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## **Rethinking the Body: An Introduction**

In this volume we are pursuing two objectives. On the one hand, we want to address and study the concept of the body in India. On the other, we want to clarify to the German and European reader, using the example of India, that the human body is understood differently in foreign cultures as to European culture. The two objectives are linked and represent the specific aim of this volume. They raise the question of what is understood by the body in the respective cultural context.

### **The “body” in humanities and social sciences**

The difference that was previously used in Germany to distinguish between “Körper” and “Leib,” whereby “Körper” refers to the physical body and “Leib” to the animated body, we consider not meaningful. This difference established a dualism, which, on the basis of new research in the natural and social sciences and humanities, as well as material from other cultures, is outmoded and limits the connectivity of appropriate research to international debate. In place of this, we are assuming a multidimensional understanding of the body, whereby it must be specified which aspects are meant in each case. As we will see, the widespread difference between a dualistic European and a monistic Indian understanding of the body is too narrowly considered and inadequate. For us, a context-related examination of differences such as between spirit and body, consciousness and soul, purity and impurity, nature and culture seems necessary. Our thoughts and considerations on this matter are further specified below. Therefore, here we should initially take a look at the central discussions on the body currently taking place in Germany before we tackle the concepts of the body of India.

Since the beginning of the 1980s, the body has become an important topic in humanities and social sciences in Germany (see KAMPER/WULF 1982; FEHER 1989); a topic that has continuously attracted attention and today is also one of the main topics in cultural studies research in other European countries (see ANDRIEU 2006; MARZANO 2007). In view of the diversity of the research that has become available in the meantime, it is almost impossible to overlook this area, particularly with regard to the extent of research carried out on the human body, without it being specifically addressed. From our point of view, there is currently broad agreement on the central meaning of body images and body concepts for the processes of cultural self-address and self-interpretation. The origin of the modern body with the developing processes of distancing and disciplining, the visualisation

of the inner self and self-observation, the willingness for knowledge and power, has been explored in several analyses. Today the questions of *dematerialisation* (1), *technologisation* (2), *fragmentation* (3), *sexuality* (4) and the *performativity of the body* (5), among others, are to the fore.

(1) The media is playing an effective role in the *dematerialisation of the body*, body perceptions and experiences. The origins of this process can already be traced back to when people in society became literate and developed writing skills as a result of the introduction of printing and the implementation of general compulsory education. Now, a physical body presence is no longer required; instead the presence of a text detached from its author is sufficient. To be understood the text no longer has to be read by a person who is present in the physical sense. In fact, individual silent reading of the text is enough. With the spread of image media comes an increase in the dematerialisation of the body as no longer the physical presence, but the transformation of the body into the image, becomes important. This transformation is recorded in one process, in which the world becomes the image and Heidegger characterises as follows for modernity: The important change is not that the image of the world changes in the transition from the middle ages to modernity, but that in modern times the world is perceived as an image (see HEIDEGGER 1980, p. 88). In new media, it is transformed into the image for the possibility of a worldwide ubiquity and simultaneity of human body images. The price is the dematerialisation of the body and many body processes. The image dependency today and the new forms of idolatry appear as irrefutable results of this development (see HUPPAUF/WULF 2009).

(2) In this process of abstraction, the *technologisation* of living and world conditions plays an important role. Here it is mainly the processes of the body's assimilation to machines that are important, if not decisive, for future development. The aim of the technologies of the living is an ever-increasing displacement of the interfaces between body and machine into the body interior. With increasingly extensive, complex and miniaturised prostheses, the age- or illness-related disabilities of the body can be compensated. And the development is continuing — in the long term, life technologies, and here in particular genetic engineering and reproductive technology, transform the human body and our understanding of the body with a lasting effect. Virtual technologies are also opening up new perspectives here.

(3) These processes are accompanied by the *fragmentation* of the human body, which is driven by, among other things, the portrayal of bodies and body parts in new media, for example in advertisements. Here the body in parts becomes the subject for historical/anthropological research. For example, the fragmentation process, religious and ritualistic practices with body parts, dismemberment of body parts and violence, gender-specific fetishes and the eroticization of individual body parts, are of interest. Body parts are examined as *pars pro toto* for the entire person; it is about the relationship of the medium of embodiment and body, expression and incorporation (see BENTHIEN/WULF 2001; BÖHME 2006).

(4) The differentiation between “sex” and “gender” and the problematisation of this difference in feminist theory and in queer theory (see BUTLER 1997) show that the developments of human *sexuality* are not natural, but, like language and imagination, develop in an historical/cultural process. From the beginning, the human body is connected to sexual discourse; however, this does not construct it. It is not a passive matrix for cultural processes; its sexuality originates in an active process, which results in the materialisation of the sexual body. The body appears as a result of eliminations on the basis of sexual difference and social adjustments, as well as previous experiences.

(5) Finally, the question today of *performativity* of the human body and the performative dimensions of cultural productions is central. Hereby, the performative character of the social practice and the staging of social activities are examined. People physically describe in scenes and arrangements how they perceive their relationship to other people and the world and what implicit knowledge guides them. The interest is the performative, staging and playful character of the social activity. Contingencies and continuities play a significant role here. What are the bases of the performatives and how are they shown in language, power, and action? Rituals are one of the most important forms of social activity that create communities using performances. With the help of ethnographical methods, their constitution, aesthetic form and their changes can be studied. Hereby, the central importance of its performative character for upbringing, education and socialisation is demonstrated. The performative character of social activities also plays an important role in social organisations and institutions (see WULF 2005, 2002; MICHAELS 2007; WULF/ZIRFAS 2005, 2007; GEBAUER/WULF 1995).

### **The body in Indian cultures**

Any attempt to put forward a single concept of the body would be falsifying Hindu or Indian thought, which is based on a variety of independent sources, social groups, languages and regions, religions and beliefs, and which, therefore, cannot be reduced to one, single, uniform world-view. After all, it must not be forgotten that even the term “Hinduism” itself, denoting a monolithic religion, was coined by Muslims to speak of the phenomenon of Indian religious life, whereas the so-called Hindus themselves have not tended to regard themselves as a unitary social group or community. Thus, in those cases where the Hindu conceptions of the body are spoken of, it is usually either simplistic or reductive and even wrong, tending predominantly to focus on just one corpus of literature, mostly within the Sanskrit literature, and merely one social group, mostly the Brahmin priests.

From this point of view, various body concepts appear in relation to South Asia, only some of which we want to focus on: (1) *subtle and gross bodies*, (2) *social bodies*, (3) *the transformation and transgression of the body*, and (4) *the sacrifice as a body and the body as a sacrifice*. Further differentiations include, for example, the tantric, medical, yogic or devotional body (see BOUILLIER/TARABOUT 2002,

WUJASTYK 2001, HOLDREDGE 2008, MAAS 2008 — with further references). In all these concepts and notions it is clear that, as Veena DAS (1985, p. 13) aptly remarked, “the moment we look at the body as a system of meanings rather than as biological substance, it ceases to be merely given. It is, then, culturally created.”

(1) The difference between *subtle and gross bodies* is fundamental for the Indian context. It concerns the religious outlooks, as well as yoga methods still practiced today. Without the classical Sāṃkhya System of Philosophy (see LARSON/BHATTACHARYA 1987), this difference is hardly conceivable. In this system, the process of evolution starts with the emerging of intellect (*buddhi*), which, in turn, produces the ego (*ahaṃkāra*). The ego then produces the mind (*manas*) and five sense faculties (*buddhi-indriya*: ear, skin, eye, tongue and nose) and five corresponding sense organs or action faculties (*karma-indriya*: voice, hand, foot, anus and genitals), the five subtle elements (*tanmātra*: sound, touch, colour, taste and smell) that, in turn, produce the five gross elements (*mahābhūta*: air, wind, fire, water and earth).

In this dualistic philosophy, psychic qualities have physical properties by which they can affect other things. Although the *puruṣas* or individual souls are, in truth, also pure spirit, they are differentiated by a subtle body (*sūkṣma-śarīra*) or a kind of “Seelenhülle.” But basically the various *puruṣas* are identical. They are not individuals which migrate through the worlds and world ages but they are individuations of the one and only *Puruṣa* which is in itself eternal, immovable, pure (spiritual) light and pure consciousness, non-attributive consciousness. It is, therefore, only possible for the liberated to know the *Puruṣa*. All others are deluded by their thoughts and senses, i.e. by their subtle and gross bodies.

When *prakṛti* or the material nature manifests itself in the process of evolution, the *puruṣas* become a gross body because of the law of *karma*. However, the great *Puruṣa* is only seemingly active, in truth only *prakṛti* is active because its constituents, the *guṇas*, are imbalanced through intellect etc. Those who are liberated know about this erroneous relationship because they do not have consciousness of something; they are themselves pure consciousness without any duality any more.

From the conception of body and nature in the Sāṃkhya system, it is clear that salvation or *Puruṣa* is identified with static, immovable, inactive states, whereas suffering is linked with dynamic, active, evolutionary and causal processes, the eternal cycle of ages and rebirth (*saṃsāra*).

A great deal is invested in this system that displays the Indian way of thinking: asceticism, retribution or the Karma system, reincarnation, multi-corporeality and the spiritual and ritualistic salvation teachings. However, it also shows that the question of dematerialisation of the body is a question that has been occupying India from early on. The view did not focus on as much as in modern ages the visualisation of the body and the diffusion through image media, but rather the inner display of a “disembodied being” and in this sense the dematerialisation of body action and thinking. Because, according to the Sāṃkhya System, matter also

comprises thoughts and feelings. This subtle matter is the material from which the rebirth and thus reincarnation takes place. Only its mental and physical dematerialisation finally leads to disembodiment and, through this, release.

(2) Because the body matter also includes theoretical and mental processes, the body is not, according to the Sāṃkhya System and common opinion, a monad that is determined by its physical body limits. In India, the body is thought of as a porous structure and concerns not only the individual, but also the social group. The body becomes a *social body*. Impure actions and thoughts befall, for example, not only the individuals, but also the relatives and family members. Individuality becomes a dividuality (McKim Marriott); the individual body becomes a social body.

This becomes clear, for example, in the Hindu death ritual (see MICHAELS 2004b, GUTSCHOW/MICHAELS 2005), which is fundamentally a gradual transformation of the body in which the bereaved play a part. After the gross body of the dead person has been burnt, the deceased remains in a subtle body with a mouth only the size of a pin, which has feelings but no respective body organs. It is then essentially a type of hungry pest that oppresses the bereaved who have to take care of it so that it finds its place and union with its ancestors. Hereby, the relatives reassemble him in the form of doughboys in a death ritual in accordance with old Ayurvedic beliefs and ideas in order to finally unite him with the three forefathers (father, grandfather and great-grandfather), who are also present in the form of doughboys. The doughboy body is a social body, not an individual one however. “Connected through the sacrificial doughboy” (*sapinda*) is a description of connection and relatedness, which is also considered at birth, endogamy and exogamy conditions and inheritance law: Who is allowed to perform the ancestral ritual is a doughboy associate and thus entitled to inherit. *Sāpindya* relatives form a common body because one is connected through forefathers and foremothers. At the same time, this ritual shows how, in such contexts, an individual body is fragmented into its *membra disiecta* and recomposed.

The social body in Indian concepts of purity and impurity is also clear. To obtain purity or moreover to maintain it, it is necessary, above all, to avoid forbidden body contact. But here the body not only means the physical body and contact with it or its secretions; glances, gestures or words, for example, are forms of body contact that can impurify. In this sense, purity is avoidance of impurity, impurity loss of purity. Since a definition of purity and impurity that would be binding on all Indian religions is not possible, the American ethnologist McKim MARRIOTT (1968, 1989) has proposed, on the basis of the Sāṃkhya-System, to pay attention to the interactions between individuals and social groups. In order to find out who may touch whom, who may enter whose house, who may eat with whom, or who may marry whose daughter, the forms of encounter and exchange matter for the notions of purity and impurity rather than personal antipathies or likings.

(3) The opening of the body limits in the diverse possibilities in India for the *transformation and transgression of the body* becomes particularly clear. Not only

that the sexuality is at least transgressed in a mythological sense and partly reversed, the body itself becomes the room for its transgression. It becomes the preferred place for mirroring ideas and mythological or ritualistic concepts. Whether the world is understood as the body of the gods, the territory or the nation of India in geo-bodies is visualised as Mother India (see RAMASWAMY 2002), or many transformation forms are opened up through incarnations and reincarnations, the organic body is hardly ever viewed as an insurmountable “Hülle” (shell). Transformations from God to person, person to animal or person to ancestor or ghost and *vice versa* are often only regarded as different forms of the incarnation. The self-deification, as Max Weber described certain forms of asceticism, is also easily possible in India as the incarnation of gods in people.

Also the important concept of a second birth with the result of a second, holy body, which every male Hindu from the upper classes receives at his initiation (see Michaels 2004, pp. 71-110), clarifies how much the natural body can be replaced or complemented by a body constructed during a ritual. These ritualistic body transformations and relations are defined considerably by their performativity: It depends on making the new body created during the ritual visible and official.

(4) In many cases, Indian religions and cultures must be understood only from the all-embracing system of sacrifice or the criticism thereof. *The sacrifice as a body* was already seen in the Vedic religion, then later in the cremation of the dead and in ascetic movements also *the body as a sacrifice*. The old Indian sacrifice was largely anthropometrical, corresponded to the body measurements of the organiser of the sacrifice. At the same time, the sacrificer was identified with the sacrifice and thus with the salvation. “In truth, the sacrifice is the person,” is how it is referred to, for example, in Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, a text from roughly 800 BC on whose basis several doctrines of salvation have developed, partly ritualistic, partly of a gnostic/spiritual nature (see MICHAELS 2004, pp. 315-344), whereby the microcosm is equated with the macrocosm or the self with the absolute. While the person and its body can be identified with the whole in this way, the body, especially in tantric forms, is also viewed as the place of the whole world. Hereby, individual organs or body limbs are attributed to the gods or various conscious levels.

In this connection, several forms of asceticism with their special body techniques have, in particular, become accepted (see MICHAELS 2004a): Yoga, fasting or mortification; practices which primarily try to control natural body references such as clothing and nakedness, eating and drinking, walking and sitting, sleeping and being awake, as well as talking and remaining silent. But as a result of the humble and devotional surrender to a god, it also leads to ecstatic forms of expression, whereby the body is predominantly to the fore.

### **Content and perspectives**

In India, as in Europe, when one talks about the body there is not only a perception of the body, but also to some extent there are many conflicting body images and body concepts. Considerable differences appear depending on the historical and cultural context, religious orientation and classes or castes. The diversity of the body images is visible in individuals and communities, as well as in geographical and social territories. This diversity is also expressed in religious and philosophical texts, narratives, rituals and gestures, as well as visualisations and images. It is depicted in the daily lives of people in villages, towns and large modern urban centres. Overlaps with globalised body images in Europe are visible, particularly in the places where body images in contemporary Indian society are being examined. As it is not possible here to describe the extent of the diversity of body images in India, in this volume we will concentrate on three focal points. Firstly, we will examine the role of the body in religious and philosophical texts (Part 1). Different historical and anthropological approaches will be presented here. Subsequently we will explore the role of the body in narratives and ritual performances (Part 2). For this purpose, important narratives containing body images will be consulted. Using predominantly ethnographical studies, we will establish what body images are expressed in rituals and body performances. The performative character of the ritualistic arrangements plays a central role here. Finally, we will examine the contributions of visualisations of the body in images (Part 3). Also here, historical and modern education processes of individual and collective imaginaries, which stem from the influence of new media, will be analysed.

We assume that the body is the result of a design, also in the religious and philosophical texts of India. Over the last 150 years, there have been two important yet different phases. In the first phase, which stretches from 1860 to 1920, Indian intellectuals refer to the body with nationalistic motives, within the context of a newly constituted “Hindu science” of the living body. During the second phase, which spans 1920-1970, a militant Orientalism from a “mixture of cultural relativism, the craze for Hindu spirituality and the political counter-culture movement” (ZIMMERMANN) led to a new understanding of the body. In this phase, emphasis was placed on the fluidity of Indian body perceptions compared to the rigidity of European body perceptions. At the same time, it becomes clear that the body perceptions also adjust to the modern subject due to the demands for knowledge and control. Referring to Foucault, technologies of the self relate to the task of “mobilis[ing] the governmentality of individuals.” With reference to traditional medical knowledge, the Orientalists designed the body as a real object, which was consequently shaped and modernised with the help of colonial strategies. In the process, they overlooked the fact that the body as a real body is a design, which, within the framework of Hindu science, was strengthened using Ayurvedic theories and many Sanskrit quotations, in such a way that its fictional character was no longer visible. The aim of these efforts was to establish the connection between Indian traditions and science in Indian public opinion and

thereby unite traditional beliefs with modern knowledge. With the emergence of new cultural areas and the development of a counter-culture in the 1970s, the body concepts changed. In the process, medical anthropology and the efforts to conceptualise “another body” became particularly important. Hereby, the dialectics between the spiritual image of India created by the nationalists and the Western materialism play a central role, whose dynamics cause conflicts on body images and the understanding of the body up to the present day.

After a reference framework for the current understanding of important aspects of the human body was created, there is now a step back into the history of Indian body thoughts. Here, initially the limits of the body in Brahmanism are revealed. Spirit and heart are recognised as decisive powers, which create the body making it possible for the person to procreate. Particularly important is the skin, which creates the surface of the body, the *tanu*, giving the body its identity. It is the nakedness of the skin that is considered as a differentiating characteristic of the person. With help of the sacrifice, during which the person is like a foetus, it is born with a new body. “In the Vedas, man transforms the nakedness imposed on him into a mode of regulating, or rather modulating, his relations with the other elements of the sacrificial world of which he is the centre” (MALAMOUD).

In various philosophical Sanskrit texts the body of God, primarily in connection with the creation of the universe, plays an important role. Hereby, there is a mutual relationship between the existence of God, its body and its image. In the Sanskrit texts, there is a devotional, a ritualistic and an epistemic approach on this. In the devotional approach, there is a fusion of God, its body and its image. God enters the world of the people with the help of his body. Under the ritualistic approach, there is a difference between the deity, its body and its image. “The image is transformed into a living body of God which is able to receive material homage, in the form of food, flowers, scents, etc” (COLAS). The epistemic approach focuses on the discussion about God’s existence, its body and its image in the texts of the Nyāyā-Vaiśeṣika school between the first and eleventh century.

A particular aspect of the Indian understanding of the body is represented in the practices of Yogis, which have also influenced the philosophical, medical, ritualistic and mythological traditions of Hinduism. The self-externalization of the Yogi in rituals, narratives and philosophy lies at the centre of these practices. This takes place by entering the sun’s rays or penetrating into the body of another being, often another person. The penetration of the Yogi into the body of King Janaka helps him to learn the esoteric teachings and forms the model for the later tantric initiation. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, a commentary described “a Yogi’s gradual reduction of the sense, cognition, and action capacities of another person’s self to a fluid amalgam, which he then incorporates into his own self...” (WHITE). While the ordinary person’s mind leaves his body first upon death, it is different in the case of the Yogi, whose spirit/body connection has already been released through initiation, practices, etc.



In Tantrism, the body is the place of a spiritual experience. Here, the question arises as to how to understand the relationship between the experience in the lived body and the system of representation and symbols that are expressed in sacred texts. This relationship between body and symbolic representation is mimetic. The body is understood as a symbolic system, with whose help the position of the person in the cosmos is determined; at the same time, it is the location of the subjective experience of the Yogi, which is expressed in the breathing. The body as a symbolic system and as lived body are connected and cannot be separated. In the Netratana, therefore, ritual practices for cleansing the body, deification of the body through mantras, and worshipping have their place. The body is an extensive symbolic system, in which meanings are assigned to its individual parts. Hereby, “the primacy of the body as pre-cognitive experience, the existential possibility of culture in contrast to the body and world as pre-given semiotic system” (FLOOD) are important. We have the world in and with the body; as the lived being, the body becomes a symbolic system within a culture. The breath links the lived body experience with the symbolic system of the body. The Yogi moves in mimetic processes between its body and the symbolic system, which opens an “as if” world.

Another perspective of the body can be seen when one considers the humorous and satirical work of Sanskrit. Here “blatant rather than subtle indications as to the character’s status in life, their profession, attitude to life and general proclivities” (BALDISSERA) are presented. The narratives report of grotesque bodies, which are ugly and unsightly, lewdly drunk, have no clear sexual identity, disrupt the established order and attributions and play eagerly with ambiguity.

The representations of the body are closely connected with the body differences; for this reason, the history of the body can be written as only one of entanglements. This is shown, for example, in Unani medicine, which has its origins in Greece. A medical system was developed that spread to India where it is still used today among Muslims. According to this system, the human body consists of four humours defined by their mixture of cold, hot, moist and dry elements. Their varied composition serves to explain the diversity of the human character. Illnesses are caused by disturbances to the balance. “Europe, the Arab world, and India had known an entangled history of medical knowledge, based on a common perception or humoral pathology” (PERNAU), which essentially defined the understanding of the body. The individual body is seen in close relation to the social and cosmic order. Health is more than a balanced relationship of juices. This understanding of the body changes the moment in which the body is seen in connection with perceptions of subjectivity and autonomy. Furthermore, the knowledge necessary for health preservation is considered to be a combination of medicine, morale and religion.

Perceptions to recognise the human body as a clear, vast and open body constitute an important part of Indian thoughts on the body. The local body is thus understood as the seat of cosmic planes. On the one hand, the body is a local unit; on the other a manifestation of a *worldwide plane* takes place in it. People can

travel into infinity on the body's astral rays and experience this utmost world for themselves. The astral body makes the experience of infinity; it is open for the ceaselessness of these regions. A substantial externalization of the body takes place. This happens because a body is not an isolated separate being, but a spatially extended being. There is a performative aspect in the fragmentation of the body. "Because, directing the *radiation* of a body toward the realm of the vast openness that envelops all other cosmic regions actually takes place as the performance of a caesura that marks *a radical change of the entire quality, the material world as such is corporally experienced*" (BÖHLER).

After central body concepts from religious and philosophical texts were reconstructed in the first part, the second part will explore body perceptions in narratives and rituals. How "bodies of knowledge simultaneously disclose a knowledge of the body, a knowledge that is deployed by Teyyam performers of formerly untouchable castes to mount an explicit critique of the spiritual, and hence, moral illegitimacy of caste" (FREEMAN) is examined in the first contribution. The untouchable body becomes a place at which a higher spiritual ethic is displayed. During ritualistic ceremonies, when the obsessed dancers from the lowest caste invoke the gods with their bodies and interact with the gathered devotees of all castes, the question arises as to whether they have the bodies of the untouchables or what bodies they have at this moment and how much are their bodies culturally shaped. The ritual knowledge and the practical and instrumental knowledge that is necessary for its production and performance are properties of the untouchable caste, which through this obtains new possible courses of action in religious contexts. A transformation takes place in the ritual, which changes the body of the untouchable. There is a flow of conscious energy in general and individuated forms between all beings, which transcends the separative limits. This draws the conclusion that personhood in India is considered more permeable than the unitary self in Western culture.

For the conceptualisation of the human body, the perceptions of God's body developed in a culture play an important role. How the body is conceptualised essentially determines how the human body is conceived. "In the numerous religions that make up what we call 'Hinduism,' god is frequently embodied, or, to put it more precisely, the numerous gods, goddesses, and demons of the Hindu pantheon have a startling variety of embodied forms, ranging from the zoomorphic (Vishnu's fish, turtle, and boar incarnations; the 'monkey-god' Hanuman), to the anthropo-zoomorphic (Narasimha the 'man-lion;' Ganesha with his human body and elephant's head) to the human (Rama, Sita, Krishna), and the hyper-human (Durga with her eight arms, Brahma with his three heads, Ravana with his ten heads)" (SAX). Using the example of popular myths about the Hindu god Bhairav, a case study examines his contribution to the performance of ritual healings. For this purpose, his appearance as a saviour is depicted, followed by an iconography of Bhairav and a description of its production and performance in rituals, whose

effects are particularly lasting because they are not only performed with language but also with the entire body.

The gods manifest their energy not only in healing rituals but also in dance. This is illustrated using the example of the Odissi dance. A field study in Orissa is the basis of the following analysis of body perceptions in this dance. Taking into consideration the historical dimension and the aesthetic quality, the central elements of understanding the body are defined, which includes the behaviour of the *bhakti*, that determines the movements of the body in the dance, the “love and surrender,” in which the dancer devotes himself to the divine. Using the example of several well-known dancers (gurus), the significance of the master for learning the practical basic body movements for dance is identified. In contrast to many Western dance theories, “the body [is] not only expressive, it is also impressive, i.e. it is a medium into which something enters ... the body of the Odissi dancer is a receptacle for deities and divine energy” (SCHNEPEL).

To become competent at a dance or to perform a ritual is the result of a multi-dimensional embodiment process. The case study of a ritual at a temple near Chennai shows that many priests are unable to read the sacred texts that form the basis of the ritual, but are, however, in the position to produce and perform the ritual on the basis of a bodily knowledge incorporated into mimetic processes. A precise analysis also reveals that the sacred texts often contain no information on the practical knowledge that is required for the performance of the ritual. The focus is mainly on basic questions such as those regarding a person’s eligibility. For this reason, the prospective priests require practical training that qualifies them to perform rituals. “A great deal of priestly competence is achieved through watching, ‘being with elders,’ but also by playing priest, and imitating their ritual actions” (HUESKEN).

The embodiments that take place in rituals are, due to their effect, of central importance. This is shown in three further case studies of ritual celebration in Tamil Nadu in South India, which deal with rituals of Periandavar worship, rituals performed by the Kaniyan community and Hook swinging rituals. In these analyses, it is established how the human body is shaped through social power structures and relations, through political, economical, social and cultural conditions and how it undergoes consistent change. In the rituals analysed, the effort to satisfy the gods in order to preserve health and prosperity takes centre stage. The rituals show “how the human ‘body’ and ‘self’ [are] submitted to the divine spirit and get purified by the shaman. The body of the shaman is considered sacred. During his spirit possession, his body is the medium for the divine spirit” (JOHN). The divine status of the body, which serves as a religious vehicle, is depicted in the rituals.

In the third part of this volume, visualisation processes of the body are examined in the following studies. Hereby, the focus will predominantly be on the developments in modernity and the present day, where the relationship of body and

mediumistic visualisation achieve a new quality. As a result of globalisation, there are many similarities in this area to the developments in Europe and the USA, without losing sight of the heterogeneity of Indian body images.

In the first contribution, it is shown how the body was used in visual practices at the Mughal Court to communicate ethical conceptions of the polity. Harassing the body as a medium also meant making the body the subject of visual representations. For this, important texts in multiple regimes of visibility were translated. A manuscript emerged which contained juxtaposed images, whereby to some extent the images followed another dynamic than the texts. In the majority of court histories and manuscripts, text and image were connected in an overall view. “Visibility, vision and visuality — all formed channels through which ritual practice, bodily experience and images interposed on and codified each other” (JUNEJA). The task of the court painter was to transform the body into an image and to render it tangible as an “instrument of the soul.” “The variety of pictorial experiments to create images that worked as both *of* the body and those which stand *for* the body, had the power that could generate cohesion among multi-ethnic and pluri-religious imperial elites in north India during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and could equally be reappropriated by these to define anew the boundaries between the empire and the regions” (ibd.).

Using the example of the multiples bodies of the bride, the concurrence of heterogeneous body images and body conceptions is explored. Here, overlaps between traditional Indian and globalised Western body images can be identified. “The bridal body patrols and transgresses borders between tradition and modernity, taste and vulgarity, global and local flows. The performative concepts of ritual, heritage, leisure and exhibition are important to understand the complexity of lifestyle politics in neoliberal India” (BROSIUS). As marriage is regarded as the chief celebration to take place in people’s lives in India, a “marriage industry” has emerged, which the new middle and upper classes use to stage and show off their social status, purchasing power, ethnic identity, as well as gender and family relationships. These celebrations are an integral part of the many, to some extent disputed, discussions on romantic love and family obligations, as well as national identity in transnational contexts. The bride’s body becomes a “tradable item of ‘world class’ and national taste.” Hereby, the overlap of the ‘ethnic body’ and ‘cultured body’ is of particular interest. To give expression to the ethnic character of the bride’s body, clothing and posture serve as symbols, which are used to express the cultural diversity and “ethnic chic.” In the traditional marriage, the bride’s body serves as a ritual gift helping to unite two families. Hereby, the purity of the woman’s body plays an important role. In the marriages of the upper middle-class and upper class, new perceptions, which are being publicised in lifestyle magazines, of the beautiful, seductive female body and a romantic love based thereon, are adding to this. The modern bride should also be a virgin and not defile the reputation of the family she is marrying into. For this reason, the caste system and horoscopes are still playing a central role. Wedding films serve to put the

bride's body on stage and celebrate it. An increasing emphasis on the bride's sensuality and sexual desires is adding to this, as is the associated responsibility to maintain a healthy married life. Many, to some extent contradictory, desires and requests blend together the body of the bride and the imaginary location occupied by her, which allow the body to be seen as an image of insatiable desire.

The staging of the bride's body during the marriage ceremony already clearly shows the importance of the aesthetic dimension. Within the framework of the various aesthetic productions of body images, the portrayal of the nakedness of the body in images plays an important but controversial role. "Bodies and their expressivities comprise two very different superfluities for India and for the West, and hence, specifically nakedness and naked bodies are judged within different hermeneutical contexts ... The volatility of nakedness includes diverse aspects: values, cultural/social norms, which, in their colonial reading, stripped us of our traditions, our discursive practices, and regarded our values as shameless, disgusting and naked; thus we were asked to dress ourselves in the rhetorical garb of the globalizing West" (MENON). The difference between the naked body in religious contexts and the naked (female) body in the context of Bollywood and Western film productions is decisive. While the naked human body poses no problem from a religious context and is in fact seen as a medium and a possibility for development, it is problematic in modern films and even viewed as obscene. If, in the first case, it is about a cosmic union and moral refinement of people, then the aesthetic nakedness in the context of modern works of art by Indians is regarded as ambivalent or even despicable.

Lasting changes of body images and their associated individual and collective identities occur within the framework of the increasingly expansive information technology. For example, the documentary "John and Jane" by Ashin Ahluwalia (2005) about working in a call centre shows how globalisation and new media can lead to distorted and restructured identities. In these transition processes, three dimensions of constructing meaning are particularly important: 1) the time dimension: Here, Indian employees work in call centres at night time when it is daytime in America; 2) the spatial dimension: The call centre is an "in-between space" between the USA and India. "On the one side the image of a systematic, well-organised, rich, modern, clean and beautiful place called America, reproduced in the call centre reality, and on the other side the 'hassle dazzle' of India" (CLEMENS); 3) and the social dimension; In order to be able to perform their tasks, Indian employees must become American. The language spoken by them plays a significant role here. A new identity is produced through English. "English started coming into me, an American feeling that I started to have. That culture has gone into me" (ibd.). The agents in the call centre must therefore develop a transitional identity; without which they are unable to fulfil the duties of their work. During their work, they must transform a virtual world into a real one. Naomi, one of the agents in this film, also shows this identity change through her body: She has dyed her hair blonde and speaks and dresses like an American so much so that she is

often asked where she comes from. She has found a new identity. Finally, it shows how the development of person, body and consciousness interact to create new forms of identity.

### **Conclusion**

*Dematerialisation, technologisation, fragmentation, sexuality and performativity* are interlinked processes, which are becoming increasingly important for understanding the body and the perceptions of the body in Western, and partly in Eastern, societies. *Subtle and gross bodies, social bodies, the transformation and transgression of the body and the sacrifice as a body and the body as a sacrifice* are particularly representative of South Asia. The discussion on these dimensions already clarifies this. The human body has become more than ever the problem and once hard-and-fast conceptions of the human body have softened up considerably. *Of which body are we speaking when we talk about the body* is the decisive question today. The human body, whose “naturalness” is so often sworn against social institutions and necessities, is never “natural.” Even there, where its “naturalness” is asserted, it deals with an historical/cultural concept, with whose help it is “forgotten” that each form of “naturalness” of the body is an historical/cultural design of “nature” and in most cases serves to show certain casts and mouldings of the body as unquestionable, uncriticisable, and unchangeable. The reference to the “naturalness” of the body has the function of concealing social power relations and not letting them enter into the consciousness. In the case of the traditional understanding of the female and male body, the connection is obvious between body conception and the social power relations. Even if one now understands the difference between “sex” and “gender” as a historical/cultural construction, this gives rise to the possibility of understanding the body in a new light in a spectrum between two concepts. Such an understanding encounters the limits of the language, which often only has inadequate concepts for new differentiations. It is therefore even more important to understand the concepts, as understanding the body from a precise knowledge of different cultures and languages. An attempt will be made to do so in the present volume with a view to Indian cultures.

In view of its complexity, the human body eludes time and time again the overall acknowledgement that there is no end in sight to its anthropological research. In the course of this development, it is necessary to assume a *corpus absconditum*. This means that one consciously renounces the necessary reductionist attempt of constructing a closed body concept consistent in itself. As God and person are not completely recognisable and identifiable, the complexity of the body thus remains incomprehensible. Only the recognition of different aspects of the body depending on questions and approaches is possible. As no academic or scientific discipline alone is responsible for the body, research on the body is an area of inter- and transdisciplinary research, as well as inter- and transnational research, which is increasingly becoming a focal point of research studies. If today,

more than before, the question of the performativity of the human body is interesting and explored as a social practice and materialisation of the in-scene composition of possibilities, this process will also be understood as a medium of corporal self-assurance in space, time and society. In this respect, human bodies are appearing less as a result but more as a process and less closed, rather more open and manageable for future developments.

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