

Why is the Bodiless (*anāṅga*) Gnostic Body (*jñāna-kāya*) Considered a Body?

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Published online: 3 December 2008
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Abstract This paper analyzes the reasons for which the incorporeal ultimate reality called the “Gnostic Body” (*jñānakāya*) is categorized as a “body” in the Kālacakra tradition. It examines the diverse ways in which the body imagery is applied to ultimate reality within this tradition. Although conceptions of the Gnostic Body (*jñāna-kāya*) as a special category of the Buddha-body have been included in all of the unexcelled *yoga-tantras* (*anuttara-yoga-tantras*), they are most extensively elaborated upon in the Kālacakra literature. For this reason, the analysis is primarily based on the Indian *Kālacakratantra* literary corpus (11th century) (From among the *Kālacakratantra* literature, I consulted the *Kālacakratantra* with the *Vimalaprabhā*, Nāropā’s *Sekoddeśaṭīkā*, Sādhuputra’s *Sekoddeśaṭīpaṇī*, and the *Ṣaḍaṅgayoga* of Anupamarakṣita.) and to the closely related *Mañjuśrī-nāmasaṃgīti*, Raviśrījñāna’s commentary on the *Mañjuśrī-nāmasaṃgīti*, the *Amṛtakaṇikāṭīpaṇī*, and Vibhūticandra’s subcommentary *Amṛtakaṇikodyotanibandha* (12th–13th centuries). In so doing, it will bring forth the evaluative and classificatory usages of the term *jñāna-kāya* in the aforementioned sources, and the analysis is concerned with both the heuristic and provocative functions of their discourses. It also addresses the interpretative framework through which the Kālacakra tradition constructs the notions of embodiment and suggests that Buddhist esoteric discourse can be useful in demonstrating that the concept of a body can be understood as a broader category that extends from a physical body, to an immaterial perceptible form, and to the pure nondual awareness. An analysis of the multileveled constructions of the Gnostic Body (*jñāna-kāya*) in the Indian Vajrayāna tradition opens new questions and new avenues of investigation with respect to critical assessments of the rubric of the “body,” while bringing to light new models of embodiment.

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Keywords Gnostic body · Bliss · Gnosis · Reflection of Emptiness · Realm of experience · Habitus

Introduction

In the Kālacakra tradition, the Buddha's body (*buddha-kāya*) is characterized as having two aspects—absolute and phenomenal—in accordance with the Mahāyāna Buddhist doctrine of two truths: the ultimate and conventional. Depending upon the context in which a particular aspect is emphasized, the formless, absolute body of the Buddha is referred to by various names such as the *jñāna-kāya* (Gnostic Body), *sahaja-kāya*, or *sahaja-tanu* (Innate Body), the *mahāsukha-kāya* (Body of Sublime Bliss), and the *viśuddha-kāya* (Pure Body).¹ It is conceived as a defining characteristic (*lakṣaṇa*) of all Buddha-bodies and as the essence (*hṛdaya*) of all the Buddhas.²

In Indian Buddhist literature in general, the term *kāya* is frequently used to convey various variations of similar meanings such as body, heap, accumulation, world, and multitude. As we will see, in the Kālacakra tradition, the term *kāya* conveys almost all of the aforementioned meanings when referring to either the phenomenal manifestations of the Gnostic Body or to its ultimate aspects. However, it also carries the meaning of a *habitus*.

The Gnostic Body is said to transcend the material nature of atoms due to its freedom from spiritual ignorance (*avidyā*) and resultant mental obscurations, which are the basis of corporeality. On account of being free from corporeal form, it is sheer luminosity (*prabhāsītva*).³ As such, it is devoid of shape, thought, and verbal expression. In other words, being ultimately unmanifest (*avyakta*) and beyond the domain of the sense-faculties, it is not a condition for objectification.

While this view of the immateriality of the Buddha's absolute body accords with the Mahāyāna's view of *nirvāṇa* without remainder (*niropādhi-nirvāṇa*), it is supplemented elsewhere by the Buddhist tantric interpretation of emptiness. The classical Mahāyāna's interpretation of emptiness as the absence of inherent existence (*niḥsvabhāva*), or as wisdom that perceives phenomenal and personal identitylessness, is here extended to include the absence of material constituents of the mind–body complex. When the Gnostic Body is characterized as having a “form of

¹ The *Vimalaprabhā* commentary on the *Kālacakratānta* (1994, v. 107, p. 202): *advayaṃ jñānaṃ saṃvṛtyā śuddhakāyaḥ sahajakāya ityārthaḥ*.

² The *Amṛtakaṇīkodyotanibandha* of Vibhūticandra (1994, p. 115): *paramākṣarajñānaṃ vakṣyamānaṃ sarvetyādi buddhānaṃ hṛdayabhūtaṃ iti sarvataḥgatajñānakāyatvād mañjuśrīyaḥ bodhisattvānāṃ ca yato vikalpakleśā bodhisattvānaṃ te vikalpāś ca paramākṣare savāsanānirundhyanta iti*.

³ The *Vimalaprabhā* commentary on the *Kālacakratānta* (1986, p. 23): *buddhatvaṃ nāma saṃsāravāsanācītam iti/ prakṛtīprabhāsvaram tad eva saṃsāravāsanārahītam*. Cf. the *Amṛtakaṇīkodyotanibandha* of Vibhūticandra (1994, p. 183): *dharmatārūpaṃ śūnyatārūpaṃ nirāvaraṇatvāt prakṛtīprabhāsvaram tasmā jātasaḥajānandacandraprabhākṛtir yasya bhagavataḥ sa tathā*.

The *Sekoddeśatīkā* of Nāropā (2006, pp. 193–194): *vajrasattvabuddhamātarau paramākṣarasukhasvabhāvau paramāṇudharmatātītāv ādarśapratisenāsvapnatulyau paramākṣarasvarūpāv iti/ . . . tathāparādhyātmikā vidyā prajñāpāramitā prakṛtīprabhāsvarā mahāmudrā saḥajānandarūpiṇī dharmadhātuniṣyandapūrṇāvasthā saḥajatanur ityucyate jinaiḥ*.

emptiness” (*śūnyatā-rūpa*), or as being the reflection of emptiness (*śūnyatā-bimba*), the phrase “form of emptiness” is understood in both ways: as an appearance of the emptiness of inherent existence and as an absence of matter.

In the context of yogic experience, the phrase “form of emptiness,” or “empty form” (*śūnya-bimba*) refers to a non-conceptualized appearance (*ābhāsa*) of one’s own mind, which spontaneously emerges in empty space as 10 sequential signs (*nimitta*) of smoke, mirage, fireflies, and so on.⁴ This non-conceptualized appearance is a result of the gradual eradication of mental obscurations and dissolution of the material constituents of the body through the practice of the six-phased *yoga* (*ṣaḍaṅga-yoga*). In the initial phase of the practice, the appearance of the empty form is seen with the physical eyes. Eventually, through progressive attainment of extrasensory perception, Bodhisattva stages, and full and perfect awakening (*samyaksaṃbodhi*), the *yogī* perceives the form of emptiness with a mental eye—with the divine eye (*divya-cakṣu*), Buddha-eye, wisdom-eye (*prajñā-cakṣu*), and with the eye of gnosis (*jñāna-cakṣu*).⁵

The space-element (*ākāśa-dhātu*) in which the appearance of the form of emptiness arises is called a “pure atom” (*śuddhāṅu*). Here, the word “atom” does not designate an irreducible material unit, but is used as a metaphor for the 12 Grounds (*bhūmis*) achieved on the path to Buddhahood. The *yogī*’s achievement of the 12 Grounds is marked by the purification of the five psychophysical aggregates (*skandhas*), elements (*mahābhūtas*), and sense-bases (*āyatana*s) from mental obscurations (*cittāvaraṇa*). On account of this purification, the *yogī*’s material constituents vanish and the state of being in which all phenomena become of the same taste (*sama-rasa*) is actualized.⁶ The empty space that remains after a material substratum of the body has vanished is metaphorically called the “pure atom,” or a “*bindu*.”

⁴ Ten daytime and nighttime signs are the signs of smoke, mirage, fireflies, a lamp, a flame, the moon, the sun, the supreme form, and a *bindu*.

⁵ The *Ṣaḍaṅgayoga* of Anupamarakṣita (2000, pp. 95–96): *atra prathamam māmsacakṣuṣā yogy ādikarmiko viśva<bimba>ṃ paśyaty abhijñābhīr vinā/ tato divyacakṣuṣā paśyaty abhijñāvadhivaśāt/ tato buddhacakṣuṣā paśyati vītārāgāvadhivaśataḥ/ tataḥ prajñācakṣuṣā paśyati bodhisattvāvadhi-vaśāt/ tato jñānacakṣuṣā paśyati samyaksambuddhāvadhicittavaśāt sarvopaddhivinirmukta itī/ evaṃ tathāgatasya pañcacakṣuṃṣi māṃsādīny <uktāni> śūnyatādarśanam prati/ anye sattvāḥ śūnyatādarśanaviśaye jātyandhā itī tattvabhāvanānīyamah.*

⁶ The *Vimalaprabhā* commentary on the *Kālacakrantra* (1994, Chap. 5, vs. 166ab and 167a): *uktaṃ prajñāpāramitāyāṃ dharmodgataparivarte buddhānāṃ kuṭracid gamanam vā agamanam vā na bhūtam na ca bhaviṣyati na bhavatīti/ tena ekarasāgre śuddhaparamāṅau siddharase sarvadhātu-vedhake ādhāre sarvabuddhāḥ samastā ye śūnyalakṣaṇā nirāvaraṇā itī/ buddhākṣetram samastam akarmakam karmavātarahitam tribhuvanajanako jñānakāyena vīkṣayitvā śuddhāṅau sarvabuddhāḥ te viharantī/ ubhayasamarase śuddhāṅv itī . . . evaṃ bhūmyādyāṅau rāgarahitādikṛtsnāni śākṣāt kṛtāny anantāny acalādyāṃ praviṣṭānītyarthaḥ/ ihānuśabdenācalādayo bhūmaya uktāḥ na para-māṅavaḥ/ śuddhāṅuśabdena ādhārābhūtā dvādaśabhūmayāḥ sarvāvaraṇakṣayata ityarthaḥ/ taiḥ sārddham vajrasattvo viharati gagane vartakālam hi yāvad/ . . . iha yāvat sattvānām puṇyājñāna-sāmbhārau na bhavataḥ tāvat tair buddhotpādo na dr̥ṣyate/ ato viharati gagane dharmakāyagata ityarthaḥ.*

Cf. the *Amṛtakaṇikā* of Raviśrījñāna (1994, p. 30): *daśabhūmayo daśadhātūnām upasaṃhārah/ te ca vāyuś cittaṃ bodhicittaṃ raktamajjā asthīni snāyuh māṃsam indriyāṇi carma ceti/ teṣāṃ upa-saṃhārah samarastbhāvah.*

Cf. the *Amṛtakaṇikōdyotanibandha* of Vibhūticandra (1994, p. 152): *dvādaśabhūmijñānam jñānasāmbhārah.* See also the *Sekkodeśaṭīkā* of Nāropā (2006, p. 194).

It is called a “*bindu*” because in the advanced stages of the practice, the form of emptiness is said to appear to the *yogī* as a *bindu*, from whose center radiates the “universal form” (*viśva-bimba*), described as the body (*rūpa*) of the five unobscured (*nirāvaraṇa*) and imperishable (*akṣara*) psychophysical aggregates (*skandha*), or as a Buddha-body. While the form of emptiness is perceptible to the *yogī* in this fashion, others engrossed in the dualistic mode of perception are said to see only empty space, like persons blind from birth. Although the form of emptiness is ultimately shapeless, it is nevertheless a form that is detected through the absence of apprehended phenomena.

However, the Gnostic Body of purified psychophysical aggregates transcends the duality of form and formlessness: it is not characterized by material form because it is devoid of atomic particles, and it is not characterized by formlessness because it has emptiness (*śūnyatā*) as its form. Since emptiness is inseparable from space, its form is the endless space in which myriads of its own reflections emerge and cease. Therefore, the form of emptiness is also called “emptiness that is endowed with all aspects” (*sarvākāra-śūnyatā*). Being all-pervading like space and endowed with all aspects, the Gnostic Body is inseparable from its appearances (*ābhāsa*)—namely, the three worlds (*traidhātukābhāsa*) and the three times.⁷ It is for this reason that its appearance is called the “universal form” (*viśva-bimba*). However, although the Gnostic Body is endowed with all aspects, it is ultimately devoid of any aspects.

Moreover, owing to its unhindered pervasiveness, the Gnostic Body abides in the diverse bodies of beings. As it is nondual from the sublime bliss (*mahā-sukha*) of *nirvāṇa*, which is present in the bodies of all beings in the form of sensual bliss, it is considered to be the Innate Body (*sahaḥa-kāya*) of both the Buddhas and all embodied beings. Thus, while essentially bodiless, it is inseparable from the diverse bodies of beings throughout *samsāra*, although ultimately remaining unaffected by them. Therefore, one is advised to attend to the phenomenal world in the same way one attends to the image of the Buddha created for the sake of worship.⁸ In this regard, the Gnostic Body can be considered a body in the sense that it is a limitless, space-like form encompassing all appearances within itself and a habitat of the corporeal world. For this reason, it is at times referred to as a bodiless (*anaṅga*) body.

The Gnostic Body as a Realm of Gnosis

Due to the fact that the Gnostic Body is ultimately devoid of corporality and yet endowed with all forms, its appearances are considered similar to the images in a

⁷ See the *Sekodeśatīkā* of Nāropā (2006, Chap. 8, v. 146a and its commentary, p. 197): *bimbaṃ śūnyodbhavaṃ hetuḥ phalam akṣarajaṃ sukham*.

⁸ The *Kālacakratāntra* (1994, Chap. 5, v. 66, pp. 37–38):

*sattvā buddhā na buddhas tvapara iha mahān vidyate lokadhātau
teṣāṃ ārādhaṇena tvaparamitabhavaś chidyate nirvikalpāt/
drohaṃ kurvan hi yogī vrajati hi narakaṃ raudravādyam mahāntam
tasmāc citte viśuddhe ‘apyabudhabudhajanānām viruddham na kuryāt//.*

prognostic mirror. Since the images appearing in a prognostic mirror are not reflections of actual objects that are external to the mirror, their cause is immaterial and they themselves are insubstantial. Similarly, the appearances of the Gnostic Body in the mirror of emptiness, in which all phenomena are at display, are illusory and insubstantial, for they have no existence outside that mirror. They are a mere reflection of emptiness (*śūnyatā-bimba*), which is inherently non-arisen although it has a form. Thus, one could say that Gnostic Body, which has emptiness as its form, is at the same time a mirror and an array of the reflections of non-existing objects in the mirror. As such it ultimately exceeds any perception.

While all of the appearances in the mirror of emptiness arise and cease, the Gnostic Body itself neither arises nor ceases.⁹ Although its wisdom aspect is primordial non-arisen, its method, or compassion aspect, is perpetually arisen, for it can be known by every individual as a *nirmāṅgakāya* and a *saṃbhogakāya*. On the other hand, its empty form is not non-existent because it has arisen from space, and its imperishable bliss is not existent because it has arisen from the non-conceptualized and illusion-like, empty form.¹⁰ Thus, the Gnostic Body transcends the categories of existence and non-existence in the same way as the image in a prognostic mirror escapes such a classification. If the image that is perceived by a virgin in a prognostic mirror were existent, the virgin would see a reflection of her face instead of some other image. If the image perceived by her were non-existent,

⁹ The *Sekoddeśatīkā* of Nāropā (2006, pp. 198–200): *bimbasya sarvākārasvaccittābhāsasyābhāva ucchedo nāsti/ ... abhāvāc chūnyāt kevalāmalanabhastalād eva pratyātmedvyasya tryadhvataraidhātukapratibhāsasyotpatteḥ/ ... ata eva rūpārūpavinirmukta ityucyate/ pratisenāyāṃ hi daprañādyupalabhyamānaśarīrāyāṃ na rūpalakṣaṇaṃ paramāṅguravyasandohābhāvān ārūpalakṣaṇaṃ upalabhyamānasya durapakramatvāt/ tasmān na bimbaṃ bhavaṃ saṃsāraṃ āyāti nirvānaṃ ucchedam āyāti nākṣaram.*

The *Sekoddeśatīppaṇī* of Sādhuputra Śrīdharānanda (1997, vs. 152–155, p. 142):

*prajñāhetor ajātatvāt prajñāhetūdbhavaṃ phalam/
prajñāhetor ajātatvāt prajñājātaṃ na hetujam//*

*ato na hetujaṃ jñānaṃ prajñājñānaṃ anuttaram/
phalena hetunānyonyaṃ na parasparamudraṇam//*

*hetuḥ phalam ca yat sarvaṃ tat pratītyasamudbhavam/
anyonyamudritaṃ bimbaṃ notpannaṃ na ca nirvṛtam//*

*prajñā cātyantanirvṛtā utpannaś ca paro 'kṣarah/
hetuphalavinirmuktir na parasparamudraṇaṃ//*

¹⁰ The *Sekoddeśatīppaṇī* of Sādhuputra Śrīdharānanda (1997, vs. 27–30, pp. 122–123):

*pihitāpihitaneṛābhyaṃ śūnye yan nānukalpitam/
dṛśyate svapnavad bimbaṃ tad bimbaṃ bhāvayet sadā//*

*abhāve bimbe bhāvanā sā yogināṃ na bhāvanā/
bhāvo 'bhāvo na cittasya bimbe 'kalpitadarśanāt//*

*pratisenām ivādarśe paśyēt kumāry avastujām/
tathātītānāgataṃ dharmam yogy ambare 'pi paśyati//*

*asyā bhāvo na bhāvaḥ syāt vastuśūnyārthadarśanāt/
vastuno 'bhāvato 'pi arthaḥ māyāsvapnendrajālavat//*

On the basis of this, it was possible for the Kālacakra tradition to personify the gnosis of sublime bliss as the Ādibuddha Kālacakra. The mutual pervasiveness of emptiness and bliss, of gnosis (*jñāna*) and the object of gnosis (*jñeya*), as ultimate aspects of the mind and body is figuratively depicted as a couple in sexual union—Kālacakra and Viśvamātā. Their nonduality is conceived as a neuter-gendered state (*napuṃsaka-pada*).¹⁷ This characterization is to point out not only the nonduality of the Buddha's mind and body but also to indicate ultimate reality as transcending any gender defining characteristics. It is said that although the Gnostic Body is often referred to as male because of its relation to the lineage of sages (*ṛṣis*) through whom it historically emanated itself in the human world, in reality, it is neither male nor female, for it is ultimately unmanifest (*avyakta*). This conception of the omnipresent Gnostic Body as evading the gender-based classifications has provided the foundation for the androgynous model of humanity, social order, and the cosmos as a whole, which permeates this tantric system in various ways.¹⁸

The Gnostic Body encompasses various types of gnosis. It is the body of the gnosis of conventional reality (*samvṛti-jñāna*), which sees all phenomena as being similar to an illusion; and it is the body of the gnosis of ultimate reality (*paramārtha-jñāna*), which is the non-perception (*anupalambha*) of any *dharma*.¹⁹ It is also understood as a bearer (*dhṛk*) of the *vajra* of gnosis of the four types of bliss (*ānanda*) inseparable from the manifestations of the four bodies of the Buddha. Hence, it is called the “Vajra-holder” (*vajradhara*) and is characterized as a collection of the four drops of gnosis (*jñāna-bindu-samūha*). Thus, in this context, the phrase *jñāna-kāya* is a body in so far as it is understood as an agglomerate of multifaceted knowledge. However, since the four drops of gnosis are present in their impure aspects as minute, physical *bindus* (“drops”) within four *cakras* of the embodied beings, the Gnostic Body is also an embodied human being in its phenomenal expression.

The Gnostic Body as a Realm of Experience

As mentioned earlier, Gnostic Body transcends the conceptual classifications of the subject of knowledge and the object of knowledge, because it does not apprehend external phenomena, but everywhere sees only itself. Therefore, it is a unified state of knowledge (*jñāna*) and the object of knowledge (*jñeya*), which is achieved through the realization of the identitylessness (*nairātmya*) of one's own mind, in which the apprehending mind (*grāhaka-citta*), or wisdom, has merged into the

¹⁷ The *Sekoddeśaṭīkā* of Nāropa (2006, p. 194): *akārasambhavaḥ samyaksambuddhaḥ prajñō-pāyātmako vajrasatvo napuṃsakapadaṃ saḥajakāya ityucyate jñānajñeyātmako hetuphalayor abhedatvāt sa ca kālacakrabhagavān paramākṣaraḥ sukhapadam.*

¹⁸ The *Sekoddeśaṭīpanī* of Śādhuputra Śrīdharānanda (1997, v. 151, p. 28):

*bimbaṃ na bhāvam āyāti nāpi nīrvāṇam akṣaram/
anyonyāliṅgitaṃ śāntaṃ napuṃsakapadaṃ param||*

¹⁹ The *Amṛtakaṇīkodyotanibandha* of Vibhūticandra (1994, p. 128): *jñānakāyā jñānabindavaḥ/samvṛtijñānaṃ māyopamabhāvabodhaḥ/paramāthajñānaṃ sarvadharamānupalambhaḥ.*

she would be able to see nonexistent things such as the hare's horn, and the like, but this is not the case.¹¹

Moreover, just as the virgin does not see the image in a prognostic mirror with her physical eyes that are covered by blinders, so the empty form of the Gnostic Body cannot be perceived by visual sense-faculty. It is perceptible only to the mind because it is nothing other than the reflection of one's own mind, since the mind is able to perceive its own reflection due to its innate luminosity; and this very luminosity of the mind is said to be an appearance of the other three Buddha-bodies.¹² Therefore, even though illusory forms of the Buddha-bodies such as limitless *nirmānakāyas* and *sambhogakāyas* may function as the object of cognition for others, they are ultimately not a phenomenon separate from the mind that cognizes them. In this context, the term *jñāna-kāya* seems to designate the "realm of gnosis," or "the realm of mind," which cannot be explained ontologically but only in terms of its appearances and their functions.

The Gnostic Body as a Collection of Bliss and Gnosis

Furthermore, an appearance of the form of emptiness is said to be the cause of the imperishable bliss (*akṣara-sukha*) attained through the accumulation of 21,600 moments of bliss, which, in turn, gives rise to the gnosis (*jñāna*) of the perfection of wisdom (*prajñā-pāramitā*). The indivisible unity of these two—emptiness and bliss—is termed the Gnostic Body (*jñāna-kāya*) and defined as the embodiment (*kāyatva*) of the gnosis of all the Tathāgatas.¹³ The term *kāya* here clearly subsumes the meaning of a "collection," suggesting that the phrase *jñāna-kāya* is to be interpreted here as a "set of bliss and gnosis."

This Kālacakra tradition's view of a corporeal body as an extension of the afflictive and cognitive obscurations implies that even the mind and body that are characterized by physicality are not two opposing principles but extensions and expressions of each other. As indicated in the *Sekoddeśatīkā*, the psychophysical aggregates, elements, and sense-bases (*āyatana*) are nothing other than incidental

¹¹ The *Sekoddeśatīpaṇī* of Sādhuputra (1997, vs. 33–34, pp. 123–124):

*yadi paśyati sadrūpaṃ svamukhaṃ kiṃ na paśyati/
yadi paśyaty asadrūpaṃ śaśāṅgaṃ kathaṃ na ca//*

*yadi tāvad vastu pratibhāti tadā kathaṃ darpaṇe samnihitaṃ kumārikāyā <mu>khaṃ vid-
yamānam eva na pratibhāti/ asad vastv api na pratibhāti/ atyantābhāvalakṣaṇaśaśaviṣāṇasya-
āpratigamyamānatvāt/*

*na paśyaty anyacakṣurbhyāṃ svacakṣurbhyāṃ na paśyati/
dṛśyamānam ajātaṃ tu kumāryā jātakaṃ yathā//*

*anyacakṣurbhyāṃ iti lalāṅādibhāvābhyāṃ svacakṣurbhyāṃ na paśyati andhapaṭapracchādi-
tatvāt.*

¹² The *Amṛtakaṇikodyotanibandha* of Vibhūticandra (1994, p. 152): *dhātugotraṃ prakṛtiś cittasya
prabhāsvaretyukte/. . . prabhāsvarād eva kāyatrayaprathanāt/ sahajodaye kṣaraṇāsambhavād
avyayaḥ/ anyam apekṣya yogiṣayaḥ svayaṃ bhavati akṛtrimatvāt sahaajāḥ.*

¹³ The *Amṛtakaṇikodyotanibandha* of Vibhūticandra (1994, p. 115): *sarvatathāgatakāyajñānatvāt.*

(*āgantuka*) habitual propensities of the mind (*citta-vāsanā*).¹⁴ In contrast, the Gnostic Body is considered to be a habitual propensity of *nirvāṇa* (*nirvāṇa-vāsanā*), which is connately present in the mind of the *yogī*. This view provides a reason for which it can spontaneously appear as a reflection of the *yogī*'s own mind in the form of various signs (*nimitta*).¹⁵ The mind and its reflection are said to be nondual, like the moon and the moonlight.¹⁶ Just as an eye can see its own reflection in a mirror, so the *yogī*'s apprehending mind (*grāhaka-citta*), which is wisdom (*prajñā*) that knows the emptiness of all phenomena, sees its own reflection, which is the apprehended mind (*grāhya-citta*) and characterized by the emptiness endowed with all aspects (*sarvākāropeta-sūnyatā*). The mind's perception of its empty form (*sūnya-bimba*) is defined as self-awareness (*sva-saṃvedanā*). This self-awareness is said to result in the gnosis of imperishable bliss (*akṣara-sukha*), which is metaphorically called the "face of the Buddha" (*buddha-vaktra*), or "the face of gnosis" (*jñāna-vaktra*).

Being free from the habitual propensities of *saṃsāra* (*saṃsāra-vāsanā*), the gnosis of imperishable bliss liberates the mind from its obscurations and facilitates the arising of the new, imperishable psychophysical aggregates. The experience of the gnosis that is aware of its blissful nature is no longer contingent on the physical body. The newly emerged psychophysical aggregates, which are mutually pervasive and indistinguishable due to their immateriality, make up the Gnostic Body. This means that the Gnostic Body is not just a mere transcendence of the mind-body complex characterized by materiality but also the manifestation of its purified aspect. Thus, at the full and perfect awakening, the mind-body complex is not eliminated but only sublimated. This explains why the Gnostic Body is considered capable of functioning as the fundamental source of the unlimited capacities of the body, speech, and mind that manifest as various Buddha-bodies. This, perhaps, in part explains why in Vajrayāna discourse in general, mind-body imagery is projected onto ultimate reality itself, whose mind-body complex is interpreted such that emptiness is its form and the imperishable bliss is its the mind.

¹⁴ The *Sekodeśaṭīkā* of Nāropā (2006, pp. 201–202): *iha hi yad vaktavyam mūrkhaiḥ paramāṅśandohāmakaiḥ skandhadhātvyatanair vinā cittamātreṇa prajñājñānam svasaṃvedyam na bhavati tan na/ kasmāt/ āgantukacittavāsanāvāsāt/ iha skandhadhātvyatanam nāmāgantukacittavāsanā.*

¹⁵ The *Kālacakrantra* (1994, Chap. 5, v. 116d): *sarvākāram svacittam viṣayavirahitam nāparam cittam eva.*

¹⁶ The *Ṣaḍāṅgayoga* of Anupamarakṣita (2000, p. 113):

*ajātasyāniruddhasya yaj jñeyasyeha darśanam/
tat svacittasya nānyasya bāhyajñeyavibhāgataḥ//*

The *Sekodeśaṭīpanī* of Sādhuputra (1997, v. 24, p. 122):

*asyaiva sādhanam kuryāt pratibhāsair acintitaiḥ/
dhūmādibhir nimittaiḥ taiḥ prajñābimbair nabhaḥsamaiḥ//*

asyeti sarvaprapaṅcarahitakāyacatuṣṭayaikalolībhūtānuttaramahāsukhasvabhāvasya vajrasattvasya prajñābimbair nirvikalpānuttaraprajñāsvarūpaprajñāpratibhāsākāraiḥ ca candracandrikevābhinnaiḥ.

apprehended mind (*grāhya-citta*), or bliss. In this regard, here too, the Gnostic Body, consisting of the unified sublime bliss and gnosis, is understood as a body in the sense that it is a realm pervaded by bliss and cognitive experience. It is said that this immaterial, luminous gnosis can be still considered a “body” (*kāya*) owing to the pervasiveness of its bliss (*sukha-caryatva*),²⁰ which radiates limitless emanations of bliss throughout the entire cosmos. It is on account of its blissful nature that the Gnostic Body is also called the “Body of Sublime Bliss” (*mahāsukha-kāya*).

The Body of Sublime Bliss is experienced in three different ways in accordance with different levels of the spiritual conditions of beings. In the case of ordinary people (*prthag-jana*), who engage in sexual bliss with emission, it is experienced as an impure (*samala*) body. *Ācāryas* experience it as their stainless (*nirmala*) bodies, and in the case of Buddhas, it is experienced as a completely stainless (*vimala*) body of the undifferentiated bliss and emptiness.²¹ Thus, although it is ultimately pure and incorporeal, it does not escape the possibility of being experienced as impure and corporeal. Considered as the all-pervasive sublime bliss and the realm of absolute space (*dharmadhātu*), it is interpreted as a cause of the origination of all other Buddha-bodies and is accordingly termed “the progenitor (*prajāpati*) of the Buddhas²²” and the “Great Body (*mahā-kāya*) of all the Buddhas.” Thus, it is the ultimate source of both *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*: with regard to the former, it is a realm of experiences within the physical body; and in terms of the latter, it is a realm of space-embodied bliss. Thus in each instance, it is considered a body (*kāya*) on account of being a domain of experience.

The Gnostic Body, known also as Innate Body (*sahaja-kāya*), is identified as a *gnosis-vajra* characterized by compassion. Therefore, it is also referred to as a pure *yoga* (*viśuddha-yoga*), or as a *vajra-yoga*, consisting of wisdom and method. Owing to the destruction of the fourth (*turyā*) state of the mind, it is purified by means of liberation through emptiness (*śūnyatā-vimokṣa*), or by a gnosis that apprehends both emptiness as an absence of inherent existence (*niḥsvabhāva*) and the emptiness of the past and the future.²³

Although this innate, Gnostic Body is a single unitary reality, it is said to manifest in four different ways. In accomplishing the goals of others, it becomes the

²⁰ The *Amṛtakaṇikodyotanibandha* of Vibhūticandra, 1994, p. 195: *anāṅgakāyo bodhicittavajrah sukha-caryatvāt kāyah/ . . . nirmāṇakāyādmāṇ koṭiparyantamahāsukhakāyaṃ visphārayati/*

²¹ The *Amṛtakaṇikodyotanibandha* of Vibhūticandra (1994, pp. 184–185): *sarveṣāṃ khalu bhāvānāṃ viśuddhis tathatā smṛtā ityukte/ śuddhaḥ śūnyah/ . . . trividhā tathatā—samalā prthag-janānām/ nirmalā ācāryānām/ vimalā sambuddhānām phalāvasthā bhūtaḥkoṭiḥ/*

²² The *Amṛtakaṇikodyotanibandha* of Vibhūticandra (1994, p. 165): *jñānaprabodhāt turyātītaṃ yatprabhāsvaram tadudbhūtatvāt tanmayam jñānasya vidyaṃ tannirmāṇatvena prajānām jananaṭ patih prajāpatiḥ.*

²³ The *Sekoddeśaṭīkā* of Nāropā (2006, pp. 69–70): *tatra svabhāvābhāvataḥ śūnyam/ tasya śūnyasya bhāvah śūnyatā/ ihātītanāgataṃ jñeyam śūnyam/ tasya darśanam bhāvah śūnyatā gambhīrodārā/ atītanāgātābhāvād gambhūrā/ atītanāgātadarśanād udārā/ tayopalakṣitaṃ tadgrāhakaṃ vā jñānam śūnyatāvimokṣah/ tena viśuddhaṃ turyāvasthākṣayād akṣaram mahāsukham/ kaṃ sukhaṃ tad-druṇaddhūti karuṇālakṣaṇam jñānavajram/ sa eva sahajakāyah prajñopāyātmake viśuddho yoga ityucyate/ . . . taduktam vimalaprabhāyām prathamāślokaḥvākyāne – sa eva sahajakāyah śūnyatā vimokṣaviśuddho jñānavajrah sarvajñah prajñopāyātmake viśuddhayaḥ iti.*

Cf. this citation with the *Vimalaprabhā* commentary on the *Kālacakra-tantra* (1986, Chap. 1, v. 1, p. 45.) *śuddhajñānavijñānātmake acyuto binduḥ . . . jñānavajrayogo vajrasattvaḥ.*

dharmakāya, which is neither one nor many.²⁴ This *dharmakāya* consists of wisdom (*prajñā*) that apprehends the minds of others; and it consists of method (*upāya*), which is the apprehended mind characterized by compassion. It is the integrated body (*yuganaddha-kāya*), in which ultimate and conventional realities are unified.²⁵ This *dharmakāya* is the translucent *sambhogakāya*, which is a reflected image (*pratibimba*) comprised of wisdom that knows the past and future of beings, and of the method that teaches them by means of unarticulated sounds that issue from it. Because it is devoid of the *prāṇic* winds associated with a physical body, its sounds are like an echo, devoid of verbal expressions, and are present everywhere. To violent beings, the *sambhogakāya* appears as the dark Heruka or as the ferocious Vajrabhairava in order to tame them. It appears as Vairocana in order to train the deluded, as Ratnasambhava to show generosity to the suffering, as Amitābha to train impassioned beings, and as Amoghasiddhi to destroy the demons of obstacles (*vighna*).²⁶

In order to mature sentient beings, this *sambhogakāya* becomes a *nirmāṇakāya*. It shows itself in the three worlds through the illusion (*māyā*) of its limitless emanations. The illusory body of its emanation, which enters the minds of humans,

²⁴ The *Amṛtakaṇīkodyotanibandha of Vibhūticandra* (1994, pp. 94–95):

samastabuddhadharmasvabhāvatayā ca tad eva satyadvayāvaidhībhāvasvabhāvaṃ yuganaddhākhyaṃ ucyate/ tasmād yuganaddhakāya eva dharmakāyaḥ sambhogikasvabhāvīkakāyābhyāṃ prthagbhūto yogipratyakṣavedyaḥ/

*rūparāśir ananto me nirmāṇakāya uttamah/
rutarāśir ananto me sambhogakāya uttamah//
dharmarāśir ananto me dharmakāya uttamah/
sukharāśir ananto me sukhakayo 'kṣarah parah//*

*evaṃ ca ṣoḍaśīkalābodhaḥ paracittajñānapratīśabdasaḍśabdādādhigamāśeṣarūpasandarśanajñānalakṣaṇaṃ
catuḥkāyasvarūpam āveditam/ uktaṃ ca śrīkālacakre*

*na prajñā nāpy upāyaḥ sahaajanur iyaṃ dharmakāyo babhūva
prajñōpāyasvabhāvaḥ khalu vigatatamo jñānavijñānabhedāt/
so 'yaṃ sambhogakāyaḥ pratiravaka ivānekasattvārthakarṭtā
sattvānāṃ pākahetor bhavati punar asau buddhanirmāṇakāyaḥ//*

The *Vimalaprabhā* commentary on the *Kālacakratāntra* (1994, Chap. 5, v. 89, p. 45), where the following verse is cited from the *Ādibuddhatantra*:

*uddhṛtaṃ mañjuvajreṇa ādibuddhān niranvayāt/
lakṣaṇaṃ buddhakāyānāṃ caturṇāṃ tadvitanyate//*

The *Sekoddeśaṭīkā* of Nāropā (2006, pp. 70–71): *sa eva dharmakāyo 'nimittavimokṣaviśuddhaṃ cittavajraṃ jñānakāyaḥ prajñōpāyātmaḥ dharmātmā yoga ityuktaḥ/ sa eva sambhogakāyo 'prajñītavimokṣaviśuddhaṃ vāgvajraṃ dinakaravapuḥ prajñōpāyātmaḥ mantrayoga ityuktaḥ/ sa eva nirmāṇakāyo 'nabhisamskāravimokṣaviśuddhaṃ kāyavajraṃ padmaprāyātākṣaḥ prajñōpāyātmaḥ saṃsthānayoga ityukta itī.*

²⁵ The *Sekoddeśaṭīkā* of Nāropā (2006, p. 198): *śūnyatākaruṇayor anayoḥ samvṛtiparamārthasatyasvabhāvaḥ saṃyogo mīlanaṃ vajrayogaḥ/ sa cādvayo yuganaddhākyo 'kṣaraś cety etad eva tattvam/*

²⁶ The *Kālacakratāntra* and the *Vimalaprabhā* (1994, Chap. 5, v. 90, p. 46):

*eko 'sau vajrasattvaḥ pralayanibho heruko vai babhūva/
raudrānāṃ pācanārthaṃ sa ca samayajino mōhitānāṃ sukhārthaṃ/
ratneṣo duḥkhitānāṃ sa ca kamaladharo rāgiṇāṃ rāgahetor/
vighnānāṃ dhvaṃsanārthaṃ tv asikarakamalo 'moghasiddhir babhūva//*

gods, and Buddhas, is a non-arisen phenomenon, devoid of origination and cessation. Although its emanations are inseparable from various phenomena, they are not physical bodies (*rūpakāya*). Just as the body of a person who appears in a dream is a projection of the dreamer's mind, so the *nirmāṅgakāyas* are mere projections of the habitual propensities of the minds (*citta-vāsanā*) of ordinary beings. Although incorporeal, each of these bodies is androgynous in that each can project an anthropomorphic form through which it appears as simultaneously male and female to beings on different planes of existence. Thus, all perceptible forms of the Gnostic Body exist only in relation to other sentient beings and not in and of themselves.²⁷

The Gnostic Body as a Set of Esoteric Teachings and Practices

The immateriality of all the manifestations of the Buddha-bodies is strongly emphasized throughout the Kālacakra literature, for if the Buddhas were physical bodies, they would meet their end when their material forms are vanished. The misconception of the *nirmāṅgakāyas* as physical forms is said to result from the incomprehension of the profound Buddha-*dharma*. This misconception is considered detrimental to one's spiritual progress, for it leads one to "deviant" practices. Those who misconceive the Buddha's emanations in this way are said to become overcome by delusion and hope that their putrid bodies will become Buddha's bodies in this life. They go for instruction to inauthentic teachers, ingest the five ambrosias (*amṛta*) in the hope of making their bodies ageless and immortal, and in hope of becoming the Varjasattva himself. They believe that one should actually kill beings by means of a *samādhi* focused on a wrathful deity; and they lie, steal, and take other men's wives. Others, taking the words of evil tantric masters (*ācāryas*) as their authority, believe that one should follow the path of ten non-virtues by means of deity-*yoga*. They ingest substances that are not ritually purified and transformed into ambrosia and thereby ineffective in bringing about the qualities of Buddhahood.²⁸

²⁷ The *Sekoddeśaṭīkā* of Nāropā (2006, v. 151 and the commentary, pp. 198–199):

*bimbaṅ na bhavam āyāti nāpi nīrvāṇam akṣaram/
anyonyāliṅgitaṅ śāntaṅ napuṅsakapadaṅ param//
anyonyāliṅgitaṅ śāntam avikāṅdriyavikāṅarahitavāt/ idam evobhayātmakaṅ napuṅsa-
kapadaṅ kevalaprajñopāyapaksayor abhāvat.*

²⁸ The *Vimalaprabhāṭīkā* commentary on the *Kālacakratāntra* (1994, Chap. 5, pp. 71–72): *ato bhgavato vacanād rūpakāyo bhagavān na bhavati sarvabuddhānām samājītatvāt/ yadi rūpakāyā buddhāḥ tadā paramāṅgurūpeṅāpi mīlanaṅ na syād itil vākyam śrutvā tathāpi sattvā bhagavatoktaṅ gambhīrodāradharmaṅ parīkṣayitvā na grhṇanti buddhatvāya guruṅ ca parīkṣayitvā nārādhayanti mahāmūrkhā lobhābhībhūtā santa ihaiva janamny asmākaṅ pūtiśarīraṅ buddhaśarīraṅ bhaviṣyatyī āślubdhā akalyāṅamitrasaṅsargād asadgurūpadeśād iha vairocanaḍāni pañcāmṛtāni gokudahanāḍipalāni bhakṣyāṅi svabhāvasuddhāni tathāgate-noktāni/ ebhir bhakṣitaiḥ śarīraṅ ajarāmarāṅ bhaviṣyati vajrasattvo 'pi varado bhaviṣyati/ anyatra vajrakule krodharājasamādhinā prāṅino ghātyāḥ/ khadgākule 'moghasiddhisamādhinā 'satyaṅ vaktavyaṅ/ ratnakule vairocanasamādhinā paraṣvaṅ hāryaṅ/ padmakule 'mitābha-samādhinā parastrī grāhyā/ cakrakule vairocanasamādhinā pañcāmṛtapalāni bhakṣyāṅiyānti/ apare 'pi daśākuśaladharmapathā devatāyogena yoginā kartavyā itil evaṅ duṣṭācāryavacanaṅ pramāṅikṛtya daśākuśalān karmapathān kurvantī aśodhitāny abodhitāny apradīpitāny anamṛtīkṛtāni bhakṣyanti/ tāni ca bhakṣitāni pañcāmṛtāni na teṣāṅ bhakṣakānāṅ buddhatvaguṇāḍayakāni bhavanti tathāgatavacanāprabhodhatvād iti.*

When the secret Vajrayāna is properly understood, one knows the Vajrayāna to be itself the unified state of the body, speech, and mind,²⁹ which results from bliss and gives rise to the gnosis of bliss. Vajrayāna itself is said to be the Gnostic Body for a number of reasons. The gnosis of sublime bliss is such that it expands (*tanyate*) as a great *tantra* (*mahātantra*), as an extended discourse (*prabandha*);³⁰ and the sounds and meanings of its *mantras* are nothing other than the sublime bliss of the Gnostic Body, which protects the mind of the *yogī*.³¹ Thus, here, the Gnostic Body is considered to be a body in the sense of being a set of esoteric teachings and practices that have issued from it, point to it, and lead one to its realization.

The Gnostic Body as a Habitus of All Divine Forms

Since there is nothing separate from the Gnostic Body, one is told that even various *nirguṇa* and *saguṇa* divine forms, which are sought after and worshipped by the proponents of the Brāhmaṇic tradition, are contained in it. The Gnostic Body is a knower of *brahman* (*brahma-vid*), as its blissful gnosis is declared to be *brahman* on the basis of the statement that the nature of *brahman* is bliss (*ānando brahmaṇo rūpam*).³² In that regard, the Gnostic Body is characterized as liberation (*mokṣa*), the fourth pursuit of men. It is also said to be the Brahmā of the Brāhmaṇas, for it is the body of sublime passion and the nature of Brahmā's four faces, characterized by the four Divine Abidings (*brahmavihāras*). It is the very nature of Viṣṇu, Rāhu, Indra, Tryambaka, and other deities,³³ although unrecognized as such by the Brāhmaṇic sages who consider the older Vedic Dharma to be

²⁹ The *Amṛtakaṇikā* of Raviśrījñāna (1994, p. 4): *guhyaṃ śrāvakaṃ pratyekabuddhayanayor uttaram vajrayānaṃ kāyavākcittajñānaikalolībhūto vā tatra mahāsukharūpatayā rājata iti guhyarāt*.

³⁰ The *Amṛtakaṇikā* of Raviśrījñāna (1994, p. 8):

māyājāle māyājālābhisambodhīlakṣaṇe tanyate vyutpādyata iti tantram/ . . . mahātantram mahāsukhajñānaṃ ity arthaḥ/ uktañ ca tantram prabandham ākhyātaṃ saṃsāraṃ tantram iṣyate/ tantram guhyaṃ rahasyākhyam uttaram tantram ucyate//

³¹ The *Vimalaprabhā* commentary on the *Kālacakratāntra* (1994, Chap. 3, v. 1, p. 2): *mantram iti jñānam/ manastrāṇabhāvāt/ Cf. the Amṛtakaṇikā of Raviśrījñāna (1994, p. 28): mahāmantram mahāsukhajñānaṃ tenottamo niravadyaḥ tadrūpa ity arthaḥ/*

³² The *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṅgītī* and the *Amṛtakaṇikā* of Raviśrījñāna (1994, v. 19, p. 67):

brahmavid brāhmaṇo brahmā brahmanirvāṇam aptavān muktir mokṣo vimokṣāṅgo vimuktīḥ śāntitā śīvaḥ

prakṛtiprabhāsvaraśūnyatākaruṇābhinnajñānaṃ brahma tattādātmyena vetty anubhavatīti brahmavit/ . . . ākāśasaktacittatayā pratyāhārādiṣaḍaṅgasamkṣepacaturāṅgabrahmavihāra-caturdhyānacaturmukhasvabhāvāt vād brahmā/ brāhmaṇo nirvāṇam ānandaḥ/ ānandaṃ brahmaṇo rūpam iti vacanāt/ tadāptavān/ śūnyatāvīnirbhāgavartītvān muktīḥ/ . . . sam-yajñānāgnibhasmikṛtasattvarajastamaskandhatvena vimokṣa evāṅga surūpaṃ yasya sa tathā.

³³ The *Amṛtakaṇikā* of Raviśrījñāna (1994, p. 199): *devānām apy atīśayena divyattīl viṣaṇād viṣṇūcyate ity ukter upendra ity arthaḥ/ . . . jagadasya prādeśikaskandhamārādeḥ prathamam vināyakaḥ/ kāyāder anāsravatāl muktis tadviśuddhyā tryambko maheśvaraḥ/*

natural and innate (*sahaja*) and the later Buddha-Dharma as artificial (*kṛtaka*).³⁴ In this way, the *Kālacakratra*'s conception of the Gnostic Body as a single, indivisible, and omnipresent ultimate reality has allowed for the appropriation and reinterpretation of the Brāhmaṇic conceptions of absolute reality and its divine manifestations. Thus, as the ultimate body of all Buddhist and Brāhmaṇic deities, the Gnostic Body is understood as a habitat of all divine forms.

The Gnostic Body as a Social Habitus of Gnosis

We are told, the Buddhas abide in their empty form (*śūnya-bimba*) whether they enter the mother's womb in order to mature ordinary people, whether they arise in a heaven to eliminate the ego-grasping (*ahaṃkāra-grahaṇa*) of the Śrāvakas dwelling in heavens, or whether they manifest in the syllable *evaṃ* in order to establish the great Bodhisattvas—such as Subhūti, Maitreya, and others—in complete and perfect Buddhahood, instructing them in the fourth, Gnostic Body.³⁵ Thus, the Gnostic Body is not to be seen as static, for although peaceful (*śānta*), it is continually operative through its luminosity, bliss, and compassion.

The phenomenal aspect of the Gnostic Body—whether cosmic, social, or individual—is an appearance of spiritual ignorance whereby one perceives a material form where there is none and identifies it as “I” or “mine.” A phenomenal body is not a thing in and of itself, but rather a series of experiential events taking place in con-

³⁴ See the *Vimalaprabhā* commentary on the *Kālacakratra* (Chap. 5, 1994, p. 95): *atha brahmarṣiṇāṃ duṣṭavacanam iha prāgvedadharmāḥ sahaḥ paścāt sarvajñadeśito dharmāḥ kṛtakāḥ / tasmād vedadharmo jyeṣṭha iti.*

³⁵ The *Kālacakratra* and the *Vimalaprabhā* (1994, Chap. 5, v. 92, p. 48):

*pañcaskandhasvabhāvair kṛpayā vajrayoṣidbhageṣu/
sattvānāṃ pācanārtham tv avihitaniyamānāṃ apuṇyārjūtānām/
śuddhāvāsādike yadviharati bhagavān śrāvakāṇāṃ nimittam/
evaṃkāre sthitiṃ yā paramaniyaminām uttare sthāpanārtham//*

*iha yat kleśādyāvaraṇarahitānāṃ garbhāvakraṃaṇam pañcaskhandagrahaṇam vajrayoṣid-
bhageṣu strīgarbhe sambhavāya viharāṇam tat kṛpayā avihitaniyamānāṃ prākṛtajanānām
apuṇyārjūtānām pācanāya/ tathā —*

*vajrakāyaśarirānāṃ buddhānāṃ yadanityatā/
kadalīgarbhatulyeṣu kā cintā 'nyeṣu jantusu//*

*ityādinā 'nityavādināṃ pācanāya/ punaḥ śuddhāvāsādike yadutpādaḥ sa śrāvakāṇāṃ dev-
atvaṃ gatānām ahaṃkāravinaśāya/ idaṃ devatvaṃ cyavanakāle mahad duḥkham iti deśa-
naya teṣāṃ pācanam/ evaṃkāre sthitiṃ yā śūnyatāyām sā paramaniyaminām subhūtyādnām
maitreyaprabhṛtīnām uttare samyaksambuddhatve sthāpanāya caturthakāyadeśanāyeti/
Cf. the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti* and the *Amṛtakāṇikā* of Raviśrījñāna (1994, p. 55, v. 3):
*arūpo rūpavān agryo nānārūpo manomayah/
sarvarūpāvabhāsaśrī aśeṣapratibimbadhṛk//**

*ākāṣaṇiṣṭhatayā sarvacittacaitūsikāvidyāpratibhāsanirodhān na vidyate prakṛtisvarūpātiriktaṃ
rūpaṃ yasya sa tathā/ dharmakāyarūpakāyaikalolībhāvād anāvilarūpatvād rūpavān/ . . .
dvāsapatināḍīśahasreṣu prakṛtirūpeṇa sukhadharmadhātūrūpanispandarūpatvān nānārūpa/
ekakṣāṇābhīsambo dhirūpatvān manomayah/ . . . viśvabimbadarśanena kṛṣṇarekhāyām ananī-
tājñānakāyābhinnasambhogakāyapratibhāsanād aśeṣapratibimbadhṛk.*

secutive moments. Until the mental obscurations are removed and the material nature of the mind–body complex sublimated, the phenomenal manifestations of the Gnostic Body are experienced as the source of bondage and suffering on account of grasping onto them as real.

Just as a human being is a phenomenal aspect of the unitary Gnostic Body, which has the capacity for transformation, so is human society. Social hierarchies based on social class and blood lineages are rooted in the ignorance of social ego, with its attachments to class distinctions, race, and social status. When a social hierarchical order is deconstructed through the uprooting of the social ignorance, and when a new integrated society is constituted, the Gnostic Body is instantiated in the form of a social body united by gnosis. In this regard, the Gnostic Body is a body in the sense of a social *habitus* of gnosis.

Even though the Kālacakra tradition's discourse on the Gnostic Body points to liberation as freedom from a corporeal body and to spiritual progress as a process of disembodiment, it does not propound a duality between the corporeal body and the immaterial Gnostic body. The corporeal body is able to function as a soteriological instrument through which liberation is achieved only because its ultimate nature does not rest in the transitory psychophysical aggregates and incidental mental obscurations but in the all-encompassing gnosis of bliss. Thus, as we have already seen, the Gnostic Body is at the same time immaterial and corporeal.

Conclusion

In concluding reflections, I would like to point to the broader theoretical implications of this analysis of constructions of the Gnostic Body in this tantric tradition. Its various interpretative characterizations of the Gnostic Body show that not only the material form that provides the basis for physical experiences can be considered a body but also the domain of mental experiences. According to the Kālacakra literature, empty space can be taken as a grand body. An event, in which knowledge and the object of knowledge are non-differentiated can also be a body, and so too can pure bliss be a body. As indicated earlier in this paper, this model of embodiment challenges the prevailing views of what makes up a body by introducing new categories of embodiment and expanding the existing definitions of the body.

One can also say that while the Kālacakra tradition takes up the body as a useful category for structuring its practice and constructing its complex theory, it ends deconstructing the entire category by positing the Gnostic Body as inconceivable and inexpressible ultimate reality that transcends any categorizations. The tradition seems to suggest that being an experiential reality, the Gnostic Body cannot be reduced to any definition but can be only experienced.³⁶ Since the Gnostic Body can mean a wide variety of different things, it gives way to different conceptualizations,

³⁶ The *Sekoddeśaṭippanī* of Sādhuputra Śrīdharānanda (1997, v. 137, p. 26):

*evaṃ na śakyate vaktuṃ samādhirathitaiḥ sukham/
samādhāv akṣaram prāpya svato vetti mahāsukham//*

none of which is able to encompass it in its entirety.³⁷ Likewise, when grasped in cognitive terms, it is difficult to definitely determine what the Gnostic Body actually is, for it can be anything and everything, and ultimately it is neither a thing nor an absence of the thing, only an experience. In this way, the Kālacakra tradition's exposition of the Gnostic Body confronts us with a paradoxical need to apprehend in cognitive terms that which by nature evades any cognition, and yet, it itself is self-cognizant.³⁸

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³⁷ The *Kālacakratāntra* (1994, Chap. 5, v. 249, pp. 151–152):

*eko naiko 'pi caikaḥ samaviśamasamaḥ savyavāmāgraprṣṭha
ūrdvādhō vai samantāt sitaharitamahāviśvavarnaikarūpaḥ/
hrasvo dūrghaḥ plutaś cāguṇa iti saḡuṇaḥ strī naraś cānarastrī
yaḥ sarvādhāra ekaḥ subhagavarabhaḡas te namaste namaste//*

The *Vimalaprabhā* commentary on the *Kālacakratāntra* (1994, Chap. 5, v. 89, p. 45), where the following verse from the *Ādibuddhatantra* is cited:

*na sannāsan na sadasan na cāpyanubhayātmakam/
catuskoṭivinirmuktaṃ natvā kāyaṃ mahāsukham//*

See also the following verses from the *Ādibuddhatantra* cited in the *Vimalaprabhā* commentary on the *Kālacakratāntra* (1986, Chap. 1, v. 1, p. 44):

*astināstīvyatikrānto bhāvābhāvākṣayo 'dvayaḥ/
śūnyatākaruṇābhinnō vajrayogo mahāsukhaḥ//
paramāñudharmāṭītaḥ śūnyadharmavivarjitaḥ/
śāśvatocchedanirmukto vajrayogo niranvayaḥ//*

The *Sekoddeśaṭṭippanī* of Sādhuputra Śrīdharānanda (1997, vs. 148–150, p. 28):

*nīrvāṇarahitam bimbaṃ saṃsārāṭītaṃ akṣaram/
śāśvatocchedanirmuktas tayor yogo 'dvayo 'paraḥ//*

*abhāvo nāstī bimbasya abhāvodbhūtalakṣaṇāt/
bhāvo nāsty akṣarasyāpi bhāvasambhūtalakṣaṇāt//*

*bhāvābhāvasamāyogo vajrayogo 'dvayo 'paraḥ/
rūpārūpavinirmuktaḥ pratiseneva darpaṇe//*

³⁸ The *Kālacakratāntra* (1994, Chap. 5, v. 98, p. 49):

*buddhānām apy agamyā tv apramitaḡuṇā buddhanirmāṇamāyā
ātmanāṃ darśayantī tribhuvanānilaye śakrajālaṃ yathāiva/
nānābhāvāir vibhinnā saḡinasuranṛṇām svasvacitte praviṣṭā
eṣānutpannadharmā payasi nabha iva bhrāntīdotpattir atra//*

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