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## The Expansiveness of the Felt Body:

A preliminary phenomenological interpretation of the *Vijñāna Bhairava*  
based on Hermann Schmitz' concept of the felt body

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Note: Here I've translated into English a German paper I wrote in the context of an M.A. in philosophy at Freie Universität, Berlin. I wanted to share my enthusiasm for the felt body and the *Vijñāna Bhairava* with English speaking friends and family. However, I'm also very excited about presenting some of Hermann Schmitz' ideas to a wider community. His work is virtually non-existent in English.

The question of how to adequately translate Schmitz is a project in itself. I didn't spend much time thinking about it. Rudolf Owen Müllan's translation of a shorter paper by Schmitz, the first ever to appear in English, provided some inspiration. In the same publication, Jan Slaby and Müllan provide an excellent general introduction to Schmitz' work. They characterize their project as "a message in a bottle sent out to find readers in a different discursive universe. The time for this might be exactly right [...] amidst the recent rediscovery of the felt body as a crucial medium and vehicle of personal life." In the same spirit, I'd like to send these snippets of Schmitz' work into the world.

The paper in question is available online, and I recommend it to anyone interested in Schmitz:

Schmitz, H., Müllan, R.O. & Slaby, J. Phenom Cogn Sci (2011). *Emotions outside the box*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-011-9195-1>

The *Vijñāna Bhairava* is available in many English translations. The text has played a role in various New Age fiascos. In my opinion, Bettina Bäumer's German translation is a good place start because it transmits essential ideas without getting lost in details, provides a useful commentary, and maintains an academic standard while still allowing room for the "esoteric."

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# 1. Introduction

The felt body, as that which most intimately belongs to each human, which, however, in its particularity is as unfamiliar as a fantasy world to nearly everyone, is shaped, even more so than by its spatial structure, by its distinctive dynamic.<sup>1</sup>

Wherever your spirit finds its fulfillment, concentrate on that. There the essence of the highest bliss shall reveal itself.<sup>2</sup>

The aim of this paper is a preliminary phenomenological interpretation, based on the concept of the felt body, of the *Vijñāna Bhairava* or “Godly Consciousness.” The text, in Sanskrit, is one of the primary written sources of Kashmir Shaivism. Almost unknown in the West, this tradition is “one of the richest and most impressive religious-philosophical systems of Hinduism.”<sup>3</sup> The theoretical foundation for the interpretation is provided by the essential aspects of Hermann Schmitz’ concept of the felt body, which he carefully and extensively develops in his five-volume *System of Philosophy*. In preparation we’ll define the felt body as that which can be uniquely felt, without using one of the five senses, in the area of the visible and touchable body.<sup>4</sup>

The phenomenology of a philosopher who on several occasions has concerned himself with mystic experience in relation to the felt body, critically examined the esoteric anatomy of meditative teachings, particularly of yoga<sup>5</sup>, and who has brought the relationship between intensity in the felt body and consciousness to light, is eminently well-suited for a cautious academic approach to the world of a body-affirming mystical

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<sup>1</sup> Schmitz, Hermann: *Höhlengänge, Über die Gegenwärtige Aufgabe der Philosophie*. 1. Aufl. Berlin: Akad. Verl. 1997, S. 70

<sup>2</sup> Bäumer, Bettina: *Vijñāna Bhairava, Das göttliche Bewußtsein*. 4. Auflage. Frankfurt am Main und Leipzig: Insel Verlag 2016, Vers 74, S. 129

<sup>3</sup> Bäumer, Bettina: *Wege ins Licht, Texte des tantrischen Śivaismus aus Kaschmir*. Zürich: Benziger Verlag 1992, S. 9

<sup>4</sup> In this paper I mostly deal with the concept of the felt body as expounded in *System of Philosophy*. I find it useful, however, to cite other texts where Schmitz has already done the considerable amount of work of condensing and summarizing. I don’t take into account the possible changes that haven taken place in Schmitz’ theory over time.

<sup>5</sup> The elements of this anatomy – for example, the so-called chakras and Kuṇḍalinī energy – play a central role in the *Vijñāna Bhairava*. Vgl. Schmitz, Hermann: *Der Leib, System der Philosophie*, Bd. II/1. Bonn: Bouvier Verlag 1965, S. 304: “The anatomical and physiological notions in yoga are thus apt, suggestive aids for influencing one’s felt body [leiblicher Selbstgestaltung], which are not based on arbitrary fancy, but on sensitive assimilation of the objective facts and opportunities that can be accounted for with a topography of the felt body.”

tradition whose teachings make use of, and highlight, the breadth of sensation and experience of the felt body. In fact, one could claim that such mystic experiences which break into and disrupt everyday life, and which are attested to in the literature of various times and epochs, are indispensable for a phenomenology of the felt body. Such deviations offer fundamental insights into the object of investigation. Indeed Schmitz often illustrates his concepts with reference to the altered states that are experienced, for example, under the influence of drugs. Nevertheless, I don't intend to reduce the "mystic enlightenment resulting from concrete experience,"<sup>6</sup> which is the aim and substance of the *Vijñāna Bhairava*, to the phenomenology of the felt body. Much more, this paper wishes to provide access to the experiences in question.

The overall interpretation of the *Vijñāna Bhairava* and the conceptual analysis of selected verses are to be understood as a practice of self-awareness of one's own felt body. Here theory is in a unique way necessarily subordinate to practice because only an accompanying felt-bodily practice that proceeds experimentally in the service of self-awareness can put one in a position to adequately understand the conceptual framework; that means, to assess the concepts and fill them with experience, if indeed the activity of thinking is to leave behind more than an uninhabited, empty intellectual structure. This type of practice distinguishes itself through an impartial, yet critical, receptivity for given realities, and essentially corresponds with Hermann Schmitz' understanding of phenomenology.<sup>7</sup>

In the course of my research I've come to the conclusion that the *Vijñāna Bhairava* is an extraordinary artifact, evidence of a deep and subtle knowledge of the human felt body. I'd like to support this thesis by providing an interpretive framework, well-founded within the phenomena, which will lend the occasionally shallowly esoteric sounding and philosophically imprecise text a certain objectivity that's worthy of this knowledge. When, for example, a verse of the *Vijñāna Bhairava* claims that the state "at

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<sup>6</sup> *Vijñāna Bhairava*, S. 14

<sup>7</sup> Vgl. Schmitz, Hermann: *Kurze Einführung in die neue Phänomenologie*. 1. Auflage. Freiburg / München: Verlag Karl Alber 2009, S. 7: „New Phenomenology [...] pursues the task of making humans' real lives understandable to them; that means, after the clearing away of historically determined artificialities [Verkünstelungen], to make non-arbitrary life experience accessible again to contextual awareness [die unwillkürliche Lebenserfahrung zusammenhängender Besinnung wieder zugänglich zu machen]"; and S. 12: "A phenomenon for someone at a particular time is a state of affairs whose factuality the involved person can't seriously deny."

the beginning and ending of sneezing partakes in the absolute reality (*brahmasattā*),”<sup>8</sup> this may at first seem to be merely a quite peculiar, yet inconsequential edifying thought. Under closer scrutiny, however, it exhibits a serious insight into the dynamic aspect of the felt body.

The possibility of becoming aware of and influencing the felt body will become a central theme. According to Schmitz, mystic mastery of the felt body consists in the possibility of consciously intervening in its dynamic.<sup>9</sup> One of the goals of this mastery is to unharness “the cosmic, boundary-dissolving power of the expansion of the felt body, which leads into the infinite.”<sup>10</sup> This felt expansion is, according to Schmitz, the basic phenomenon underlying mystic experiences. The *Vijñāna Bhairava* teaches methods of concentration, that “have the function, so to speak, of a springboard for immersion in the great ocean of godly consciousness.”<sup>11</sup> The same experience of the expansion of the felt body supposedly underlies ecstatic sexual states, mystical absorption, and the unification with God as described by mystics.<sup>12</sup>

A word on the structure of this paper: First, I introduce and discuss the relevant concepts from Schmitz’ work. I attempt to provide a good overview, but this is not an easy task given that the concepts build a complex interwoven structure and finally can’t be understood in isolation. A rough presentation with many gaps is unavoidable: the concept of the present – which underlies the concept of the felt body and according to which mystic ecstasy is in the last instance to be understood – takes up an entire volume for itself in Schmitz’ *System of Philosophy*. Second, I introduce the *Vijñāna Bhairava*, highlighting aspects that essentially relate to the felt body. Even the text’s form and symbolism demonstrate an intuitive knowledge of the felt body. Subsequently I turn to the interpretation of selected verses. Once the conceptual foundations are in place, the

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<sup>8</sup> *Vijñāna Bhairava*, Vers 118, S. 175

<sup>9</sup> Vgl. *System* II/1 S.178. Here it ought to be mentioned that mastery of the felt body should not be understood in the sense of overpowering or controlling. Vgl. *System* II/1, S. 194: “In concluding my observations regarding mystic felt-bodily techniques, I point out that yoga, and likewise meditation from the Far East, oppose any violence during concentration [...] [At the beginning of this section it already] became clear how important this nonviolence is for winning a superior command of the felt-bodily economy [...]”

<sup>10</sup> Vgl. *System* II/1, S. 74

<sup>11</sup> *Vijñāna Bhairava*, S. 17

<sup>12</sup> Schmitz equates this experience with Romain Rolland’s oceanic feeling and R. M. Bucke’s concept of cosmic consciousness. Vgl. hierzu *System* II/1, S.78. For a detailed treatment of mystic ecstasy, *System* III/1, S. 183-184. For the mystic union with God, *System* III/4, S. 195-197

meaning of several verses should become clear. The paper also serves to demonstrate the validity of Schmitz' phenomenology by applying it to another area. It should become clear just how surprisingly well Schmitz' phenomenological considerations and the *Vijñāna Bhairava* can be joined together.

### **a. Preparatory Phenomenological Demarcation of the Felt Body**

“The phenomenology of the felt body first of all works towards a more finely differentiated human self-awareness [...].”<sup>13</sup> In the following I mostly restrict myself to a schematic reconstruction of Schmitz' in-depth expositions.<sup>14</sup> The detailed argumentation, numerous demonstrations, and literary evidence can't be taken into account. First we'll attempt to get a rough phenomenological idea of the felt body. Subsequently I'll give a more finely differentiated determination according to the concept of the present.

The felt body is to be differentiated from the human body that one can see and touch. The felt body is that which one feels, without using the sense organs, in the region of the human body.<sup>15</sup> The felt body presents as a unity.<sup>16</sup> That which is felt in this way is uniquely spatially extended and can transcend the borders of the visible and touchable human body. The most direct example of this are the phantom limbs experienced by amputees.<sup>17</sup> However, this barely broaches the subject of the felt body's spatiality. Here it's important to emphasize that the felt body is not identical with a mental representation of the human body. Later we'll briefly discuss the relationship between the felt body [Leib], the body [Körper], and the perceptual image of the body [Körperschema].

Schmitz calls that which one feels on one's felt body a felt-bodily experience [Regung]. This encompasses an indescribable wealth of sensation, for the felt-body is “the universal sounding board where all human involvement [alles Betroffensein des

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<sup>13</sup> Schmitz, Hermann: *Der unerschöpfliche Gegenstand, Grundzüge der Philosophie*. 1 Aufl. Bonn: Bouvier Verlag 1990, S. 116

<sup>14</sup> In my opinion, Schmitz has already found the best examples for illustrating his basic concepts. There is thus little reason to use examples from one's own experience. Nevertheless, in the following I'll employ a few examples from my experience.

<sup>15</sup> Vgl. *Der unerschöpfliche* S. 115

<sup>16</sup> What exactly non-sensory feeling means and how the felt body is immediately presented in its unity are questions beyond the scope of this paper. Vgl. hierzu *System II/1*, § 44, c) δ) S. 24

<sup>17</sup> Vgl. S. 115 *Der unerschöpfliche*, and for the topic phantom limbs, *System II/1*, § 44 b) S. 21

Menschen] is grounded.”<sup>18</sup> As an initial illustration we’ll mention with Schmitz pain, hunger, shock, pleasure [Wollust], exhaustion, inhalation and exhalation. These sensations can be diversely characterized. To mention only two essential characteristics, felt-bodily sensations can be pointed, as with a prickle, but also diffuse and atmospheric, like “the feeling of comfort that flows through the entire felt body in the bathtub.”<sup>19</sup> The atmospheric aspect of the felt body includes how we feel and sense climate.<sup>20</sup> Such felt-bodily experience involves the entire felt body. Feeling fresh or lethargic, for example, has to do with holistic felt-bodily experience.

The felt body is spatially extended in a unique manner, which is quite different than the spatiality of the body. The spatial extension of the *felt* body is voluminous but without any surfaces. For this reason, it is also *indivisible*. In contrast, the volume of the *body* has surfaces and is thus divisible. Schmitz compares the spatiality of the felt body to the phenomenal volume of that which is heard: “What is felt on one’s own felt body is indivisibly extended in the same way as the volume of expansively protruding, massily outpouring sounds [...]”<sup>21</sup> Schmitz claims that this experience of space is pre-dimensional, in other words, it doesn’t involve three-dimensional extension.

## **b. A First Approach to the Absolute Locality of the Felt Body**

The felt body has a different spatial locality than the body whose parts are localized in the three-dimensional space known to us from the sciences and everyday experience. The body’s location is determined within a system of *relative* spatial relations. The *absolute* locality of the felt body functions differently. For example, if one has an itch, its location is directly and immediately given.<sup>22</sup> It’s not necessary to determine relative distance from the writing desk or ceiling in order to know where one should scratch. Here we have an

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<sup>18</sup> *Der unerschöpfliche*, S.116

<sup>19</sup> Ebd.

<sup>20</sup> Vgl. ebd., S. 118

<sup>21</sup> *Der unerschöpfliche*, S. 118

<sup>22</sup> *Höhlengänge*, S. 70



absolute location that spontaneously sets itself apart.<sup>23</sup> Relative spatial relations can then be brought into association with the absolute location after the fact.

The absolute locational system of the felt body occurs in the total space of the felt body. This encompasses all felt-bodily experiences which are felt holistically and as separate sensations. The total space of the felt body “is determined through itself as an absolute location, and only secondarily takes on relative determinations within a system of spatial orientation.”<sup>24</sup>

The felt body as a whole exhibits, under normal circumstances, a structure that consists of many vaguely described islands which are less detailed than body parts and only partly spatially correspond to them. If one attempts to continuously sense the felt body, one finds “instead of a steady, fixed mass only an undulation of blurry islands [...]”<sup>25</sup> These islands “find themselves in continuous, usually barely noticed change, lacking clear outline and stable position.”<sup>26</sup> For example, if one massages one’s hand thoroughly and energetically and then closes one’s eyes – in order to somewhat suspend familiar relative spatial orientation – one notices the presence of a softly buzzing shape. Under certain circumstances the islands of the felt-body can disappear or coalesce. This can happen, for example, when one leaves a hot sauna and lies down in the fresh air on a comfortable surface. The felt body is then experienced as a unified, pleasantly streaming aura.

### **c. Relation between the Body and the Felt Body**

Now that the felt body has been cursorily differentiated from the body, we can more closely consider the relation between the two. The pure *felt* body is exclusively determined by absolute locality. The meaning of this will become easier to grasp later when we discuss the concept of the present. In contrast, the pure *body* is exclusively determined by relative locality. The body in this sense forms the object of scientific research. “In the middle between both [the body and the felt body] is the felt body as it

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<sup>23</sup> Schmitz has many well-considered arguments that allow one to infer the absolute locality of the felt body. This example is only an indication. Vgl. *System* II/1, §44 a) b) und c)

<sup>24</sup> *Höhlengänge*, S. 69

<sup>25</sup> Ebd.

<sup>26</sup> *Der unerschöpfliche*, S. 119

corresponds to the body [körperlicher Leib], which is determined by both relative and absolute locality: the undulating whole of blurry islands which are each determined by both relative and absolute locations, as they are held together through an absolute location as the unity of the felt body as a whole.”<sup>27</sup> The felt body is usually known to us as it corresponds to the body.

In addition to this, everyone possesses a perceptual image of the body. This is “a habitual mental image of one’s own body drawn from the experience of seeing and touching oneself [...]”<sup>28</sup> In contrast to the fluctuating island structure of the felt body, the schematic perceptual image of the body consists of a fixed mass of invariably ordered parts. In my experience, an essential step in becoming aware of the felt body is freeing oneself from the perceptual image of the body.

#### **d. Interaction between the Body and the Felt Body**

In this paper, we’ll mostly leave out the question concerning the interaction between the body and the felt body.<sup>29</sup> We’ll make do with the claim that there is one.<sup>30</sup> In *System of Philosophy* Schmitz’ quite cautiously claims: “[It’s] plausible that occurrences in one location pull everything else located there into involvement.”<sup>31</sup> For example, through autogenic training one can influence the temperature of specific areas of the body. According to Schmitz the will engages with islands of the felt body, which in turn exercise an influence on the body.<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless, it’s not necessary to reconsider or much

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<sup>27</sup> *System* II/1, S. 54

<sup>28</sup> *Höhlengänge*, S. 68

<sup>29</sup> The problem is closely bound up with Schmitz’ attempt to overcome anthropological dualism – the idea that humans are made up of a body and a soul. In this relation, Schmitz seems to see the advantage of his phenomenology of the felt body in its being more philosophically understandable to build a bridge between the body and felt body than between the body and the soul in the Cartesian sense. The soul is non-spatial, whereas the felt body at least has a particular spatiality. Here I’ll refrain from further comment. Vgl. *System* II/1, §46 und §47.

<sup>30</sup> Vgl. *Der unerschöpfliche*, S.116-117: “One will just have to be satisfied with stating the correspondence [between body and felt body] and to research and utilize this fact in the familiar, medically beneficial manner, without allowing oneself to be seduced by metaphysical usurpations. The reward for such modesty is getting free from theoretical artificiality and impoverishment [...]”

<sup>31</sup> *System* II/1, S. 66

<sup>32</sup> Ebd., S.71-72

less solve the psycho-physical problem<sup>33</sup> in order to consider the possibility of influencing or mastering the felt body. Later we'll discuss such methods.

### 3. The Present and the Absolute Location of the Felt Body

#### a. Brief Introduction to the Present

The present is the foundational principle of Hermann Schmitz' philosophy.<sup>34</sup> It is not only temporally determined, but also has, among others, an essential spatial dimension which for the interpretation of the *Vijñāna Bhairava* is of primary importance.

The present can be understood as a continuum between its two extreme forms: the primitive present and the unfolded present. "Human life moves between [these extremes], occasionally plunging into the primitive present [...] The awake, mature, thoughtful human lives in unfolded present. As a personal subject she stands above the here and now to which she is bound through her felt body [...]"<sup>35</sup> Certain experiences cause the unfolding of the present to diminish. In extreme shock "all definiteness contracts to the pointedness of the sudden and immediate [...]"<sup>36</sup> This happens, in certain ways, for example, with laughing, crying and sneezing. "All elemental felt bodily experience has something of shock, something startling, which doesn't exclude its being at the same time delightful [...]"<sup>37</sup> The felt-bodily dynamic, which will become central in the following exposition, governs the unfolding of the present.

To clarify: The primitive present is, roughly speaking, the undifferentiated ground from which originate the essential structural moments of human experience as the unfolded present. The primitive present persists in the coincidence of five moments, of

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<sup>33</sup> Vgl. ebd., S. 63: "[...] how, in consideration of their differences, the interaction between body and soul is possible."

<sup>34</sup> Vgl. *System I*, S. 149: "[The present] shall perform within the fabric of my study that which was assumed by the Good for Plato, the Ego for Descartes, and the absolute for Hegel: when going astray in locating oneself in the environment, to remain always accessible and unmistakably hold its ground [in der Beirung des Sichfindens in der Umgebung immer zugänglich und unverwechselbar Stand zu halten]." Certainly an interesting view of philosophy, and no less refreshing!

<sup>35</sup> *Der unerschöpfliche*, S. 48

<sup>36</sup> Ebd., S. 49

<sup>37</sup> *Der unerschöpfliche*, S. 122

which two have been mentioned. The moments are *here, now, being, this* (principle of individuation)<sup>38</sup> and *I* (subjectivity.) “One’s own self, the pure I-moment of that which we are, is, just like the *here* and *now*, enfolded in the primitive present.”<sup>39</sup> It isn’t possible to discuss the meaning and phenomenological demonstration of each moment.<sup>40</sup> They are interdependent and mutually determined. It’s important for our purposes to highlight that the temporal and spatial dimensions influence each other. Furthermore, the moment of the individuation of the I hangs together with the unfolding of the present. Regarding the rest, we’ll have to satisfy ourselves with intimations. We’ll leave much to the side and allow the moments *here, now* and *I* to speak for themselves, concentrating above all on the primitive spatial dimension that presents itself as the absolute location of the felt body.

#### **b. The Present as the Origin of the Absolute Location**

The absolute location of the *pure* felt body stands out in certain experiences. Schmitz gives a phenomenological demonstration of the absolute location on the examples of anxiety and pain. The upshot of his elaborate exposition of anxiety phenomena is: “*Anxiety proves to be an inhibited impulse to get away [‘Weg!’]: an impulse to escape that is so to speak deflected.*”<sup>41</sup> This is most clear in panicked anxiety. There is a blocked urge to escape the situation. It should be clear that one doesn’t want to get away from a particular *relative* location, but rather from the *absolute* location of the felt body. The same is basically true in the case of pain. Schmitz introduces a figure of speech to illustrate his point: “One wants to climb up the walls because of the pain.”<sup>42</sup> Of course, a mere change of *relative* location won’t help. We’re dealing with the absolute location of the felt body, which forms the present as here.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> As principium individuationis the primitive present functions, based on its singularity, as the indispensable criterion for identity and difference. Here it can only be mentioned that this insight could shed light on the notion of non-duality that comes up in the *Vijñāna Bhairava*. Vgl. *System I*, S. 223-225

<sup>39</sup> *System I*, S. 197

<sup>40</sup> Vgl. ebd., §22-26

<sup>41</sup> Ebd., S. 175

<sup>42</sup> Ebd., S. 186

<sup>43</sup> Vgl. ebd., S. 208. One would perhaps like to counter that the place one wants to get away from is the *relative* location of the anxiety-producing situation. Many examples show, however, that we’re dealing with a more primitive experience of spatiality. Vgl. hierzu ebd., S. 192

## 4. The Structure of the Felt Body

### a. Narrowness and Wideness

The basic structure of the felt body consists in the relation between narrowness and wideness [Enge und Weite]. We've already dealt with a phenomenon where narrowness comes to the fore, namely anxiety. In anxiety, the total location of the felt body constricts. Schmitz sometimes expresses this by saying that the affected individual is forced into narrowness.

Narrowness, however, also belongs to the usual structure of the felt body and plays an essential role: "Narrowness belongs to the absolute location of the felt body as a whole and provides it with unity."<sup>44</sup> Narrowness in this form is felt "in the dull pressure usually experienced on the felt body and which is experienced in the entire body."<sup>45</sup> Narrowness holds the islands of the felt body together. In a deeper sense it is a fundamental manifestation of the primitive present: "For individuation, to differentiate the way she currently is [Soseins], a person requires the *here* and *now* as the narrowness that allows her to be affected [leiblich betroffen werden]."<sup>46</sup>

Wideness – a helpful translation in this context is *expanse* – is the fundamental concept in Schmitz' phenomenological theory of space. Wideness is unavoidably present with narrowness as its counterpart. The absolute location lifts itself from the expanse "as if from a background."<sup>47</sup> After a thorough examination of spatial phenomena, Schmitz comes to the conclusion that there is only a "single wideness"<sup>48</sup> that presents itself both in experience of the felt body and our perception of "external space."<sup>49</sup> Roughly speaking, Schmitz claims that this wideness or expanse is the origin of our spatial consciousness.

However, this would seem to imply that one's own felt body were as large as the universe.<sup>50</sup> The absurdity of this idea can be mitigated through an explanation of the *phenomenal* size of wideness. The pure form of wideness is not expressible in units of

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<sup>44</sup> *System II/1*, S. 73

<sup>45</sup> Ebd.

<sup>46</sup> *System III/1*, S. 13

<sup>47</sup> Vgl. *System II/1*, S. 74

<sup>48</sup> Vgl. *System III/1*, §125 a) S.193

<sup>49</sup> For a comparison with Kant's theory of space, vgl. ebd., S. 207

<sup>50</sup> Vgl. *System III/1*, S. 204-205

measurement; in other words, it is not measurable in finite lengths or distances. “In this sense of an indivisible and un-measurable magnitude, the expanse of each felt body is indeed as large as the expanse of space, given that they are identical, but not in the way that the distance from Athens to Thebes is the same as the distance from Thebes to Athens and longer than the distance from Athens to Piraeus.”<sup>51</sup> The fundamental theorem of Schmitz’ theory of space reads: “*The endless expanse of space is the wideness belonging to the felt body of each human or animal.*”<sup>52</sup> The relationship between narrowness and wideness – in the form of the felt body’s dynamic, which we’ll discuss below – can determine the phenomenal size of the spatial expanse.

Narrowness and wideness of the felt body are involved in a reciprocal relationship. In the context of this dynamic, Schmitz uses the terms expansion and contraction. He gives a detailed exposition of various forms of expansion, from the nearly unnoticed, everyday occurrences of expansion to cosmic expansions that transport.<sup>53</sup> We’ll have opportunity to more closely consider various forms of expansion when we discuss verses of the *Vijñāna Bhairava*. The ecstatic-universal form of expansion as rising sense of total oneness plays an important role for religion.<sup>54</sup> This measureless expanse or wideness will become a theme in the interpretation of the *Vijñāna Bhairava*.

Normal felt-bodily sensations or experience remain between the extremes of measureless narrowness and wideness: “just as rarely as they perish in immeasurable narrowness, do they reach the boundless, pure, immeasurable expanse. This is only achieved in extremely heightened forms of ecstasy, where the felt body deliquesces and flows into endlessness.”<sup>55</sup> We’ll return to the subject of felt-bodily ecstasy as a possibility of mystic revelation.

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<sup>51</sup> Ebd., S. 205

<sup>52</sup> Ebd., S. 206

<sup>53</sup> Vgl. *System* II/1, §48 b) S. 75-83

<sup>54</sup> Vgl. ebd., S. 78

<sup>55</sup> Ebd., S. 74

## b. The felt-bodily Dynamic

More essential than the mere schematic structure of the felt body is its dynamic. In *The Inexhaustible Object* [*Der Unerschöpfliche Gegenstand*] Schmitz has advantageously condensed the thorough and in-depth study carried out in *System of Philosophy*:

Being a felt body [Leiblichsein] means first of all: existing between narrowness and wideness and neither coming completely away from the one nor the other, at least so long as conscious experience endures. In severe shock consciousness vanishes in extreme contraction without expansion; in falling asleep and related trance states, it vanishes in extreme expansion without contraction [...] So long as we remain conscious, contraction and expansion can at most partly dissociate: as privative expansion, for example in moments of relief [...] but also when one's heart opens in a peaceful, natural setting; or as privative contraction in the case of distressful or joyful fright [im peinlichen oder freudigen Erschrecken].<sup>56</sup>

Expansion and contraction compete with each other as swelling and tension [Schwellung und Spannung].<sup>57</sup> They uphold each other in this productive struggle. When one of them becomes too strong, the relationship breaks down. This productive antagonism maintains the unity of the felt body.<sup>58</sup> To illustrate this, one can imagine a balloon: if the swelling provided by the gas breaks through the tension provided by the membrane, the entire relationship disintegrates. Swelling and tension then dissipate. In this case, the swelling flows into the expanse.

Felt-bodily experience is characterized by the relationship between tension and swelling. Dominance of tension united with swelling occurs in anxiety and pain. "On the other hand, dominance of swelling united with tension is the essence of pleasure or lust [Wollust], which not only occurs in relation to sex [...]"<sup>59</sup> Inhalation<sup>60</sup> is an example where tension and swelling maintain an approximate balance.

Felt-bodily intensity is the index of the strength of the antagonism between tension and swelling. Schmitz claims that felt-bodily intensity is related to intensity of

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<sup>56</sup> *Der unerschöpfliche*, S. 122

<sup>57</sup> Vgl. *System* II/1, §49, S. 89

<sup>58</sup> Ebd., S. 93: "Thus it emerges that the tension belonging to the absolute location of the felt body as indivisible (definite) extension maintains and demonstrates the felt body's unity."

<sup>59</sup> *Der unerschöpfliche*, S. 123

<sup>60</sup> This is not always the case. For an extensive treatment of inhalation, *System* II/1, §49 b) S. 94

experience or, more specifically, the intensification of sensory qualities.<sup>61</sup> We already mentioned, above, the relationship between felt-bodily intensity and consciousness: that unconsciousness or sleep can occur when the felt-bodily dynamic comes apart. This can happen at both extremes of the dynamic.

## 5. Mastering the Felt Body

In preparation for the interpretation of the *Vijñāna Bhairava*, this section provides an overview of the mystic techniques for felt body mastery that Schmitz discusses in *System of Philosophy*. Here I can only provide a cursory presentation of Schmitz' careful phenomenological analysis. I'll attempt to highlight aspects that are of particular importance for understanding the *Vijñāna Bhairava*.

The goal of mystics is to reach special states that are essentially characterized by immeasurable expanse or wideness.<sup>62</sup> We'll refer to these states in general as forms of the mystic ecstasy described by Schmitz in the third volume of *System of Philosophy*. The islands of the felt-body deliquesce, the self merges with the present, one sinks into the original spatiality of the felt body or rather opens into it. These states are variously described, but the same features are more or less always present. Schmitz documents this within both Christian and "Eastern" mysticism.<sup>63</sup> One speaks of endlessness, eternity, an oceanic tranquility, a great emptiness, absorption in God. Careful distinctions between the phenomena are not important for our purposes.

We've already provided the basis for the techniques of the mystics, that is, the felt-bodily dynamic: "The range of possible phases between contraction and expansion, between the extremes of measureless narrowness and measureless wideness, form so to speak the claviature for such mystics [who speak of the great emptiness], upon which they must learn to play like virtuosos."<sup>64</sup> In order to better understand the possibility of guiding this dynamic, we'll take a look at a few techniques.

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<sup>61</sup> Vgl. ebd., S. 117-119

<sup>62</sup> Vgl. ebd., S. 74

<sup>63</sup> Vgl. u. a. *System* III/1, §124 c) S. 184 und *System* II/1, §57 c) S. 190

<sup>64</sup> Vgl. *System* II/1, S. 86-97



First, I'll discuss Schmitz' exposition of techniques in Zen Buddhism, as here the underlying, simplified mechanism for mystic mastery of the felt-body comes to the fore: "the possibility of unleashing privative expansion through intense contraction."<sup>65</sup> Here it's necessary to clarify two concepts which above were only mentioned incidentally: privative contraction and privative expansion. In the privative forms, the productive antagonism between expansion and contraction is in a certain way suspended without completely dissolving the felt-bodily dynamic – which would lead to unconsciousness. The basic form of privative contraction is shock [Schreck].<sup>66</sup> One notices this aspect of shock in the momentary emptiness that enters consciousness. In severe shock, the felt-bodily dynamic is in fact broken and one becomes unconscious. Expansion tends to follow privative contraction. This is demonstrated in the everyday experience of relief, which feels like weightlessness, following a small shock.

"In Chinese-Japanese Zen Buddhism, shock occasionally plays the decisive role in facilitating the possibility of passage to enlightenment."<sup>67</sup> Schmitz gives an account of a well-known story: A Zen master suddenly grabs a questioning student by the nose and twists. In this moment, the student attains enlightenment. The privative contraction caused by the shock reverts to expansion, subsequently breaking into the measureless expanse, "and in relation to the now of the present, this measureless expanse is eternity."<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, the student must be prepared for this. The student learns, particularly through breathing exercises, to make use of the opportunity presented by the shock, so that the expansion doesn't merely "fall back into its everyday [...] state of being bound to contraction."<sup>69</sup>

The releasing of immeasurable expanse need not, however, occur suddenly and unexpectedly. One can learn through meditative exercises to gently and subtly steer the felt-bodily dynamic so that one opens into the measureless expanse in a controlled manner. The risk with such methods is that one will fall asleep. This can be prevented through concentration. Schmitz discusses a technique from an ancient Chinese meditation book, which he claims was certainly influenced by Indian techniques. The book teaches

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<sup>65</sup> Ebd., S. 178

<sup>66</sup> Vgl. ebd., §56

<sup>67</sup> Ebd., S. 179

<sup>68</sup> Ebd., S. 180

<sup>69</sup> Ebd.

exercises that involve silent sitting with the goal “to rise [...] above the *here* and *now* to spatial and temporal endlessness.”<sup>70</sup> Schmitz claims that these exercises require one to concentrate in such a way that one is able “to find one’s own middle, the narrowness of the felt body.”<sup>71</sup>

“Among the traditional systems for mastering the felt body, Indian yoga is the most complex and subtle.”<sup>72</sup> We won’t discuss the various, sometimes unusual methods. In yoga, exercises from the realm of self-awareness (concentration exercises) are combined with exercises in the realm of muscular activity (bodily postures), allowing a skilled mastery of the felt body.

Conscious intervention in the felt-bodily dynamic doesn’t necessarily lead to extraordinary states. With autogenic training one can willfully modify the speed of one’s pulse through autosuggestion.<sup>73</sup> Expansion of the felt body regularly accompanies deceleration of the pulse, whereas contraction of the felt body occurs alongside acceleration. Here one could possibly determine a law-like interaction between the body and the felt body.

## 5. The *Vijñāna Bhairava*

### a. Brief Introduction

*Vijñāna Bhairava* basically means “mystic knowledge of godly reality.” The text contains various teachings and can be considered a practical handbook for mystic experience.<sup>74</sup> The text dates approximately to the sixth century and belongs to the body and world affirming branches of Indian spirituality.<sup>75</sup> It is one of the oldest and most authoritative texts of Kashmir Shaivism.<sup>76</sup> The *Vijñāna Bhairava* is exceptional for many reasons<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Ebd., S. 182

<sup>71</sup> Ebd.

<sup>72</sup> Ebd., S. 189

<sup>73</sup> For example, through mental representations or verbal expression. Vgl. *System* II/1, S.84-87

<sup>74</sup> Vgl. *Vijñāna Bhairava*, S. 19

<sup>75</sup> Vgl. ebd., S. 11

<sup>76</sup> For an introduction to this tradition, Bäumer, Bettina: *Wege ins Licht*

and contains methods from every direction of Indian spirituality.<sup>78</sup> In contrast to the doctrine of gradual unification with God, the *Vijñāna Bhairava* belongs to the school of spontaneous and immediate enlightenment, “which in the form of Zen Buddhism has reached as far as Japan.”<sup>79</sup> The *Vijñāna Bhairava* is part of a once living tradition. The extremely short verses would usually be complimented by the relationship between master and student.<sup>80</sup>

## **b. General Interpretation based on the Phenomenology of the Felt Body**

In this section I'll provide an overview of the form and content of the *Vijñāna Bhairava*. I'll concentrate on the aspects that are most important for a general felt-bodily phenomenological interpretation. I hope to show that felt-bodily experience to a great extent forms the ground of the text. This general interpretation should serve as preparation and background for the analysis of selected verses to follow.

The *Vijñāna Bhairava* comprises 164 verses. The central theme is becoming one with Śiva,<sup>81</sup> the highest God and reality. More precisely, it's about a certain experience or state of being.<sup>82</sup> The text “is of an eminently practical nature.”<sup>83</sup> It teaches 112 methods of concentration that aim to help the student attain mystical insight: that is, experience.

Bettina Bäumer provides an extended explanation of the title *Vijñāna Bhairava*: “Bhairava whose essence is mystical insight.”<sup>84</sup> In popular religious consciousness, Bhairava is the terrible incarnation [schreckliche Gestalt] of Śiva. Bäumer claims, however, that the mythological aspects of the god don't play a role.<sup>85</sup> I would somewhat revise this claim. It should be clear from the discussion of shock [Schreck] in relation to

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<sup>77</sup> It should at least be briefly mentioned, for example, that in contrast to many spiritual traditions, women were not excluded from the practice. Vgl. *Vijñāna Bhairava*, S. 52: „They were even supposed to be better qualified for mystic experience than men.”

<sup>78</sup> At that time, Kashmir was an important center for intellectual activity and a gathering place for various schools of spiritual thought. Vgl. *Wege ins Licht*, S. 15-16

<sup>79</sup> *Vijñāna Bhairava*, S. 11

<sup>80</sup> Vgl. ebd., S. 49-50

<sup>81</sup> For Schmitz' treatment of the four-armed ascetic god who, in the whirl of his dance, reveals the imperturbable peace of the one who dances, see *System III/4*, §212 b) δ), S. 53

<sup>82</sup> Vgl. *Vijñāna Bhairava*, S. 14

<sup>83</sup> Ebd., S. 49

<sup>84</sup> Ebd., S. 16

<sup>85</sup> Vgl. ebd., S. 14

the felt-bodily dynamic and mystic techniques that precisely this terrifying aspect of the God likely corresponds to the world of experience from which the text originated. The mystic state of Bhairava may be indescribable and ungraspable,<sup>86</sup> yet here one recognizes in the central position of the terror-inducing God the presence of an intuitive knowledge of the felt body.<sup>87</sup> We've seen that the privative contraction caused by shock plays an essential role in unleashing measureless expanse or wideness. This expansiveness is the underlying phenomenon of ecstatic mystic states. I don't mean to completely identify the shock as discussed by Schmitz with the god Bhairava. In any case, I'm convinced that the symbolism of Bhairava attests to an understanding of the function of intensity in the felt-bodily dynamic.

Verses 11 through 17 exhibit a negative theology that also points to the felt-bodily nature of the mystic experience in question. According to Schmitz, "negative theology sets God's transcendence and incomprehensibility, with a wall of negations, against every attempt to behold or grasp."<sup>88</sup> Indeed, verses 11 through 17 contain a series of such negations: Bhairava is not to be identified with symbols or elements of metaphysics. "God as form or shape should be understood as the deception of a magician [...]"<sup>89</sup> Schmitz comes to the following conclusion, which in my opinion is also applicable to the *Vijñāna Bhairava*: "The negative theology of the mystics seems always to have its sharp point only against thinking oriented towards persons or figural entities that imitate bodily form; by contrast, it spares the atmospheric – that is to say, the world of feeling – and even preserves its genuinely spatial characteristics."<sup>90</sup> The state of Bhairava is repeatedly described in a language of feeling. Furthermore, the centrality of the spatial dimension of the experience will only become clearer as we proceed. Thus we're primarily dealing with a felt-bodily experience.

The form of the text is a dialogue between the goddess Bhairavī and the god Bhairava. The gazelle-eyed goddess has studied all the texts, but she is still plagued with doubts. Bhairava thus reveals to his lover the secret knowledge in the form of 112

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<sup>86</sup> Vgl. ebd.

<sup>87</sup> The twofold nature of the god also fits with Schmitz' analysis of shock: it can be a source of dismay or joy. Bhairava is terrible, but he is also the source of the highest bliss.

<sup>88</sup> *System* III/4, S. 199

<sup>89</sup> Ebd., Verse 8.b-10, S. 62

<sup>90</sup> *System* III/4, S. 201

methods. At the end of the dialogue the goddess becomes one with Śiva. The symbolism implicitly equates the mystic state with sexual ecstasy and unification with God. Here we have everything in one: the claim that the same kind of felt-bodily experience underlies all three experiences is strengthened.

Bhairava's companion is also referred to as Śakti. "In brief, the Śakti is a godly, cosmic, vital and spiritual energy [...] She is 'incarnated' as a goddess who takes on innumerable forms in Hinduism [...]"<sup>91</sup> I'd like to tentatively propose that talk of energy in the *Vijñāna Bhairava* is to be understood as consciousness for the dynamism of the felt-bodily dynamic.<sup>92</sup> "Without Śakti, it's impossible to realize Śiva, the absolute."<sup>93</sup> In order to attain mystic insight, it's thus necessary to learn to handle this energy, or in other words to practice mystic mastery of the felt body. Later we'll support this hypothesis in the interpretation of individual verses.

## c. Interpretation of Selected Verses

### i. Introductory Remarks

I don't mean to make the impression that Hermann Schmitz' phenomenology of the felt body can offer an exhaustive understanding of the *Vijñāna Bhairava*. This paper completely ignores a considerable amount of topics. I'm certain, however, that the phenomenological interpretation provided here is not completely off the mark.

The text is unique "because it can be directly applied to all concrete life situations."<sup>94</sup> This was indicated in the introduction to this paper with the example that involved sneezing. Unfortunately, however, we'll have to leave out many of the finest

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<sup>91</sup> *Wege ins Licht*, S. 22

<sup>92</sup> Śakti is inseparable from Śiva. She is referred to as his energy, but there is an essential unity. She "is the sole cause of the creation of diversity" (*Vijñāna Bhairava*, S. 46). When one takes into account that the felt-bodily dynamic regulates the enfolding of the present and that the primitive present, as principium individuationis, is the origin of identity and diversity, the relationship between Śiva and Śakti receives a deeper philosophical meaning.

<sup>93</sup> *Vijñāna Bhairava*, S. 46

<sup>94</sup> *Ebd.*, S. 48

verses. I'll only handle a few of those which are relatively easy to interpret and where the felt body clearly stands out. The concentration methods or meditative exercises can be roughly broken into categories,<sup>95</sup> and I believe it's arguable that the structure of the dialogue has a pedagogical function. One point, however, should become clear: that an essential step in mastery of the felt body is increasing self-awareness for it.

A word about the translation. Engaging with the Sanskrit terms is unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper. I'd at least like to briefly introduce one concept, *śūnya*. In the introduction to her translation of the *Vijñāna Bhairava*, Bäumer explains the concept, which means "emptiness," over a few pages. *Śūnya* "is a symbol for the *endless expanse* [Weite; my emphasis] and for the omnipresent nature of the absolute."<sup>96</sup> "The text attests to a fascination with emptiness in all forms, and a series of concentration methods are dedicated to it."<sup>97</sup> "Some meditations result in one's attaining 'a body that consists of empty space' [...]"<sup>98</sup> At this point it shouldn't be necessary to emphasize that *śūnya* at least partly has to do with the spatiality of the felt body.<sup>99</sup>

I'll otherwise rely on Bäumer's expertise in both Sanskrit and Kashmir Shaivism. Bäumer cautions against comparing Shaivism with a Western system of thought. I'd like to believe that the difficulty lies more in the fact that the felt body is almost completely absent in Western philosophy. My approach proceeds from the proposition that the terms and verses of the *Vijñāna Bhairava* lack conceptual precision. I don't mean this negatively. The text is descriptive and suggestive, which aids self-awareness by drawing attention to the appropriate phenomena.

In what follows, I'll handle the verses in groups.

## ii. Breathing Exercises and Locating the Center

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<sup>95</sup> For Bäumer's categorization, vgl. ebd., S. 22-42

<sup>96</sup> Ebd., S. 31

<sup>97</sup> Ebd., S. 29. In a footnote Bäumer lists verses 32, 33, 39, 40, 42, 44, 45, 58, 89, 120, 127, 128, 134 and 149.

<sup>98</sup> Ebd., S. 31

<sup>99</sup> Another important concept would perhaps be *śamādhi*. Bäumer and Schmitz give essentially the same definition. According to Schmitz, *śamādhi* is the goal of yoga and, in relation to the felt body, measureless expanse "in which all locational determinations – the *here* and *there*, so the absolute location and with it the narrowness of the felt body – sink as if into an ocean" (Vgl. *System* II/1, S. 190). In the glossary Bäumer defines *śamādhi* as the highest level of yoga: absorption in the absolute (*Vijñāna Bhairava*, S. 227).

“Virtually all *dhāraṇās*<sup>100</sup> involve locating the center in all conceivable meanings.”<sup>101</sup> I have little doubt that this at least partly has to do with finding the center of the felt body: that means, with finding the narrowness which, belonging to the absolute location and persisting in the tension of the felt-bodily dynamic, sustains the felt body.

Bhairava spoke: exhalation shall rise and inhalation shall descend [...] the highest energy is united in a *visarga* (consisting of two points). The state of fullness is attained through concentrative fixation (keeping) of the breath on the two places (points) of its origin.<sup>102</sup>

The god Bhairava wisely begins his teaching with breathing exercises. I assume that we’re dealing with breathing as a felt-bodily experience and not only as a bodily activity. Inhalation is for Schmitz the most important example of the interaction of contraction and expansion.<sup>103</sup> As long as one is still living, breathing offers direct access to the felt-bodily dynamic. The two points in the verse illustrate the two poles, contraction and expansion. These originate in the felt-bodily dynamic, that is, in the antagonism between tension and swelling. The term “energy” refers to this dynamism. The first thing one must learn is to guide one’s attention to this relationship. This exercise is thus mainly about becoming self-aware. Verses 24 through 28 are dedicated to breathing.

### iii. The Spatiality of the Felt Body

One should concentrate on oneself in the form of empty space, unlimited by cardinal directions. Then the power of consciousness becomes free from all supports, one witnesses one’s essential nature.<sup>104</sup>

We’ve seen that the spatiality of the felt body is pre-dimensional. For this reason, the “empty space” is not limited by any cardinal direction. The emptiness refers to the expanse or wideness of the felt body, which is essentially immeasurable. For further

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<sup>100</sup> That is, concentration methods. Vgl. *Vijñāna Bhairava*, S. 16

<sup>101</sup> Ebd., S. 26

<sup>102</sup> Ebd., Verse 24, S. 70

<sup>103</sup> Vgl. *System II/1*, S. 94

<sup>104</sup> *Vijñāna Bhairava*, Vers 92, S. 148

explanation, I'll cite Schmitz: "Everyone is familiar with spatial extension not just through her own body, from which she – as a 'soul' or even a 'pure I' – were supposedly free, but rather through her self, her very own self." Schmitz continues: "However, this is usually inconspicuous and therefore difficult to realize [...]"<sup>105</sup> This exercise thus aims at awakening consciousness for the spatiality of the felt body.

When during the night, by the new moon, one meditates on the darkness for a long time, one attains the being of Bhairava.<sup>106</sup>

Here it's important to remember that the perceptual image of the body – the fixed mental representation made from visual impressions – is to be differentiated from the fluctuating form of the felt body. I believe this exercise helps one disengage from the perceptual image of the body. Besides that, "the transition into a dark room or the arrival of night"<sup>107</sup> is similar to closing one's eyes – which serves as an appropriate transition to the next verse.

When one concentrates one's mind [Geist] on the inside of the skull and dwells thus with closed eyes, one gradually, through firmness of mind, achieves the highest goal.<sup>108</sup>

Many of the concentration methods require that one close the eyes. Verse 36 even instructs to close all the sensory openings – ears, eyes, nose, and mouth – with the hands.<sup>109</sup> This seems to me in part to have a ritual or symbolic aspect. However, we've seen – admittedly without satisfactorily discussing its theoretical meaning – that feeling the felt body takes place without implementing the five senses. "My felt-bodily state, when I've thus closed my eyes, leads to more awareness of myself [...] It invites me more than usual to become self-aware."<sup>110</sup> I interpret the "firmness of mind" mentioned in the verse to be the heightened attention required to become aware of the felt body.

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<sup>105</sup> *System* II/1, S. 42

<sup>106</sup> *Vijñāna Bhairava*, Vers 87, S. 143

<sup>107</sup> *System* III/4, S. 209

<sup>108</sup> *Vijñāna Bhairava*, Vers 34, S. 83

<sup>109</sup> Vgl. ebd., S. 84-85

<sup>110</sup> *System* III/4, S.208. For Schmitz' treatment of closing one's eyes and the "looking inward" see *System* III/4, §217 a) α), S. 207



#### iv. Awareness of Expansion

Schmitz discusses various forms of expansion. What he terms “trivial expansion” remains mostly unnoticed in everyday life. To illustrate this form of expansion, Schmitz cites a test subject who reports experiencing a slight feeling of opening or expansion. This feeling was reported to occur when merely thinking about a familiar person.<sup>111</sup>

When one experiences great joy, as when one is reunited with a friend (or relative) after a long time, one should meditate on the origin of this joy – then one will become absorbed and spiritually [geistig] one with it (this joy).<sup>112</sup>

This verse contains more than inspiring words. In the structure of the *Vijñāna Bhairava* as a whole, they have a pedagogical function. When the student’s awareness is purposefully guided to the phenomenon, the expansion (that is, joy) is raised to the level of discourse and becomes recognizable. Verse 70 teaches the possibility of intentionally giving rise to expansion by recalling “the joy that one has experienced with a woman through kissing, tenderness and embrace.”<sup>113</sup> This may at first seem trivial, yet we’re dealing with the possibility of intentional influence of the felt-bodily dynamic. Implementing the imagination is a first step towards this accomplishment. Furthermore, it should be emphasized that one is instructed to comprehend the *origin* or arising of the joy, that is, one should observe it within a relation.

When sleep has not yet come, but the impressions of the external world have faded – this state can be touched by the mind [Geist]. Here the goddess, transcendence, is revealed.<sup>114</sup>

Schmitz establishes that there is an experience of expansion while falling asleep.<sup>115</sup> He supports this claim with the association found in various literature and religions between eternity and sleep. Besides that, we’ve already seen that expansion can lead to falling asleep (unconsciousness) when the dynamic between tension and swelling

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<sup>111</sup> Vgl. *System* II/1, S. 74-75

<sup>112</sup> *Vijñāna Bhairava*, Vers 71, S. 126

<sup>113</sup> Ebd., S. 125

<sup>114</sup> Ebd., Vers 75, S. 130

<sup>115</sup> Vgl. *System* II/1, §48 b) ζ) S. 83

breaks apart. This verse raises once again an unnoticed, recurring phenomenon to the level of reflection. I believe that these insights gradually join together, resulting in an intuitive knowledge of the felt body. Just as the child gradually becomes aware of, and masters, her body, the student becomes familiar with her *felt* body.

## v. Ecstatic Sexual States and the Possibility of Mystic Revelation

Sexual rituals were restricted to small circles of initiated adepts and required a high level of spiritual development.<sup>116</sup> Schmitz would probably appreciate this: “Sexual ecstasy often runs too naively into unconscious transience that its inherent capacity for mystic revelation could be realized.”<sup>117</sup>

The joy experienced in the moment of unification with Śakti (one’s partner) through the elation of complete penetration is like the bliss of Brahman. It is the joy of one’s own self.<sup>118</sup>

For a basic idea of how this related to the felt body, I’ll cite Schmitz:

The extreme contraction in orgasm is followed by an ecstatic rush [Rausch], the streaming or sinking into measureless expanse. The intoxicating ecstasy deepens in the rush to the loss of the absolute location and self-consciousness. The human abandons herself to the measureless expanse into which she sinks.<sup>119</sup>

Under normal circumstances, sexual ecstasy, when attained, only grants a small rush<sup>120</sup>, because the felt-bodily dynamic so to speak erratically breaks apart through hyperextension.

One should steer the mind [das Denken] that is completely filled with joy in the middle between “fire” and “poison.” Alone or filled with breath one becomes united with the bliss of love.<sup>121</sup>

I’ll rely on Bäumer’s explanation of the terms. In the secret language of the tradition, “fire” and “poison” have various meanings. “At the level of loving union, ‘fire’ means

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<sup>116</sup> Vgl. *Wege ins Licht*, S. 21

<sup>117</sup> *System III/1*, S. 183

<sup>118</sup> *Vijñāna Bhairava*, Vers 69, S. 123

<sup>119</sup> *System III/1*, S. 167

<sup>120</sup> Vgl. *System III/1*, S. 192

<sup>121</sup> *Vijñāna Bhairava*, Vers 68, S. 120

the beginning of the sexual act and ‘poison’ its end.’<sup>122</sup> The terms, however, also relate to the practice in the *Vijñāna Bhairava* as a whole. “In this context, ‘fire’<sup>123</sup> means the contraction [Zusammenziehen] of energy and ‘poison’ the expansion [Ausdehnung] of energy, through which the Kuṇḍalinī<sup>124</sup> [that is, energy] arises.”<sup>125</sup> According to Bäumer, contraction and expansion are the two basic movements of this energy. Thus the hypothesis that the term “energy” denotes the felt-bodily dynamic or its intensity is supported.

## 6. Concluding Remarks

I refer to this paper as a preliminary interpretation of the *Vijñāna Bhairava* because it merely locates the tip of the iceberg. Many rich verses were left out – I’m thinking particularly of those which have to do with intense felt-bodily experiences, such as pain. Furthermore, there are methods that we didn’t mention at all; for example, mantra meditation, for which Schmitz’ phenomenology of the felt body also provides a theoretical point of reference.<sup>126</sup>

Above all, what’s most fascinating about the *Vijñāna Bhairava* is that it is merely the written remains of a once living tradition. The relationship between master and student is supposed to have been of great importance.<sup>127</sup> It would thus be interesting to research the relationship between felt-bodily communication (in Schmitz’ sense)<sup>128</sup> and felt-bodily self-awareness.

Finally I’d like to say a word about mystic experience. Here I don’t believe it’s about attaining a constant state of mystical absorption. Bäumer states: “Once

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<sup>122</sup> Ebd., S. 120

<sup>123</sup> Interestingly, Schmitz also uses the metaphor of fire when he writes about the narrowness of the felt body. Vgl. *System II/1*, S. 74: “In anxiety and pain it shows itself as an unbearable, consuming fire [...]”; and S. 74, where it is characterized as “a hearth” [Herd].

<sup>124</sup> Unfortunately it’s not possible here to discuss the meaning of Kuṇḍalinī. This refers to, grossly oversimplifying, the energy already referred to as Śakti. Vgl. *Vijñāna Bhairava*, S. 38. Schmitz broaches the topic in his discussion of yoga techniques. Vgl. *System II/1*, §57 c) S. 189

<sup>125</sup> *Vijñāna Bhairava*, S. 121

<sup>126</sup> For the topic of mantra, vgl. *System II/1*, S. 193. Furthermore Schmitz deals with the topic of mandala, which is also found in Kashmir Shaivism. Vgl. hierzu *System III/4*, S. 215-217

<sup>127</sup> Vgl. *Vijñāna Bhairava*, S. 49

<sup>128</sup> Vgl. u. a. *Der unerschöpfliche*, S.135-140

experienced, the point is to keep this state of consciousness present, so that a spontaneity and ecstasy expand to all areas of life.”<sup>129</sup> Schmitz appears to have established something similar within Christian mysticism: “This rapture can also become permanent, persisting so to speak with its own voice, like a bass beneath the melody of life.”<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> *Vijñāna Bhairava*, S. 42

<sup>130</sup> *System III/4*, S. 189

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