

*Laura E. Weed*

6 Liminality and Ambiguity: Christina the Astonishing as Co-Redemptrix and Alternative Model of Authority 121

*Charlotte Radler*

7 The Patristic Roots of John Smith’s *True Way or Method of Attaining to Divine Knowledge* 141

*Derek Michaud*

8 “The Body Gains Its Share”: The Asceticism of Mechthild of Magdeburg 159

*Michelle Voss Roberts*
9 The Enlightened Body in A. H. Almaas's Diamond Approach 175
   Ann Gleig
10 The “Map of Consciousness”: A New Paradigm for
    Mysticism and Healing 197
   Fran Grace
Conclusion: The Virtues of Sensuality 223
   Thomas Cattoi

List of Contributors 237
Index 241
Acknowledgments

Thomas Cattoi and June McDaniel would like to extend a word of thanks to Burke Gerstenschlager, Editor at Palgrave Macmillan, and Kaylan Connally, Editorial Assistant, for their help in making this volume a reality. They would also like to express their gratitude to Dr. David Rounds, Editor of Religion East and West, and to Prof. LikKuen Tong of the Academy for Field Being Philosophy of Hong Kong for allowing the republication of the articles by Joseph Molleur and Laura Weed.


Joseph Molleur’s article “A Hindu Monk’s Appreciation of Eastern Orthodoxy’s Jesus Prayer: The ‘Inner Senses’ of Hearing, Seeing, and Feeling in Comparative Perspective,” was previously published in Religion East and West No. 9 (October 2009), 67–76.
The Mysticism Group of the American Academy of Religion

The Mysticism Group began as a consultation within the American Academy of Religion (AAR) in 1987 and achieved formal group status in 1989. While its early focus was primarily Christianity and Western religions, and the study of experience and textual interpretation within those areas, the group has grown and changed over time, paralleling the change and growth in the AAR itself. Today, our conversations cut across boundaries that characterize many of the program units within the AAR boundaries of discipline, tradition, temporality, and region. Members of our group use different methodologies and work across a variety of disciplines, among which are psychology of religion, sociology of religion, history of religions, hermeneutics and textual analysis, biographical analysis, feminist studies, film studies, philosophy of religion, mysticism and science, art criticism, postmodern theory, cultural studies, and anthropology of consciousness among others. This interdisciplinary character has importance not only to our work as scholars, but also to our work as teachers and public educators.

Over the past few years, the group has hosted several panels on the topic of mystical perception and the spiritual senses. The present volume is an attempt to share with a broader public the insights that emerged from these sessions.

Interested readers may join the list-serve of the group at aarmysticism-owner@yahoogroups.com
Illustrations

4.1 Spirits of the five yin-orbs  
4.2 Ingestion of solar effulgences  
4.3 Locating the Northern Dipper in the body  
4.4 Inner landscape map  
4.5 Diagram of the emergence of the yang-spirit

All illustrations come from the private collection of Louis Komjathy.
The spiritual senses have grown out of favor in the modern world. Like the appendix, they may be considered vestigial organs, once important but today atrophied or disused, vaguely known but of uncertain function. They may be considered less “real” than the appendix, as they are harder to find. On the other hand, we have a clearer idea of their function than we do of the appendix (theories on whose uses range from helping immune function to digesting tree bark), as the mystical literature of various religious traditions describes their nature and development.

Humanity routinely develops and loses skills. A good example is memory. Earlier forms of schooling emphasized the importance of rote memory, especially before publishing became available. In ancient India, brahmin sages would memorize entire Vedas, which consisted of thousands of stanzas, and recite them in order without an error (it was understood that each recitation was symbolically recreating the world, and any error would distort that world, so they would have to go back to the beginning and do it properly in case of a mispronunciation). In the early twentieth century, Classics scholars could often recite the Iliad in the original Greek, and students at Muslim madrassas today can recite the entire Qur’an in Arabic. Yet in the modern West, we see college students who suffer through memorizing a single page from a textbook.

Another form of memory that gets lost is eidetic or “photographic” memory. With this sort of memory, the person can still perceive an object after it has been removed from sight. Today, this is sometimes seen in childhood, but it is rarely developed in modern cultures. Indeed, children
with this ability are often accused of dishonesty or an overactive imagination, and the skill disappears after a few years.

Two major difficulties for the study of the spiritual senses in the modern West have been the European Enlightenment and the rise of Protestant Christianity. From the perspectives of the philosophers and scientists of the Enlightenment, such senses required belief in the existence of a supernatural realm, and were thus superstition, irrational and unprovable, and unpredictable even if they did somehow exist. There was no mechanism for prediction and control. The rise of Protestant thought involved the negation of the supernatural as well, with its arguments against saints, intercession, and the mystical body of Christ. There was no experiential ladder linking heaven and earth, the only link to God was through faith—or perhaps ethics. Alternative sorts of perceptions could be superstition, but they could also be heresy. Neither was an attractive possibility, and neither could legitimately be investigated.

Such alternative forms of perception came to be jumbled together into the areas of occultism, spiritualism, and psychic phenomena, with the modern New Age taking an interest in the same sort of areas that we see explored in the late-Victorian period. These variously included communication with ghosts, mediumship, extrasensory perception, telepathy, clairvoyance and clairaudience, prophecy, encounters with alien beings, experiences of past lives, predictions of the end of the world, and messages from ancestors and supernatural beings. These phenomena come from different understandings of the nature of the world and mankind, different conceptions of time and space, even the question of whether time is linear (having a beginning and an end) or cyclical (without beginning or end, and continually undergoing transformations). They do not make sense in relation to each other, or with a secular worldview. They are now a subject of humor, as in the film satire “Ghostbusters,” or mediumistic dramas for television entertainment. Humor is an improvement from earlier responses to such phenomena, which included burning at the stake.

Rejection of ignorance and superstition can be refreshing, leading to gains in truth and insight and the removal of false beliefs. Of course, from another perspective, losing ability at a form of perception can also be a disability. In this case, such a disability becomes a virtue, and the less that is perceived, the more virtuous the investigator becomes. In the study of religious and mystical phenomena today, most writers who mention mystical states note their lack of such experiences to emphasize their legitimacy in studying it. It is a sign of academic rigor to have no personal experience of the area under study. This is beginning to change in the field, but very slowly.
Indeed, a recent novel has as its narrator a scholar working on a treatise on medieval mysticism. He notes,

I personally have no belief or faith whatsoever in anything supernatural, or even transcendent for that matter, and so I thought myself eminently qualified for the difficult task of elucidating mystic states.¹

If we wish to do something more than simply dismiss the whole range of such phenomena, it is important to clarify the systems of thought from which these experiences and perceptions arise. This allows for contexts in which these ideas make sense, as opposed to contexts in which they do not. An example of the importance of context and framework comes from the story of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, a siddha or saint from nineteenth-century West Bengal in India. From his childhood on, Ramakrishna had a series of experiences that were often labeled as madness by observers. As a child he fell into trances, and by the age of twenty he would hear mantras and see them formed before his eyes, see the world turned to light, feel his body burning and being destroyed, see his environment dissolve into a great ocean of consciousness, perceive supernatural beings, and laugh and dance with a statue of the goddess Kali, which he understood to be alive.²

His relatives understood him to be insane, and took him to Ayurvedic doctors, exorcists, and other healers. He worried about insanity himself. Eventually, a holy woman called Bhairavi Brahmani who was educated in Hindu Vaishnava and Shakta tantric spiritual practices came to see Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. She interpreted his visions not as madness but as mahabhava, a state of altered perception that is due to legitimate spiritual experiences. She arranged a conference of Vaishnava scholars to prove Ramakrishna's status as a saint, and quoted from the Caitanya Caritamrta and other scriptures. The scholars were convinced and declared Ramakrishna to be a saint rather than a madman. His previous visions and supernatural claims, which had earlier been grounds for viewing him as insane, were now interpreted as divine events. Ramakrishna began to perform spiritual practice, sadhana, to learn about these states and how to control them. He eventually became quite famous as a guru and teacher in India. His experiences came to be understood as a model for how spiritual states can occur spontaneously in people, and his perceptions became a model for how spiritual senses should be understood in India.

Hinduism is a good religion in which to study the range of spiritual senses, as there is a wide literature available on the topic. In the Indian context, spiritual senses tend to develop in two ways. One comes from the model of wisdom or jnana, and is elaborated in the Yoga, Samkhya, and
Vedanta traditions of India. The emphasis is upon distinguishing truth from falsehood, understanding degrees of relative and ultimate truth, and analyzing the ways that perception works through the many inner, spiritual bodies that people possess. The other development tends to come from the devotional or bhakti traditions of India. From this approach, it is love or devotion that develops the soul, and spiritual senses grow to perceive the deity in his or her various forms. The body that is composed of spiritual love, or prema, corresponds to the physical body, and has many of its skills. But this spiritual body or siddha deha can perceive the heavens of the deities and the actions that occur there.

These approaches reflect different understandings of the person and the nature of the universe. The yogic models are based upon the Upanishads, a set of writings derived from the visions and commentaries of Vedic sages, often dated around 1000 BCE. According to the Taittiriya Upanishad, there are five layers or sheaths of self: physical, vital (based on breath or prana), mental, intellectual/spiritual, and blissful. Each layer has its own equivalent of a body, with its own abilities to perceive (these are sometimes called subtle bodies in English). A major approach to understanding the Upanishads is the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta, which interprets the Upanishads according to a nondual model. It notes that the physical body (annamayakosa) has the five physical senses: the vital body (pranamayakosa) has the energies of breath and includes bodily perceptions that are ordinarily unconscious (like respiration and digestion); the mental body (manomayakosa) has the ability to interpret the information from the breath and the senses; the intellectual/spiritual body (vijayanamayakosa) can perceive and analyze (it generally includes buddhi, which reveals and reflects on data by echoing the forms that it encounters, citta or memory which is a storehouse of all past impressions and information, and sometimes ahamkara, in which a relation between the self and the stored information is established). The highest sheath or level of body, the bliss body or anandamayakosa, directly perceives infinity as Brahman. It is considered to be pure consciousness, so it does not require separate spiritual senses.

Advaita Vedanta follows several of the Upanishads in arguing that people have four states of consciousness: waking, dream, deep sleep, and the fourth state or turiya, which is the unmediated perception of the absolute. Such direct perception (saksatkara) is a desirable state, and the goal of all experience. The individual mind merges with the universal mind, the individual soul (jiva) with God (Isvara), and the divine aspect of the self (atman) mingles with the cosmic spirit (brahman). While the ordinary senses work in the waking state, in the dreaming state they are disconnected from mind, and clouded by ignorance or avidya. The senses do not connect with their
physical objects, only with the perceptions of the subtle body. From the Advaita perspective, both realms of sensation are unreal and illusory. In the state of deep sleep, we have a state of pure witness, but no sensations, even from the subtle body. There is only consciousness, without memory. In the deepest state, there is direct perception of the Absolute.\(^4\)

From the Advaita Vedanta perspective, the mind reaches out toward its objects through the sense organs, drawing in sensations and impressions, and it stores and evaluates them. There is indirect perception without the five senses, like pleasure, pain, and knowledge of self, and also direct perception by the five senses, in which the object must be knowable, exist in time, and have some relationship to the knower. The highest form of perception, direct mystical insight, does not involve separate sensory organs, but is rather a direct merging of self and infinite consciousness.

As we move toward the Yoga schools, we may note that spiritual senses come into play as a result of yogic meditative practice, with the withdrawal of the senses and the focus of the mind on a single point. This draws the mind into various states of concentration or samadhi, leading to kaivalyam or liberation. As the yogi performs spiritual practice or sadhana, the sense organs are transformed. By the practice of samyama or meditations on specific objects, we see the development of unusual abilities—the vision of subtle, hidden, or distant objects; the vision of inner anatomy and physiology; knowledge of the minds of others. Ordinary perception is stilled or redirected.

Yogic perception may involve a single intuitive sense, or a variety of spiritual senses. It includes flashes of intuition about future events (pratibhajnana), and knowledge of past, present, and future events. These occur as a result of a single insight, for temporal order is understood as an artificial construction of the intellect.\(^5\) For these events, there is a single perception or cognition, rather than a set of spiritual sense perceptions. There is also siddha-darsana, valid and immediate perceptual knowledge of hidden and remote objects, using transformed external sense organs (involving supernatural vision, sound, touch, taste, smell, and knowledge). This transformation may occur through spiritual practice, visualization, mantra, drugs, and accumulation of karma. This “sensory perception of supersensible objects” comes through sense organs that are strengthened and purified, according to Candrakanta.\(^6\) Yogic perception is the highest excellence of human perception, according to Jayanta Bhatta, for the minds of yogis can have immediate knowledge of all knowable objects, even varied and contradictory ones.\(^7\)

Yogic perception is sometimes divided into ecstatic (yukta) and non-ecstatic (viyukta) varieties. According to Prasastapada, ecstatic yogic perception
involves realization of the essential nature of self, space, time, and consciousness, while non-ecstatic perception involves hidden and remote knowledge using sense organs. For the philosopher Udayana, yogic perception (yukta pratyaksa) occurs when yogis withdraw consciousness (manas) from the sense organs and focus it on supersensible objects. An example of this is seen in the Bhagavad Gita, when Arjuna sees Krishna through his spiritual (divya) eye, an ability granted by Krishna. There is a longstanding debate in Vedanta and yoga philosophy as to whether supernatural perception occurs through pure awareness (manas) or through separate spiritual senses, or transformed external senses. Some philosophers understand that spiritual perception is still limited (by ignorance, karma particles, or material elements), while others argue that there is special perception by liberated souls, in which the mind becomes transparent and all of reality is reflected. Here the mind is unobstructed, and the yogi can see things as they really are, an ability bound souls do not share.

The supernatural yogic states, in which specific forms of hidden knowledge are perceived, are understood to occur as a part of spiritual practice whose further goal is samadhi, a total focus of mind. The goal of samadhi may be understood in two forms. Nirvikalpa samadhi has the soul identified with the Absolute, a union of knower, known, and knowledge. We may perhaps call this a collapse of perception, as there is no relation of subject and object. The limitations of time, space, and causation are negated, and the person enters a state of pure existence, consciousness, and bliss. Infinity is a state of consciousness rather than a personal deity.

However, there is also a form of samadhi in which infinity is understood as a God, a personal figure with a personality and emotions. This is called savikalpa samadhi, a state in which the senses are withdrawn from the objective world and focused on God. God may be understood in a particular form, as one’s ishta deva or personal form of God, or through a relationship. God may be one’s mother, father, child, friend, or beloved, and the devotee becomes the embodiment of love. This approach has been elaborated in the tradition of Hindu bhakti or devotional love.

Each form of Hindu devotion has its own theology and spiritual practices, but we can give as an example the Gaudiya Vaishnava school, in which the major deity is Krishna. His devotees focus on Krishna as a monotheistic god, the origin of the universe, who exists in eternal play with his consort Radha in the heaven of Vrindavana. Gaudiya Vaishnava devotees can worship him in many moods, but one that is greatly respected involves the manjari sadhana. In this practice, devotees take on the spiritual bodies of Radha’s handmaidens or manjaris, and they live eternally in Krishna’s paradise. These spiritual bodies are composed of pure devotional love (prema)
and are young and female. They are created by visualization and meditation, with spiritual senses that are focused on the play (līla) of Radha and Krishna. Each spiritual body has its own service to the deities, its own color of clothing, its own residence. The devotee must memorize the layout of the heavenly Vrindavana world, learn the location of Radha’s house and village, and Krishna’s house and village, and the pond in the forest where they meet, and locales for their various flirtations. When the visualization is successful, these places and events are directly perceived through the spiritual senses within the siddha deha or visualized spiritual body. Such a spiritual body exists not only during life, but is understood to live eternally after death.

There is a strong link between the material body and the spiritual body, which is increased as the devotee’s love intensifies and the heart softens. It can show up physically, as in stories where the spiritual body is burned while boiling milk, and this shows up in physical burns on the person. There are also stories of devotees getting physical indigestion from food eaten by the spiritual body. While the spiritual body normally exists separately from the physical body, at times they may interact or even merge together. The spiritual senses come to be merged with the physical senses, and the deity and heaven may be sensed with the material body.

This range of understandings of spiritual senses, from one sense to many, from united to separate spiritual bodies, may be seen in the chapters in this volume.

Joseph Molleur’s chapter, “A Hindu Monk’s Appreciation of Eastern Orthodoxy’s Jesus Prayer: The ‘Inner Senses’ of Hearing, Seeing, and Feeling in Comparative Perspective” examines some aspects of Vedantic understanding of the spiritual senses and compares them with Orthodox theology on the inner senses. Swami Prabhavananda followed the philosophy of Ramakrishna and the Vedanta Society, but also had an interest in comparative religion. He was particularly interested in the Hindu practice of mantrajapa, in which a sacred word or mantra is repeated for long periods of time, until the sound resonates on its own. The practice of mantra is found in both yogic and bhakti traditions—Molleur cites Prabhavananda’s use of both Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras and Narada’s Bhakti Sutras. Prabhavananda argues that the Jesus prayer in Eastern Orthodoxy, in which the name of Jesus is invoked until it becomes automatic, like the heartbeat or breath, can be viewed as a mantra. Both are forms of interior prayer, in which contemplation is constant and uninterrupted. Both mantrajapa and the Jesus prayer involve the spiritual senses of hearing and seeing. The Jesus prayer is said to move from the lips, to the spirit, to the heart, until it occurs spontaneously, as mantrajapa does. However, while much Hindu practice also emphasizes visualization of images, the Orthodox practices avoid
specific visualizations, and instead focus on perception of spiritual light and the feeling of Jesus’ presence.

He cites the most famous Orthodox text on the Jesus prayer, The Way of a Pilgrim, which emphasizes Jesus’ name as radiant and the importance of the inward light of the heart. Mantrajapa, too, brings illumination and divine light, especially as located in the lotus of the heart. Orthodox theologians debate whether this perception of the inner light is a physical perception of a supernatural light (using physical senses), a supernatural perception of a supernatural light (using the inner sense of sight), a metaphorical description of a theological truth, or an inner feeling of luminosity, in which the person feels penetrated by light, a sort of feeling of joy and warmth. All of these seem to be legitimate theological possibilities.

Prabhavananda is interested in the phenomenological similarities in these experiences, despite the theological differences. Molleur emphasizes the similarities in these understandings of spiritual senses, noting Prabhavananda’s universalist perspective and belief in Jesus as an avatara. He interprets these similarities of practice and interpretation as a part of Prabhavananda’s outreach to the Western world and hopes for tolerance and understanding in turn. The distinction he follows from Shankara, of “ordinary” vision that comes and goes, subject to birth and death, as compared to “real” vision of the atman, which is eternal, describes the visionary aspect of mystical experience that is found in many of our chapters in this volume.

Stuart Sarbacker’s paper, “Indo-Tibetan Tantrism as Spirit Marriage” examines a very different side of Hinduism—it discusses the role of spirit marriage in Hindu and Buddhist tantric traditions. It analyzes spirit marriage as a similar phenomenon to shamanic ritualism and a way to understand tantric spiritual development and the mediation of religious power. Indo-Tibetan tantra involves a variety of mystical ideas, including the transference of numinous power, the transformation of the practitioner into a deity, a transcendence of ordinary limitations, and a direct and immediate encounter with the sacred. The spirit spouse transforms marriage into initiation, bringing the practitioner into spiritual awareness through sexual activity.

The major connection between the practitioner and the spirit spouse is through dreams and possession. The spirit world is sensed through dream images and felt and embodied through the state of spirit possession, in which the practitioner’s ordinary identity is merged with that of the spouse. The physical senses are spiritualized through tantric ritual, by ritual worship or puja, in which the experience of darsan gives the practitioner direct sight of the deity. The deity is internalized through eating sacred food or prasad, in which taste becomes a means of contacting a divine realm. The tantric “five Ms” or pancamakara symbolically transform the senses, and
the tantric exchange of sexual fluids brings supernatural power and a change in the practitioner’s status and abilities. Sexual interaction is primarily by touch, which is the most important of the spiritual senses for this tradition. It brings direct contact with the deity and evokes a depth dimension not present in ordinary perception.

It is the sense of touch (sparsa) that best represents the tantric conception of contact with divinity, and like sexuality can evoke the intensity and transformative power of bliss (ananda). While the spiritual sense of sight is important for the initial stages, it is touch that represents closeness to and interaction with the deity.

David Gray’s article, “Experiencing the Single Savor: Divinizing the Body and the Senses in Tantric Buddhist Meditation” deals more specifically with the Buddhist tantras. It focuses on one in particular, a manual attributed to the tenth-century tantric practitioner and mahasiddha Luipa, called the Cakrasamvarabhisamaya. It describes a purification practice in which the senses are visualized as male deities, and their sense objects are visualized as female deities. They are imagined as embracing in sexual union, which both represents and induces a union of sensory powers and their objects, creating a state of bliss or ekarasa. It is a transformation of human perceptual powers in order to gain liberation.

One major process of tantric purification involves identifying aspects of the self with deities by means of visualization. In this case, the body is recognized as a mandala, and the senses and elements are cleansed of ignorance by the process of identification with male and female mandala figures. Ordinary human senses are corrupted by egotism and greed and perceive the world in a limited fashion. They are dim echoes of the divine senses. But this process allows the person to recapture original perception, recognizing that the world is filled with Buddha wisdom and bliss. Deities are placed in the eyes, ears, nostrils, mouth, and sense of touch, and also in the bodily elements. These deities act as transforming agents within the human subtle body, a body similar to the physical one, which is capable of supernatural power and movement. The purification process leads toward the extremely subtle state of clear light of nonduality. The male and female deities engage in sexual union, which represents the union of the senses and their objects (or elements). Their state of bliss in union reflects the consciousness of the practitioner. The senses within the spiritual body are cleansed of obstructions, divinized, and able to perceive the true bliss of union.

With respect to East Asian perspectives, we also have two papers on Chinese religion, focusing on Daoism. Louis Komjathy’s chapter, “The Daoist Mystical Body,” shows many similarities between Daoism and the tantric Hindu and Buddhist traditions. He describes the Daoist understanding
of the body as complex, and having many subtle, esoteric dimensions. He emphasizes “somatic mysticism,” for the practitioner experiences the Dao through the body.

Komjathy identifies seven views of the body in this tradition: naturalistic, cosmological, bureaucratic, ascetic, theological, alchemical, and mystical. It is the latter few that are most relevant for a study of the spiritual senses. From a Daoist theological perspective, the body is a sacred realm with a diverse pantheon, in which spirits dwell within the organs. From an alchemical perspective, the person creates an immortal body, with qi flowing through energetic networks. The mystical view recognized the divine aspects of embodiment, and the body is often mapped and illustrated.

In order to perceive the sacred aspects of the body, or to create an immortal body, a major technique used is visualization. For instance, in the Highest Clarity techniques, the body-gods are visualized (down to their white brocade robes), and secret parts of the brain are seen and explored: the palace of the Hall of Light, the cavity of the celestial court. Such visualization, using a spiritualized sense of sight (and sometimes inner sound and music) brings encounter with the deities. In these techniques, we also see an inner sense of taste, in the ingestion of qi through elixirs, which allow light to reach down to the stomach. There are a variety of elixirs, which cause or encourage alchemical transformation.

However, in this chapter, the focus has been upon the spiritual sense involving vision or inner observation (neishi). It integrates the cosmological and mystical, and allows a systematic exploration of the energies and divinities of the body. It allows the person to perceive the body as a microcosm of the universe and as an internal landscape with deities and worlds.

Laura E. Weed’s paper on Daoism, “Daoist Mysticism: Embodiment, Eudaimonia, and Flow,” also talks about the importance of the body. However, her “embodied mysticism” deals more with ethics and examines self-cultivation as a way to transform and perfect the self. The self is complex—it is simultaneously physiological, cosmological, psychological, and transcendent. It includes the shen, comparable to the ego, but also a collection of all senses, and it is in a continuous process of transformation. Daoist practices include visualization, the use of ritual iconography, and belief in pantheons of gods. There are also rituals of listening to sounds and being enraptured by music, and the music reveals the Dao with primordial purity, allowing the person to achieve perfection. But it is the kinesthetic sense of movement or transformation that Weed finds to be most important to bring the person into the darkness of Dao and to evoke the experience of spiritual liberation.

This sense is part of the spiritual development that Weed describes in both Aristotle’s idea of eudaimonia, and Csikszentmihalyi’s idea of flow.
Aristotle viewed contemplation as the highest activity, which brought out aspects of the person that are most divine or perfect. These moral virtues bring happiness, and also develop the person into an ideal. For Csikszentmihalyi, the state of flow is a process, during which a person is fully functioning and full of energy. The ordinary limits of time disappear. The person is totally involved in activity, living intensely and completely focused. Such activity is “autotelic,” done for its own sake, as opposed to the dull passivity and “psychic entropy” of required and unappealing work. Flow, too, brings a person into an ideal state.

While the more yogic applications of inner sight and sound can purify and transform the body, the kinesthetic flowing with the Dao brings attunement to nature (through such exercises as tai chi) and unimpeded action that is harmonious.

On the Western side for spiritual senses, we have Charlotte Radler’s article, “Liminality and Ambiguity: Christina the Astonishing as Co-Redemptrix and Alternative Model of Authority.” It deals with the medieval saint Christina, known for her bodily transformations and ascetic life. The dominant sensation described in her biographies is pain, which would be aligned most closely with the sense of touch. Christina’s spiritual body dominates her physical body, distorting it in strange and bizarre ways. This causes her suffering, which is understood as redemptive, as Jesus’ sufferings redeemed humanity.

Radler notes that Christina’s spiritual senses are located in both her body and her soul, which can be seen in the clear physical results of her mystical states. She carries purgatorial torments in her physical body, which may be compressed into a sphere, or levitate, or bring miracles, such as allowing her to nurse herself on her own milk while she was starving in the woods. She was also physically tormented, forced into hot ovens, boiling cauldrons, and freezing water, yet her body remained unmarked and unharmed.

Christina may be understood as both living and dead, or at least she seems to have access to both physical life and purgatory, which allows her to intercede for both the living and the dead. The evidence for this is marked in her body—it is not her claims that convince others of her spiritual status, but rather her sufferings and her miracles. While these deal primarily with bodily feeling and touch, her other senses are heightened as well—she has visions of purgatory and hell, and listens to Christ’s words; she cannot stand the foul stench of human corruption, she tastes the horror of evil alms, and her voice involved a spiritual breath that no instrument could imitate.

For Christina, the spiritual body and its senses could dominate her physical body, making her a human link to the supernatural worlds. Her
astonishing ability to suffer freezing and burning and beating, and yet remain whole and unharmed, demonstrated the power that a spiritual body could possess, and her relationship with God.

Derek Michaud’s article “The Patristic Roots of John Smith’s True Way or Method of Attaining to Divine Knowledge” is a study of Christian Neoplatonism, ranging from the Patristic writer Origen to the Protestant John Smith. Both Origen and Smith are dualists, assuming the existence of separate but related physical and spiritual bodies, each with their own senses. For both, the physical and spiritual senses are ontologically distinct. Michaud describes the spiritual senses as perceptual, as they encounter purely noetic or spiritual objects, but also conceptual, as their objects are nonphysical, like concepts and ideas.

Origen based his understanding of the spiritual senses on his interpretations of the Bible, especially the prophetic books, which give many examples of dreams and revelations (with visions of cherubim, hearing divine voices, and tasting living bread). For Origen, these are not allegories—they are literal, but in a different way. Smith was a philosopher and theologian, and based his understanding of these senses on scripture as well as on Descartes and his notion of mind/body dualism. Smith described visions of light common to Origen and Plotinus, and understood Christ to link purity of heart with beatific vision. He emphasized seeking God within the self, with the soul’s own senses, rather than in books.

Both writers sometimes speak of five separate spiritual senses, and also of a single spiritual capacity, an “intellectual sense” or “sense of the heart.” Such senses can be understood as multiple, or as fused together. All human beings have such senses, it is part of human nature, an important aspect of rational beings. However, most people do not realize this potential. For Smith and Origen, the development of the spiritual senses requires personal effort and practice, as well as the gift of divine grace.

Michelle Voss Roberts’ chapter, “The Body Gains Its Share: The Asceticism of Mechthild of Magdeburg,” focuses on a medieval saint and beguine of the thirteenth century. Mechthild contrasts body and soul, but does not understand them as ultimately separate. Instead, they are linked together through a unified sensorium, a single set of physico-spiritual senses. These senses begin as ordinary physical ones, but with ascetic practice and contemplation they are transformed into organs of divine perception.

The ascetic path involves three sorrows: for guilt, for purification and penance, and for love of God. All of these sorrows are understood as painful, but ultimately transformational. The soul becomes able to rise and fall, “as love dissolves through the soul into the senses,” and the senses are refined and divinized. The physical senses are thus able to participate in mystical
experiences. This process of transformation also includes the emotions, which come to focus on God and appreciate divine love more and more.

Transformation also comes in three stages. Initially there is spiritual blindness, there is no divine perception. Then the person begins to have glimpses of divine light and sound and sweetness as he or she develops virtues. Ultimately the person proceeds to the state where the light of God can be seen more directly. All of the senses are transformed—the soul is light, musical, with the taste of grapes and the smell of balsam. Body and spirit are not opposed, they exist together on multiple levels, like the meanings of Scripture. The physical can point to the spiritual, and both can exist equally.

The process of asceticism and contemplation give insight into the state of the future resurrected body with its divinized senses. For Mechthild, the *sinne* (mind/senses) or sensorium begins as an ordinary set of senses, and is trained and perfected to receive divine relation. It is a single joint collection of senses, and incarnational sensorium, and as such can be understood as one or many spiritual senses.

While many studies of the spiritual senses are quite ancient, we also have papers that examine this area from a more modern perspective. Ann Gleig’s chapter, “The Enlightened Body in A. H. Almaas’ Diamond Approach” focuses on a new tradition that emphasizes the importance of psychoanalytic knowledge in exposing unconscious barriers to mystical insight and experience. Rather than transcending the ego, the Diamond Approach emphasizes knowledge of the ego and its dynamics. Gleig’s paper discusses the role of psychoanalysis in understanding problems of mystical experience in the modern West.

Almaas draws largely on Sufism for his Ridhwan School, with influences from Gurdjieff and other sources, and uses retreats and sessions to induce spiritual states. Its major practice, the Diamond Approach, first has the person become aware of repressed thoughts and emotions, which manifest as blocks and tensions in the body (as in Wilhelm Rich’s character armor). As those repressed ideas and tensions rise to the surface, the body becomes sensitized, and this allows several subtle energetic centers to emerge. These allow the person to perceive essence, which is understood as the subtler aspect of ordinary sensory experience.

The initial awakening of these subtle and essential senses occurs in the belly center or *kath*. It corresponds to touch—subtle events are first encountered through the body. The heart center then develops subtle taste, where emotions can be tasted and felt (love, for instance, tastes sweet). Sight corresponds to the head center in the forehead, which gives both information about essential existence and appreciation of its form and beauty. While there are also capacities for subtle hearing and the subtle sense of smell,
these are only described to advanced practitioners. The essential aspects of these senses, as color, texture, small, taste, sound, or emotion, can be directly experienced by the embodied soul. Almaas links them theoretically to the traditional Sufi latifahs or spiritual centers. Experiencing these inner senses leads the person to a realization of deeper unity, bringing self-realization and self-development, linking ego, soul, and Absolute. Such senses allow both soul and body, ego and spirit, to be included on the person’s path to Being.

Fran Grace writes on a modern mystic in her “Map of Consciousness: A New Paradigm for Mysticism and Healing.” Her article deals with David Hawkins, a physician who had spontaneous mystical experiences while he was not affiliated with any religion, and so had to adapt his own interpretive framework to understand them. He is interested in uniting the worlds of mysticism and medicine, and his focus is on spiritual healing through contact with radiant goodness, a physical contact that transforms the person in multiple ways. Hawkins examines fields of consciousness, which he believes are able to integrate scientific thought into a mystical worldview. This interest came from his own mystical experiences, which he described as a sense of infinite presence, in which the individual self had been dissolved. When seen from this perspective, all things appeared as beautiful, perfect, and infinite, beyond space and time. Hawkins first analyzed this through the model of kundalini yoga, and later developed his own teachings of “devotional non-duality.” He developed a roadmap of the spiritual life, organized by higher and lower emotions. Its focus is not on separate spiritual senses, but rather a united sense of energy and love, realized when in contact with spiritual leaders like the Dalai Lama, Mother Teresa, Ramana Maharshi, and Ammachi. The “physics of silent transmission” is a way to examine this spiritual energy. Hawkins believes that the spiritual senses can be awakened spontaneously by the presence of a living mystic, and that these senses can discern both subtle bodies and the essence of all things.

As we look at these widely varying mystical traditions, there are a few ideas that we might wish to keep in mind. The collection of mystical senses, the sensorium of embodied spirituality, is configured in a variety of ways. For those traditions that describe the spiritual body as separate from the physical body, there tend to be separate collections of senses that work independently from the physical senses. For those mystical traditions that emphasize a continuity linking physical and spiritual dimensions of the person, we tend to see a single sense, or a focus on the presence or encounter with a divine source. Both interpretations have been largely lost in the modern West. They are casualties of early modern philosophy, as will be shown in the conclusion.
Notes

3. Raghunath Safaya, *Indian Psychology: A Critical and Historical Analysis of the Psychological Speculations in Indian Philosophical Literature* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1976), 223. Citta also holds such basic instincts or *vasanas* as the desire for name and fame, concern for beauty and attractiveness, and the passion for knowledge.
4. Ibid., 237–42.
6. Ibid., 131.
7. Ibid., 132.
8. Ibid., 133.
9. Ibid., 134.
11. Ibid., 48.

Bibliography

Safaya, Raghunath. *Indian Psychology: A Critical and Historical Analysis of the Psychological Speculations in Indian Philosophical Literature*, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1976.
CHAPTER 1

A Hindu Monk’s Appreciation of Eastern Orthodoxy’s Jesus Prayer: The “Inner Senses” of Hearing, Seeing, and Feeling in Comparative Perspective

Joseph Molleur

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” This prayer formula, sometimes with slight variations (such as the omission of either “Son of God” or “a sinner” or both), is referred to in Eastern Orthodox Christianity as the “Jesus Prayer” or the “Prayer of the Heart.” Two of Eastern Orthodoxy’s most prominent commentators on the Jesus Prayer tradition, Kallistos Ware and Lev Gillet, have rightly pointed out that the appeal of the Jesus Prayer in recent decades has spread beyond the confines of Eastern Orthodoxy, with many Roman Catholic and Protestant Christians now repeating the prayer as a regular component of their spiritual practice. Appreciation of the Jesus Prayer has spread even beyond the borders of Christianity. For example, in an article called “Jesus Prayer and the Nembutsu,” Taitetsu Unno, a Shin Buddhist of the Pure Land tradition, explores with great appreciation the affinities between the Orthodox practice of repeating the Jesus Prayer and the Japanese Pure Land Buddhist practice of repeating as its normative prayer Namo Amida Butsu, “I take refuge in Amitabha, the Buddha of Immeasurable Light and Life.” Another example is Swami Prabhavananda, the main subject of this chapter. Prabhavananda, who led the Vedanta Society of Southern California from 1923 until his death in 1976, is one of the most influential monks of the (Hindu) Ramakrishna Order to have “come to the West.”