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For Elizabeth

Sunthar Visuvalingam

[The earlier version, without footnotes, of this now greatly expanded essay was presented at the Indic Colloquium, 2002]

Introduction

In this overview of Abhinava's aesthetics,[1] I've attempted to maintain a balance between opposing constraints:

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[1] The first part of this essay was originally presented to the Indic Colloquium (July 2002) and has since been published in Spanish in the Sarasvatī journal (Madrid), issue #7 (May 2004). The second part on "universalization"—an abstract (of a paper yet to be) written for the World Association of Vedic Studies (WAVES) conference in 2002—nicely complements the preceding overview. They are both being published here in print for the first time in English (as a combined essay). All clarifications of a technical and 'Indological' nature have been relegated to the footnotes so as to ensure that the flow of ideas remains uninterrupted for the non-specialist audience. For further post-publication developments of (the latter part of) this essay, check

http://www.svabhinava.org/abhinava/Sunthar-integral/default.htm

Please post your comments and queries regarding the contributions to this volume to the Abhinavagupta forum (where many of the theses in this essay have been already debated):

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Abhinavagupta/

- focus on making the core insights accessible to educated laymen interested in aesthetics even while judiciously introducing technical Sanskrit terminology that has no equivalent in non-Indian languages (also to satisfy the trained Indologist intent on recognizing what's being 'translated').
- provide sufficient historico-cultural context to clarify the specific expression they found in *rasa* doctrine even while highlighting the universal constants in human experience that the Indian formulations are derived from and seek to address in consonance with a particular ethos.
- enable the reader to 'problematize' Indian aesthetics through an account that remains faithful to Abhinava's explicit theorizing even while resituating his diverse pronouncements (and person) as a whole within our evolving understanding of the tradition in relation to other cultures.
- avoid making explicit comparisons (favorable or otherwise) privileging any particular non-Indian mode of artistic expression even while facilitating such

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I thank Rajiv Malhotra and Tenzin Robert Thurman for having invited me to the Indic Colloquium at Menla (New York state), where I also got to know Makarand Paranjape, who has assumed the daunting challenge of publishing this ongoing series on "The Synthesis of Indian Culture." I also thank Chandana Dutta and Aneeta ??? for all their editorial work on this volume. Many of the scholars with whom I had the privilege of exchanging ideas, there at Menla, have since joined the Abhinava forum (which now stands at more than 500 members). A no-strings-attached grant of ten thousand dollars from the Infinity Foundation facilitated my taking time off to prepare this volume, most of all for the varied research and exchanges that have gone into this essay. I am most grateful to Felix and Aurora Ilarráz for their steadfast friendship and generous support over the last two decades. I dedicate this essay to my dear wife, Elizabeth, who introduced me to the continuing vitality of Bhairava-worship in India and Nepal, the hidden life of contemporary Benares, French intellectual (not just Indological) traditions, and has been a constant resource and inspiration for my researches.

dialogue with readers predisposed to thinking about aesthetics in terms of a particular thinker, school, or (religious) tradition.[2]

So doing, I originally formulated this overview entirely from long-term memory without consulting any primary or secondary materials (not even my own Ph.D. thesis here at hand) on the assumption that what would take shape in this way would be rather a crystallization of thoughts that are as much Abhinava's as they are those of a contemporary mind that has been impacted by his way of thinking in its perception of the world today.

When it has been already established by tradition,
why these pretentious claims to originality?
When self-conscious thought blossoms so freely on its own,
why bother to cram down these stifling canons?
With these two objections, ever so precious and within easy reach,
what's then left that this world has not turned to derision?
Climbing ever higher and higher, knowing no repose,
the intellect finally perceives the truth of things.
This is the reward of treading the rungs of discrimination,
the conceptual ladder built up by generations of forerunners.
Groping in so many directions and, indeed, without a firm foothold,
such I say, is our first plunge into the ocean of certain knowledge.
Once the right path has been found and cleared, building bridges and
founding entire cities, such architectural feats are no cause for wonder.
Therefore, far from having been overturned and demolished here,
the views of fellow truth-seekers have been merely refined.
In the blueprints bequeathed by our predecessors, we recognize
the foundations of this crowning achievement of our own labors!

Abhinava's "Voice of (Rejuvenated) India"[3] *- Abhinava-Bhāratī*, I, p.280[4]

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[2] There are, however, three contributions to this volume that offer such comparisons: V. Solanki, "Abhinavagupta and T.S. Eliott: a comparative study of aesthetics" (the latter having been far more profoundly influenced by Hindu thought than generally acknowledged); Shrikrishna Mishra, "Abhinavagupta and S.T. Coleridge" (a veritable dissertation that compares the philosophical underpinnings of both these exponents of the creative imagination); and Dusan Pajin, "Remembrance and recognition in Plato, Abhinavagupta, and Proust" (which explores the interface between aesthetics, anamnesis, and tantric spirituality).

[3] Abhinavagupta's choice of the title *Abhinava-Bhāratī* for his stupendous commentary on the thirty-six chapters of Bharata's treatise on dramaturgy, the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*, reflects his characteristic play upon (the etymological resonances of Sanskrit) words. Bharata, its eponymous author, is just the signature left by the generations of 'bards' (*bharata*), who recited the epics and eventually took over the theatrical traditions. Though *bhāratī* is yet another term for speech, it is derived from *bharata* the ancient Vedic tribe from whom the modern Indian nation has borrowed its self-appellation. At the same time, this comprehensive and creative commentary gave an 'entirely new' (*abhinava*) lease of life to the labor-intensive edifice bequeathed by Bharata's 'offspring' (*bhāratī*), these mostly anonymous architects of Indian theater, this mirror of the life of the people. This is what justifies the liberty I have taken, only in this invocatory context, in 'translating' (the significance of) his commentary into "Abhinava's Voice of India."

[4] *Āmnāya-siddhe kim apūrvam etat saṁvid-vikāse'dhigatāgamatvam* / [= (*kim*) *adhigatāgamatvam*]
itthaṁ svayaṁ-grāhya-mahārha-hetu-dvandvena kim dūṣayitā na lokaḥ //
ūrdhvordhvam āruhya yad artha-tattvam dhīḥ paśyati śrāntim avedayantī /
phalaṁ tad ādyaiḥ parikalpitānāṁ viveka-sopāna-paramparāṇām //
citraṁ nirālambanam eva manye prameya-siddhau prathamāvatāram / [*read also premeya-sindhau*]
tan-mārga-lābhe sati setu-bandha-pura-pratiṣṭhādi na vismayāya // [*read also san-mārga*]
tasmāt satām atra na dūṣitāni matāni tāny eva tu śodhitāni /
pūrva-pratiṣṭhāpita-yojanāsu mūla-pratiṣṭhā-phalam āmananti // *Abhinava-Bhāratī*, I, p.280.

After having demolished the views of his predecessors on the nature of *rasa*, it is with these verses that Abhinavagupta introduces his own synthesis (see note 21 below). I recited the first two lines, in response to George Cardona's demonstration at the Indic Colloquium of the palpable tension between adherence to tradition and independent critical thinking animating the Sanskrit commentators (especially on grammar) starting with Patañjali, to emphasize that—far from being mutually opposed—Abhinava saw collective tradition and individual originality locked in **creative** tension, embracing each other in the spiraling dance of a virtuous cycle of (self-) discovery. Arindam Chakrabarti subsequently approached us to express his gratitude for my having so meaningfully translated the first line—I had unwittingly but correctly repeated the 'why' (*kim*) thereby splitting it into two symmetrically opposed halves (*samvid-vikāse (kim) adhigatāgamatvam*]—that had never made sense to him or to any of the Sanskrit scholars he had discussed it with in Benares. If Abhinava had as it were 'revealed' his intentions to me, I

Sanskrit theater as the total art-form based on the *rasa*-canon

Abhinavagupta's aesthetics is the culmination, in Kashmir by around the late 11th century, of convergent developments in Indian dramaturgy, rhetoric, linguistics, epistemology, psychology, and spirituality. Drama had long been accepted as the 'total' art form that united plot, acting, dance, poetry, music, architecture, fine arts, human values, and practically all other concerns of life in order to sustain and nourish an 'other-worldly' (*alaukika*) emotional enjoyment (*rasa*). Though *rasa* was also evoked by separate art forms such as (the *rāga*s or 'modes' of Indian) music, only in theater was the full range of human feelings expressible in all their infinite variety and subtlety, with each emotion rendered with recognizable distinctiveness. While Bharata's theater claimed to be modeled on the 'originary' unifying principle of the solemn Vedic sacrifice[5] but

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ventured, it would be because of my humility before the received text, the expectation of an overdose of sense even in (the) seeming nonsense (of the *vidūṣaka*). But then we have 'authorities' on 'Kashmir Shaivism' who can get away with their doctorate on the explicit presupposition that "Abhinavagupta, being Indian, does not see the contradictions of his own thought" (André Padoux). Not only is this the implicit foundation of the (increasingly politically motivated) intellectual arrogance of the 'patent' mediocrity that reigns over so much of Western Indology, everything is done to ensure that these 'contradictions' in the "voice of India" are never resolved.

[5] Bharata claims to have created the theater by integrating speech from the Ṛg-, music from the Sāma-, acting from the Yajur-, and emotion from the Atharva-Vedas. The 'superhuman' (*apauruṣeya*) Rigvedic 'revelation' regularly invokes a (often *soma*-inspired) poetic inspiration that exploits a wide variety of intricate tropes (even to the point of unintelligibility); the Sâma Veda is sung according to strict musical rules and its status is reflected in Abhinava's distinction between the ritualistic *gāndharva* and the profane *dhruva-gāna* (see note 82); the 'preclassical' brahmanical ritual likewise admitted of 'popular' performances, as exemplified by the festivities of the Mahāvrata, and the execution of the paradigmatic classical sacrifice may itself be interpreted as a hieratic form of theater. The 'conservative' tendency and many of the cultural 'idiosyncrasies' of the 'Sanskrit' theater—as exemplified above all by the 'stereotyped' character of the *vidūṣaka* ('clown)—become more intelligible when this 'lip service' to Vedic ideology is taken at its word.

offered instead as a delightful spectacle to amuse all strata of Indian society,[6] by this time the dramatic art had largely outgrown its ritual framework, narrowly defined, to carve out for itself in both theory and practice a specifically aesthetic domain, epitomized by *rasa*, that could be wholly endorsed by 'heterodox' ideologies and even by a purely 'secular' temperament.[7] The challenge then, as it still remains now for Western thought, was to clarify the distinct nature of such 'dramatized' emotion (*rasa*) in terms of its rootedness in the psychology of everyday life even while accounting for its radical transformation in art.[8] Moreover, what is the role of language in the evocation of

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[6] Huizinga had identified play and the sacred on the basis of their formal similarities, going so far as to derive the sacred itself from play. Caillois, criticizing him, has stressed the doubly profane character of play when viewed in terms of its contents, intention, and the attitudes of the participants involved. In the 'Veda of Dramatic Representation' (*nāṭya-veda*) as the 'plaything' (*krīḍanīyakam*) of all the levels of Hindu society, the comic Vidūṣaka would have been the privileged locus for the exteriorization of the structures and hidden significations of the sacred before a profane audience intent on enjoying an aesthetic spectacle far removed from the mundane concerns of life.

[7] We see a similar development of Greek theatre, both tragedy and comedy, from sacrificial origins into an art-form that could be appreciated by all citizens in terms of primarily aesthetic criteria. In both traditions, however, such sacrificial notations have been scrupulously and systematically retained and elaborated beneath the surface of the plot and dialogue. For example, "The Little Clay Cart" (*Mṛcchakaṭikā*), a 'worldly' romance with 'realistic' themes drawn from urban life (*prakaraṇa*), is entirely structured by the Vedic sacrificial ideology. Whereas Nietzsche, in *The Birth of Tragedy*, drew a line after Sophocles to take his successor, Euripides, severely to task for 'deconstructing' the true spirit of Greek theater and conception of man, it seems to me that the latter (like Aristotle in philosophy?) was rather attempting to maintain as much of the traditional as was humanly possible in the relentless face of the emerging 'critical' mentality.

[8] I. A. Richards' 'synaesthesis' is one such attempt by Western psychology, unsuccessful because it is obliged to conceive the aesthetic experience as the mutual neutralization of or precarious balance among opposing emotional tendencies so as to cancel out real-life behavioral responses. Such a 'laughable' (= bisociative) theory fails to account for the distinctiveness of our enjoyments

the aesthetic response, particularly in the imaginative context of poetry? Ānandavardhana's theory of 'suggestion' (*dhvani*), even while developing and exploring the communication of factual (*vastu*) and figurative (*alaṅkāra*) meanings, revolves around *rasa* (-*dhvani*) as the ultimate meaning of poetic speech. However, if *rasa* is simply a 'subjective' psychological response on the part of the connoisseur to the 'objective' meaning of a verse, surely the former cannot be rightfully said to be the 'meaning' of the linguistic utterance.[9] If you get upset with me for not making sense here, surely your anger can't be the meaning of what I said!

Aesthetic identification is the very life of *rasa-dhvani*

Emotions in real life are largely within the sway of the laws of psychological causation: certain events or actions by others provoke a specific emotional response that

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of different emotional textures (*rasa*) and, even much less, of their inner fluctuations (*vyabhicārin*). While 'Sanskritists' (which apparently makes you an authority on all things Indian…) persist in demonstrating their superior intelligence by debunking the ('contradictions' of) Indian knowledge systems—often thereby betraying their ignorance of corresponding issues in their own culture—Western specialists in the relevant disciplines have begun to look here for ways out of their own theoretical and practical impasses; see Patrick Colm Hogan, "Toward a cognitive science of poetics: Ānandavardana, Abhinavagupta, and the theory of literature" (in this volume).

[9] Marie Claude Porcher's lengthy paper on "Linguistic and Aesthetic categories in Dhvani theory: On the Relation between Figures of Speech and Suggestion" (in French, *Indologia Taurinensia*, vol. X, 1982, pp.257-280), argues that Ananda had actually confused the ("linguistic") meaning of the poem with the aesthetic (i.e., "psychological") response that the apprehension of this meaning evokes in the connoisseur. Sheldon Pollock, for his part (see note 29 below), argues on the contrary that the presumed suggested meaning is often arbitrary and, ultimately, conditioned by the social norms and idiosyncrasies—largely unconscious for they were rarely explicit and never adequately theorized—of the enveloping cultural order. What I'm attempting to show here is that *rasa* itself actually constitutes the **aesthetic meaning** which presupposes and depends upon (a literary competence trained in) processing the text to generate pertinent suggested meanings. K. Krishnamoorthy makes this point forcefully, adducing the understanding of traditional commentators, in "Abhinava's integral view of aesthetic concepts," (in this volume).

I express through characteristic, often visibly recognizable, physiological reactions, effects that can in no way be construed as the 'meaning' of the original actions. Moreover, my emotional state, if sustained, would also be modulated by a succession of concomitant transitory states of mind; for example, sexual attraction might express itself as a kaleidoscopic pattern of longing, trepidation, joy, jealousy, and so on. What's represented on the stage are not just the 'causes' (*vibhāva* = determinants) of the intended emotion but also the 'effects' (*anubhāva* = consequents) that they evoke in another responsive dramatic personage (*āśraya*), who displays the appropriate 'transitory states of mind' (*vyabhicārin* = concomitant). And what evokes *rasa* is the (connoisseur's attempt to restore meaning to this) configuration as a coherent whole as perceived by the mind's eye. As we 'infer' the emotion in the *āśraya*,[10] the accumulated traces (*saṁskāra*) of the same predisposition are awakened from our own subconscious and our hearts begin to resonate (*hṛdaya-saṁvāda*) with their fluctuations depicted by the *dramatis personae*. Instead of 'responding' behaviorally to the transposed psychological causes, the focus is instead on understanding the interactions on stage by supplying the relevant emotional motivations from our own store of latent memories. *Rasa* is therefore not simply an emotional response to artistic stimuli but the inner organizing principle of a distinct mode of apperception (*anuvyavasāya-viśeṣa*), their *raison d'être*, and very meaning. This 'identification' (*tanmayī-bhavana*) is so complete that we seem to be

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[10] To what extent this recognition constitutes an 'inference' and whether the *āśraya* too 'really' feels the *rasa*, are tricky questions on account of the fact that, unlike the natural concomitance between smoke and fire, people regularly feign emotions (such as sympathy) even in real life (see note 19 below). Though the actor's imagination may succeed in invoking the corresponding emotion within from life-experience so as to better play the assumed role on stage, no participant on the stage could possibly experience the dramatic configuration as a whole as does the spectator from beginning to end. We let ourselves 'infer' the emotion only because it procures us aesthetic delight, and it may be argued that, in the final analysis, it is we who project our own *rasa*-experience 'back' onto the personage (*āśraya*) as opposed to the actor.

experiencing the same emotion without any distinction of self and other.[11] This is precisely why our whole-hearted enjoyment of Sītā's beauty through the eyes of Lord Rāma is no stigma to Indian aesthetics.[12]

Universalization of shared emotions in aesthetic relish

Through aesthetic identification, an emotional stimulus that was originally unique (*asādhāraṇa*) to a particular *āśraya* becomes in this way 'generalized' (*sādhāraṇī-karaṇa*) into an object of relish for the spectators at large, who experience the corresponding *rasa* (e.g., *śṛṅgāra* = love) in an 'impersonal' mode in the sense of its being not conditioned by an ascertainment of the form "I am in love" (which would result in a purposive attitude) or "he/she is in love" (which would leave one indifferent). Worldly (*laukika*) emotion immediately engenders a stream of cogitation, impelled by a purposive attitude towards the external stimulus, which sustains the feeling of self as distinct from

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[11] This also amounts to Abhinava's resolution of a long-standing disagreement as to the seat or locus of *rasa*: the poet, the dramatis persona, the actor, the audience. Given the process of de-subjectivization (*sādhāraṇī-karaṇa*), the *rasa*-experience, unlike its counterparts in worldly feelings, cannot be properly said even to 'belong' somehow to the individual connoisseur.

[12] Considering the real-life infatuation that actors (Amitabh Bacchan, M.G. Ramachandran, now Shah Rukh Khan) and actresses (Aishwarya Rai and, more recently, Gayatri Joshi in *Swades*) can evoke in their fans, it is worth noting that the shared enjoyment of the heroine (*nāyikā*), even vicariously in theater, posed a dilemma to the Indian ethical consciousness. This ingenious concept of *tanmayībhavana* removes the moral compunction even while sanctioning the unreserved sensuous delight. Considering that the (often royal) hero (*nāyaka*), presided by Indra, actually assumes the role of the sacrificer, the (male) audience (at least) participates through this same identification in the play as sacrifice. The net result of the above processes is that we have N. T. Ramarao voted in with a thumping 'democratic' majority as Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, and Arnold Schwarzenegger as Governor of California, the main difference being that the former played Lord Rāma in Telugu movies, whereas the latter has won fame as the Hollywood *Terminator*. Similarly, Jayalalitha, the controversial Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, was formerly MGR's *nāyikā* on the Tamil screen and surviving wife in real-life.

other. The choice is between a 'personal' interest and the withdrawal of attention due to indifference or other more insistent matters. In the aesthetic context, the emotion, even while being nourished and intensified by the evolution of the artistic configuration, is arrested at the initial (i.e., pre-discursive) stage of development[13] because the sustenance (and not just the 'production') of *rasa* depends on keeping the attention focused (*avadhāna*) on restoring coherence to the 'conjunction of determinants, consequents, and concomitants' (Bharata's famous axiom on *rasa*).[14] Though Bharata states that the 'basic emotion' (*sthāyi-bhāva*) 'becomes' the *rasa* through the action of these three elements, Abhinava clarifies that what is really experienced is only the *rasa*, and it is only through analogy that it's appropriate to identify it with the corresponding worldly emotion.[15] As

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[13] A successful production, even the musical exposition of a *rāga*, does indeed systematically diversify, consolidate, explore, and intensify the distinctive *rasa*, often culminating in an emotional climax rarely experienced in the 'real' world. Abhinava's qualification 'initial' (*pramukha*) here means simply that this shared elaboration is entirely determined by (our 'self-surrender' to the enchantment exercised by) the 'art-work' as opposed to discursive thought on our part, for such 'subjectivity' would rather be the cause of 'breach of *rasa*' (*rasa-bhaṅga*)

[14] The dynamic tension underlying this cognitive structure assumes a special significance when viewed in the light of the tantric dictum that "the awareness of the relation between subject and object is common to the perception of all embodied beings; what distinguishes the adept is the discriminating attention focused on the relation" itself (*sambandhe sāvadhānatā*). In the aesthetic setting, this attention comes effortlessly and 'unselfconsciously' to the subject hankering after *rasa*; for it to be sustained in the midst of worldly experience, however, presupposes a cultivated insight into the nature of consciousness and an effort of directed will.

[15] Neuroscience now distinguishes between instinct, emotion, and sentiment. Instinct would refer to the biological reflexes (aggression, sex, fear, disgust) rooted in the genetically programmed propensity of an animate being to preserve and perpetuate itself. Emotion would refer to the various corporeal (chemical, nervous, etc.) changes engendered by the operation of such instincts in response to an immediate context and to maintain an internal equilibrium. Damasio claims that even the simplest organisms are subject to the rudimentary equivalents of our basic emotions, like fear, with the palette becoming richer and more complex as we ascend towards

darkness envelops the galleries of our mundane day-to-day consciousness, such rapt attention is rendered possible by our voluntary suspension of purposive attitudes (*artha-kriyā-kāritva*) in favor of an intentness to enjoy whatever the spotlight of a receptive consciousness reveals before us. This 'catharsis' that purifies the emotions from their biological inertia and self-centeredness is also, paradoxically, what renders the experience of *rasa* all the more intense and enjoyable.[16] Whereas our mundane psychology is characterized by a flow of ideation driven and buffeted by instinctual needs that are often below the surface, and corresponding efforts of reason to negotiate and escape their thralldom, *rasa* is willingly evoked and sustained by the combined faculties of the discriminating intellect, thereby achieving the reconciliation of thought and emotion that constitutes culture. The spectacle thus also creates and reinforces a psychic bond among the 'participating' community even as had Greek tragedy or the sacrificial ritual.[17]

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humanity. Sentiment is distinguished, in this evolutionist perspective, by the integrated mapping of the experience of such emotions in relation to their external causes—evoking the memory of past patterns and future projections—onto the general psycho-somatic state as a whole. Manifesting already somewhat in higher animals (birds, dogs, apes), sentiment is hence characterized by 'self-awareness' and implies an increasing degree of 'freedom' from the automatism of the body, finding its culmination in the subjective human consciousness, where such cognitive autonomy is mirrored in language. *Rasa* would correspond, in this schema, to the evocation of such 'sentiment' in a specifically aesthetic mode that intensifies self-awareness. Bharata's *sthāyi-bhāva*— which includes such 'instincts' as enterprise (and even cessation)–is thus already an eminently cultural construct that has been 'retrofitted' onto our biological inheritance.

[16] It might be noted that there have been two different interpretations of Aristotle's *katharsis*: as the purgation of emotions (such as fear and horror) from the spectators (of the tragedy), or rather as the purification (with ritual overtones?) of these emotions themselves, the latter understanding being closer to the Indian (account of the) experience of *rasa*.

[17] The chief spectator of the Greek play was the priest of Dionysus, from whose sacrificial cult the Attic theater emerged. A fundamental difference would be that tragedy depicted violence (hence horror and fear, see note 16 on *katharsis* above) before an Athenian polis of indigenous males,

Rasa is ultimately reflexive consciousness mediated by emotion

Rasa is hence not the psychological 'effect' that the artistry 'produces' in us but rather the (source and) inner organizing principle of the aesthetic creation, its very meaning.[18] We do not particularly relish the emotions of others inferred in real life, so the aesthetic emotion cannot be reduced to the *rasa* merely deduced in the *āśraya* (it's irrelevant whether the actor is really feeling that or any emotion).[19] The dramatic spectacle does not simply 'intensify' our worldly emotions, for we would otherwise never lose an opportunity to fall into a fit of psychopathic anger or wallow in suicidal depression.[20] Nor is stagecraft an illusion for we do not mistake the objective

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who were in principle equals, whereas (the depiction of) death was prohibited in the classical (brahmanical sacrifice and) Indian theater that served to mirror and hold together, in its self-representation, a diverse and hierarchized (caste-) society. The tragic hero has been derived from the ritual scapegoat just as the *vidūṣaka* from the deformed brahmin 'sin-eater' of the Aśvamedha.

[18] The meaning of a love poem (by Amaru) is (our enjoyment of) the erotic sentiment (*śṛṅgāra*), in all its rich inner differentiation, whereas the word 'love' denotes no more than the idea of this emotion, which would rather short-circuit the aesthetic process. This is why Sanskrit poetics insists that *rasa* is always suggested and never to be directly expressed as "I love you." Unfortunately, this elementary point has not been grasped by Indologists, like Marie-Claude Porcher (see note 9 above), steeped in the 'objectivist' linguistics of the signifier/signified.

[19] This disposes (note 10) of Śrīśaṅkuka's earlier attempt to account for *rasa* in terms of logical inference reducing it to our way of interpreting the (even unspoken) feelings of others in real life. For the same reason, the *rasa* is not 'located' in the actor as would be the case of fire deduced to be burning on a hill emitting smoke. Perception, memory, inference, feeling, etc., are rather integrated here into a unique (*sui generis*) mode of (aesthetic) cognition (*pratīti*, *bodha*).

[20] This disposes of Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa's earlier claim that the basic emotion, somehow intensified by the mixture of the determinants, concomitants, and consequents, is transformed into *rasa*. What remains unaccounted for from the perspective of Sāṅkhya and other psychological frameworks derived from an 'ascending' spiritual perspective is the precise working of the (tantric) 'alchemy' responsible for such transmutation. See part II of this essay.

configuration for something else, but rather reorganize the sensory data through an active apperception (*anuvyavasāya*) focused on the enjoyment of *rasa*.[21] For the same reason, it's not an imitation,[22] as the simultaneous (bisociated) perception of the imitated and the imitating element can only amount to caricature provoking laughter.[23] Nor is it necessary to invoke some mysterious twin-power, inherent in the language of theater, that would first universalize through 'creative imagination' (*bhāvakatva*) then 'render into an object of relish' (*bhojakatva*) the otherwise private emotion.[24] *Rasa* is ultimately

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[21] The conventional account of there having been several 'schools' of *rasa*-theory based on different philosophies—Sāṅkhya (Lollaṭa), Nyāya (logic, i.e., Śaṅkuka), Mīmāṁsaka (hermeneutics, i.e., Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka), Buddhist (*rasa* as stream of consciousness), Advaita-Vedānta (Jagannātha), etc.—largely miss the point. The aesthetic experience defied encapsulation within the narrow categories of any of these systems, which were formulated to conceptualize, defend, and propagate the concerns—worldly, ritual, or spiritual—of their respective discipline. What we are witnessing, rather, is the best minds coming together in an interdisciplinary effort to leverage and adapt existing categories of thought to do full justice to a shared pleasure that remained intractable to intellectual analysis. Abhinava (see my opening invocation) does not reject any of these contributions that he rather builds upon by integrating them into a sophisticated 'phenomenology' (*ābhāsa-vāda*) of art. Though providing the hidden intellectual framework, the Pratyabhijñā perspective is itself extended into the emotional realm and enriched in the process.

[22] Though Bharata's dictum that the stage is an "imitation" (*anukaraṇa*) of the world (*loka*) is wholly true as regards its depiction of human pursuits and situations in a plausible or 'life-like' manner (*vraisemblance*), the drama is not lived through as an imitation of something exterior to it.

[23] Brahmā's very first (mythical) performance of the theater in honor of the king of the gods, Indra, was rudely disrupted by the demons (*asura*), who took offense at being (caricatured and hence) ridiculed. Since the event was intended to commemorate the annual festival of raising the Indra-pole (*dhvaja-maha*), Kuiper has rightly concluded that the theater, enacted within an agonistic setting, must have originally had a cosmogonic significance (the Vedic New Year).

[24] Though taking Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka to task for inventing these supposedly separate 'operations' (*vyāpāra*) of poetic language, Abhinava integrates both the principle of 'universalization'

not even an emotional object presented to consciousness but rather a specific non-mundane (*alaukika*) mode of cognition (*bodha*, *pratīti*) that is indistinguishable from an active relishing (*āsvādana*, *rasanā*).[25] Since emotions—not even love, the basis for that most delectable *rasa*, the erotic sentiment (*śṛṅgāra*)—are not in themselves objects of relish, what is really being enjoyed here is the reflexivity (*vimarśa*) of consciousness as mediated and sustained by a particular emotional state.[26] This is why Abhinavagupta

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(*sādhāraṇī-karaṇa*) and of delectation into (his systematic defense of) the psycholinguistics of Ānanda's theory of 'suggestion' (*dhvani*) that his contemporary had thereby sought to refute. The Pūrva Mīmāṁsā likewise accounts for the efficacy of ritual by resorting to the unique causative power of Vedic injunctions to engender unseen fruits (*apūrva*). Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka's attempt to explain the peculiar emotional effect of *kāvya* upon the audience through such a hermeneutics assumes a special significance in the light of the sacrificial underpinnings of Bharata's theater.

[25] The thrust of the Pratyabhijñā epistemology is towards breaking down the opposition between categories such as action (*kriyā*), knowledge (*jñāna*), and conation (*icchā*); or rather, it aims to demonstrate how each is indispensably penetrated by elements of the others (hence the trident-symbolism and the name Trika = 'three-based' of the tantric system from which it draws its inspiration). Thus, whereas the Pūrva-Mīmāṁsā bases itself on the supremacy of (the injunctive to ritual) action, the Uttara-Mīmāṁsā (Advaita-Vedānta) is obliged reject the 'previous' doctrinal edifice so as to reinterpret the whole Veda in terms of the primacy (of spiritual self-) knowledge. Of course, many learned brahmins were steeped in the practice of both systems (and even dabbled simultaneously in Tantra…), but theoretically the two have remained (literally) worlds apart. Abhinava is likewise deconstructing the distinction between perceiving an (aesthetic) object and (then subjectively) relishing it: 'knowing' (a woman) here means 'enjoying' (her).

[26] Discussions of the emotions based on empiricism are still invariably loaded with (culture-specific) philosophical assumptions, like Damasio's neurobiological intervention (see note 15 above) in the debate between Descartes (mind versus body opposition) and Spinoza (reduction of soul to body). I do not see how even a materialist psychology could account for our experience of an aesthetic emotion as both the same as and different from its worldly counterpart, without examining and re-conceptualizing the nature of (self-) consciousness itself (see note 8 above). Though the cerebral representation of emotion—in relation to the body, the external causes, and past experience—may have been an 'accident' of evolution that has improved our chances of

repeatedly equates *rasa* with a more fundamental and universal 'aesthetic rapture' (*camatkāra*) that reveals itself in a variety of circumstances that are not artistic in the conventional sense, particularly in modes of 'spiritualizing' otherwise 'worldly' experience.[27] Though evoked or, rather, mirrored by the emotions in the typical aesthetic context, *rasa* is ultimately an inalienable property of consciousness itself.

Suggestion, the soul of poetry even before its late formulation

The burden of conveying the sensory effects of the aesthetic configuration (plot, determinants, etc.) is borne in poetry (*kāvya*) by language alone. What is lost in terms of the vivid but relatively passive overpowering of the eye (gesture, costume, props, etc.), and the ear (music, song, dialogue, etc.) must be compensated for by a more subtle, discriminating, and rarefied use of words that demands a correspondingly greater (re-) creative effort on the part of the hearer. The direct expression of feelings (e.g., "I love you") is in bad poetic taste because it fails to evoke the corresponding emotion in the connoisseur. *Rasa* can only be 'suggested' (*vyaṅgya*) through the presentation of determinants, consequents, and concomitants that may themselves be merely suggested (e.g., the mutual glances of estranged lovers through averted eyes). The highest form of 'suggestion' (*dhvani*) is where the poem is 'dramatized' (*nāṭyāyita*) by the imagination so that all the signifying elements of sound, syntax, rhythm, rhyme, fact, figure, speaker, intonation, context, time, place, and composite sense converge on the evocation of *rasa*

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individual (and group) survival by enabling better adapted and more sophisticated responses, artistic creation consists in reversing this finality by playfully reconfiguring these stimuli to evoke and nourish emotion simply for the pleasure of enhancing the element of self-awareness.

[27] *Camatkāra* is also derived from the clicking sound (*camat*) made by the tongue when we lick our lips together while relishing a dainty dish, something that would characterize the connoisseur (of wines) as opposed to a glutton (or drunkard). Though often used interchangeably (by Abhinava himself) with *rasa* in the artistic context, *camatkāra* does not specifically refer to the emotional content but to the wonderful 'ever-new' freshness of its relishing.

as the 'primary meaning' (*mukhyārtha*).[28] There are also other possibilities: the suggested meanings may be subordinated (*guṇī-bhūta-vyaṅgya*) to the directly expressed sense to enrich and beautify the latter; there might be an interplay of figures of speech, some literal and others merely suggested, so that they resonate together with tantalizing hints of unexpressed thoughts; the emotion itself may serve only to provide texture to a strikingly apt description or idea—there are no bounds to language! What is more, the sparing yet strategic deployment of (often carefully half-defined) poetic speech can capture, highlight, and immortalize fleeting and otherwise ineffable moods, as exemplified by the erotic verses of Amaru that Abhinava delights in dissecting to make his theoretical points.[29] Though there is often some indeterminacy as regards the

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[28] Hidden behind this formulation—repeated parrot-like by many Indian scholars sympathetic to the tradition but nevertheless so perplexing to Western Indologists (see note 9 above)—is an entire theory of meaning in terms of 'subsidiary' (*gauṇa*) and 'focal' (*pradhāna*) 'awareness' (*parāmarśa*). Unlike positivist attempts to treat the problem of signification in objectivizing terms as a special kind of relation that would be external to the knowing subject, Abhinava distinguishes the 'signifier' (*vācaka*) as a mediator of which we are (only) subsidiarily (and not separately) aware while being focused on (it as being merged into) the 'signified' (*vācya*). The relationship between (a) word and (its) sense ('*sens*' in French carries the sense of 'direction') thus becomes the exemplary paradigm for a more comprehensive theory of signification where any (emotional, etc.) 'object' that is the focus of such a sustaining perceptual structure may be elevated to the rank of 'final' meaning. Such meaning is typically projected away from the (indwelling) subject consciousness onto the external (drama of the) world: "when the poet is amorous, the whole world is suffused with *rasa*" (*śṛṅgārī cet kaviḥ sarvaṁ rasa-mayam jagat*). The (analogy of the aesthetic) 'concoction' (*pānaka-rasa*) implies that the connoisseur's relish, though keenly attuned to the unique flavor contributed by each of the varied ingredients (determinants, etc), does not perceive them independently of the indivisible (*akhaṇḍa*) experience of *rasa*.

[29] The best that translation can do is to convey some of the key mechanisms, overall import, and flavor of the verse, along with a perceptive commentary that clarifies how each linguistic element of the original has contributed to the total effect. It therefore takes determined and repeated effort on the part of the foreign reader confident of being eventually rewarded with unique pleasures. See Daniel H.H. Ingalls, "Some Problems in the Translation of Sanskrit Poetry" (in this volume).

suggested meaning, which hence admits multiple, even conflicting, interpretations of the utterance[30] and as to the range of emotional nuances projected, all commentators typically agree on the principal *rasa*.[31] The theory of *dhvani* as an additional third power of language, over and above direct and figurative meaning, was propounded only in the 10th century, but the illustrations cataloguing its diverse possibilities were largely

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Several of these suggestive verses along with Abhinava's insightful comments on how they illustrate various technical principles enunciated by Ānanda have been analyzed in my Ph.D. thesis to demonstrate the bisociative structure and exploitation of humor in Sanskrit love poetry. See chapter 8, http://www.svabhinava.org/HumorPhd/Thesis-08/default.htm.

[30] This is precisely why *rasa* could never be the psychological response to an exclusively linguistic object but is itself the ultimate meaning of the poem (see note 18 above). The rhetorician, Mammaṭa, starts by showing how the simple statement "the sun sets," can in real life suggest a virtually unlimited number of meanings to different listeners. The poetic context not only reduces the range of possible meanings, but enriches whatever remains by directing the hermeneutic effort along (largely pre-established) aesthetic expectations. Analyzing and comparing the conflicting interpretations of certain illustrative verses by Ānandavardhana and subsequent exponents of *dhvani*, Sheldon Pollock (see note 9 above), "The Social Aesthetic and Sanskrit Literary Theory" (*Journal of Indian Philosophy* 29: 197–229, 2001), argues that this uncertainty as to the 'real' meaning is indicative of non- (and infra-) linguistic factors at work that the theoreticians were themselves unaware of largely because they were so deeply embedded in the value-constructs of the surrounding culture. Every art-form is entirely conditioned by shared conventions both social and aesthetic that have to be either assimilated tacitly by those native to the culture, or self-consciously learned by outsiders. To appreciate the checkered artistic evolution of even a single genius, like Picasso, requires unlearning a whole set of perceptual constraints—at the rupture of each period—to put on a new pair of tinted glasses.

[31] Lack of precision (*asphuṭatva*) as to the *rasa* being depicted constitutes a recognized flaw in poetry, which does not imply that nuances of interpretation and even deliberate ambiguity, especially with regard to the transitory emotions, are to be avoided. Indeed, the perennial appeal of a poetic 'pearl' (*muktaka*) often consists precisely in the exploitation and cultivation of such indeterminacy through sparing brush-strokes. The humor in Sanskrit love-poetry depends—as I have shown (see note 29)—on key elements to simultaneously provoke opposing affects.

drawn from the classical poets (like Kālidāsa) and from verses in the vernacular. Though this 'theorizing' of prior implicit criteria and techniques was to counter the inordinate (and often flamboyant) resort to the mechanical aspects of the poet's craft such as figures of speech to the detriment of good taste, it enabled the explicit articulation and application of these hitherto 'tacit' principles to practical literary criticism.[32]

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[32] This 'new-fangled' *dhvani* theory provoked stiff resistance on all sides from proponents of other traditional disciplines (see the invocatory verses of this essay), in much the same way as did the conceptual innovations, several centuries earlier, of the grammarian Bhartṛhari, whose intellectual legacy was instead taken over and reformulated by Buddhist epistemology until subsequently rehabilitated and reclaimed by the Kashmiri Shaivas. Ānanda drew his inspiration for the sudden and intuitive flash of suggestion, in all its integrality, from the speculations on the indivisibility (*sphoṭa*) of meaning propounded by the grammarians. What was contested is not so much the linguistic mechanisms described by Ānanda, but the questionable necessity of introducing an entirely new and additional function of language to account for the universally acknowledged experience of *rasa*, an innovation that threatened to disrupt the familiar intellectual framework that all, even mutually exclusive, existing disciplines had simply taken for granted. Some accomplished literary critics apparently remained on the sidelines, freely adopting and developing the practical insights of these advocates of *dhvani* without taking sides in this theoretical debate. Kuntaka, the best known among such contemporaries, thus subsumes *dhvani* under his own generic explanation of poetry as 'crooked speech' (*vakrokti*). Abhinava's learned commentary on Ānanda's *Light of Suggestion*, followed by Mammaṭa's codification and popularization of these tenets, is largely responsible for the hallowed position of *dhvani* theory today. Bimal K. Matilal claim, in his "Vakrokti and Dhvani: Controversies about the theory of poetry in Indian traditions" (in this volume; echoed by Pollock, see note 30), that philosophers like Abhinava were more interested in the (psychology of the) *sahṛdaya* than in the poem itself (as linguistic object) is misleading. Porcher's critique of *rasa-dhvani*, which is central to—but could be taken for granted in—Ānanda's 'revolutionary' project, is precisely that an emotional response could not be an 'objective' feature of poetic speech. Abhinava demonstrates, rather, how exactly *rasa* is the (aesthetic) **meaning** of the linguistic utterance as Ānanda simply assumes.

Painting the world with musical colors: the ineffability of *rasa*

The indeterminacy at the heart of *dhvani* extends also to the recognition and enjoyment of *rasa*, in the sense that without the human drama enacted on stage (or on the screen) and imaginatively recreated by poetry it may be difficult, even impossible, to identify the specific feeling evoked by a painted scene, a frozen sculpture, or a wordless melody. Though we all seem to share certain basic and distinctly recognizable feelings—no doubt corresponding to dosed proportions of hormonal secretions and modes of nervous excitation within the parasympathetic system—even independently of external cues, the very definition of an 'emotion' in real life, it may be argued, is not only determined from the beginning through its being universally informed by typical patterns of external situations, but also further crystallized in the aesthetic taxonomy and historical sedimentation of the surrounding culture.[33] In this twilight zone between the obscure inner experience of self and the codified external norms of culture have arisen—already from practitioners of these arts within the learned tradition—contestations of (the arbitrariness of) Bharata's fundamental distinction between eight (or nine) permanent (*sthāyin*) and thirty-three transitory (*vyabhicārin*) emotions, and of the (dubious rationale underlying the) choice of particular emotions being elevated to the canonical rank of full-fledged *rasa*s.[34] A modern critic, even an Indian such as I,

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[33] The sudden visitation of permanent, overpowering, and incapacitating 'apathy' (*nirveda*) may thus be valorized in traditional India as the awakening of an irresistible urge for spiritual 'liberation' (*mokṣa*), whereas it is simply diagnosed as chronic schizophrenia in the modern West. Considering the degree to which the 'individual' is in reality immersed in and shaped by social expectations, the manner in which such 'world-weariness' is experienced may differ between cultures. Benares was the haven of a 'gentle' madness (*masti*) even for foreigners (see note 109). The confrontation between the two perspectives is tellingly dramatized by pioneer Jeffrey M. Masson—I discovered Abhinavagupta through his work on *śāntarasa*—who became a Sanskritist because of his inner conversion to Advaita Vedānta, but eventually ended up as a practicing psychoanalyst to dismiss Indian mysticism as an 'escapist' return to Freud's 'oceanic' feeling.

[34] Whereas Bhoja, the poet-king, attempted to demolish Bharata's entire edifice along these lines so as to better replace it with his own scheme of a single underlying *śṛṅgāra* that would also be a

would certainly wonder how 'disgust' (*bībhatsa*) could possibly become the underlying and principal theme of an entire narrative.[35] The status of the *rasa*-canon becomes even shakier when we extend it beyond poetry to the non-verbal arts. For what relevance could the canonical scheme of nine *rasa*s have for (instrumental) music, whose vast range of 'modal structures' (*rāga*) typically 'color' (*rañj-* from which *rāga* is derived) the mind with tranquility, love whether in separation or union, pathos, ecstasy, devotion, or a combination of these,[36] but hardly ever with disgust, fear, anger, humor or even

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form of 'self-love' (*ahaṁkāra* = 'egoism'), Abhinava's public project is avowedly 'conservative' in that it is aimed at preserving and affirming the continued authoritativeness of the *Nāṭya-Veda*. Hence, he rejects *bhakti* as an independent *rasa* despite its central importance to the personality and philosophical project of Utpaladeva, the original proponent of his own doctrine of (the) 'Recognition' (of the Lord). The only significant exception is his (ambivalent) endorsement of *śānta-rasa*, which had been however simply read (i.e., interpolated) into the Kashmiri recensions of the *Nāṭya-Śāstra*. Though Abhinava's handling of *rasa* in his Tantric writings is, by contrast, wholly 'radical' it ultimately offers a more profound understanding and appreciation of Bharata.

[35] Though this is indeed what Peter Greenaway has successfully achieved with "A Cook, a Thief, his Wife, and her Lover," it is difficult to imagine how such an overtly transgressive production could have fitted into Bharata's normative scheme (but see note 44 below). The movie begins with a gang pissing on a battered victim, and includes scenes such as making love on a toilet seat and amidst the carcasses hanging in a butcher's van, transforming the body of the wife's lover into a daintily seasoned dish that the villainous husband is forced to consume, starting with the offending organ. But what is the 'life-goal' (*puruṣārtha*) promoted here within the appreciatively wincing spectators…unless, perhaps, they were modern-day would-be Kāpālikas (who, like the Pāśupatas, are privileged butts of ridicule in the Indian farce)?

[36] For example, the pathetic *rāga* par excellence in Carnatic music is the rare Mukhāṛī. Sweetness characterizes Mohanam, the equivalent of the Hindusthani Bhūpāli. The energetic Natta, that often opens a Southern concert, lends itself readily to the heroic sentiment. Revatī is considered the most sublime *rāga* in the South, no doubt because its notes correspond to the Vedic chant. Instrumentalists improvise on (the popular composition *Raghuvaṁśasudhā* in) the *rāga* Kadhana Kutūhalam so as to highlight the element of astonishment and even humor. Preferences for particular *rāga*s vary not only with individual temperament but also with the vicissitudes of one's

wonder?[37] Each *rāga* does have its own unique personality and emotional flavor whose Gestalt is (often immediately) recognizable—regardless of the composition, singer, instrument, style, and so on—to connoisseurs, even if some of us may be incapable of identifying its specific notes or even recalling its name. However, the romantic mood, for example, is conveyed by so many otherwise contrasted *rāga*s that *śṛṅgāra* does not (sufficiently) account for their specific colorations; and conversely, many a *rāga* readily lends itself to varied treatment so as to communicate several *rasa*s even while retaining its distinct individuality.[38] But when the *rāga* becomes the soul of a composition, it takes on the flesh and blood of the lyrics to suggest distinct sentiments and finely variegated nuances that the words alone would have not sufficed to capture. For the Indian singer keeps repeating the lines 'polytonously'—at least to the ear attuned to the variation in microtones (*śruti*) and ornamentations—so as derive a wide range of transient moods and delicate hues from the underlying emotional tone. The identity of these

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personal and anecdotic encounters with specific recitals: my own ecstatic predilection for the pentatonic Malkauns (= Carnatic Hindolam) bears the indelible impress of my emotional state at the first exposure, and has been reinforced through a serendipitous trail of rediscovery.

[37] This is a question that Thakur Jaidev Singh, the renowned musicologist of Benares, who was also a life-long student of Trika Shaivism, often posed to me with scepticism at his home (where I used to teach him French and German). It seems to me that Indian scholars, in general, have become so caught up in the particulars of the traditional taxonomies that even those exposed to the critical spirit of the West are often unable to penetrate to the underlying cultural scheme. Whereas commentators of genius like Abhinava and Patañjali found ingenious ways, even subterfuges, to reconcile the letter of the authoritative text with the spirit of its underlying project, we who live in the universal age of deconstruction can go straight to the kernel.

[38] The renowned Hindustani vocalist, Pandit Jasraj, has attempted the remarkable feat of deliberately stretching the *rāga* Bhāgeśrī—which primarily evokes the yearning, anticipation, and joy of the romantic sentiment, even when directed towards God—to convey each of the nine *rasa*s in turn. Of course, the Hindi lyrics from the *Rāmcaritmanas* have made the task more feasible. Sometimes the difference is so palpable that we end up with two (or more) *rāga*s sharing the same scale, for example, Darbārī Kāṇaḍa hovering in the lower and Aḍāna in the upper register.

concomitants (*vyabhicārin*) becomes yet more palpable when interpreted through shifts in intonation, facial expression, bodily gesture, and rhythmic movement as in a dance-drama.[39] The point here is that the very ineffability of the recognizable mood conveyed by the *rāga* becomes the artist's license and resource to improvise freely even while scrupulously respecting its formal and emotional structure. Despite the arbitrariness of the scenes they depict and the colorful palette of an indulgent imagination, the *rāga-mālā* paintings are ample testimony that these 'garlands of musical modes' were very real and distinct emotional entities to the Indian palate.[40] Bharata's sacrosanct *rasa*-taxonomy is best understood as the millennial reflection of a collective enterprise to harness the raw ineffability of our emotional nature within the larger project of an axiological schema governing the (otherwise unruly) drama of ('Hindu') life. Abhinava helps us extract from this traditional (and otherwise contingent) schema its hidden aesthetic principles in order to explore the universal validity of its underlying 'metapsychology'.

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[39] Abhinava discusses these details in the context of the proper use of the ten 'elements of the gentle dance' (*lāsyāṅga*); see G.H. Tarlekar's contribution on "Abhinavagupta's treatment of the *Lāsyāṅga*s" (in this volume).

[40] I have resorted here to mixed metaphors drawn from the visual, gustatory, and auditory (without excluding the other) senses in order to draw attention to the synaesthetic ordering of experience fostered by *rasa* theory and practice. Indians associate a *rāga* with a particular *rasa*, season (Megh and Malhār cycles with the onset of the monsoon, Bahār and Vasant with spring), time of the day (Miyan-kī-Toḍī with the morning), a landscape (Pahāḍī with the mountains or rolling foothills), and even attribute miraculous powers to certain *rāga*s (Dīpak to kindle fire) Despite the secondary (cultural) elaborations, the underlying taxonomy often seems to have some natural basis, as evidenced by the Western musician new to Indian music sensing that the rendering of Bhūpāla *rāga* was 'somehow' evocative of dawn. Miyan-kī-Malhār's association (in lyrics)—despite its structural resemblance to Darbārī Kāṇaḍa—with the rainy season, gravitates around the characteristic sliding of the *gandharva* note, evocative of (the uneasiness occasioned) by rolling thunder. A systematic analysis might elucidate such affinities in other *rāga*s.

Good taste, bad taste, 'Hindu' taste: the aesthetics of *rasābhāsa*

The universal dimension of Bharata's schema is reflected in its fundamental dichotomy between pleasant and painful responses rooted in the survival instinct.[41] Though aesthetic relish is intrinsically amoral, the objective configurations that evoke *rasa* must be grounded in our shared experiences and memories of the real world. Our pursuit of various life goals (*puruṣārtha*)—(sexual) pleasure (*kāma*), wealth-security-power (*artha*), socio-religious obligations (*dharma*), and salvation (*mokṣa*)—are translations of our basic emotional dispositions into rationalized personal and cultural values. Hence, the various opportunities, challenges, and circumstances that are presented on the stage to evoke *rasa* inevitably bring into play the questions of ethics. Powerful emotions are engendered through the conflict of values and their resolution; the personal values of the spectator unavoidably color one's perception, impeding or facilitating this identification with the protagonists so crucial to the evocation of the intended *rasa*. Hence Indian dramaturgy aligns the four basic emotions of love (*rati* —> *śṛṅgāra*), aggression[42] (*krodha* —> *raudra*), enterprise[43] (*utsāha* —> *vīra*) and quiescence[44]

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[41] Among these primary emotions, anger (*krodha*), sorrow (*śoka*), disgust (*jugupsā*), and fear (*bhaya*) are painful, whereas love (*rati*), enthusiasm (*utsāha*), surprise (*vismaya*), and laughter (*hāsa*) are pleasant. Abhinava analyzes each in turn to demonstrate how the pleasurable emotions necessarily contain elements of pain, and vice-versa. In chapter four, on "Laughter and Distress," of my PhD. thesis, I've attempted demonstrate that *hāsa* (the emotional basis for 'humor') is actually a mutual neutralization of pleasure and pain that finds release as pleasurable laughter (hence its allotted place in Bharata's classification of the *rasa*s). It should be noted, however, that several of these emotions cannot be reduced to the survival schema of approach versus flight, either by themselves (enthusiasm, wonder, humor, and cessation) or on account of their distinctive treatment in drama and the arts, particularly in the case of love (see note 64 below).

[42] It may seem counter-intuitive, to Americans in particular, to make aggression (as opposed to enterprise) the principal goad for the pursuit of 'success' in life (*artha*), and to turn a blind eye to the spirit of rivalry that often animates statesmen undertaking social projects (*dharma*). By drawing the line between *raudra* and *vīra* in this manner within the continuum of human striving, Bharata is relegating the aggressive pursuit of wealth-security-power to the self-interested realm

(*śama* —> *śānta*) with the ascending socio-religious hierarchy of the life-goals.[45] Though in itself transcending all (purposivity and hence) value-judgments, *rasa* is sustained by a dramatic representation that embraces the whole spectrum of cultural values. Abhinava hence enjoins that these primary emotions should be depicted on stage so as to inculcate

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of competition and conflict (as reflected in Kauṭilya's *Artha-Śāstra*), while preserving socio-religious order as the privileged arena for wholly altruistic undertakings. The most palpable manifestation of this cultural difference is that of (not just freshly arrived) Indian immigrants tending to experience American behavior—even when friendly and generous—as 'aggressive'.

[43] But does not such 'enthusiasm' permeate all human endeavors, whether courting a woman for the gratification of personal desire, the self-interested pursuit of wealth and worldly power, or even the energetic postponement of individual salvation in order to serve all beings? Such extroverted, committed, and long-sighted 'enterprise' is best understood as the resolute action of the 'disinterested' ego committed to the well-being of the whole. This is why Abhinava also elevates the 'purified' form of 'compassionate heroism' (*dayā-vīra*)—the underlying motivation of the (not just Buddhist) *bodhisattva*— to a possible basis of *śānta-rasa*. This is yet further testimony of the degree to which (the aesthetics of) Indian 'psychology' is informed by a shared axiology.

[44] In the 'orthodox' (as opposed to the Buddhist-influenced) brahmanical recension of Bharata's schema, this slot would be occupied by 'disgust' instead; and Abhinava does indeed consider 'pure disgust' (*śuddha-bībhatsa*)—towards all the sensual attractions of the world— as a possible basis for *śānta-rasa*. However, he admits that such 'pure' forms of all the other *rasa*s could also play a similar role, and we may ask why the earlier tradition privileged *bībhatsa* despite all the operational problems it poses (see note 35 above). The overriding concern for purity—the basis of the caste-system—which simultaneously aligns the classical brahmin (sacrificer) with and distinguishes him from the (heterodox) renouncer, best accounts for this unique status of disgust.

[45] Having arrived in Benares with a strong background in the natural sciences and as it were to study Indian 'psychology', I was long troubled by this fact that the *puruṣārtha* scheme does not recognize 'the pursuit of knowledge' (for its own sake) as an independent goal of life. Knowledge (*vidyā*) has always been seen in instrumental terms—not just by the Pūrva Mīmāmsā reflecting the orthodoxy of Vedic ritualism—as serving worldly (*apara*) aims or the supreme (*para*) goal of spiritual liberation (where it can become synonymous with *gnosis*). Those familiar with Foucault's discourse on the power-knowledge nexus should have little difficulty here.

the proper pursuit of their corresponding life-goals. Even the subsidiary emotions indirectly contribute to this schema:[46] for example, the spice of humor (*hāsya*), though especially enhancing the enjoyment of the erotic sentiment, can also be employed to depict and censure the improper pursuit of any of these legitimate life-goals. Since we are able to enjoy the *rasa* only by participating in the values projected by the (idealized) protagonists, the underlying moral injunctions are subliminally implanted and reinforced as through the tender ministrations of a loving wife. Classical Sanskrit theater thus reflects a convergence of aesthetics and ethics: a traditional Indian exposed to such cultural pedagogy from all sides would often act appropriately because this was not just morally right but also a matter of good taste.[47] This attempt—problematic in any

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[46] Bharata pairs each of these principal *rasa*s with a specific subsidiary: *śṛṅgāra* with *hāsya*, *raudra* with *karuṇa* (pathos), *vīra* with *adbhuta* (wonder), and *bībhatsa* with *bhayānaka* (terror). Abhinava clarifies that each of these pairs exemplifies a different mode of 'causation' that may, in reality, be generalized to all our emotions. *Hāsya* would be the natural result of the 'semblance' (*ābhāsa*) of any emotion (see note 48 below); *karuṇa* exemplifies those evoked by the real-life consequences of the same actions that evoke the principal emotion (destructive anger); *adbhuta* typifies the class of those directly evoked in onlookers by the very actions that evoke the primary *rasa* (admiring the exemplary feats accomplished against all odds, instead of simply identifying ourselves with the hero); and *bhayānaka* the possibility of two different emotions being occasioned by the same cause: Bhairava 'terrifies' because his radical worship involves the 'disgusting' transgression of taboos of purity (to extrapolate from Abhinava's own extra-theatrical praxis; see note 44 above). This overcoming of revulsion—otherwise so constitutive of the (emotional life of the) Brahmin—is not an invention of antinomian Tantra, but rather the generalization of an already Vedic principle: Jagannātha characterizes the (literary depiction of) disgust felt for the fat, flesh, or blood of the sacrificial animal to be a mere semblance (*bībhatsābhāsa*).

[47] This complex and elusive relationship has been explored with great sensitivity and clarity by my long-standing interlocutor and friend, Frank Burch Brown, in his *Good Taste, Bad Taste, Christian Taste: Aesthetics in Religious Life* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2000). Even while restricting and conditioning the universal range of artistic possibilities, a religious tradition at the same time becomes the inspiration and resource for the remaining privileged modes of expression that continue to expand and proliferate, ultimately though subtly effecting profound shifts even in the

civilization—to align artistic sensibility with socio-religious norms is perhaps best epitomized by the 'semblance of *rasa*' (*rasābhāsa*) that results when the corresponding emotion is evoked through 'improper' (*anucita*) stimuli. The stock example is the villain Rāvaṇa's ('pathetically') genuine but unreciprocated love for Sītā (the chaste wife of Lord Rāma) despite the social gulf that separates them in terms of age, status, and so on. Though the heroine's innate attractiveness and the natural responses of the demon-king inevitably evoke the erotic sentiment, its consolidation is immediately[48] thwarted by our apprehension of these incompatibilities and her contempt for him. The question here is whether this 'semblance of (the erotic) sentiment' amounts to little more than the intrusion of moral considerations into an aesthetic context where they are otherwise of no relevance, or is it an aesthetic category in its own right, like a regular *rasa* with its wake of *vyabhicārin*s. The permanent tension and possible conflict between the socio-religious norms governing human behavior and the imaginative exploitation of the latter for procuring public delight is explicitly discussed by subsequent rhetoricians and

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theological backbone of the tradition. This essay may be considered, among other things, a concerted attempt to likewise reconsider 'Hinduism' in the light of a shared aesthetic sensibility.

[48] Pollock (see note 30, pp.208-215) endorses Ingall's translation of the relevant passage from Abhinava to the effect that what we experience is actually *śṛṅgāra* and that it is only on looking back that we recognize it to be merely a laughable semblance. He then proceeds to reject this claim by pointing out that *rasābhāsa* had been accepted by the tradition itself as a distinct and valid aesthetic category. Abhinava is saying, on the contrary, that our appreciation of *śṛṅgārābhāsa* is a complex cognition that comprises within itself an incipient but defining element of love that is immediately sublated and transformed into humor (*hāsya*) instead. This is what allows him to press ahead and affirm that the semblance of any emotion whatsoever results in *hāsya*. My entire Ph.D. was, in a sense, dedicated to demonstrating that this was not some idiosyncratic rationalization on the part of an Indian didact to 'laugh away' the 'contradiction' between aesthetics and axiology, but a penetrating insight into the psychology of laughter. For all his *rasa*-sensitivity and literary skill in translating Sanskrit poetry, Ingalls was sometimes rather obtuse in the face of Abhinava's subtlety as an epistemologist. A case in point is a similar misconstruction of another passage on *hāsya* in his English typescript of the *Locana* that I hastily brought to his attention: this was corrected in the published volume (without acknowledgment).

the verdict is almost invariably in favor of curtailing artistic liberties.[49] But is 'propriety' (*aucitya*) a moral ('social') or an aesthetic category or, rather, symptomatic of the 'confused' overlapping of the two domains?[50] Though morality and art constitute

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[49] After Pollock's lecture on aesthetics (second in a series of four on "Sanskrit Culture on the Eve of Colonialism") at the Collège de France on 22 March 2005, where he reduced *aucitya* to 'social impropriety' and attributed this 'confusion' to the entire tradition, I objected that for Abhinava (as for many other connoisseurs) the veritable pearls (*muktaka*) of the erotic sentiment were to be found in poets like Amaru, who celebrated the crookedness of the ways of love, including the adulterous woman (who is the stock example from the outset for Ānanda's illustration of *dhvani*). We first ought to address, I insisted, this obvious 'contradiction' before attempting to unearth more deeply embedded and hence 'unconscious' cultural constraints. His response—that what may have been less true at Abhinava's time was very much the case later—is well demonstrated in "The Social Aesthetic" (see note 30 above) for Jagannātha (pp.213–15). Bhoja (pp.216–23) goes to the extent of proposing that poets should 'rectify' even those moral misdemeanors enshrined in the epics. However, even Jagannātha argues that, despite its flaws, the 'semblance of *rasa*' is not a (total) absence of *rasa* (as claimed by others), and cites the more liberal view of the 'ancients' (*prācīna*) on the validity of (our appreciation of) polyandrous *śṛṅgāra* (as in Draupadī's simultaneous love for the five Pāṇḍāva brothers) that he rejects altogether (Pollock, ibid., notes 41 and 43). This tightening of socio-aesthetic norms seems to reflect rather a growing and defensive conservatism within Hindu society (see note 112 below); there is evidence that Muslim poets in the Persian tradition found the Sanskrit treatment of certain (especially erotic) themes too direct.

[50] Bear in mind that in India, more than anywhere else, there was not only great regional and other diversity but also a socio-aesthetic hierarchy among the spectators that was reflected within the drama itself. The stage characters are thus classified as elevated (*uttama*), middling (*madhyama*), or inferior (*adhama*), each class being distinguished by their behavior and responses. With regard to their sense of humor, for example, the lowly laugh loudly at the least provocation, whereas the nobler persons barely manage a smile in appreciation of subtle wit. This implies that Rāvaṇa's amorous antics might strike a ready chord in the less cultivated while provoking an element of distaste in those whose moral compass has become second nature. The deliberate use of humor to chastise the infringement of social norms—advocated also by Bergson later in the West—may be understood as mediating between these two perspectives: by laughing at the transgressor we are weaning ourselves away from the same propensity in us and becoming more

distinct domains,—each with its own practices, rules, and rationality—they are also intertwined through their very nature, particularly in the context of normative theater.[51] Over and above the inevitable conflicts over where (external) boundaries are to be drawn, the poetics of suggestion often revolves around the (at least imaginative) transgression of social norms, the connoisseur's ability to appreciate their validity even while sympathetically entertaining the possibility (and even likelihood) of their circumvention (if not suspension). The uncertain and ambivalent status of *rasābhāsa* with regard to 'good' and 'bad' taste is no doubt symptomatic of a larger cultural 'project' where the (rigid external) observance of (binding socio-religious) norms is gradually subsumed within a generalized aesthetic sensibility that is keenly attuned to (the 'irregularities' of) particular context and individual circumstance. Born of and appealing to a highly diverse society—where each (sub-) caste is (self-) regulated by its distinct and often conflicting norms—'Hindu' taste is the product of constant (re-) 'negotiation'.[52]

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like Rāma. However, the underlying moral sensibility might remain worlds apart as seen in the even worse ridicule of the aristocratic villain (Śakāra) in 'The Little Clay Cart' for imposing himself on the virtuous courtesan Vasantasenā, the 'unprofessional' heroine of the play.

[51] Their divergence is perhaps best exemplified by the opposing stances taken by the two founding fathers of Sanskrit poetics with respect to the treatment of the anti-hero: whereas Daṇḍīn opines that highlighting his virtues would enhance our enjoyment of the hero's eventual triumph, Bhāmaha holds it futile and counter-productive to praise a foregone loser. Bhoja adjudicates the dispute by proposing that the villain's flaws and violations of social norms should be depicted as bringing upon his eventual downfall, whereas his virtues should serve to magnify the hero's preeminence. This clinches Pollock's thesis (note 30 below, pp.221–223) that Sanskrit literary theory completely collapses the two domains into the social aesthetic, whereas the emergence of this discussion at the very beginning and its continuing till the end (Jagannātha) suggests to me rather that the poet-moralists were keenly aware of the (inclusive) disjunction.

[52] This principle is best embodied by the *mahābrāhmaṇa*, who paradoxically combines the two extreme poles of the Hindu caste-society: pure brahmin and untouchable. Pushing his formula of the 'semblance of any *rasa*' (*rasābhāsa*) becoming humor to its extreme but logical conclusion, Abhinava affirms that the "semblance of humor (*hāsyābhāsa*) is itself productive of humor," and

Aesthetic rapture embodies a 'descending' spiritual realization

Ever since the Buddha's 'skeptical' interrogations into the nature of self and the categories we impose upon our world of suffering, Indian philosophy has always proceeded—especially given the diversity of its often mutually exclusive perspectives (*darśana*)—from a rigorous analysis of everyday experience that appeals to the logic of common sense, which is precisely what grounds the evolution of their polemics upon a shared bedrock of reason.[53] The radical non-dualist schools of both Vedism (Advaita) and Buddhism (Mādhyamika) that constitute, for many still, the highest reaches of Indian spirituality affirm the ultimate identity of worldly immanence (*saṁsāra*) and transcendental reality (*nirvāṇa*). But they do not provide the conceptual framework or epistemic categories required to account for the (psychosomatic processes underlying

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then proceeds to attribute *hāsyābhāsa* to this 'great brahmin' clown! So do his (pseudo-?) 'jokes' provoke our laughter in bad taste, amount to no humor at all, or provide a ready disguise for wit that is completely lost on (the vast majority of) the audience? Whatever the case, why does he stand beside the chief (moral) protagonist of the play as his equal (see note 122 below)?

[53] Though all the *darśana*s draw their inspiration from the privileged insights of *yogin*s (Buddhism and Jainism) or even from Revelation (brahmanical schools), they are intent on deriving general principles and conditions of validity that would apply universally to the specific phenomenon they are investigating. Thus, Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika realism accounts systematically for pragmatic activity and logical inference in the external world (despite its theism); Sāṅkhya-Yoga for human psychology, uncovering and dissolving the 'unconscious' (despite its finality in self-liberation); Advaita scrutinizes the inherently dialectical nature of all cognitive categories (so as to transcend them); even the Pūrva Mīmāṁsā (despite its avowed purpose of justifying and preserving the Vedic ritual) has contributed greatly to hermeneutics in general and has eventually helped clarify the specificity of poetic language (see note 24 above); though Sanskrit itself was 'normalized' to contain and preserve the Vedic Revelation, it has served as the privileged medium for such 'secular' intellectual pursuits (see note 77 below) and for the poetic expressions which are the object of classical aesthetic theory. Conversely, the Buddhist focus on emancipation nurtured the freedom of this critical impulse so crucial to Indian thought (instead of letting it become the slave of any overriding technological project or of market fundamentalism), even as Jaina 'agnosticism' (*syād-vāda*) helped preserve philosophical discourse from narrow theological dogmatism.

this) transformation of everyday life into an expression of inner emancipation, for artistic creation as an autonomous domain, nor for the reflexive consciousness that distinguishes aesthetic sentiment.[54] The enjoyment of *rasa* is not a 'spiritual' experience in the regular sense, for some of its choice expressions are in love-poetry with absolutely no religious overtones, so much so that it's been possible to claim (with king Bhoja) that the erotic sentiment (*śṛṅgāra*) is indeed the *rasa* par excellence permeating all the other emotions. At the same time, the ability to discriminate the nuances merely suggested by the poem and to identify aesthetically with its emotional 'texture' presupposes not just an inner detachment on the part of the connoisseur (*sa-hṛdaya*) but also a certain 'purity' of heart (*hṛdaya*), so much so that for Abhinava the fundamental *rasa* is that of tranquility (*śānta*) which all the other *rasa*s emerge from and disappear into, just as the phenomenal world itself may be understood as waves 'ruffling' the calm mirror of the enlightened state. *Rasa* is thus characterized by a peculiar state of awareness that simultaneously 'transcends' (*lokottara*) the 'objective' configuration and the corresponding 'subjective' emotion, but is nevertheless, unlike the introversion of a *yogin*, both receptive to and intent on enjoying the sensory impressions.[55] In this respect, it is both a fore-taste and

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[54] These non-dualist philosophers were often (radical) Tantric practitioners, which accounts for their relative lack of enthusiasm for defending the conceptual scaffolding erected by 'ascending' spiritual paths that advocated steadfast withdrawal from the senses and even extreme asceticism. Abhinava demolishes not just the Sāṅkhya dualism of spirit and matter, but also the uniform need for the disciplines of classical *yoga*. The grammarian Bhartṛhari had already introduced the principle of 'reflexive awareness' (*pratyavamarśa*) as an attribute specific to language, without which (the 'light' of Vedantic) consciousness (*prakāśa*) would be unable to 'illumine' its objects. The Pratyabhijñā reclaims this faculty as an inherent 'power' (*śakti*) of (self-) consciousness, the key insight animating Abhinava's (and the tradition's) insistence on the *sui generis* nature of *rasa*.

[55] Abhinava emphasizes that the determinants (*vibhāva*) and other elements of the aesthetic configuration are not external objects at all but only cognitive constructs (*vijñānārtha*), which is why they are referred to through such distinctive terminology: it is only by analogy that they are identified with the psychological stimuli recalled from real-life. Similarly, the *rasa* experience is

after-taste of the sort of 'mystical' experience privileged by Abhinavagupta that dissolves the distinction between the sacred and the profane.[56] When rooted in and illuminated by spiritual insight (bolstered by intellectual discrimination), this 'aesthetic stance' may be generalized to the world at large, such that the experience of *rasa* is no longer evoked and conditioned by a specifically 'artistic' artifact but is also revealed even in biological pleasures (such as eating, drinking, and sex)[57] or ritual activities (such as the religious devotion of an Utpaladeva) as an inherent and inalienable property of reflexivity (*vimarśa*) within consciousness.[58] Such 'aesthetic rapture' (*camatkāra*), even

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not characterized by subjectivity because its internal cognitive structure inhibits the emergence of the (limited) subject (*pramāṭṛ*): a mode of 'extroversion' that arrests and reflects (self-) awareness.

[56] Western Indologists, particularly those who fancy having wholly freed themselves from the Christian prejudices underlying European thought, persist in imposing their inherited dichotomy of the sacred and the profane on Indian culture. Thus Abhinava's focus on the 'psychology of the reader response' is typically described as the 'intrusion of religious preoccupations' into 'secular literature' where they do not rightly belong (cf. note 48 above). The Harvard pioneer of research into *śāntarasa*, Jeffrey M. Masson, has gone so far as to suggest that Abhinava's 'rationalizations' are actually a sustained attempt to somehow assuage his 'guilt' for enjoying sensual literature (like our naughty Krishna caught red-handed with his finger in the 'cookie-jar' full of ghee?)! Edwin Gerow has argued more cogently that it is rather the aesthetic experience that has provided the paradigm for Abhinava's religio-philosophical outlook. True to its name, Indian non-dualism seeks the transcendent by plunging into the heart of profane experience.

[57] Dusan Pajin (in this volume, see notes 2 above and 116 below) illustrates several of these techniques, from the *Vijñāna-Bhairava Tantra*, of 'self-remembering' (*aham-bhāva*) in the midst of sensuous experience with concrete examples from the fiction of the French writer, Marcel Proust.

[58] More than a mere 'apologetics' for a resolutely theistic monism, the 'doctrine of recognition' (*pratyabhijñā*) could just as well be understood as a thorough-going attempt to defend the reality and validity of our (day-to-day transactions in the external) world. Indeed, Abhinava keeps whispering into the ear of the Hindu logician (*naiyāyika*) having a really hard time in the face of the 'deconstructive' onslaughts of his Buddhist counterpart (whom he eggs on) his offer to save (the reality of) his common-sense world if only he would accept its internality to Consciousness.

independently of the play of emotions in the mirror of art, is after all the original referent of the term '*rasa*' in the Upaniṣads (*raso vai saḥ*).[59]

Ambiguous status of art within the spectrum of the religious life

Partaking in both the spiritual and the sensuous dimensions of human experience, the enjoyment of art is something less than either pole though potentially capable of embracing and surpassing both. Not only may any transcendental underpinnings be denied by the modern artistic sensibility, the overflowing experience of *rasa* that sometimes spontaneously emerges in the course of the 'ascending' modes of Indian spirituality, such as the wholly introspective yogic discipline, is canonically recognized as much, if not more, as an obstacle to full illumination than as a sure sign of progress. Both the Vedic brahmins intent on sacrifice and the early Buddhist monks intent on liberation (*arhat*) were averse to the temptations of the senses even, and perhaps especially, when they were disguised as art. On the other hand, the aesthetic experience may be said to be derivative in the sense that this imaginative 're-creation' presupposes and depends on (our prior experience of) the real world of practical pursuits. Whereas the modern artist may trespass on and even violate the territory of the philosopher, mystic, politician, linguist, advertiser, etc., in seeking to create his/her own values and reshape the medium, the traditional *kavi* (poet) simply endorsed, illustrated, propagated, and humanized the existing order of things and inherited value system that had required a long period of apprenticeship to assimilate and master. Aesthetics comes into its own particularly in those domains of endeavor where the spirit casts its shadow upon the world of the senses that, in turn, reach out towards their own hidden unifying

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[59] The sweeping movement of 'return' within the Indian sensibility back to this world-affirming and joyous dimension of Vedic spirituality had already thoroughly interiorized the Buddhist (and Jaina) conviction of human life as suffering (*sarvaṁ duḥkham*), a cultural verdict that is embodied in Abhinava's (ambivalent) elevation of *śānta* (peace) to the status of the supreme *rasa* with the Buddha himself as its patron deity. The Enlightened One sought to dissolve the blinding emotional turbulence that keeps the wheel of existence spinning by interrogating the ignorance at its core (see note 70 below); Abhinava seeks to 'pacify' them through discriminating enjoyment.

principle. Here's where cultural 'choices' have been made: where ethical imperatives have been articulated around the life of the emotions, where the details of human *scientia* are transmitted in context, where an experiential feel of proportion and balance is shared with a younger generation that's been exposed only to the theory, where creative energies are awakened, challenged, and offered models worthy of emulation. The aesthetics of *rasa* has flowered in the thought of Abhinavagupta, precisely because his philosophical endeavor has been to conceptualize a (for him) supreme mode of 'mystical' experience that dissolves the opposition between transcendence and immanence, sacred and profane, the spiritual and the sensuous. Though derivative of and subordinate to both religious and worldly pursuits, this cumulative 'sensibility' has been constitutive of 'Hindu' culture in the most inclusive sense of the term.

Quiescence as the soul of *rasa*: liberation through emotion

It is evident that the passages on the *rasa* of 'tranquility' (*śānta*) in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* had been interpolated into some manuscripts as a response to its effective use by the Buddhists to promote the ideal of renunciation through poetry and theatre. Orthodox Hindu dramaturges refused to accept *śānta* because the traditional eight emotions were sufficient to account for meaningful activity (*pravṛtti*) in this world in pursuit of *puruṣārtha*. Abhinava stretches the transcendental possibilities of the aesthetic experience in two ways. Firstly, *śānta* is given the supreme place as corresponding to the pursuit of the highest human goal of spiritual emancipation and presided over as such by the Buddha. His defense of *śānta* consists largely of demonstrating the possibility of its practical implementation on the stage in terms of motivation, plot, recognition, identification, etc. Why would a liberated soul pursue a consistent course of action? By what external consequents would we recognize his inner peace? How could worldly spectators empathize with his (lack of) behavior? Secondly, *śānta* is shown to underlie the other eight 'orthodox' *rasa*s as their common denominator constituting as it were the indispensable '*rasa*-ness' of what would otherwise be merely mundane emotions. So much so that he is now obliged to turn around and clarify that the canonical distinction between the basic emotion (*sthāyin*) and its corresponding *rasa* still holds good even for the 'cessation' (*śama*) / 'tranquility' (*śānta*) pair. Whereas Aśvaghoṣa began, not without

misgivings, by composing his epic poetry and plays primarily with the didactic intent of extolling the Buddha's (life and) attainment of *nirvāṇa*, by now the varied sentiments evoked have themselves become kaleidoscopic reflections of that ineffable state of appeasement, and integrated as such into the Hindu scheme of values.[60] Yet, Abhinava's own privileged (Tantric) mode of spiritual experience was one where the barrier between the transcendent and the immanent was completely dissolved such that the world of the senses was not just reflected within but a mere phenomenal projection (*ābhāsa*) of the supreme Consciousness. He also affirms that any of the emotions, not just *śānta*, could serve as the springboard for emancipation: for example, a consistent attitude of laughing at the whole world as 'incongruous' (*vikṛta*)! Such dispassionate and ubiquitous laughter, in imitation of his terrible deity Rudra-Śiva, did characterize the comic Pāśupata ascetic.[61] Emotion binds only because it is directed at particular objects

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[60] The only sustained example of the viability of *śānta* that Abhinava, in his ambivalent defense, is able to provide, is the play *Nāgānanda* on the Bodhisattva Jimūtavāhana, which was written by the 'Hindu' king Harṣa, who however longed to end his life in the robes of a Buddhist mendicant. Does this signal the triumph of the Buddhist renunciation ideal within the heart of Hindu sensibilities? Not quite! For Abhinava integrates *śānta* in such a way as to leave the existing scheme of *rasa*s intact and even concedes that it is impossible to represent 'tranquility' in its pure form on the stage, and that it needs to be supplemented by extraordinary modes of the other *rasa*s. Abhinava refers approvingly to Buddhist theories of *rasa* as a 'stream of consciousness' and, by then, even monks like Dharmakīrti had begun to write very sensuous poetry in Sanskrit. The endorsement of the Buddhist *śānta* has resulted not in the rejection of the world-drama but in its appreciation in an aesthetic mode

[61] Unlike his French successor, Bergson (see notes 50 above and 122 below), Abhinava cannot be confined within a 'sociological' perspective, which hardly does justice to Hindu culture that accords a privileged place to sacred laughter—the terrifying *aṭṭahāsa* of Lord Śiva imitated by his 'crazy' Pāśupata devotees—as signifying transgression. Even the Kāpālika 'ascetics' who are ridiculed for their debauchery in the 'farces' (*prahasana*) are valorized from an esoteric perspective. Bharata's association of *hāsya* specifically with *eros* has (Śaiva) ritual roots in the 'lechery' (*śṛṅgāraṇa*) feigned by the (brahmin) Pāśupata ascetic as an integral part of his spiritual

as opposed to others; when universalized, love, for example, liberates rather than enslaves us to the object of attachment. This latter possibility was developed in subsequent centuries, particularly in Bengal, into a full-fledged aesthetics of 'devotion' (*bhakti*) to a supreme personal God who transcends the objects of the senses that are nevertheless offered up in worship as manifestations and indices of his/her glory. *Bhakti* too serves as an emotional bridge between the world and its transcendence, and as such it's possible to rework (and rewrite) the entire sensuous framework of *rasa*-aesthetics around the attitude of personal devotion. Infused with such aesthetic sensibility, the nectar of *bhakti-rasa* overflows the confines of both (secular) art and (religious) ritual to outpour already into the hymns of Utpaladeva, who promulgated the new non-dualist doctrine of the 'Recognition of the Lord' (*īśvara-pratyabhijñā*): 'become' God to worship God (or, if you prefer, realize your own Godhood by worshipping God).[62]

Rasa in the service of devotion or the aestheticization of *bhakti*?

Worshipping (the image of) the deity in a temple is neither a mode of (Orientalist) art appreciation (as in a museum), nor a worldly relation with another (royal) person (however powerful and benign). Aesthetically reinforced by the variegated props of ritual activity and often engaged in as a mode of supplication, the conduct of such *bhakti* nevertheless draws upon and revolves around the life of the emotions that are (at least temporarily) withdrawn from their routine objects and

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discipline, an association that is maintained within the drama in the 'lewd chastity' of the (hero's) "counselor in the arts of love" (*vidūṣaka*).

[62] Unlike the reigning pan-Indian *gnosis* of Śaṇkara's Advaita Vedānta or the dualist schools of Śaiva Siddhānta ritualism then prevalent in Kashmir (before finding their home in the Tamil country down South), the Pratyabhjñā doctrine was expounded in order to found and justify (the sensuous practices of) *bhakti* on a firm non-dualist basis (see note 100 below). The 'personal' God being worshipped externally is a deliberate projection of, as real as, and non-different from the Self (*ātmānam eva jñeyī-kuryāt, pṛthak sthiti jñeyam… na*). Whether the focus is on the (emotional relationship to this) 'objectified' Deity¸ on the (thereby mediated gnostic) realization of the non-dual Consciousness, or fluctuating between the two poles, depends largely on temperament.

focused instead on a transcendental Person. Precisely because God not only appears in human form but takes on all possible relations to the devotee, Hindu polytheism can appropriate any (conceivable nuance of any) 'worldly' emotion for religious purposes.[63] *Bhakti* is therefore not simply one *rasa* among an array of sentiments, but an all-consuming passion (*prema*) that tends to fuse the aesthetic and the personal into a wholly novel configuration around a privileged object of worship. The entire *rasa*-canon becomes a resource for the religious imagination to transform the world into a stage where the soul is no longer a mere spectator but the principal actor performing for the gratification and beseeching the intervention of a divine Witness. Like aesthetics, *bhakti* may be approached in two ways: as hovering between the transcendental and the immanent, as seems to be the stance of the (qualified) dualism of some, especially Vaiṣṇava, philosophical schools; or fully embracing the opposing poles, as with the Trika, which claims to be an inclusive supreme non-dualism (*parādvaita*) that integrates the dualist perspective. Though a valid and desirable emotion, Abhinava himself rejects *bhakti* as a separate *rasa* for the same reason that he refuses other propositions such as 'affection for a child' (*vātsalya*), etc., that they would result in an uncontrollable multiplication of entities whereas Bharata offered a still workable scheme of eight (or nine, with *śānta*) *rasa*s. Instead, he treats *bhakti* (etc.) as a particular mode of 'love' (*rati*) that is best known and universally enjoyed in its expression as the erotic sentiment

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[63] Devotional music suitable to Christian taste would seem limited by the range of acceptable attitudes to Christ: for example, suffering on the Cross, forgiving his persecutors, our joy at his resurrection, ascending to or looking down from Heaven, communion with fellow men in partaking of the Eucharist, etc. Music in the Islamic context is either prohibited for its frivolous audacity in seeking to mediate the transcendental reality of Allah, or embraced by the mystic in promoting a trance-like union (as in dervish dances or *qawwali* singing), or, curiously enough, by masquerading as 'secular' poetry and song by resorting to allegory. By contrast, there is no limit to the devotional range of 'Hindu' emotions, and even the opposition between the sacred and the secular becomes blurred, especially in the worship of the mischievous, fickle, adulterous Cupid-Krishna, who has been 'humanized' more than many real-life human dignitaries. Oothukadu Venkata Kavi's all-consuming *bhakti* for the child Krishna did not prevent him from taunting, scolding, and even ridiculing (*hāsya*) the God for his errant ways (see notes 88 and 89 below).

(*śṛṅgāra*). His secret tantric writings, as opposed to his better known and authoritative treatises on aesthetics proper, would rather suggest that *śṛṅgāra* might be the ultimate *rasa*.[64] The spiritualization of the 'libido' (*kāma*) in the (often transgressive) context of sexual enjoyment is indeed the occasion for the most exuberant and even 'somatic' descriptions of the effervescence of *rasa*, for example, as an 'interiorized emission' (*vīrya-vikṣobha*) that powerfully vitalizes the 'heart' overflowing with indescribable emotions. Through the 'primordial sacrifice' (*kula-yāga*), 'physiological' pleasure and even objects of disgust become transmuted into an 'aesthetic' experience that reveals the ultimate (*anuttara*) nature of Reality. The independence of the aesthetic domain, vis-à-vis the moral, the religious, the profane, is brought into relief when these 'underground' writings are juxtaposed to his public commentaries on formal art. After all, Amaru's love-poems celebrate the erotic as such without moral edification or religious intent. Some of the persistent motifs of Indian poetry, such as the celebration of the adulterous woman (*abhisārikā*), would be even construed as 'immoral' were they to spill over into real life as worthy of enactment, as they do in certain 'tantricized' modes of (even Vaiṣṇava) devotion (such as the Sahajīya). While exploring 'devotion' in all its human possibilities (between friends, towards child, husband, parents, king, suicide, etc.), *bhakti* too has not just countenanced such transgressive attitudes but even encouraged them as the supreme manifestation of surrender. Despite their inherent tension, the waves of 'worldly' *śṛṅgāra* and 'religious' *bhakti* could swirl together—when aroused by the irresistible (flute of) Krishna, the supreme Lover, dancing amidst the enraptured souls—losing themselves in the embrace of an indescribable 'play of sentiments' (*rāsa-līla*). This

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[64] Abhinava's esoteric treatment of *eros* (*kāma*) might best explain king Bhoja's—he was himself a contemporary Tāntrika—public elevation of *śṛṅgāra* to the supreme *rasa* from which not only all the others but even the worldly passions emerge, and around which are centered all ego-centric human pursuits (of the life-goals). What Bhoja's great literary synthesis, the *Śṛṅgāra-Prakāśa* attempts might be understood as a sort of Hindu 'psychoanalysis'—but from the perspective of a thoroughly 'aestheticized' sexuality—that not only embraces morality and love (*prema*) but equates *eros* with the (self-aware and synthesizing) 'ego-function' (*aham-kāra*), whereas Freud's materialism posits a polar opposition between libidinous instinct (id) and individual adaptation.

is the supreme achievement of the melodious Sanskrit of Jayadeva's 'Song of God' (*Gītagovinda*), where the climax of sexual union is surrender to the call of the Divine.[65]

Religious art as propaganda: trans-sectarian aesthetics of *rasa*

The evolution of Indian aesthetics—like that of philosophy and spiritual techniques—was conditioned, facilitated, and even necessitated by the needs of sectarian propaganda and (to counter) conversion within a larger process of religious acculturation across the whole subcontinent. Archaic Vedic religion had elements of poetry, music, dance, mime, dialogue, and even theatrical episodes that were typically marked by (sometimes overt) confrontation, sexuality, and violence.[66] Though such

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[65] There is a tantricized ritual context to such *bhakti* that should not be overlooked. Jayadeva is said to have married Padmāvatī, the dancer (*deva-dāsī*) at the Puri Jagannāth temple, and settled there to serve the 'Lord of the World' and his wife simultaneously. The tradition of *devadāsī* dance continues at the temple to this day. In his introductory verse, he affirms that those given to 'remembering' the Lord (Viṣṇu) and who find pleasure in love sports would appreciate his ode. The story goes that his courtesan-wife was trying in vain to distract him with her charms while he was intent on completing a verse, and eventually insisted that they have enjoy lunch together. Leaving the verse half-finished, he goes out to take his bath first. Suddenly, she sees him rush back to finish the couplet while insisting that she massage him at the same time. When the real Jayadeva comes from his bath to enjoy the meal together, they realize that it was the Lord of the World who had come in person to bless them both with his divine inspiration. So did our inscrutable Krishna stoop to seduce his own devotee's wife, or is the supreme Lover ultimately the projection of Jayadeva's own Self, or is it just that 'feeding' the senses with the pleasures of tantric sex (see note 90 below) reveals the playful Krishna residing in the heart of the *bhakta*?

See Kapila Vatsyayan's online multimedia project at the Indira Gandhi National Center for Arts:

http://ignca.nic.in/gita.htm

[66] Attempts have thus been made from the beginning to trace the hieratic 'origin' of the classical theater to the Rig Vedic dialogue hymns (Yama and Yamī; Purūravas and Urvaśī; Indra,

performances often seem to be the intrusion of the surrounding popular culture that must have continued to conserve and develop them,[67] the classical sacrifice was thoroughly reformed before 600 B.C. to all but eliminate this crucial agonistic dimension such that whatever remained of artistic sensibility was made entirely subservient to the claims of a purified ritual universe.[68] This 'axial' transformation was not specific to the Vedic 'orthodoxy' but the reflection of a wider spiritual movement that questioned and rejected the violent, sexual, inebriating, and other excesses of the 'pre-classical' religious culture.[69] Both the orthodox Brahmin steeped in a ritualistic worldview and the early

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Vṛṣākapi, and Indrāṇī; etc.) episodes in the Mahāvrata ritual (copulation between *brahmacārin* and hetaera after an abusive altercation; exchange between a brahmin praising and *śūdra* reviling the sacrificial performance; etc.). My own work on the mythico-ritual underpinnings of the *vidūṣaka* suggests rather that the theater as a whole is a transposition and reworking of the underlying Vedic sacrificial ideology onto an all-embracing profane medium, which would justify Bharata's characterization of stagecraft as the Nāṭya-Veda.

[67] There have hence been opposing attempts to derive classical theater from popular mime, puppet-theater, 'subaltern' and subsequently Buddhist-inspired ridicule of Brahmanism. This dichotomy reflects rather the distorting Western projection of a (bourgeois) elite/popular (working-class) opposition onto Indian culture, where the two poles of this continuum have constantly shaped each other down the millennia even while remaining in tension.

[68] The triumph of classical Brahmanism is epitomized by the contest between Prajāpati and Death, where the latter performs the (Vrātya-) sacrifice through songs accompanied by the harp, dance, and sexual intercourse. Finally, Prajāpati, who represents the sacrificer, overcomes his opponent by neutralizing, appropriating, and sublimating these into the Rig Vedic praise hymns, Sāma Vedic songs, and the dramatized ritual of the Yajurveda. The 'shamanizing' potential of such artistic expression would have however been conserved, elaborated, and systematized by subsequent Śaiva religious currents such as the Pāśupatas.

[69] This schema attempts to simplify, for the sake of intelligibility, a civilizational process that is more complicated. The Indus-Sarasvatī civilization—an exceptionally pacific culture that nevertheless seems to have sanctioned (animal and) human sacrifices—collapsed by around 1700 B.C. to be replaced by perpetually warring tribes and a generalization of sacrificial frenzy. What

Buddhist (later Theravāda) renouncer were wary of—if not overtly hostile towards—gratifying the senses through the refined, and hence all the more dangerous, enchantment of profane art.[70] In their growing rivalry, however, both Brahmanism and Buddhism were obliged to adopt the theater, the arts, and sensuous expression in general, as a privileged medium for inculcating their respective world-views and value-systems, and as a means for gaining or retaining adherents among the lay public and various ethnic communities on the fringes of the 'Aryan' society.[71] The earlier forms of brahmanical theater may only be guessed at from Bharata's definitions of various long extinct genres with cosmogonic, agonistic, even violent themes, of which we have no surviving specimens, but which must have been closely modeled on the Vedic sacrifice and its mythico-ritual universe.[72] The Mahāyāna's eventual appropriation of epic poetry

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Jainism, classical Brahmanism, and early Buddhism share is the common ethos of self-restraint and 'non-violence' (*ahiṁsā*) that came to permeate the whole of Indian civilization. This is the cultural rationale for the absence of tragedy in the classical theater.

[70] In his "Not-Self consciousness and the Aniconic in Early Buddhism" (in J. Scott Jordan, ed., *Modeling Consciousness Across the Disciplines Symposium* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1999, pp. 269-280), Michael Rabe interprets the nymphs (*apsaras*) depicted on the Bharhut Vedikā (*stūpa* railing): as "reenacting the futile wiles of Mara's daughters […] the earliest surviving depictions of the threesome that came to be known in later Buddhist texts as Tanhā, ('Thirst'), Arati ('Dissatisfaction'), and Rāga ('Passion'), […] celebrating the Buddha's triumph by reenacting the frustrated dances of Death's daughters, to the accompaniment of harps, drums, and a flute! An early Buddhist passion play, indeed." It is as if the Buddha would have reenacted Prajāpati's triumph over (the artful wiles of) Mṛtyu.

[71] It's crucial to bear in mind that from the perspective of acculturation, Brahmanism and Buddhism—who despite their intense religious competition were often patronized by the same kings—found themselves on the same side of the cultural divide that distinguished those who subscribed to 'Aryan' norms of behavior. Equally important is that these norms themselves gradually evolved as other local (artistic) traditions were assimilated and 'ethnically' redefined.

[72] The best evidence for this brahmanical inheritance is to be found in the 'Preliminaries' (*pūrva-raṅga*) retained in Bharata's compendium. F.B.J. Kuiper has adduced the festival of Indra's

and stagecraft to propagate the Buddhist *dharma*—articulated around the supreme pursuit of *nirvāna* that had as its aesthetic correlate the enjoyment of quietude (*śānta-rasa*)—had for its familiar backdrop and counterpoint the profane pursuits of an urban milieu inhabited by not only monks but also merchants, artisans, courtesans, rogues, and kings.[73] This process of 'secularization' is reflected, for example, in the 'worldly' genre called the *prakaraṇa* that the Nāṭya Śāstra pairs with the supreme form called *nāṭaka* that, though based on traditional legendary themes, is imbued with the same aesthetic sensibility. An earlier commentator had surmised that (a disciple of) Bharata had more or less synthesized two pre-existing schools of drama, namely the Brahmanical and the Shaiva, a thesis that Abhinava refutes not so much on historical grounds but because such composite origins would undermine the authority of the Nāṭya-Veda. It seems wholly plausible that the brahmanical stream would have been highly ritualistic and explicitly modeled on the Vedic sacrifice, whereas the Śaiva current would have remained closely linked to the 'shamanistic' possibilities of dance, music, and the tantric transmutation of the emotions. The transgressive Pāśupata ascetics not only worshipped Śiva-Rudra as the Lord of Dance but were also expected to be familiar with the theatrical art. Bharata's school would have recast the interiority of *rasa* within the authoritative Vedic framework but with the focus now on entertaining a much wider lay public through epic, legendary, and profane themes.[74] Restoring the

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banner—the occasion of Brahmā's stage-production of the first drama—and the ensuing conflict between gods and demons, the verbal contest between the hero and the *vidūṣaka*, and so on, as evidence of the origin of the theatre in Vedic cosmogony.

[73] This transformation of aesthetic sensibility was so profound that the earliest specimens of Indian literature to have survived are of Buddhist provenance (c. 2nd century): Aśvaghoṣa's epic poems on the "Life of the Buddha" (*Buddha-carita*) and the conversion of his handsome and reluctant half-brother (*Saundarānanda*), and fragments of drama (*Sāriputra-prakaraṇa*).

[74] The 'non-Vedic' (*avaidika*) *vidūṣaka*, who bears so many resemblances to the 'initiated' (*dīkṣita*) Pāśupata, thus emerges at the intersection of the socio-cosmic model of the brahmanical sacrifice and the 'individualized' esotericism of the Tantras, to become the indispensable *alter ego* of the hero in dramatic narratives often inspired by the epics. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that in

authority of tradition for the contemporary mind (see note 3 above) would consist rather in demonstrating the coherence of the synthesis around a unified vision that in the past was affirmed through (the fiction of) single (often 'eponymous') authorship (whether to Bharata, Vyāsa, or other 'compiler'). Though the 'Buddhist' *śānta* was missing in the prevailing manuscripts and its status as a traditional *rasa* hotly contested by Hindu orthodoxy, Abhinava himself was not above illustrating this (ongoing) project of acculturation by championing its (interpolated) cause in his (Kashmiri recensions of the) *Nāṭya Śāstra*, elevating the sentiment of 'cessation' to the quintessence of the aesthetic experience, and crowning the Buddha as its patron deity.[75]

(the surviving fragment from) Aśvaghoṣa's *Sāriputraprakaraṇa*, the first 'Sanskrit' play, the brahmin clown already converses in Prakrit and seems to be the (otherwise most improbable) companion of the hero bent on renouncing the world.

[75] Brahmanical thought as expressed in normative Sanskrit almost completely ignored the challenge of the radically different (religious, intellectual and) aesthetic traditions brought by Islamic invaders and immigrants from the twelfth century onwards, and became increasingly preoccupied with preserving and mimicking (the shadow of) past achievements. Having spearheaded a collaborative interdisciplinary effort to document, analyze, and account for this "Death of Sanskrit" in such diverse domains as the sciences, hermeneutics, law, and aesthetics, Sheldon Pollock has also drawn our attention to the dispersed and sporadic attempts by 'new' (*navya*) intellectuals to reformulate inherited wisdom, sometimes quite radically. He ventured towards the end of his third "Mīmāṁsā and the fate of moral philosophy" (29 March 2005) of his recent series of four lectures at the Collège de France that the now over-wieldy tradition had suffocated under its own accumulated weight. This would be—I pointed out—because the forgotten constraints, hidden nature, and presiding logic of this cross-disciplinary systemicity would have been determined by the (by now thoroughly interiorized) Buddhist challenge, whereas the surviving Sanskritic tradition had inherited only half-a-conversation: the reason these 'new' intellectuals were rejected—sometimes vehemently, and with all due respect, even by other members of their own family—was because their 'innovations' could only be piecemeal. Rejuvenating Sanskritic knowledge systems for a global future requires that we reconstruct these millennial dialogues and reinstate such crossroad figures such as Bhartṛhari and Abhinavagupta.

Sanskritize, popularize, and acculturate: the vernacular triumph

Rigorously hemmed in from outside influences and preserved by brahmin lineages intent on maintaining its (and their) purity, the 'obsolete' Veda remained the source and inspiration for a symbolic universe and sacrificial ideology that had nevertheless continued to penetrate, adapt itself to, mould, and provide a shared framework for representations and practices at the popular and illiterate level.[76] Unlike other languages that derive their very names from a particular ethnicity, 'Sanskrit'—which enabled the intelligentsia with otherwise mutually unintelligible mother-tongues to converse, debate, and learn from each other—simply means 'polished' or 'refined' as opposed to the 'fallen' (from the norm) vernaculars (*apabhramśa*).[77] The manner in which this 'language of the gods' facilitated the articulation of socio-cultural differences in the very process of reshaping and integrating this rich diversity within a hierarchized

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[76] For a systematic account of the 'Hindu' acculturation of Buddhist and tribal elements among the Tibeto-Burman Newars in the context of "Abhinavagupta and the Synthesis of Indian Culture," see Sunthar Visuvalingam and Elizabeth Chalier-Visuvalingam, "A Paradigm of Hindu-Buddhist Relations: Pachali Bhairab of Kathmandu" (*Evam* volume #3, 2004), pp.106-76. The most comprehensive case for the centrality of the brahmanical frame of reference even after the triumph of *bhakti* is Madeleine Biardeau, *Hinduism: Anthropology of a Civilization* (OUP 1994).

http://www.svabhinava.org/HinduBuddhist/default.htm

[77] The attention and energy consecrated to Sanskrit was originally motivated by the imperative of preserving intact the Vedic corpus, frozen in a now archaic language (*chandas*) that was both distinct from and related to the forms of current usage (*bhāṣā*). Systematized and codified by Pāṇini, kept alive and contemporary by Patañjali, Sanskrit (and the knowledge systems of which it was the privileged vehicle) was rendered even more universal and 'secular' by generations of Buddhist grammarians. Not until the last century has any civilization so self-consciously attempted to understand the phenomenon of speech in itself, transforming its unfathomable powers into a goddess of inspiration: Sarasvatī. The uniqueness of this achievement is measured by Pāṇini's unforeseen relevance for the abstract modeling of computer programming syntax, and his endorsement by otherwise mutually opposed schools of modern linguistic theory.

system of representations is perhaps best exemplified by the uniquely polyglot nature of the classical Indian theater: whereas the brahmins, aristocracy, and the most elevated male roles spoke in Sanskrit, the women and plebian characters spoke in vernaculars that reflected their ethnic origins, region, caste, or station in life.[78] While the plot of the *nātaka* (the most complete and exemplary dramatic form) derives from the epic traditions and pan-Indian legends and, no doubt, served as the model to be imitated by popular performances in the vernaculars, other genres would have conversely drawn some if not all of their subject matter and inspiration from local narratives and styles, and from the vagaries of the profane world.[79] We have in this way inherited several major and readily distinguishable forms of dance-drama, each employing its own (set of) regional language(s) and all of which, despite taking great liberties, look back to the *Nāṭya-Śāstra* as the legitimizing authority and frame of reference.[80] Conversely, some of

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[78] Bharat Gupt, for example, has repeatedly called for the adaptation of the classical 'Sanskrit' plays for performance in the contemporary Indian vernaculars. See our digest of the online exchanges around "Is Sanskrit dead?" which attempts to provide a preliminary overview of the complexity of the practical, political, cultural, and intellectual challenges to reviving Sanskrit.

http://www.svabhinava.org/HinduCivilization/Dialogues/SanskritDead-frame.htm

[79] Rajiv Malhotra recapitulates this acculturation process within its pan-Asian context in his (fiercely debated) Sulekha column, "Geopolitics and Sanskrit Phobia" (July 5, 2005; based on his plenary talk delivered in June 2005 at the Sanskrit Conference in Thailand).

http://www.sulekha.com/expressions/column.asp?cid=306016

[80] The 'northern' Sanskritic tradition has been best conserved in the 'southern' Bharata Nāṭyam, snapshots of whose intricate dance-movements have been immortalized in stone along the temple-walls of Tamil Nadu. See Padma Subrahmanyam's article on "Karaṇas and Aṅgahāras: some pearls from the fourth chapter of the *Abhinavabhāratī*" (in this volume). In Kerala, the elaborately masked Kathakali has developed in a highly original manner that probably reflects the transplantation of Vedic Nambudiri traditions within a largely tribal milieu (see note 84 below). The cycle of thirteen plays attributed to Bhāsa, which continued to be performed within

the most widely appreciated modes (*rāga*) of classical music bear names and reveal traits that suggest their popular origin in a specific region or caste, with the process of cross-fertilization continuing till this day. [81] Such a hierarchized approach already finds sanction, within the classical tradition itself, in Bharata's distinction between the hieratic *gāndharva* and the worldly *gāna* (*deśī*) *rāga*s that Abhinava elaborates in terms of contrasted formal structure, purpose, usage, and function.[82] Sanskrit literary theory and

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the active repertoire of the Malayalam actors, thus violates several of Bharata's canons such as those forbidding the depiction of death or tragic endings. Secularized under Muslim influence, Kathak has continued to depict the variegated emotional flavors of Krishna's amorous pranks. Odissi, with its distinctively rounded postures (as opposed to the angular ones of Bharata Nāṭyam) has also blended southern dance-styles with Hindustani *rāgas* and instruments.

[81] For instance, Sindhu Bhairavī, Surati (Gujarat), Ahir ('milkman') Bhairav, Ānanda Bhairavī (gypsies), Multani, Gujar Todī. The same melodic mode (*rāga*) or rhythmic cycle (*tāla*) might end up with contrasted high (*mārga*) and (even several) popular (*deśīya*) styles of rendering leaving it open to doubt whether a particular instance reflects the standardization of a popular musical mode, the regional variation of a (lost) classical model, or an even more complex state of affairs. Some distinguished *rāga*s (Kāpi, Deś, etc.) of modern Carnatic music seem to have found their way south from other regions during Maratha rule, and are hence referred to as *deśīya*. *Raga*s shared in common that grew apart with the separate development of Carnatic and Hindustani music, to undergo yet further internal differentiation and admixture, have more recently been tending to influence each other even from a distance. Thus, the majestic Darbāri Kāṇaḍa—associated with Tansen in Akbar's court—has affected the southern rendering of (the *dhaivata* note in) the passionately moving Kāṇaḍa. Carnatic composers and (often Muslim) Hindustani musicians popularize once exclusive *rāga*s across the north-south divide, a homogenizing process that has received a huge boost from (figures like A.R. Rehman in Madrasi) Bollywood.

[82] See the relevant section of Thakur Jaidev Singh, "Abhinavagupta's contribution to the solution of some problems in musicology" (in this volume). *Gāndharva* music—employed only in the ritual preliminaries (*pūrva-raṅga*) to please the gods—was rigidly conservative in the rules governing the use of notes and microtones (*śruti*), rhythmic cycles (*tāla*) were fixed and subordinated to the melody, and the words (*pada*) served essentially to express the melody and rhythm; like the Vedic sacrifice— and unlike the primarily aesthetic intention of *gāna* that was used only in the actual

practice drew much of its inspiration and illustration from the vernacular: Ānandavardhana, in his foundational *Light of Suggestion* (*Dhvanyāloka*), proclaims the most delectable of sentiments, the erotic, to be most at home in Prakrit (which is, after all, the language of the 'opposite' sex). While commenting on the 'elements of the gentle dance' (*lāsyāṅga*), originally performed by the Śaiva Goddess, Abhinava dwells upon the particularities and judicious usage of the various regional vernaculars.[83] The cultural vitality of the 'worldly' language (*bhāṣā*) depended on such creative interaction with the everyday life of the people, a long symbiosis that has resulted in the Sanskritization of most of the Indian vernaculars, including the otherwise recalcitrant Tamil.[84] More significant, in civilizational terms, was the continuing availability of the time-tested

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play—*gāndharva* produces unseen (*adṛṣṭa*) beneficial effects. Many 'classical' (*grāma*) *rāga*s were somewhere in-between, based on *gāndharva* and yet influenced by folk music.

[83] See G.H. Tarlekar, "Abhinava's treatment of the *lāsyāṅga*s" (in this volume). Abhinava notes that Saindhava (from Sindhu)—in which regional folk-plays like Ḍombikā, Bijaka, etc., should be performed—consists of harsh and coarse language, and that Bhejjala's play (*rāsaka*) called "The lovelorn condition of Rādhā" (*rādhā-vipralambha*) uses this vernacular. Bharata observes that Dhruvā songs are typically in Śauraseni (while the Narkuṭa is in Māgadhi) dialect: celestials should sing them in Sanskrit whereas men should resort to 'semi-Sanskrit' (*ardha-saṁskṛtam*). Abhinava mentions the prevalence, in his own times, of such admixture of Sanskrit with regional languages in Kashmir (*śāṭakula*) and in the 'southern' lands (*maṇipravālam*); see note 84 below). These theatrical discussions on the (Sanskritization of the) vernaculars reveal a wholly self-conscious 'politics of acculturation' that extends to the whole of Indian 'culture' (*saṁskṛti*).

[84] Malayalam, the regional language of Kerala, evolved relatively recently through the Sanskritization of Tamil. The acculturating role is perhaps best exemplified by the *vidūṣaka* in the Kuṭṭiyāṭam (theater), where he translates the Sanskrit speeches into a hybrid tongue (*maṇi-pravālam*) for a much wider vernacular audience. Unlike the *smārta*-brahmins of the Tamil country, who remained aloof from the surrounding populations, the sexual politics (hypergamy) of the Nambudiris in establishing multiple and much-sought-after 'relations' (*sambandha*) with women of (former) low-caste (Nair) matriarchal families, even while maintaining Vedic traditions, has contributed to Sanskrit's prestige in Kerala. It is probably no accident of history that the extant manuscripts of the *Abhinavabhāratī*, like Bhāsa's plays, were discovered here.

practices, intellectual achievements, artistic imagination, and cosmopolitan worldview recorded, systematized, and rationalized within this classical tradition as a perennial resource to draw upon for responding to contemporary challenges and exploring new modes of creativity in the vernaculars. Once the rustic speech that celebrated the playful amours of the mischievous Krishna amidst the wives of the cowherds at Mathura, Braj-bhāṣā was thus able to translate, appropriate, and adapt the science and art of *alaṁkāra*, achieve literary distinction in its own right, vie with Sanskrit to attain a trans-regional status, and eventually become, as Hindi, the official language of the Indian nation.[85] Hailing from families steeped in Sanskrit learning, poets like the pioneer Kesavdās drank deep from this pan-Indian inheritance to sustain their creative experiments within a vernacular milieu more attuned to their historical situation and immediate surroundings.[86] This 'classical period' (*rīti-kāl*) of Hindi literature ushered in a new and more generalized aesthetic sensibility: Braj poetry provided a mystical focus to the

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[85] The following discussion is based on Allison Busch's article, "The Anxiety of Literary Innovation: The Practice of Literary Science in Hindi/Riti Tradition," Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern South Asia, Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East (volume 24, no. 2, 2004)., and our exchanges following her visit to Paris in March-April 2005.

http://www.cssaame.ilstu.edu/issues/24-2/busch.pdf

[86] The Marathi poet, Jayarama Pindye keeps the first ten cantos of his "Dalliance of Rādhā and Krishna" (*Rādhā-mādhava-vilāsa*) composed in jaded Sanskrit completely separate from his innovative verses in eleven regional languages in the eleventh canto, which is as voluminous as the rest of this *campū* (genre that mixes prose and poetry). Kesavdas professes his own 'dull-wittedness' (within his family circle of accomplished scholars), but does not hesitate to allude to his own status as the 'best of poets' (within his Braj circle), thereby neither disparaging the value of his classical heritage nor minimizing his own pioneering mastery of the new vernacular medium. Assimilation of and faithfulness to the Sanskrit tradition was the prerequisite qualification for radical experimentation outside of its jurisdiction; lack of aptitude and inclination in the top-heavy traditional universe—where systemic innovation was no longer within individual reach (see note 75 above)—could translate instead into a source of creativity in virgin territory.

hitherto profane treatment of sexuality in Sanskrit tradition even while further humanizing the sweet character of Krishna by making his amorous dalliances with Rādhā the primary focus of its treatment of *śṛṅgāra*.[87] The esoteric lore underlying this bodily ecstasy has found compact allegorical expression even in dance-dramas written in that most Dravidian of languages, Tamil. Venkata Kavi's immensely popular composition "The waves surge, O Kṛṣṇa!" evokes in turn—through its exquisite combination of melody, rhythm, and lyrics—*śṛṅgāra*, *śānta*, and *bhakti* only to fuse them together within an inner alchemy of *rasa* that alludes to the awakening and transmutation of the serpent-power.[88] The blissfully enchanting flute that immobilizes the senses, the midnight moon burning as at midday, knitting the eyebrows to focus within, the eyes rolling over as if in trance, dying for the climactic tryst in a secret bower, the divine child dancing on (the head of the multi-hooded serpent-of-the-deep emerging from) the sun-bathed waves of the ocean, chiding the neglectful Lover for shamelessly frolicking with those other women, the consuming desire to dangle helplessly as Kṛṣṇa's

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[87] Whereas Abhinava had declined independent status to *bhakti* subsuming it within *eros*, the later Vaiṣṇava theorists elevated devotion to God to the status of the supreme *rasa* embracing all the rest. The emerging and expanding class of Braj poets mediated between the lowly saint-singers, who sang without artifice of divine love, thus awakening and nourishing the religious impulse among the illiterate masses, and the brahmin elite, who monopolized and transmitted the secular theory, conventions, and practice of *rasa* in classical rhetoric. Similar hybrid sensibilities also developed in the other (including Dravidian) vernaculars, but such eroticized *bhakti* had already been achieved long ago, within Sanskrit itself, in Jayadeva's twelfth-century *Gīta-govinda*, on the eve of the literary efflorescence of the regional languages (see note 65 above).

[88] See the digest "From Abhinavagupta to Bollywood: "the waves surge, O Krishna" for my detailed exegesis of Venkata Subbaiyer's *alaiy pāyude* in the *rāga* Kāṇaḍa (see note 81 above). This online dialogue (with Frank Burch Brown and others) juxtaposing various (Christian, Muslim, Roma, Bollywood, etc.) musical traditions serves as a vantage point for mutual appropriation among different religious and secular frameworks (see note 63 above). Mani Ratnam's recent Tamil romantic hit movie takes its title from Venkata Kavi's song re-rendered by A.R. Rehman.

http://www.svabhinava.org/abhinava/Dialogues/AbhinavaBollywood-frame.htm

earring in surrender to the movement of his flute, all this poignant imagery serves to suggest (the song's hidden inspiration and finality in) *unio mystica*. Whereas Abhinava has drawn upon his own consummate realization to describe directly in chaste and normative Sanskrit the transgressive techniques, inner processes, and aesthetic transformation effectuated by the 'original sacrifice' (*ādi-yāga*), and the vernacular poets have immortalized the amorous and heroic exploits of the dark-hued Flute-Player for the world at large, the ocean of *rasa* churned by this deceptively simple Tamil composition brings alive to our very senses the elegant manner in which the Hindu imagination translates carnal knowledge into self-sacrifice, esoteric tradition into popular devotion.[89] The intimate symbiosis of Vedic learning and vernacular diversity is perhaps best embodied by the *vidūṣaka*, who disputes in (enigmatic) Sanskrit in the ritual preliminaries but 'jokes' only in 'vulgar' Prakrit in the plays themselves.[90]

Muslim allegories on the taste of Love: becoming God's image

The sculptural representation of the otherwise transcendent Śiva as the 'Lord of Dance' (*naṭa-rāja*) is ultimately the kinesthetic projection of the dynamic stillness of the Pāśupata ascetic in a state of ecstatic trance. The underlying metaphysical principles continue to animate the emotional choreography that the professional (not just the

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[89] Venkata Kavi was a life-long celibate who attributes his untaught musical genius and learning to the grace of his preferred divinity (*iṣṭa-devatā*), the child Krishna, whose initial vision at the Oothukadu shrine would have struck him unconscious. He was nevertheless well-versed in Tantric worship of the goddess to whom several of his compositions are dedicated. Separated by several centuries, the Carnatic composer may have perhaps never have heard of Abhinava, the musicologist, but both Tamil Vaiṣṇava and Kashmiri Śaiva have sprouted from the same religio-aesthetic trunk to which the Oriya Jayadeva too belonged (see notes 65 and 87 above).

[90] The same alchemy of *rasa* is embodied by this 'non-Vedic' (*avaidika*) 'great brahmin'—in whom Veda and Tantra coincide—through his insatiable hankering for food and sweetmeats (*modaka*).

temple-) dancer evokes for the delight and edification of her audiences.[91] Since so much of Hindu aesthetics revolves around the artistic representation of the human form whether as the protagonist of a worldly drama or poem, in the image of a divinity to be worshipped, or hovering somewhere between the two as in the idealized narrative of Lord Rāma,[92] the genealogy of religious aniconism and anthropomorphism in Indian

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[91] The principle of 'dynamic stillness' is embodied even within the fundamental units of dance (*karaṇa*) that blend (a rapid sequence of) static postures (*avasthāna*) with graceful (continuous) movement (*cāri*). Abhinava clarifies Bharata's definition and enumeration of the *karaṇa*s by demonstrating how the whole body of the dancer is transformed into a living icon (see Padma Subrahmanyam, note 80 above). The still Void at the yogic heart of the cosmic ballet—in the sacred geography of (Tamil) Shaivism, the temple (-town), where the 'chaotic' dance of creation and destruction takes place, is (called) 'clad in Consciousness' (*cid-ambaram*)—is translated here into the balance and equipoise so 'visible' in the dancer's pirouettes. Considering that our (sense of) limited personal identity is so rooted in the unceasing claims of the instinctual body, such complete mastery over and rhythmic coordination of its (even minor) 'limbs' (neck, eyebrows, toes) amounts to a spiritual discipline equivalent to—despite being at the visual antipodes of—the immobile introversion of the ascetic: "the Self is the Dancer" (*nartaka ātmā*, *Śiva Sūtra*).

[92] Whereas the original Sanskrit epic of Vālmīki depicts Lord Rāma as an exemplary human hero with his divine dimension as an 'incarnation' (*avatāra*) of Viṣṇu relegated to the background, the Hindi *Rāmcaritmānas* of Tulsīdās transforms him into a deity to be worshipped. The participation of Muslims in the Rāmnavamī / Dashera celebrations based on the latter version (and the participation of Hindus in Muharram, etc.) has led some well-intentioned scholars to claim that the denominations of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' were irrelevant (or simply did not exist) in pre-colonial India. A closer and impartial analysis would reveal that such 'syncretic' practices—though providing the space for the emergence of fresh syntheses—were the arena for (sometimes intense) religious competition that could erupt into (even large-scale) communal conflict. See our case study of the Lāṭ-Bhairo cult and the Benares riots of 1809 in the context of Ghâzî Miyan in Sunthar Visuvalingam and Elizabeth Chalier-Visuvalingam, "Bhairava in Benares: Negotiating sacred space and religious identities" (Wiesbaden: OttoHarrassowitz, 2005). The debate around the theses advanced in this section are available in the online digest: "Idolatry, iconoclasm, and aesthetics of the human form: Becoming God's image in the Mirror of (Self-) Recognition"

civilization assumes a central significance, especially in the subsequent light of the wholesale adoption of the *rasa-dhvani* canon by Muslim poets and musicians. The 'polytheism' of the Rig Vedic hymns attributes vivid human traits even to key ritual elements like Fire (Agni), but the gods—even and especially the foremost among them, Indra their king[93]—were adored through figures of speech and never in sculpted form. Though the Buddha was a wholly human prince of the sixth century B.C., the 'Enlightened One' was visually represented in devotional art for five centuries primarily through symbols like the vacant throne, footprints, parasol, tree, and/or the spinning Wheel of the Law. The gradual concessions to the demands of lay devotion notwithstanding, the central focus of Buddhist predication, endeavor, and practice was not the adoration of his personhood but the intangible principle of its self-dissolution into the Void (*nirvāna*).[94] Even at the height of the *bhakti* period, the image of Brahmā as the third member of the Hindu Trinity did not as a rule receive worship in temples, which the Purānic myths account for through a curse that devalorizes this 'arrogant'

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http://www.svabhinava.org/abhinava/Dialogues/AnthropomorphismIconoclasm-frame.htm

[93] The only sculptures of Indra that have come down to us in Nepal are not from the 'Vedic' culture of the Licchavis—when royal sacrifices are known to have been performed—but from the late Transitional period, when the country was considered to be Buddhist.

[94] As for the ongoing controversy as to whether there had in fact been a (tacit) prohibition against images of the Buddha, the pedagogic strategy of the earlier narrative friezes that depict a vacant space at the center of adoration is maintained, even in South-East Asia, well after the efflorescence of his anthropomorphic representations. The pre-first-century *bodhisattva* (Buddha-in-the-making) images confirm (rather than refute) this doctrinal rationale behind the refusal to transform Buddha (-hood) into tangible divinity (Michael Rabe, see note 68 above). Susan L. Huntington's argument that these friezes do not depict (scenes from the life of) the Buddha, but the contemporary lay adoration of such symbols, fails to explain their primacy from the very beginning. By functioning simultaneously on both registers, the artistic representation collapses the time interval so as to make the (life of the invisible) Buddha present to the pilgrims at these sites. The real issue here is not so much that of anthropomorphism versus aniconism, but that of conserving, transmitting, and diffusing the Buddha's 'Awakening' at the risk of deformation.

creator-god before Viṣṇu and Śiva as the supreme objects of devotion. The real reason, however, is that the prior brahmanical ideology that still underpins Hindu *bhakti* accords no independent status or even reality to the gods who were mere cogs in the sacrificial machinery.[95] Though the late Vajrayāna Buddhists similarly end up multiplying their (Bhairava-like ferociously erotic) deities to a degree that would bewilder most god-fearing Hindus, they are systematically reduced to insubstantial creations and reflections of one's own nature as the Supreme Void (*śūnya*). The mystic physiology of the yogic body, the accompanying tantric techniques, the esoteric language (*sandhā-bhāṣā*) used to communicate such truths (only) to the initiated, and this celebration of the alchemy of *rasa* that proliferated across sectarian lines within popular religion, is embodied in the 'Nectar of Immortality' (*amṛta-kuṇḍa*) attributed to Gorakhnāth.[96] The

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[95] Though Maitreya, the *vidūṣaka* in the "Little Clay Cart" (*Mṛcchakaṭikā*), complies with his brahmin friend's wish to leave the offerings at the crossroads for the goddesses, he makes it a point to complain: "What's the use of worshipping the divinities? They don't listen anyway!" The 'prohibition' of images is not peculiar to the monotheistic cultures (it's not just the Catholics in Europe but even the Muslims in India who have found ingenious 'theological' solutions to get around the interdiction). It may be recognized as a powerful (not just Western) tendency, already within a pagan context, in a philosopher-mystic like Plato: art as being engrossed in the shadow of an already 'imaginary' world in the (allegory of the) Cave.

[96] This esoteric knowledge was so highly treasured by the Sufis that translations of this 'text' were made into Urdu, Persian, Arabic, Turkish (the Mehlevi fraternity of 'dancing dervishes' could ascribe it to ibn-Al Arabi, the Islamic counterpart of Abhinavagupta!), and even Hebrew, and openly acclaimed as the most valuable 'book' of (but yet to be discovered in) India. Though many of the more alien (i.e., specifically Hindu) details were often suppressed, re-contextualized, and/or substituted with Islamic equivalents for the consumption of Muslim novices (especially outside of India), the true provenance and meaning were often known to the redactors (as confirmed by the existence of multiple versions, with and without censorship, from the same hand). Carl Ernst—who has consecrated many long years to collecting, collating, and interpreting this complex manuscript tradition—came to the paradoxical conclusion (at the end of his lecture series in Paris in 2003) that this corpus would, in fact, owe very little to pre-existing Hindu esotericism but simply attributed to India for reasons of prestige! All because his agenda is to

Hindavi literature of Awadh at its height had systematically assimilated not only this entire range of mystical content and understanding but also gave ornate expression to that perennial quest for perfection through the medium of epic romances that resorted to erotic love and sensuous descriptions as allegories for the fusion of the human soul with the Divine.[97] Such achievements had been prepared for by the meticulous translation, avid reception, and experiments in the application of Sanskritic texts on music, *dhvani*, and *rasa* already during the Delhi Sultanate, and by attempts to delineate, negotiate, and bridge the gulf between Persian-Islamic and Hindu literary genres, conventions, and tastes. The ideal listener to such prurient recitations was designated as the Sufi novice whose heart was focused on transmuting the (otherwise) 'worldly' emotions evoked into the elixir of divine love (*prem*) for the Lover who lay behind all name and form. Skill in Koranic exegesis was not just a religious but an aesthetic prerequisite for full appreciation because the crisscrossing waves of meaning generated by this wide confluence of the two rivers of literary allusion and hermeneutics traversed and played upon multiple registers, such that inherited Indian themes and imagery could begin to resonate with Islamic revelation, learning, pursuits, and sensibilities.[98] Though such

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counter the claims of earlier Orientalists that Sufism was little more than yoga (Central Asian shamanism, etc.) in Islamic garb. The 'originality' of a religious tradition, in my perspective, lies not in its refusal to 'borrow' (from even inimical sources) but in the specific imprint, reformulation, re-evaluation, and sensibility it imposes on these otherwise shared contents.

[97] My following observations on the new Indo-Persian aesthetic sensibility are based on notes and handouts from the lectures in Paris of Aditya Behl (June 2005) on Shadows of Paradise: An Indian Islamic Literary Tradition, 1379-1545." His ongoing studies of (the audiences of) Hindavi literature (and music) focus on Malik Muhammad Jayasi's *Padmāvat* and Mir Sayyid Manjhan Shattari's Madhumālatī through the crosshairs of Abhinava's aesthetics, Persian genres (*masnavi*) and sensibilities, tantric conception of the body, and skill in Koranic exegesis. The *Padmāvat* won such acclaim among connoisseurs that the poet Ala'oul rendered it into (highly Sanskritized) Bengali for the delectation of his Muslim patrons at the Arakan court in eastern Burma.

[98] Conversely, Hindu poets could extend the resources of the Sanskritic *alamkāra-śāstra* to celebrate significant secular developments in contemporary Indo-Muslim society. Kesavdas, for

hybrid creativity received much impetus and motivation from the competitive milieu—not just between Hindu and Muslim genealogies, but also among rival Sufi sects, and amidst individual sheikhs—and often served to proselytize, the net result was a shared aesthetics and an emerging synthesis that transformed both the tributary religious cultures. Hindu divinities, like Shiva and Krishna, could intervene to narrate the secrets of bodily perfection or become the recipient of unbounded love, against the canvas of (not just Islamic) self-annihilation (*fanā*).[99] At the height of the Kula 'sacrifice', the body itself is experienced not only as the supreme (aniconic) *liṅga*, but as the abode of all the (anthropomorphized) gods. Devotional worship amounts, in the Pratyabhijnā doctrine, to externalizing the self through the objectified image of the chosen deity upon the Void (of Consciousness) so as to better realize and dissolve within the non-dual Principle.[100] With his prodigious ability to assimilate and synthesize 'ever-new' approaches to the

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example, wrote an elaborate panegyric in Brajbhāṣā of emperor Jehangir, using puns and other stock rhetorical devices to equate his court with that of Indra. See Allison Busch's treatment of his *Jahaṅgir-jas-candrikā* in her article on "Literary Responses to the Mughal Imperium: The Historical Poems of Kesavdas" in *South Asia Research* (2005 25: 31–54).

[99] The rapidly expanding Islam was imposed upon or embraced by Buddhistic currents in Iran, Central Asia, and eventually India, no doubt providing a powerful impetus for the development and consolidation of the ideal of 'self-annihilation' among (not just the newly converted) Sufis, the forerunners among whom hailed from outside the Arabian peninsula. What's distinctive about *fana* is precisely its reworking into an Islamic theism that insists on the transcendence of God: I'd find its inner 'orthogenetic' precedent in the first intimation of the Koran—which was already likened to an experience of death—by archangel Gabriel to the sleeping Prophet.

[100] See note 62 above. Instead of being stuck in the rut of idolatry versus iconoclasm, we'd make real progress in our understanding of the treatment of anthropomorphism in art if we looked more closely at the inevitable tension between symbol and reality already inherent in the (divine) image, and the (religious constraints on the) different strategies at work behind the scenes.

Ultimate Reality, Abhinava it seems to me, would have readily 'recognized' (*praty-abhijñā*) himself in this Indo-Muslim universe in construction.[101]

Banarasipan as 'intoxicated' (*mastī*) state of spiritual autonomy

With the right mix of cultural orientations, aesthetic sensibility can permeate the 'ordinary' life of the masses well beyond those restricted circles where it is nourished, cultivated, and refined through the formal techniques of the fine arts. The day-to-day ethos (*banarasi-pan*) of Banaras, the holy city of the Hindus, had long been characterized by a feeling of gentle 'intoxication' (*mauj, masti*) that takes an eccentric delight in simple pleasures such as the chewing of betel-leaves (*pān*), bathing in the Gangā, going on an outing (*bahrī alaṅg*) on an unpredictable whim, consumption of marijuana (*bhaṅg*), etc., that extended to all age groups, castes, and religious denominations. The cultural justification for such carefree behavior in this center of Hindu orthodoxy was that such a life-style was modeled on the patron deity of the city, namely the ascetic Shiva.[102] Spirituality is not confined to places of worship but permeates the entire public space as calls to prayer, devotional songs, murmuring of pilgrims thronging the streets. Inner detachment was also fostered by the omni-presence of Death that constantly walks the alleys with piercing cries of "Rām's name (alone) Is!" on its predestined tryst with the undying funerary pyres at the burning *ghāṭ*s in the very heart of the 'City of Light'

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[101] After the twelfth century in Kashmir itself, the 'elitist' Sanskritic legacy of Trika non-dualism was inherited and generalized at the popular level by the Muslim Rishi tradition through luminaries like Nuruddin in close spiritual symbiosis with Hindu ascetics like Lallā.

[102] The Hindi devotional song (*bhajan*) in Darbāṛī Kāṇaḍa, a favorite of Sai Baba and greatly popularized among the Indian diaspora in South-East Asia by Swami Śāntānanda, goes: "Repeat the name of Rām with a heart full of love (*prem*), *śrī rā-ma-rā-ma-rām, śrī rā-ma rā-ma-rām, śrī rā-ma-rā-ma-rām*; […] The name of that *mantra*, which is ever on the lips of the Great God (Śiva), is Rām; Rām's name alone confers liberation on those who die in Benares" (*kāśī marat mukti karat*).

(Kāśī).[103] Moreover, under the watchful eyes of Bhairava, Banaras was earlier the center of transgressive Shaiva currents such as the Kāpālikas and Pāśupatas, who sought spiritual autonomy by deliberately and publicly violating social conventions. Over the centuries, these seemingly contrary attitudes have mingled, filtered into, and become homogenized as it were within the down-to-earth sensibilities of the local populace, including merchants and scholars, so as to shape their temperament.[104] An attitude of inner autonomy (*svātantrya*)—that could self-organize politically as in the spontaneous yet peaceful civil disobedience against the House-Tax of 1813 just after the imposition of British rule[105]—especially characterized the (mostly poor) Muslim artisans, who would

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[103] The story is that the repentant robber Vālmīki was instructed to redeem himself by sitting under a tree to unceasingly repeat "*Marā*, *marā*"—another name for the god of Death—which naturally became his epic hero "Rāma" (the Hindu king is identified with Yama-Dharmarāja). This quintessential character of the city of the dying could have a disconcerting—sometimes visibly traumatizing—effect on Westerners, even those otherwise intellectually equipped to understand Hindu traditions, shielded at home till then from (the inevitably of) death. Playing upon the word *citi* meaning both 'funeral pyre' and (the light of) 'consciousness', Abhinava 'figuratively' locates the blissful experience of the *kula-yāga*—the source of his highest realizations—in the 'great cremation ground' (as Benares is also called).

[104] A couple of striking examples: I was intrigued for years by the familiar sight around Assi Ghat of a dignified, dark-hued, and wholly naked (Jain?) ascetic strolling amidst the indifferent crowd or traveling seated on a cycle-rickshaw through the main thoroughfare adorned only with a pair of tinted sunglasses, shoes, and a black umbrella. Similarly, one of the three witnesses at our marriage—he also performed at our request the modest fire ceremony for tying the knot—was a senior professor at the Geology Department, who had the habit of walking around the BHU campus and surrounding main streets well after midnight exclaiming praises of Lord Śiva (and occasionally pounding on our door at around 2.00 a.m.). Though he had only the least interest in 'Kashmir Shaiva' texts, he was the only person that my teacher had ever declared as being a naturally 'perfect one' (*siddha*).

[105] This 'passive resistance' (*satyāgraha*) a century before Gandhi and without the charisma of a single leader was spearheaded by the lowest, especially untouchable, classes and the fiercely

stop working at their looms to take a boat to the other side of the Gangā whenever they felt like it even if this meant a diminution of income. This 'permissive' ethos is what made traditional Banaras such a hospitable place during the seventies for hordes of Western hippies who felt crushed by the 'heartlessness' of their own industrialized societies.[106] Gradually over the years, many of them weaned themselves of their (drug and other) addictions, mastered some art-form such as dance, music, painting, etc., studied a branch of traditional knowledge, and/or assimilated a spiritual discipline of their preference, and eventually returned home to reintegrate as productive and even creative members of their countries of origin. [107] My own teacher of 'Kashmir Shaivism',

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caste-conscious Muslim weavers, and all in the name of protecting the traditional privileges of brahmins and fakirs. The political implications of *svātantrya* need to be drawn out for our own times in the context of a re-evaluation of caste, as guaranteeing the real exercise of a degree of group autonomy, and of Indian kingship. Abhinava, in accordance with the meaning of tantric (royal) 'consecration' (*abhiṣeka*), resorts to the image of the 'autocrat' as embodying 'individual' autonomy (not oppressive domination over others). See also Makarand Paranjape's account of his encounter with a proudly humble rickshaw-driver in Benares (*Evam* volume #3, 2004).

[106] More generally, many Westerner travelers (as opposed to tourists) are even now attracted to India for the simple experience of soaking in this aesthetic ambience that they find difficult to formulate intellectually or even to account for in terms of the (often distressing, sometimes repulsive) particulars of everyday experience. During my two recent years (2002–2005) in Paris attending a variety of India-related events, I was repeatedly approached with warm sympathy (especially after my public verbal interventions) by women and men of all ages and from all walks of French life, who were there primarily to make sense of their own fascination (and who privately expressed their displeasure at what they often perceived to be denigrating interpretations and extrapolations by 'bread-and-butter' Indologists). A French expatriate couple—not spiritually inclined in any regular sense, the husband is a nuclear physicist—whom we know in Chicago spend their vacations to simply 'being' in India, though they speak none of its languages and know very little factually and conceptually of its complex traditions.

[107] In the early 1970s, there was a mounting influx across the overland route of Westerners, many of them without regular papers and little money. Despite pressure exercised on the Indian government by the urban bourgeoisie in Delhi and elsewhere to stem the 'corrupting' tide, Indira

an extremely orthodox Mithila brahmin and very learned (not only) in Advaita Vedānta, would proceed after our sessions to the banks of the Gaṅgā where, floating high on *bhaṅg*, he would remain immersed in spiritual contemplation (*samādhi*).[108] His daily words of parting were the benediction: "remain wholly intoxicated" (*khūb mast raho*)![109] Aesthetic sensibility opens the "doors of perception" to experience well beyond the confines of art.

Is Abhinavagupta still relevant to the emerging global aesthetics?

In Abhinava's aesthetics, we thus discover a supple conceptual and experiential synthesis[110] that exhibits apparent 'inconsistencies' only because it pushes the envelope

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Gandhi adamantly refused, declaring that the nation had always been hospitable to refugees of all sorts, whether political or cultural.

[108] Rameshwar Jha's contention was that, for the spiritually inclined, the ingestion of *cannabis* facilitated natural repose and delight in one's true inner nature; the wealthy brahmin jewellers who hosted my teacher in Benares would regularly consume *bhaṅg* dissolved in milk with him. My only experience with this concoction—my teacher, never one to push anything down my throat, often indulged my curiosity—resulted in my throwing up at home and falling into a deep sleep from which I feared never being able to wake up!

[109] The notion of (Hindi) *mastī* has the semantic range of Sanskrit *matta* (from the root –*mad*) meaning "intoxicated, drunk, amorous, mad, and/or elated" (see note 33 above). Elizabeth had originally come to Benares to work on her Ph.D. on the 'crazy' (Unmatta-) Bhairava to answer the question: how come Hindus worship such 'mad' divinities whereas she had been taught in Paris by Michel Foucault that Western Reason had constructed itself through the systematic banishment, imprisonment, and clinical pathologization of folly...we were subsequently visited by French ethno-psychoanalysts researching madness in India. Our friend, Jacques Vigne, for example, came to Benares to study the guru-disciple relationship and ended up renouncing a promising career in psychiatry back home to become an ardent disciple of Mā Ānandamayī.

[110] K. Krishnamoorthy (see note 9 above) highlights this uniquely integrated understanding of the (not just aesthetic) tradition with well-chosen examples and corrections—based on parallel

of human possibilities simultaneously in several contrary directions. His familiarity with the practical performance-oriented details of music, dance, poetry, and theater in the context of the theoretical controversies of his own times, is abundantly attested.[111] Such a unifying framework was possible largely because the surrounding traditional culture shared a common discourse whatever one's particular position or choices within its available range of values.[112] Contemporary ('western') culture is defined instead by a

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readings in other unpublished manuscripts—to corrupt text-places in his two commentaries. Such errors have crept in, it had often seemed to me, especially where the Indian scribes have had difficulty making sense of Abhinava's analyses, subtle enough even for one familiar with his philosophical and tantric outlook. Only a well-coordinated interdisciplinary effort that goes beyond a mere collection of disparate articles could do justice to (all that) Abhinava (represents).

[111] This is reflected in his perceptive comments on a dazzling range of otherwise obscure and controversial topics, such as phonetic texture, musical notes, dance sequences, language use; authoritative pronouncements that extend beyond aesthetics into the particularities of different tantric traditions. Whereas recent Western scholarship in both domains has attempted to project the image of a theoretician reading his own 'rationalizations' into the craft of practitioners of art and religion, all the evidence indicates instead that his capacity for abstraction made him all the more keenly attuned to significant details, connections, and rationales missed by lesser minds.

[112] When Pollock (see notes 49 and 75 above) raised the question at the end of his second lecture on "The quarrel of the ancients and the moderns (*prācīna-navya-vivāda*) and the end of Sanskrit literary theory," as to why the innovators (*navya*) won the day in France but lost out in India, his host at the Collège de France, Gérard Fussman, suggested that the answer might be rather simple: France was a sovereign nation that fully and proudly assumed its own traditions (even after and despite the Revolution), whereas the Hindu polity had become the 'subject' of an (alien religious tradition under the) Mughal dispensation. Pollock rightly pointed out that the reasons had to be much deeper than that because several Muslim sovereigns and patrons—such as Zain-ul-abidin, Akbar, Asaf Khan—had actually attempted to promote and even revive Sanskrit learning only to be thwarted by the closure of the brahmin mind. Similarly, when C. Rajendran concluded his subsequent talk on "Sanskrit in Contemporary India: Evolution and Status" (26 May 2005) in Paris, by citing fruitful instances of Hindu-Muslim interaction in music, the arts, devotional religion, etc., I pointed out that such symbioses took place mostly at the popular level and in the

fragmentation of not just theory but also of the corresponding practice and the resulting experience. Unlike the carefully delimited 'transgressive sacrality' that hid behind and inspired Abhinava's experience of aesthetic rapture, artistic expression today seems to leap forward through a perpetual movement of trespassing its own unstable norms.[113] What has been problematized is not just the content and technique of art but also the boundaries between aesthetics and everything else.[114] Not only does the artist

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vernaculars, whereas the Sanskrit tradition had remained resolutely aloof. The obvious reason, it seems to me, is that, unlike their home-grown Buddhist interlocutors of the previous millennium, the challenge of the Koran-based knowledge systems came from without and had its roots in alien sources, unfamiliar modes of thinking, and radically divergent values. It is only now, through modern (largely Western) scholarship, that Hindus can better understand and appreciate (not only) Islamic traditions (but even the 'skewed' systemicity of their own inheritance).

[113] The socio-religious hierarchy of the 'legitimate goals of life' (*puruṣārtha*) was considered problematic already in the traditional didactic (and even within the same family!), as exemplified by the Mahābhārata debate where each of the Pāṇdava brothers extols, in turn, the supremacy of only one: *kāma* (the warrior Bhīma), *artha* (the royal Arjuna), *dharma* (the 'brahmin' Yudhiṣṭḥira). Similarly, Bhoja's 'erotic non-dualism' (*śṛṅgārādvaita*) derives from the observation that all these pursuits, including the quest of the world-weary for liberation (*mumukṣu* in the 'desiderative' form of the verb), are driven by desire (see note 64 above). Those clamoring for a 'Hindutva' restoration of **the** (increasingly politicized) Dharma in 'secular' India might take note that the epic describes (the ways of) this 'Order' as being hidden in an unfathomable cave.

[114] Historically, the emergence and consolidation of Indian aesthetics must be replaced within the larger matrix of the parallel evolution of other semi-autonomous domains such as philosophy, law, 'sectarian' religion, and so on, from the mythico-ritual roots of the Vedic tradition, wherein these disciplines are not clearly distinguished. Neither the Rig-Vedic 'poems' nor even classical epic poetry, with its long stretches of descriptive verse and didactic intent, can be satisfactorily accounted for in terms of *rasa*-theory, whereas one discovers abundant use of figures of speech and sound-effects. Of the ten forms of drama (*daśa-rūpaka*) enunciated by Bharata, several seem to have been of ritual orientation and have as such been lost (so that we may only guess at their nature), whereas others have survived only at the cost of profound transformations that reflect the critical mentality and 'secular' urbanity that came with far-reaching socio-cultural change.

express his 'personal' (as opposed to received social) values but the medium also becomes the vehicle of contestation and now serves non-aesthetic purposes.[115] Conversely, other modes of life, like the religious or the commercial, likewise cultivate, in good taste or bad, only specific possibilities of art to further their own agendas. Artists have also responded by barricading themselves into an 'aestheticism' that's supposedly immune to all other considerations, whether moral, political, religious, pedagogic, or even that of simply affording delight.[116] New media have emerged such

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[115] Pursuing his initial comparison between the divergent fate of the Brahmanical and French 'innovators' (*navya*s), Pollock (see notes 49, 112, and 75 above) summed up (the last of) his four talks ("Political thought in early modern India," 5 April 2005) with the claim that the ultimate reason for the stagnation and sclerosis of Sanskrit knowledge systems—this inability or refusal to engage in a style of thought that looks for new questions rather than simply more precision to the formulation of older ones—would be the socio-political 'revolution' that never happened. Referring to the growing discourse on Asian values and alternative paths to modernity, I expressed my surprise that never once in the course of his lecture-series had he raised the question of the 'individual'—so central to Louis Dumont's systematic comparison between traditional societies, exemplified above all by India, and the modern West—who is rooted in a specifically Christian (re-) formulation of religious faith. How otherwise, I asked, do we account for the historical fact that the geographical cradle of the modern world was Europe? In retrospect, the human costs and continuing legacy of these (Jeffersonian, Robespierrian, Stalinist, Hitlerian, Maoist, Khomeinian, and now Ladenian) 'revolutions' seem dubious (to say the least), and 'communist' China's successful modernization is accompanied by a return to (neo-) Confucianist values. In the face of Western encroachment, Chinese intellectuals are turning again to Indian (not just Buddhist) knowledge systems as a resource for revitalizing their socio-cultural order:

http://www.svabhinava.org/IndoChina/TanChung/default.htm

I would simply add here that a specifically Indian formulation of 'individual' creativity is available in Abhinava's insistence on (spiritual) 'autonomy' (*svātantrya*).

[116] There is a vicious cycle here: the reigning confusion and nihilism obliges the artist to create his own meaning, restructure his little world, and so doing justify his life at least to himself; but he

as cinema, television, (multimedia on) the Internet, which challenge some of the basic presuppositions of traditional art (for example, that of a localized as opposed to virtual community) and offer tantalizing (for example, remote interactive) possibilities yet to be adequately explored. Fuelling all these cross-currents of innovation are large doses of theory and practice being injected through the exposure to non-Western cultures, with their own indigenous forms of aesthetic sensibility,[117] which likewise cannot be reduced to *rasa* or even *dhvani* in its canonical formulations. While various classical Indian art-forms, such as music and dance, find an increasingly receptive audience world-wide, they are also being rethought, extended, and transformed even in India itself through the experiments of (some of the foremost) indigenous artists often in collaboration with representatives of such contemporary trends.[118] So long as the language of art depends on the powers of signification and especially in their ability to evoke, fathom, and

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thereby adds his own voice to the growing cacophony. Hence, (contemporary reworkings of) ancient Gnostic traditions that had cast life-in-this-world in the darkest shade of a prison, combined with elements of Eastern esoteric traditions, continue to exercise a strong appeal on such circles. Dusan Pajin (in this volume, see notes 2 and 57 above) shows, with the example of Marcel Proust, how Platonic *anamnesis*, elaborated into a sophisticated technique of *aham-bhāva* in Abhinava's Trika, is particularly adapted to this 'existentialist' dilemma. G.I. Gurdjieff placed such 'self-remembering' at the heart of his own esoteric teaching and practice in the last century.

[117] For the continuing ethnocentrism of (post-) 'modernity' centered formerly on the 'classical' tradition and now around (lucrative fads like) 'deconstruction' and 'postcolonialism', see Patrick Colm Hogan, "Ethnocentrism and the very idea of literary theory" (in this volume). The 'Anglo-Brahmins' who make American careers for themselves by debunking and decrying attempts to valorize (their own) Sanskritic heritage through (*guru*-) English are being offset by the increasing number of Western (including religious) scholars whose awareness of the constitutive problems of their own cultural legacy is impelling them to study other traditions for alternate perspectives.

[118] The aesthetic sensibility of Indian cinema—despite its eclectic reception of musical, dance, and other elements from all over the world—remains in many ways, particularly in its 'sentimentality', a contemporary prolongation of classical 'Sanskrit' theater (which could be deeply esoteric and yet exercise mass 'box-office' appeal). Bollywood might find an incomparable intellectual resource here in its growing challenge to Hollywood.

transform human emotions, the Indian legacy remains an incomparable resource for the aesthetics of the future. Abhinavagupta himself lives in our consciousness not so much as an artist *stricto sensu* but as a discriminating commentator, connoisseur, and veritable doctor.[119] The deepening crisis of values further exacerbated by the 'clash of civilizations' is in need not so much of even more art-forms with their conflicting rules, theories, and subjectivities, but rather of a shared aesthetic sensibility that extends to the whole of life. Here, it seems to me, is Abhinava's greatest contribution to our world.

Bisociative insights: enigmatic humor and Internet pedagogy

Given the increasing fragmentation and contestation of so much of contemporary human knowledge due to the dissolution of barriers to mass communication among the various religio-cultural traditions—as manifested in and exemplified by the ubiquitous Internet, the modern Tower of Babel—these traditions now need to be systematically juxtaposed, read against the grain, and problematized so as to extract fresh insights and principles for the global future. Abhinava offers four casual observations on the nature of (Indian) humor (*hāsya*) that had been relegated to minor, even trivial, status because it does not directly further the legitimate goals of life. Taken together, the assertions that "the semblance of any emotion becomes *hāsya*" and "all the emotions are included in *hāsya*" are explicable only in terms of a bisociative theory of humor as deriving from the aestheticization of the mutual neutralization of two sharply opposing emotions whose energies would normally be released through the reflex of laughter: humor is thus not a

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[119] See note 111 above. In the same way, the highest-paid among the priestly 'laborers' (*śram-*) of the Vedic sacrifice (*yajña*) was the 'do-nothing' *brahmán* who silently—with an occasional nod of approval (AUM)—contemplated the (hidden connections being established within the) ritual drama unfolding before his eyes. Though without a Ph.D., he was also called the 'doctor' (*bhiṣaj*) of the sacrifice, because he alone knew enough to 'heal' the inevitable mistakes. I've shown in my own 'doctorate' that the *vidūṣaka* is the transposition of the same function within the play. For the philosopher (Plato) as physician curing the people of the ill-effects of earlier remedies, see the musings of my 'Nietzschean' friend Joseph Martin: "Mediating the opposites - East meets West: Philosophy as cultural critique and remedial dialogue" (digest of online dialogue).

'simple' unitary feeling but a cognitive structure where the associative field is split down the middle between mutually incompatible emotional responses. That the "semblance of humor likewise becomes humor" and that "so too does the clown deploy the semblance of humor" (*hāsyābhāsa*), this joint-claim is possible only where such playful and ridiculous nonsense serves as the sustained but opaque vehicle for a hidden ritual meaning and purpose. Through the 'incongruous' connections (*bandhu*) that he repeatedly establishes between things and domains that have (apparently) nothing to do with each other, the ('great') brahmin (*mahābrāhmaṇa*) Fool becomes—as I have shown—the comic expounder upon the world-stage of the (secret of the) Vedic enigma (*bráhman*).[120] Going all the way in applying Abhinava's insights with the help of modern studies—on Indian civilization as a whole and on the cross-cultural anthropology of ritual laughter—we arrive not only at the realization that the *vidūṣaka* is the institutionalized violator of brahmanical norms but, more generally, at a dialectical conception of traditional order as revolving around the principle of transgression.

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[120] This resolves another of the many puzzles of the theatrical preliminaries (*pūrvaraṅga*), the sudden and unexplained appearance of an actor called the 'institutor' (*sthāpaka*), who assumes the guise of the stage-manager (*sūtradhāra*) to usher in the (first character of the) first Act of the play proper: for example, the 'friendly' *vidūṣaka* Maitreya lamenting (like our pot-bellied Gaṇeśa?) the loss of his *modaka*s in the *Mṛcchakaṭikā*. The *sthāpaka* would have been a logistical device to free up the real Sūtradhāra (-Brahmā) to appear in the play himself as the Vidūṣaka. This (good-for-nothing) 'great brahmin' is indeed the seasoned 'joker' (*narma-vid*) who 'knows' how to 'pierce' and weave together the 'vital joints' (*marma-vidh*) of the sacrificial play through his 'incongruous' remarks. The stage-manager is so-called, not simply because of his sacred-cord (*yajñopavīta*); rather, it is he who 'holds' (*-dhāra* from the root *dhṛ*) and spins together the invisible thread (*sūtra*) not only of the profane narrative but above all of the (noose of the) sacrificial 'plot' (of which his dear friend Cārudatta ends up the pre-designated victim). This behind-the-scenes 'wire-puller' projects himself as the indispensable companion and chief resource of the hero. In the Prologue to this 'Little Clay Cart', the Sūtradhāra is famished and insists, in Sanskrit, on being feasted by his wife-actress, before switching to Prakrit "for the purpose of the play." Of course, were he here on stage before us today, this 'weaver of enigmas' (*brahma-bandhu*) would be spinning his 'yarns' by synthesizing disparate threads from multiple Internet forums (*sabhā*)!

Abhinavagupta-Bhairava himself embodies this paradox of being the champion of the traditional (*puruṣārtha*) order who nevertheless attributes his highest realizations to the systematic violation of this sacralized order. Whereas the brahmin clown drew upon a shared mythico-ritual universe and value system to crack his often unintelligible (sometimes even to the initiated!) jokes on the profane stage, the contemporary confusion and demise of ideologies as a whole is inimical to any form of exposition and dialogue that insists—in the manner of the philosophers—on starting from (supposedly) 'first' principles. More effective is the immediate, abrupt, and elliptical projection of highly condensed cognitive 'knots' (*bandhu*—from *badh* "to bind")[121] in the form of outrageous questions, improbable analogies, juxtaposition of disparate domains, unexpected turns of thought, reversal of values, and so on, that challenge, titillate, and otherwise engage a most varied audience even if initially (only) because of their (apparent) humor. The 'joke'[122] thus becomes the intriguing focus for a collaborative effort in unwinding its multiple strands of meaning through layered commentary that

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[121] The sacred knot, depicted in art across so many prehistoric cultures, is best understood as the primitive representation of the neural node as the fundamental unit of knowledge, and wisdom was the facility with which the sage was able to untie and retie the thread. Whereas Alexander, that paragon of Western civilization and future (short-lived) ruler of Asia, claimed to have 'solved' the Gordian Knot by simply chopping through it with his triumphant sword (like many a present-day Indologist?), the *vidūṣaka* excels, like an incorrigible Indian boy-scout (*duṣta-baṭuka*) at amusing himself, and others, by 're-solving' one riddle only to metamorphose it into another.

[122] Some of the most significant Western contributors to humor theory were primarily interested in serious matters: Bergson in laughter's role in chastising infractions against social norms; Freud in jokes (like dreams) as the royal road to the workings of the unconscious; Koestler in bisociation as the key to the secret of creativity; and Gurdjieff in tapping into the economy of energy within the duality of our psychosomatic existence. More than a mere symptom, humor could just as well serve as a therapeutic device—especially when deployed across the Internet—for interactively rewiring our neural networks. I began introspectively scrutinizing my own internal mechanisms of laughter so deeply that I had already lost my sense of humor before arriving in India: thanks to Abhinava's revelation of *hāsyābhāsa*, I now laugh and pretend to be serious at the same time ☺

draws upon more conventional (bibliographic, etc.) knowledge resources. Such a practice would renew with an entire Indian tradition—starting from Abhinava's pronouncements on humor, through the nonsense of the clown and the witty expositions of the riddle play (*vīthī*), back to the Vedic enigma-contests (*brahmodya*)—by compressing its history and dissolving the boundaries between genres,[123] even while opening it up to the contemporary and increasingly interconnected world. We thus become active participants in a collective exercise in disjointed, proliferating, open-ended, cumulative, and 'ever-renewed' (*abhi-nava*!) sense-making, that is as entertaining as it is mutually instructive, therapeutic, and self-transforming. The best—and perhaps the only—way to clarify and preserve Indian tradition (and not just in aesthetics), it seems to me, is to keep extending it creatively. As the 'doctor' said, "use it or lose it!"

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[123] See note 114 above. Already extinct by Abhinava's time, the *vīthī* appears, in the light of the definitions of its various elements (*vīthyaṅga*), to have been a riddle-play, drawing inspiration from the verbal jousts of the assembly hall (*sabhā*) and eventually going back to the Vedic enigma-contests (*brahmodya*). The only way Abhinava is able to vindicate this category is to 'aestheticize' our understanding of these elements by finding illustrations, mostly in vernacular (Prakrit), of such verbal wit and linguistic ambiguity in the sentimental (often humorous) repartees of the love-dramas (*nāṭikā*). Defined in terms of the 'verbal' (*bhāratī*) 'style' (*vṛtti*), the *vīthī* must have originally been enacted by male characters in Sanskrit. The clown's 'refutation' (*vidūṣaṇa*) indeed resorts to several of these *vīthyaṅga*s in Sanskrit during the 'three men's talk' (*trigata*), enacted as part of the ritual preliminaries. Abhinava's commentarial strategy, however, does suggest that such riddling mechanisms had penetrated (the dialogue of) all the dramatic genres, which may be confirmed by independent analysis of plays such as the "Little Clay Cart."

Consciousness, self and other: universalization in Abhinava's theory of Rasa

This Life's dim Windows of the Soul
Distorts the Heavens from Pole to Pole
And leads you to Believe a Lie
When you see with, not thro, the Eye.

William Blake, *The Everlasting Gospel*

Only a world-affirming spirituality can conceptualize *rasa*

The enjoyment of aesthetic emotion (*rasa*) is a paradox that posed a challenge to Indian philosophical speculation that on the whole postulated an opposition, or at least a sharp dichotomy, between consciousness and its manifold objects.[124] Even the non-dualist schools like Vijñānavāda and Advaita Vedānta were more concerned with providing an epistemo-ontological foundation for modes of spiritual realization predicated on the 'purification' or separation of a static consciousness from its possible contents, both physical and especially psychic, than in accounting for its creativity or at least for the manner in which it positively shapes its contents. So much so that any

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[124] This second part forms an appendix, where I've minimized repetition in the description of aesthetic identification and universalization. The online debate at the Abhinavagupta forum over Ian Whicher's attempt to (re-) interpret the Sāṅkhya-Yoga tradition from a world-affirming (as opposed to the traditional world-negating) perspective provided an opportunity to clarify persistent misunderstandings of the meaning of 'universalization' (*sādhāraṇîkaraṇa*) in Sanskrit aesthetics. Refer to the main essay above if you have difficulty in following the links in the argument in some places. Many of the Sanskrit passages on which this exposition is based may be found in the notes to chapters 7 and 9 of my Ph.D. thesis. Ian Whicher's presentation. "Countering World Negation: World Affirming and Integrative Dimension of Classical Yoga," to the Indic Colloquium (July 2002) is available at

http://www.infinityfoundation.com/indic_colloq/papers/paper_whicher2.pdf

discussion of its inherent intentionality and possible dynamism was skewed by their relegation and assimilation to the extraneous realm of contaminating desire. By straddling the divide however, aesthetic rapture—as exemplified by the phenomenology of *rasa*—demands a more integrated analysis of experience than allowed for by conceptual frameworks based upon such 'ascending' modes of realization that debase all activity (or, on the contrary, upon a materialist reduction of all consciousness to a mere epiphenomenon). The status of self-awareness (regardless of the metaphysical existence or otherwise of the Self) encapsulates this problematic: on the one hand the extroverted spectator is wholly immersed in the make-believe world of passion that unfolds on the external stage (that is, they are doubly removed from Absolute Reality), on the other hand the mundane self is thereby effortlessly suspended to the point that the experience has been likened to the introverted relish of the transcendent reality, and even celebrated as a foretaste of or akin to the bliss of the absolute Brahman.

Emotion as bondage in the Indian philosophy of ascent

The mundane experience of self is conditioned by a cluster of interdependent parameters such as a distinct subjectivity (*pramāṭṛ*) vis-à-vis others, situated-ness within a space-time (*deśa-kāla*) continuum that constitutes the necessary field of practical activity or at least of a purposive attitude towards the world. The finitude of our body, as the source of all our perceptions and as the instrument through which we affect our environment, is thus reflected in our emotional states and the thoughts they engender bearing (however tenuously) upon our self-preservation and self-aggrandizement. Anger, for example, is a permanent emotional disposition (*sthāyī-bhāva*) that presupposes an interactive opposition between my individual subjectivity ('first person') to an offending other ('second person'), and is sustained by a stream of distress at perceived past wrongs interspersed with the anticipative pleasure of retaliation. The obvious way to escape this constricting vicious circle of thought and activity is to analyze the anger dispassionately at its source so as to weaken its hold and eventually renounce it. As exemplified by the early Buddhist dissections of the 'personality', Indian 'psychology' has thus focused on the deconstruction and rejection of this composite

'individual' with the aim of revealing its underlying ground: for the wheel of life is kept turning by the lust, anger, and delusion whirl within its very core.

Problematic status of the subject in aesthetic identification

The aesthetic sentiment (*rasa*) of anger (*raudra*), terror (*bhayānaka*), etc., evoked and sustained in the theater by drawing upon our familiarity with and subservience to this mundane psychology, is paradoxically in the form of a relish wherein the same emotions are experienced with as it were greater intensity and yet without the concomitant urge to do something about them. This is why Abhinava rejects the opinion of Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa that it is the mundane emotions intensified by the objective aesthetic configuration that acquire the status of *rasa*: though attributed to the Sāṅkhya viewpoint, this conceptual failure is actually shared by all the preceding schools of Indian epistemology. For the more powerful the passion the more overpowering our response in the world, whether it be psychopathic rage, uncontrollable flight, or suicidal depression. On the contrary, it is the willing suspension of purposivity (*artha-kriyā-kāritva*) that facilitates the evocation, development, and consolidation of the emotional disposition within the heart of the receptive spectator. But what is the mode of subjectivity, what happens to the awareness of 'self', in the phenomenology of *rasa*? The perception of the lovers on stage is initially a 'third person' experience of others that would have left us indifferent had we not already set aside our worldly purposivity as we took our seats at the theater. We are able to make sense of their (what would have been) 'second person' interactions (in the real world) only by recalling and thereby reactivating our accumulated subconscious traces (*saṁskāra*) of the same predisposition to love. As our hearts begin to resonate (*hṛdaya-saṁvāda*) with its fluctuations depicted by the *dramatis personae,* the focus is on understanding the interactions on stage by supplying the relevant emotional motivations from our own store of latent memories. This 'identification' (*tanmayī-bhavana*) is so complete that we seem to be experiencing the same emotion without any distinction of self and other.

Universalization of (aesthetic) emotion even without identification

Abhinava states categorically that in the enjoyment of *rasa*, for example the depiction of the startled deer fleeing before the king's chariot during the opening hunt-scene in the play *Abhijñāna-Śākuntalam*, what we experience is fear alone, supreme and unconditioned by personal subjectivity (*pramātṛ-tva*), space, time and other usual concomitants of the dynamics of worldly emotion. The peculiar mode of attention (*avadhāna*) required by the aesthetic configuration to evoke, sustain, and nourish the *rasa* also ensures that the emergence of 'first person' subjectivity is arrested at its incipient stage—there is no cognition of the form 'I'm afraid'. It's because the emotion has been unable to dissipate itself into myriad self-centered thoughts that it feels so impersonally intense and alive. At the same time, awareness of ego-self is not entirely suppressed as in an introverted state of spiritual absorption; it's merely suspended into a transparent ghost of its regular self. So much so that as a kid I sort of enjoyed horror movies but had to keep peeking from behind the back of the chair in front of me, and occasionally stop my ears, during the more climactic scenes. Since this same psychological state is shared by the entire audience, the aesthetic emotion (as opposed to its personal worldly counterpart) is said to have undergone 'universalization' (*sādhāraṇī-karaṇa*). *Rasa* is best embodied by pathos (*karuṇa*) and love (*śṛṅgāra*) which always depend entirely on identification with another person for their very existence, whereas the other sentiments may also be engendered without such a support (*āśraya*) through stimuli (*vibhāva*) acting directly upon us. What's the difference in the enjoyment of humor with co-workers cracking jokes around the water-cooler at the office and at watching a stand-up comedy on television? However, even in the case of these other emotions (the status of humor remains dubious), the mutual neutralization of space-time as conditioning the characters represented on stage and the representing elements of the spectator's here-and-now, [125] further reinforces this universalization, in a second sense, of the aesthetic emotion.

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[125] The 'theatricality' (*nāṭya-dharmi*) of the performance, that depends on a wide variety of artifices that are absent in real-life interactions and thus contribute to our recognition of a 'make-believe' world, is also conducive to 'universalization' (*sādhāraṇī-karaṇa*).

World as theater: the aesthetics of the descent

Though wholly 'extroverted', the aesthetic consciousness, intent on enjoying the sensuous objects of perception, is nevertheless turned back upon itself, mirrored by the impersonal nature of the universalized emotion that they sustain. In its theatrical enactment, the world no longer stands in opposition to the subjective self but is enveloped by the latter as the ultimate stage for the assumption of multiple roles, in a manner that corresponds to the Tantric dictum of 'the self being the (supreme) actor' (*nartaka ātmā*—*Śiva Sūtras*). By dissolving the opposition between the subjectivity of the connoisseur and the emotions deployed by the stage-characters, the separateness of the individual onlookers is also temporarily suspended. The goal of Abhinava's doctrine of 'recognition' (*pratyabhijñā*) is precisely to universalize the consciousness of the adept beyond the bounds of the limited (*parimita*) subject (*pramāṭṛ*) so as to embrace all objectivity (*viśva-rūpāvibheditvam*). Not only overpowering real-life emotions such as anger, fear, lust, and laughter but also other modes of sensuous physical experience, both pleasurable and painful, are exploited (in the *Vijñāna-Bhairava Tantra*) as springboards to spiritual insight and aesthetic rapture (*camatkāra*). Though retaining the ascending mode of realization within its larger perspective—as Abhinava's elevation of 'tranquility' (*śānta*) to the very essence of *rasa*-ness itself eloquently testifies even within the classical framework of Indian theater—the Trika metaphysics is more intent on restoring to consciousness its pristine powers (*śakti*) of will (*icchā*) and action (*kriyā*) in addition to those of knowledge (*jñāna*) already accorded by the other schools of philosophy. Abhinava has been able to provide an adequate account of the *rasa*-aesthetic using the traditional categories of brahmanical discourse precisely because he was experientially grounded in a 'descending' mode of spiritual realization that celebrated transcendence-within-immanence.

Abhinava's *śānta* versus the Buddha's cessation of desire (*śama*)

The distinction between *śānta* and its corresponding permanent 'emotional' disposition of 'cessation' (*śama*), a distinction that Abhinava defends at length, sheds a curious but all the more revealing light on the challenge posed by the aesthetic

experience to canonical Indian understandings of spiritual liberation. Whatever their conceptual difficulties, everyone seems to have agreed that, just as emotional dispositions impose worldly finitude on the bound consciousness, the enjoyment of (the corresponding) *rasa* somehow restores (even) to the (unwitting) subject, by relaxing these very limitations, something of its pristine freedom and innate bliss. However, an enlightened sage like the Buddha tarrying in the real world even after the cessation of all emotional attachment—surely his experience of cessation (*śama*) must be more fundamentally spiritual than the ephemeral appreciation of 'tranquility' (*śānta*) induced in others through their identification with his depiction on the stage? The problematic nature of this distinction is betrayed by the fact that Abhinava appeals to the distinction, not between pathos and worldly sorrow (*śoka*), but to the equally (if not even more) problematic distinction between the worldly emotion underlying laughter (*hāsa*) and the aesthetic relish of humor (*hāsya*) in order to make his case. The inherent logic of *rasa*-thinking might have us believe that the *śānta* enjoyed vicariously and hence 'extrovertedly' by ordinary folk is somehow superior to the 'first-person' cessation of emotions in the introverted spiritual adept! Strange as this may sound to Indians used to affirming that Truth is One though the sages call it by many names, the Trika recognizes not only various stages but also multiple modes of spiritual realization: after all, many devotees (*bhakta*) of a personal God are not particularly keen to dissolve their individuality in the ocean of the Infinite. Thus, those who pursue the classical Sāṅkhya discipline till the very end are said to end up as wholly isolated selves (*vijñāna-kevala*) with no capacity to act upon the world (like the early Buddhist *arhat*). Unlike its 'worldly' (*laukika*) counterpart, *śānta,* as the quintessence of *rasa,* rather points to a mode of being in and enjoying the world that remains grounded in transcendence. [126]

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[126] See note 59 above. Abhinava tends to equate *śama* not only with 'dispassion' (*nirveda*—an overwhelming spiritual 'depression' due to disenchantment with the world akin to the 'loss of feeling' that a 'schizophrenic' might undergo) but also with 'compassionate heroism' (*dayā-vīra*) exemplified above all by the *bodhisattva*, his own personal ideal of the 'essence of enlightenment' in whom the Buddha-to-be is no longer easily distinguishable from the Buddha-who-was-and-is.

My own experience, for which the living proof is Abhinavagupta himself, is that continual immersion in artistic delight ends up with the aesthetic posture becoming generalized to the world at large. What's required is a conceptual framework (*bauddha-jñāna*) that facilitates the spiritual insight becoming entrenched and such an attitude taking full possession of self. The Pratyabhijñā may well have facilitated Abhinava's endeavor to conceptualize the peculiarities of *rasa*-consciousness, but the latter has in turn impregnated his 'self-recognition' within the sensuousness of life.