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Theatre, Acting and the Image of the Actor in Abhinavagupta's Tantric Sources

Judit Törzsök

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Abhinavagupta is undoubtedly the most famous Kashmirian medieval intellectual: his decisive contributions to Indian aesthetics, Śaiva theology and metaphysics, and to the philosophy of the subtle and original Pratyabhijñā system are well known. Yet so far his works have often been studied without fully taking into account the specific context in which they are embedded – an intellectual background that is not less exceptional than Abhinavagupta himself. While providing fresh interpretations of some of the great Śaiva polymath's works, the nineteen essays gathered here attempt to map out for the first time the extraordinary cultural effervescence that took place in the little kingdom of Kashmir around Abhinavagupta's time.

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Eli Franco, Isabelle Ratié (Eds.)

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from the Ninth to the Eleventh Century

edited by

Eli Franco and Isabelle Ratié

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Theatre, Acting and the Image of the Actor in Abhinavagupta's Tantric Sources*

JUDIT TÖRZSÖK

A considerable number of Sanskrit plays that depict *śaiva* tantric practitioners have been subject to detailed analysis to obtain more information about tantric currents in classical India. This is perhaps particularly true for *kāpālikas*, who figure conspicuously in several classical plays.¹ This paper proposes to look at the question the other way round and show how *śaiva* tantric sources use theatrical terms and the image of the actor and how they incorporate theatre or some form of acting in their rituals. For, rather surprisingly, a number of *śaiva* tantric passages show awareness of the classical theatrical tradition and theory of drama. I shall focus on sources available to Abhinavagupta, whose major works treat theoretical questions concerning both tantra and drama. In fact, Abhinavagupta himself is the most important link between these two areas, for he is an exceptional author in that he produced original and influential works on both subjects. It is to be hoped that by studying points of contact between these fields we shall better understand the intellectual history of Kashmir in the early middle ages

* I am greatly indebted to Prof. Lyne Bansat-Boudon for her corrections, suggestions and critical remarks as well as for her prompt help at various stages during the writing of this paper. I would also like to thank Csaba Kiss for his corrections of the final text and for his remarks concerning the general argument. I am very grateful to the editors, Prof. Eli Franco and Prof. Isabelle Ratié, whose suggestions, corrections and insightful remarks greatly improved this paper, both in content and form. All the remaining errors are mine, of course.

¹ For some general information and debate on the identity of *kāpālikas*, see SANDERSON 2011 and TÖRZSÖK 2011. The most important and well-known classical plays studied in this context are Mahendravikramavarman's *Mattavilāsaprahasana* and Bhavabhūti's *Mālatīmādhava*.

and the cultural background in which Abhinavagupta wrote his masterpieces.

In what follows, I shall first look at some examples of how dance is used in imagery and ritual, for, although dancing and acting cannot be identified, they often overlap in the Indian tradition, and dance forms an integral part of Indian theatre. After this partial detour, I shall analyse the image of the actor (*naṭa*) in scriptures (*tantras/āgamas*) as well as in some exegetical works and attempt to understand the theoretical implications it entails in different contexts. This analysis is followed by a presentation of ritual observances, *vratas*, which may involve some form of role playing. While the mere identification of the practitioner with the deity cannot be called role playing, the vocabulary used in these *vratas* (e.g. *nepathya* for the costume to be worn, *rasa* for the dominant sentiment) often evokes the world of theatre. Finally, a short passage prescribing the offering of a dramatic representation (*nāṭaka*) is focused on.

1. SETTING THE MOOD: DANCING DEITIES, DANCING DEVOTEES

Śiva's association with theatre and dance² is a commonplace. The appearance of dancing forms of Śiva is also unexceptional in tantras and cannot be taken to bear any significance in itself. However, a pantheon in which dancing deities figure prominently, especially if they are described using some technical terms, may reflect a closer acquaintance with dancing and acting, or at least shows an attempt to associate such deities with the actual art. Similarly, it is

² Here, I only wish to point out that I do not intend to discuss the concept and treatment of dance and theatre as overlapping but distinct notions in the Indian tradition. The terminology in Sanskrit is often ambiguous, or rather, the inseparable nature of the two is also reflected in that it is often not possible to translate certain terms as either denoting pure dance or pure theatre. For a detailed discussion of the terms *nṛtta*, *nāṭya* and *nṛtya*, see BANSAT-BOUDON 1992, pp. 408ff. It must be remarked that these distinctions may not always be applied systematically in the non-technical literature (when dealing with the goddess Nāṭeśvarī/Nāṭyeśvarī, shall we translate her name as “Mistress of Dance” or “Mistress of Theatre”?). Nevertheless, in what follows, it is mainly the role of dance that is discussed in Part 1, before turning to acting and theatre proper (Parts 2-4), an order which reproduces (unintentionally) Bharata's order of discussion (whose internal logic is pointed out in BANSAT-BOUDON 1992, p. 96).

also prescribed sometimes that practitioners themselves should dance. Such dance may simply indicate happiness metaphorically, as, for instance, when the practitioner dances “out of joy” – these instances are irrelevant in the present context. It is, however, also enjoined occasionally that he should worship the deity with dancing, and, at least in some instances, his dance appears to conform (or is supposed to conform) to rules of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (henceforth NŚ). Although the presence of these dancing deities and devotees may not have a direct bearing on how theatre is perceived or represented in the tantras, they form a background that cannot be neglected.

A Pantheon of Dancing Goddesses

The *Jayadrathayāmala* (henceforth JY)³ in particular mentions a number of dancing Kālīs, whose description sometimes evokes more than just their association with Śiva destroying the universe at the end of each cosmic aeon. In the following passage, reference seems to be made to the various styles of poetic or dramatic composition (*vṛtti*) and “the power of speech” or “command of language” (*vāgvibhava*) is also mentioned.

*naumi kālīm karālāsyaṃ pradhānāvāṇibhakṣyaṇī[m]*⁴ ||
krīḍārthaṃ yā kare citrabrahmāṇḍārbudamālikam |
etā[m] natvā pravakṣyāmi rahasyam idam adbhutam ||
na mayā kasyacit khyātaṃ tvadṛte surasundari |
sarvapralayasamsthāne jagad etat samāharet ||
nartanti⁵ ghoracaṇḍākṣī vṛttirājavilāyakī |
sā kalākālanīlayā tasyāṃ kālāḥ pralīyate ||
cidacidvyaktimadhyasthā sā mahābhairavātmikā |
anasūyutā⁶ vāgvibhave prajñāyogagatā yadā ||
tadā yogeśvarī jñeyā sarvakālīśvareśvarī | (2.17.772cd-777ab)

³ I am grateful to Olga Serbaeva for making her e-text of the JY available to me.

⁴ Letters or syllables in square brackets have been added by the present author.

⁵ I have left this form as it stands in the MS, for it is unclear whether it is meant to be an irregular verb form (for *nṛtyati*, which would create an unmetrical *pāda*) or a present participle (for *nṛtyanti*).

⁶ This is meant to stand for the adjective *anasūyā*. Given that *anasūyā* is almost always used as a noun, the author(s) may have preferred creating a form which resembles a past participle ending with *-ta*.

I pay obeisance to Kālī,⁷ whose mouth is gaping wide, who devours *prakṛti* and the earth [i.e. the universe from the *tattva* of Earth up to *prakṛti*] and who [holds] a colourful garland of ten million eggs of Brahmā in her hand,⁸ to play with. After paying obeisance to her, I shall explain this miraculous secret. I have never told it to anyone apart from you, o beautiful goddess. When the dissolution of everything takes place, she withdraws this world, dancing, with terrible and frightening eyes, destroying⁹ the King of [Poetic] Styles.¹⁰ Time/Death and energy¹¹ reside in her, and time dissolves in her. She stands between the manifestation of consciousness and non-consciousness, she is of the nature of Mahābhairava/ of a very frightening nature. When she practices her [transcendental] wisdom/when she is absorbed in [transcendental] wisdom, without envying the power of speech [of anyone], she is known as Yogeśvarī, the ruler of all Kālī rulers.

However, rather than using the *ṛttis* and linguistic skills as tools, this Kālī does not appear to need them: she destroys the King of Styles and does not envy [anybody's] power of speech. The image suggests that her knowledge is beyond what can be expressed ver-

⁷ I do not comment on particularities of tantric or Aiśa Sanskrit here, unless they result in problems of interpretation.

⁸ Alternatively: she [holds] a garland of hundreds of millions of parts [which form] the manifold egg of Brahmā. In both interpretations, emphasis is laid on the fact that she holds the world in her hand, to play with.

⁹ Lit. “who makes him dissolve.” However, it is likely that she is visualized as trampling on a male figure, as is common in visualisations and iconography.

¹⁰ The compound *ṛttirāja* could be interpreted in other ways, for instance as the King of Existence/Subsistence. However, a passage from the *Kubjikāmata* (6.29-33), in which this word also figures, suggests that a *ṛttirāja* possesses mastery of poetic and śāstric composition: *anena jñātamātreṇa pratyaṅgān kurute bahūn | ṛttirājā varārohe niveśya cakramadhyataḥ || ṛttihīnas tatas tatra kāvyakartā na saṁśayaḥ | cakramadhye ca sañcintya suśuklāṃ ca parāparām || pustakavyagrahastāṃ ca jñānamudrādharāṃ tathā | sphāṭikenākṣasūtreṇa sarvābharaṇabhūṣitām || ... udgīrantī[m] mahauḅhena śāstrakoṭīr anekāṣaḥ | evaṃ dhyānasamāviṣṭaḥ sāksād vāgīśvaro bhavet ||*. For the place and importance of the four *ṛttis* in the context of drama, see BANSAT-BOUDON 1995. It is also possible that both meanings are intended: being beyond what can be expressed, she tramples on the King of Styles, and representing Time and Death, she crushes the King of Existence.

¹¹ The word *kalā* can be interpreted in several ways in tantric contexts and it may also be used here to achieve a certain poetic effect. Apart from “energy” it could also denote “limited power to act” or “principle(s) constituting the universe” etc., see the entry *kalā* in TAK II.

bally, and her performance cannot be controlled by the prescribed rules.

While it may be forced to see allusions to aesthetic experience and theatre in the descriptions of various dancing Kālīs,¹² it may be of some interest to point out the existence of a so-called “Dancer-Goddess”: Naṭṭeśvarī¹³ or Nāṭyeśvarī. At least three śaiva sources mention this goddess,¹⁴ whose name appears alternatively as Naṭṭeśvarī (JY chapter 4.64), Nāṭeśvarī (*Agnipurāṇa* 1.50.32b) and Nāṭyeśvarī (*Pratiṣṭhālakṣaṇasārasamuccaya* 6.171).¹⁵ The earliest source, the JY, clearly names her Naṭṭeśvarī¹⁶ and describes her as a dancing goddess dominating the cycle of withdrawal (*saṃhāra-cakra*) and wearing bone ornaments or being skeleton-like (*karāṅkiṇī*). The other two sources first identify her with Cāmuṇḍā (*rudra-cāmuṇḍā*), suggesting that she has this name because she holds severed heads (*śiras/muṇḍā*); but they also give her the name Naṭeśvarī or Nṛtyatī, apparently because she also holds a *damaru* drum.¹⁷ In all these sources, she seems to be the female equivalent

¹² One of them may still be worth mentioning, for it uses the word *rasa*, although it is possible that no allusion to the term *rasa* describing aesthetic experience is meant: *kālī karālā kalanapratṛptā cakrakṣayākāramahograrūpā || nartantī sarvaḡrasanodbhātākṣī kṣībā parānandarāsāvena* | (JY 2.5.15cd-16ab). “The terrible Kālī has been satisfied by seizing (*kal-*) [the world], has the very fierce form of the destruction of the multitude [of the world]/of the wheel [of time/of deities] (*cakra*), she is dancing with eyes eager to devour the universe and drunken with the nectar (*rasa*) of supreme joy.” As suggested by Lyne Bansat-Boudon (personal communication), both meaning of *rasa* may be used here: intoxicating liquor and aesthetic enjoyment; similarly to *Paramārthasāra* (henceforth PS) 79-80 (for which see BANSAT-BOUDON AND TRIPATHI 2011, pp. 265-270).

¹³ The word *naṭṭa-* seems to come from Middle Indic *naṭṭa-*, which can be derived from *naṭa*, *nṛtya* or *nāṭya*, cf. the entry *naṭṭa-* in the *Pāīa-sadda-mahaṅṅavo* (SHETH 1928). Judging from the Sanskrit forms, the last derivation may be the most likely.

¹⁴ These parallels have been pointed out by Olga Serbaeva in her personal notes to the e-text of the JY.

¹⁵ The last of these sources was certainly not available to Abhinavagupta, but it includes a close parallel to the *Agnipurāṇa* passage.

¹⁶ *evaṃ tava samākhyātā nāmnā naṭṭeśvarī śivā* 4.64.36cd; and the name also figures in the colophon.

¹⁷ This appears to be the implication in the following verse: *sā caivāṣṭabhujā devī śirodamarukānvitā | tena sā rudracāmuṇḍā naṭeśvaryā atha nṛtyatī* | *Agnipurāṇa* 1.50.31cd-32ab.

of Śiva destroying the universe as the Lord of Dance (*naṭeśa*).¹⁸

*Dancing as an Offering in Pretantric
and Tantric Worship*

The act of dancing can be part of prescribed *śaiva* worship, at least from the *pāśupatas* onwards. The first passage to prescribe the offering of dancing is perhaps the well-known *Pāśupatasūtra* (henceforth PSū)¹⁹ 1.8: “One should serve [the Lord] with the offerings of laughing, dancing, making the sound *huḍuk*, making obeisance and mantra recitations.”²⁰ However, such an offering was probably not a *pāśupata* oddity for it is also to be found in lay contexts, in the *Skandapurāṇa* for instance. To cite but one example (26.37), when people of Benares worship the *gaṇa* Nikumbha, they also sing and dance, among other things:

Some did pilgrimage, others undertook fasts, fire rituals, mantra recitations, yet others, wishing their desire to be fulfilled, performed worship, or made offerings,²¹ yet some others offered songs and dances.²²

¹⁸ Let us remark here that while the South Indian bronze image of a gracefully dancing Śiva has always dominated Western secondary literature, the earliest North Indian images of the dancing Śiva (from the 6th-7th centuries CE) seem to be bhairavic forms, carrying perhaps a skull-staff, such as the famous image (the west panel of the north entrance) in Elephanta (see e.g. COLLINS 1988, p. 24 and BURGESS 1871, p. 41).

¹⁹ The date of this text is uncertain, as is that of its commentator, Kauṇḍinya. The latter’s dating, based on scanty evidence, is usually given between 400 and 600 CE, while the founder of the *pāśupata* movement, Lakulīśa, may have lived near the beginning of the Christian era (see e.g. HARA 2002, pp. 198-199). Inscriptions confirm that *pāśupatas* were actively involved in public religion by the fourth century CE (see e.g. RĀMESH AND TEWARI 1990, pp. 4ff. and 21ff.)

²⁰ *hasitaḡāṇṛttahuḡḍuḡkāranamaskārajapyopahāreṇopatiṣṭhet*. The odd word to be pronounced, which resembles the bull’s cry according to Kauṇḍinya, is written in different forms *ḡuḡḡuḡ*, *huḡḡuḡ*, *huḡuḡ*, *huḡuk* in various sources. For a discussion, see HARA 2002, p. 216 and ACHARYA 2013.

²¹ Note that here, *upahāra* clearly seems to refer to offerings, unlike in the PSū passage, at least if we follow Kauṇḍinya’s interpretation. Dancing and singing is a very commonly cited *śaiva* way of worship from the earliest tantras onwards, see for instance, the way in which various semi-divine beings worship Śiva in *Niśvāsa Mūla* 1.4-6: *keciḡ stuvanti deveṣaḡ keciḡ nṛṡyanti cāgrataḡ | keciḡ gāyanti hr̥ṡṡās tu keciḡ praṇatamūrdhabhiḡ || keciḡ ramanti gāyanti keciḡ puṣpaḡ kṣipanti ca | keciḡ dhyāyanti niratā vādyam vādyanti cāpare || siḡha-*

Turning back to *pāśupata* worship which includes singing and dancing, it seems to have been adopted and adapted in *śākta* tantric scriptural sources, such as the *Brahmayāmala* (henceforth BY) and the JY, often in sections concerning the *vidyāvratā* or *pūrvasevā*, the preliminary observance preceding *sādhana* proper.²³ However, occasionally it also pops up in other contexts in which one may not expect it to appear, such as in the following passage of the JY (2.17.252-8), in which it is integrated into a standard invocation of *yoginīs* that does not commonly involve such *pāśupata*-like elements.

atha melāpasaṃsiddho vidhānam idam ārabhet |
vīrabhūmau²⁴ vīravapu[h] smṛtim āsādyā śobhanām²⁵ ||
tatpratāpaprājaptāṅgo palālipravipūritah |
stabdhātmā devadeveśīm japet saptaśatāni tu ||
yāvat tāvad devadevyā āgacchanti samantataḥ |
nānārūpadharā bhīmā madaghūrṇitalocanā[h]²⁶ ||
dr̥ṣṭvā vāmāṅgasambhūtam²⁷ argham āsāṃ prakalpayet |
datte [']rghe tāḥ pranṛtyanti mahātumulanādinaiḥ²⁸ ||
huḍukkārādivādyaiś²⁹ ca karavaktre kṛtair api |
tāsāṃ sārddham ato nartte[n] mahātāṅḍavayogataḥ ||
nṛṭtyamānaḥ sādhakendraḥ khetalaṃ yānti vegataḥ |
tābhiḥ sārddham rājamānas³⁰ tārābhir iva candramā ||
vaset kalpakṣayaṃ yāvad bahubhogabharāvṛtaḥ |
paryante devadeveśyā dehe nirvāṇam ety³¹ asau ||

nādam pramuñcanti garjante hy utpatanti ca | hasante kilakilāyante nityapramuditendriyāḥ ||.

²² *cakrur yātrās tathā kecid upavāsāṃs tathāpare | homaṃ japyam tathāivānye pūjāṃ cānye varārthinaḥ | upahārāṃs tathāivānye gūtanṛttaṃ tathāpare |.* Note that the NŚ (37.29) itself also attests that theatre was considered an offering to the gods: in fact, the text claims that they preferred it to garlands and incense (cited in BANSAT-BOUDON 1992, pp. 57-58).

²³ See e.g. BY 21.

²⁴ *vīrabhūmau* conj. : *cīrabhūmair* MS.

²⁵ *śobhanām* em. : *śobhanāt* MS.

²⁶ °*ghūrṇita*° em. : °*ghūrmita*° MS.

²⁷ *vāmāṅga*° conj. : *nāmāṅga*° MS.

²⁸ Understand or emend °*nādinaiḥ* to °*nādanaiḥ*.

²⁹ *huḍuk*° conj. : *huhuk*° MS.

³⁰ *rājamānas* em. : *rājapānas* MS.

³¹ *ety* em. : *aty* MS.

The practitioner who is successful in meeting *yoginīs* should undertake the following rite. On a ground prescribed for heroes, having the body of a hero, he must mentally recite his auspicious [mantras], and having empowered his body by their force, being filled with meat and wine, he must paralyse his Self and repeat the mantra of the goddess of gods seven hundred times, until the divine goddesses arrive from all directions. They have different forms, are frightening, with their eyes rolling in intoxication. When he sees them, he should prepare a guest offering of blood taken from his left arm. After the offering, they will dance and shout loudly all around. He must make sounds such as *huḍuk* and the like with his hands and mouth; and then he will dance with them, performing a great *tāṇḍava* dance. The eminent *sādhaka*, while dancing, will suddenly fly up in the sky with them as their lord, shining just like the moon with the stars. He will then live till the end of a *kalpa* with them and enjoy multiple pleasures. In the end, he will reach final liberation in the body of the goddess of the gods.

The description of worship with dancing, the sound *huḍuk* and the like clearly echoes PSū 1.8, except that here the practitioner dances with the *yoginīs*, who are at the same time the objects of worship. Moreover, the dance is required to be performed *mahātāṇḍavayogataḥ*. The term *tāṇḍava* can have a more or less technical or general meaning according to context,³² and here the short description does not allow us to determine the intended meaning. It is nevertheless probable that by this potentially technical precision, the dance prescribed is not simply jumping around in joy, but something more specific and structured.

The prescription of this structured or choreographed dance stands in contrast with another prescription of dance in the same text (albeit in another, independent section). The context of this passage is different, for what is prescribed is a unique *mudrā*. As this and other *mudrās* of the JY show, they are not hand gestures but more complex performances involving the whole body. Their aim is to propitiate the deity, to obtain superhuman effects, and/or to induce possession. The *mudrā* in this case (4.2.407-411) is called the Mudrā of Dancing (*nṛttamudrā* or *nṛttanī*).

³² It can be used in at least two different meanings: 1) Śiva's fierce dance as opposed to Pārvaṭī's graceful (*lāsya*) one (e.g. in NŚ 4.13-16 and *Daśarūpaka* 1.4, for which see also BANSAT-BOUDON 1992, pp. 22 and 285); 2) dance in general (*nṛtta*), see BANSAT-BOUDON 1992, p. 96 citing Abhinavagupta on NŚ 4.268: *tāṇḍavam iti sarvaṃ nṛttam ucyate*.

ataḥ paraṃ pravakṣyāmi nṛttanī nāma yā smṛtā |
mudrā sarvārthasampannā sādhakānāṃ mahātmanāṃ ||
unmattā³³ ca pralāpī syād bālavat krī[date] punaḥ |
†śiṣṭāla -- pravaddhāni†³⁴ mudreṣā samudāhṛtā ||
tuṣyante devatās tasya deśalābhaś (?) ca jāyate |
bālava[n nṛ]ttanaṃ kuryāt phatkāraravayojanaṃ ||
nṛttanī nāma mudraiṣā sarvalokavaśaṃkarī |
mahāmelāpasamsiddhau nāsty asyāḥ sadṛśī priye ||
kim anyad vā samākhyātā vistareṇa sumadhyame |
na sā siddhir ihāstīti yā na vā naiva sidhyati ||
pūrvavīryasamāyuktā sarvākarṣakarī parā ||

I shall now teach you the *mudrā* traditionally called the “dancing one,” which has everything an eminent *sādhaka* may desire. One must be intoxicated and babble, play like a child. [...] The deities will be satisfied and one shall obtain regions/places (?).³⁵ One must dance like a child and shout the sound *phat*³⁶ – this dancing *mudrā* will subjugate everybody. There is nothing comparable to it for obtaining an encounter with *yoginīs*, o my Beloved. What else shall I explain about it in more detail, o Beautiful Goddess? There is no supernatural effect that could not be obtained with it. This supreme *mudrā* has the power previously described and attracts everybody.

The dance prescribed is explicitly an unstructured, “child-like” one, although it also leads to encounter with *yoginīs* and is considered to be an offering, by which the deities will be propitiated.

The presence of wild, child-like or madman-like dancing on the one hand (*unmatta* above in 4.2.407-411) and that of more controlled or structured dance offerings on the other (*mahātāṇḍava* in

³³ This may be corrupt for *unmatto* with a Middle Indic *-o* ending; or perhaps the word *mudrā* mentioned in the previous line attracted the feminine form here.

³⁴ Cruxes are enclosed by cross signs.

³⁵ This compound does not seem common and one feels tempted to conjecture something more usual such as *dravyalābha* (obtaining things), *dhanalābha* (obtaining wealth), *dhānyalābha* (obtaining grains/corn) or possibly *veśalābha* (gaining entry into someone or something). Alternatively, *deśalābha* could stand for *upadeśalābha* (obtaining instruction) or *samāveśalābha* (obtaining possession). If *deśalābha* is retained, it could perhaps also mean ‘obtaining a country/countries’, something that may be promised to kings. Finally, it could also mean the supernatural power of reaching a place (in an instant), but this magical power is not normally expressed in this way.

³⁶ Perhaps this is corrupt for the more wide-spread mantric syllable *phat*.

the preceding passage of 2.17.256), which occur in different parts of the JY, raises the question as to what kind of dance the *pāśupata* version was originally meant to be.

While the *sūtras* themselves do not help to answer this question, Kauṇḍinya does deal with the problem. His text reads:

And dancing is performed without being attached to the conventions of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (*nāṭyaśāstrasamayānabhiṣvaṅgeṇa*), with [various] movements: throwing up or down hands and feet, contracting or extending them, moving without stopping.³⁷

This is also how singing is understood to be performed by Kauṇḍinya: without attachment to the rules of the Science of music.³⁸

However, at this crucial point, there is also an alternative manuscript reading concerning the use of the NS: *nāṭyaśāstrasamayānūsāreṇa*, “according to the rules of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.” This reading was adopted by HARA 2002. According to HARA 2002, p. 216, even the reading *anabhiṣvaṅgeṇa* (in the case of singing) should refer to conformity to śāstric prescriptions, which is nevertheless doubtful. What *anabhiṣvaṅga* could possibly denote is that dancing and singing are performed *without* applying the rules in a very strict manner.

More light may be shed on the question if Kauṇḍinya’s description or gloss on *nr̥tta* is better understood. HARA 2002 (p. 216) takes the upward and other movements (*utkṣepaṇādi*) to denote the five types of motion and refers to *Vaiśeṣikasūtra* 1.1.6,³⁹ whose list

³⁷ *nr̥ttam api nāṭyaśāstrasamayānabhiṣvaṅgeṇa hastapādādīnām utkṣepaṇam avakṣepaṇam ākuñcanam prasāraṇam calanam anavasthānam*. While the four elements *utkṣepaṇam*, *avakṣepaṇam*, *ākuñcanam*, *prasāraṇam* must be construed with ‘hands, feet etc.’, the last two words cannot. I understand them to add a more general element of the definition of dance, namely the fact that it implies moving without stopping. I thank Prof. Eli Franco for calling my attention to the problem here, although his understanding is slightly different from mine in that he takes *anavasthānam* to qualify all the other movements. Note that the *Daśarūpaka* defines dance itself (*nr̥tta*) as being “various ways of throwing the limbs” (*gātravikṣepa*, see BANSAT-BOUDON 1992, pp. 408-409). This dance must, of course, conform to rules (cf. NS, cg. 4 and BANSAT-BOUDON 1992, p. 40).

³⁸ *gāndharvaśāstrasamayānabhiṣvaṅgeṇa*. The term *gāndharva(śāstra)* refers in particular to the teaching of the NS on music, see BANSAT-BOUDON 1992, pp. 193ff.

³⁹ This is cited as 1.1.7 by Hara, but editions of the text commonly number this *sūtra* as 1.1.6, including Jambuvijayaji’s edition used by Hara.

indeed agrees with Kauṇḍinya's on the whole. What this betrays is not that Nāṭyaśāstric rules must be applied (as Hara takes it), but rather that Kauṇḍinya was not concerned at all with Nāṭyaśāstric conformity here – he allows the devotee's dance to involve any kind of movement. He allows similar freedom for singing, which does not conform to Gāndharvaśāstra and can be in Sanskrit or Prakrit, of the practitioner's own composition or someone else's. In fact, he even specifies ad loc. that for the sake of the observance, dancing (*nṛtta*) is to be performed together with singing.⁴⁰ Thus, unlike in a proper performance, the practitioner here acts as singer and dancer at the same time.⁴¹

From the *pāśupata*'s dance, the dancing *mudrā* and the dancing goddesses, the conclusion one can draw is that the dances described do not normally appear to conform to śāstric norms. The dance of the goddesses is meant to express their total freedom, which is not determined by śāstric prescriptions. This “wild dance” is in turn probably what is imitated by the dancing devotees, whether *pāśupata* or *śākta*, in order to strengthen their identity with the deity⁴² and/or to enact possession by them (in the case of the *mudrā* at least). Accordingly, they may involve any kind of movement and are compared to the uncontrolled behaviour of children or madmen. However, one may occasionally encounter a more structured type of dance when the practitioner invokes *yoginīs*. Dancing with *yoginīs* seems to require a more controlled performance – perhaps so that the practitioner should remain the controller of these female powers, rather than abandon himself to them (and thus become their play-thing, *paśu*).

⁴⁰ *niyamakāle niyamārthe geyasahakṛtaṃ nṛttaṃ prayoktavyam.*

⁴¹ Unless we assume that he asks someone else to sing for him, which is highly unlikely. However, the two may not be performed simultaneously.

⁴² On this idea in the *pāśupata* case, see HARA 2002, pp. 216ff.

2. LIKE AN ACTOR (*NAṬAVAT*)*One Actor Playing Many Roles*⁴³

More relevant to our investigation is the image of the actor (*naṭa*), who often figures in various comparisons. The most famous one, which also brings out several details of the image, is perhaps to be found in the *Śivasūtras* (henceforth ŚS): the Self is an actor, the subtle body (*puryaṣṭaka*) is the stage and the sense organs are the spectators. As the commentaries further explain, the Self is identical with the godhead or consciousness (*cit*), who enacts a play, which is the phenomenal world. The roles he takes up are the limited individual subjects. Thus, the image, which is very wide-spread in different writings of Kashmirian nondualist Śaivism, conveniently explains the way in which one god or one soul becomes manifested as many.

This ontological image takes on an epistemological aspect in the writings of the exegetes. For the roles of the actor there, instead of being aspects of the phenomenal world, are identified with various philosophical and theological schools. This is the case in Kṣemarāja's *Pratyabhijñāhṛdaya* (henceforth PH) 8, in which the roles of the actor/consciousness are identified with the points of view of various schools⁴⁴ from the Cārvākas at the lowest level up to the Trika at the highest. The image relies on the same idea of representing how the One becomes many, but with a different emphasis: the One, which is perfect and omniscient, takes up various, imperfect forms which have limited knowledge. Consequently, in Kṣemarāja's description, various schools are further identified with the various, hierarchically arranged ontological principles or *tattvas*, from *buddhi* (representing several *darśanas*) up to Sadāśiva (grammarians following Bharṭṛhari) for non-*śaiva* systems, with *śaivas* being situated above them.

The idea of placing various religious systems in the hierarchy of *tattvas* seems to come from a scriptural source, as Kṣemarāja himself points out. The unidentified citation given by Kṣemarāja and

⁴³ For another usage of the actor analogy, see Lyne Bansat-Boudon's article in this volume, in which she examines *Tantrāloka* (henceforth TĀ) 1.332 and the commentary thereon.

⁴⁴ *tadbhūmikāḥ sarvadarśanasthitayah*. On this passage and its commentary, see also BANSAT-BOUDON AND TRIPATHI 2011, p. 160, n. 689.

starting with “Buddhists are at the level of intellect (*buddhi*)” appears in slightly different forms in several exegetical works. The hierarchy it expresses is, however, the same: Buddhists are at the level of the intellect (*buddhi*), Jains are at the level of the [three] material strands of existence (*guṇa*),⁴⁵ at the top of the *guṇas* are the Sāṃkhyas, the Pāñcarātra is placed at the level of the material source of creation (*prakṛti/avyakta*), while the Veda-knowers (perhaps covering both Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta) are at the level of Puruṣa.⁴⁶ While the source is scriptural, seeing these systems as Śiva's roles seems to be Kṣemarāja's contribution to the idea. Kṣemarāja also includes several more systems into his account, which is another significant innovation.⁴⁷

In addition to Śiva's roles being identified with schools, Kṣemarāja also hints at a further series of identifications between these schools and the sets of cognizing subjects (*pramātr*).⁴⁸ For in Kṣemarāja's above account, the Sāṃkhya and (some unidentified) others are said to be attached to the level (*bhūmi*) of the *viññānakalas*. The *viññānakalas* or *viññānākalas* form a group of cognizing subjects who are “inert in gnosis” (SANDERSON 1986, p. 191), and are only tainted with the *āṇavamala* (impurity of believing one's self to be limited). They are one of the (usually) seven groups of cognizing subjects (*pramātr*). The identification of Śiva's roles and the seven cognizing subjects is brought out in Kṣemarāja's *Span-danirṇaya* 1.1.:

⁴⁵ Note that *guṇa* or the *guṇas* are not usually included in the standard list of *tat-tvas*, but they do figure among them in some scriptures, see the entry *guṇa* in TAK II.

⁴⁶ The longest version of the quote is in *Nareśvaraparīkṣāprakāśa* ad 3.80: *buddhitattve sthitā bauddhā guṇeṣu tv arhatāḥ sthitāḥ | guṇamūrdhni sthitāḥ sām-khyā avyakte pāñcarātrikāḥ | sthitā vedavidāḥ puṃsi...* The *Īśvarapratyabhi-jñāvivṛtivismarṣinī* (henceforth *ĪPVV*), vol. III, p. 98, gives only *buddhitattve sthitā bauddhā avyakte pāñcarātrikāḥ*, while Jayaratha ad TĀ 6.151 omits the Sāṃkhya: *buddhitattve sthitā bauddhā guṇeṣv apy arhatāḥ sthitāḥ | sthitā vedavidāḥ puṃsi tv avyakte pāñcarātrikāḥ ||*. On the different conceptions of the Self, see also PS 33 (BANSAT-BOUDON AND TRIPATHI 2011, pp. 169-173 and 338-342).

⁴⁷ In particular the inclusion of Bhartrhari, who does not figure in the scriptural version at all, but who is placed very high in Kṣemarāja's hierarchy. On the importance of Bhartrhari for Kashmirian nondualist Śaivism, see e.g. TORELLA 2008 and 2013, pp. 465ff. See also a possible reference to Bhartrhari in PS 27 (in BANSAT-BOUDON AND TRIPATHI, p. 157, n. 675).

⁴⁸ For discussions of the seven *pramātr*s, see BANSAT-BOUDON AND TRIPATHI 2011, pp. 330ff and VASUDEVA 2004, pp. 151ff.

By his power of absolute freedom, the glorious Great Lord assumes [on the subjective level] the cognitive roles of Śiva, the Mantramaheśvaras, the Mantreśvaras, the Mantras, the Vijñānākalas, the Pralayākalas and the Sakalas[, whereas, on the objective level,] he assumes the roles [of the objects that are] made known thereby. (Transl. BANSAT-BOUDON AND TRIPATHI 2011, p. 331.)

A similar idea appears in Kṣemarāja's disciple's, Yogarāja's commentary on Abhinavagupta's PS.⁴⁹

Although it is in Kṣemarāja's works that the epistemological aspect of Śiva's "roles" appears in the foreground, something of this shift is perceptible already in Abhinavagupta's TĀ 4.29ff. Without using the image of Śiva as actor, Abhinavagupta speaks of various theological and philosophical currents (*vaiṣṇavas*, *vedāntins*, *vai-bhāṣikas*) as being at different levels of the cognizing subject (*pramātr*),⁵⁰ in particular at the double level of *pralayākalas* ("those inert in dissolution"), which comprises *prāṇapramātr*s (those conceiving the self as inner breath) and *śūnyapramātr*s (those conceiving the self as void). In the same passage, he also cites the (lost) *Kāmika* and points out that the Sāṃkhya, Pāñcarātra, Buddhists and Jains are tainted by limited knowledge (*vidyā*) and passion (*rāga*), as well as by *niyati*. He gives us only a cursory account of where different schools are placed in the hierarchy of the universe and the cognizing subjects and does not elaborate on the question further; this short passage is nevertheless enlightening not only because of the placement of rival theories in the scheme of cognizing subjects, but also because of the context of this placement. For after explaining that all those following a [false, *asat*] master of these rival schools of thought are fettered by Māyā, he goes on to say that thanks to the practice of right reasoning (*sattarkayogena*), such a person will be led to a true master (*sadguru*). To support this, he cites *Mālinīvijayottara* 1.44, but with a slight alteration. The scriptural passage clearly states⁵¹ that turning to the right *guru*

⁴⁹ The hierarchy of schools is expounded in his commentary on Kārikā 27 (see BANSAT-BOUDON AND TRIPATHI 2011, pp. 152ff). However, the image of the actor appears only elsewhere, in his commentary on Kārikā 1 and 5 (BANSAT-BOUDON AND TRIPATHI 2011, pp. 68 and 87ff).

⁵⁰ The cognizing subject (*pramātr*) and the subject of experience (*bhoktr*) is considered to be a knower (*jñāttr*) in śaivism as well as in other systems, see e.g. VASUDEVA 2014, p. 15.

⁵¹ Note that Abhinavagupta cites the full *śloka* elsewhere (as in 13.202 or 13.249).

is the result of the descent of Rudra's *śakti*.⁵² But in Abhinavagupta's description here, the descent of Rudra's power happens *after* such a person has already turned to a true *guru*. Thus, while scripture sees the descent of Śiva's power or his divine grace as the cause of turning to a *śaiva* guru for initiation, Abhinavagupta describes the path taken toward conversion as motivated primarily by reasoning.⁵³

In this light, the passage preceding the verses about such a conversion gains more significance. By describing other religious currents in terms of variously limited cognizing subjects, their partial legitimacy is recognized by Abhinavagupta. For these limited ways of cognition can form a ladder to reach true (*śaiva*) cognition – in other words, conversion is possible, and it is possible through right argumentation (*sattarka*), even if one has a different theoretical background.⁵⁴

Thus, it is potential conversion that forms the wider context of presenting religious currents as cognizing subjects in the TĀ. And conversion also seems to be the wider context of Kṣemarāja's PH and Yogarāja's commentary on the PS, in which similar passages are found. For both are short introductory texts, meant to explain the *śaiva* doctrine to those who are not yet initiated into its intricacies.

⁵² The verse starts by saying that such a person is *rudraśaktisamāviṣṭo*, possessed by the Power of Rudra.

⁵³ For the soteriological importance of *tarka* in the Pratyabhijñā, see RATIÉ 2013, pp. 425ff.

⁵⁴ Abhinavagupta in fact goes even further than this: he claims that the person who realizes himself the *śaiva* truth or doctrine through right reasoning is superior to others and will have also mastered all the *śāstras*, again thanks to his true reasoning. Here, he turns his scriptural source upside down again. For the *Mālinīvijayottara* describes someone possessed by *śakti* as suddenly (i.e. miraculously) becoming the master of all *śāstras* (this is a sign or proof showing that he is really possessed); while Abhinavagupta attributes such knowledge to right reasoning (*sattarka*): *sa samastaṃ ca śāstrārthaṃ sattarkād eva manyate* (4.44cd). Abhinavagupta and his commentator painstakingly point out that when the *Mālinīvijayottara* says that such knowledge appears “suddenly” (*akasmāt*), it must be understood as a way of saying that ordinary people do not see where this knowledge comes from, rather than as really meaning “out of the blue.”

cies,⁵⁵ therefore both may be used to introduce relative outsiders to *śaiva* thought.⁵⁶

Having seen something of the later history of Śiva's or the Self's roles in the works of Pratyabhijñā authors, it may not be irrelevant to look back and identify the possible source of the image of the actor in theoretical writings. As pointed out above, the earliest *śaiva* source for this image, the ŚS, do not contain any reference to theological schools as roles: the Self is the dancer (*nartaka*) or perfected actor (*prauḍhanaṭa*, in Bhāskara's gloss), dancing (*nṛtyati*, in Kṣemarāja's commentary) in a play which is the world (*jaḡannāṭya*), on the inner-self as the stage. The *sūtras* themselves do not mention the roles of this actor-dancer. Kṣemarāja does com-

⁵⁵ Even if both texts contain arguments whose real understanding requires one to read and understand an impressive corpus, as the richly annotated translation of BANSAT-BOUDON AND TRIPATHI 2011 shows.

⁵⁶ According to the introductory part of the PH, Kṣemarāja offers his work to those who are simple-minded, without much śāstric sophistication, but who desire the “entering into” Śiva, “entering” that the descent of Śiva's Power has already started to be bring about (*unmiṣita*). (*ye sukumāramatayo 'kṛtatī-kṣṇatarkaśāstrapariśramāḥ śaktipātonmiṣitapārameśvarasamāveśābhilāṣiṇaḥ* ...). I understand this reference to “simpletons” (*sukumāramatayaḥ*) to imply that he intends to write for a wider public of little learning or insight and in particular for those who have been attracted to *śaiva* theology (through a “descent of *śakti*”), but are unable to guide themselves by their own reasoning (Abhinavagupta's *sattarka*) to discover *śaiva* doctrine in a spontaneous way, and therefore need guidance in the form of an introductory work. The text does not intend to convert those who have no inclination toward śaivism. But it tries to draw into śaivism those who have some interest in it, and in this sense its purpose is conversion. The PS does not name its target audience. However, being the *śaiva* rewriting of an originally *vaiṣṇava* work, it does not seem unreasonable to assume that the textual transformation was also intended to provide a model for the spiritual one, and that conversion was therefore one of the desired effects the work was expected to have. (On this work as the rewriting of Ādiśeṣa's original, see BANSAT-BOUDON AND TRIPATHI 2011, pp. 7ff.) Let us remark here that even Ādiśeṣa's original could be considered a “conversion text” to some extent, for, as noted in BANSAT-BOUDON AND TRIPATHI 2011, p. 4: “one has the feeling that the questions put by the disciple are principally framed in terms of Sāṃkhya, whereas the responses of the teacher are usually couched in advaitic terms, even though the latter continues to utilize (in order to make himself better understood?) several Sāṃkhya concepts.” A possible conclusion one could draw from this is that the dialogue represents the conversion of a Sāṃkhya disciple to nondualist *vaiṣṇavism*. (Bansat-Boudon in BANSAT-BOUDON AND TRIPATHI 2011, pp. 4-6, considering the text more vedāntic than *vaiṣṇava*, concludes rather that it represents a transposition of dualism into nondualism.)

ment on them but without mentioning the line of reasoning about the roles as limited cognizing subjects. Here, he defines the roles of the Self as having the forms of the states of being awake etc.⁵⁷ and thus maintains the image as an ontological one.⁵⁸

It may be difficult to identify the ultimate or earliest source of the image of the actor for the self. It is, however, quite possible that the idea comes from the Sāṃkhya, just as so many other elements in *śaiva* ontology, in spite of the fact that the Sāṃkhya presents it in a dualist system.⁵⁹ More precisely, the *Sāṃkhyakārikās* speak of the subtle body taking up different forms or incarnations as an actor/dancer plays different roles:

Caused in order to fulfill the aim of the Puruṣa/Spirit, and through the power of Prakṛti/Matter, this subtle body (*liṅgam*) [takes up forms] like an actor [takes up roles], which inevitably leads to a causal sequence.⁶⁰

The idea or the comparison may have come from a yet different source. However, the same image is referred to around 700 CE in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (9.66) and it is taken to represent the Sāṃkhya view there. The fact that an outside source, a Buddhist text, mentions this image as that of the Sāṃkhya supports the hypothesis that around 700 CE, this simile was associated with the Sāṃkhya and its arguments.

The passage of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* summarizes the debate between the Sāṃkhya and the Mādhyamaka on the individual soul.

tad evānyena rūpeṇa naṭavat so 'py aśāsvataḥ |
sa evānyasvabhāvaś ced apūrveyaṃ tadekatā ||

[If you argue] it is the same thing taking on a different form, like an actor [we reply:] he too would not remain permanent. [If you say] it is the

⁵⁷ *tajjāgarādīnābhūmikāprapañcam.*

⁵⁸ Similarly, Maheśvarānanda follows this line of interpretation. For more details, see Cox 2006, pp. 147 ff and 369ff.

⁵⁹ The parallel is remarked in BANSAT-BOUDON AND TRIPATHI 2011, p. 68. It must also be noted that the dancer is always female in the Sāṃkhya as opposed to the male one in the *śaiva* system, as Prof. Eli Franco pointed out to me (personal communication).

⁶⁰ *puruṣārthahetukam idaṃ nimittanāmittikaprasaṅgena | prakṛter vibhutvayogān naṭavad vyavatiṣṭhate liṅgam ||* (42). The *Sāṃkhyakārikās* also use the image of the female dancer (*nartakī*) for *prakṛti* in 59, 65 and 66. However, this usage cannot be the source of inspiration for the *śaiva* version.

same with different natures [we reply] its uniformity is then unprecedented.⁶¹

The image of the actor is again used to explain the identity of the one and the many, one identity existing behind numerous manifestations in the course of rebirths. In the argument of the Sāṃkhya, it is of course used in the framework of a dualist ontology, to explain the identity of the same soul in different rebirths. In this sense, a major shift occurs when the image is adopted in the ŚS, for there the Self is also the godhead.

To turn back again to Śaivism, when Abhinavagupta uses the image of the actor, although he maintains it as the metaphor of the Lord/Self, playing out the (phenomenal) word as the drama, he elaborates on it with very different details.

*sa ca bhramo nāṭyatulyasya aparamārthasato 'tyaktasvarūpāvaṣṭambhannaṭakalpena parameśvaraprakāśena pratīgocarīkṛtasya saṃsārasya nāyakaḥ sūtradhāraḥ pradhānabhūtaḥ pravartayitā itivṛtte nāyako vā, yallagnaṃ viśvetivṛttam ābhāti; tata eva prathamah.*⁶²

And this error [of identifying the body etc. with the subject of experience] is [called] the primary one. For the universe (*viśva*), [which can be identified with] the story of a play (*-itivṛttam*), manifests itself as depending on this leading (*nāyakaḥ*) [error], [just as the story of the play depends on] the Sūtradhāra, who is the main person, being the producer and (*vā*) the protagonist (*nāyaka*) in the story. [In the manner of a Sūtradhāra,] this error leads the world of transmigration (*saṃsārasya*), comparable to a play that is not ultimately true and which is made to be perceptible through the manifestation of the Supreme Lord, who is like an actor (*-naṭakalpena*) firmly relying on his nature he does not abandon.⁶³

⁶¹ I follow the interpretation of Prajñākara's *Ṭikā* as edited by LA VALLÉE POUSSIN 1898 (p. 300), which agrees with Prof. Eli Franco's suggestions (personal communication). For a different understanding, cf. CROSBY-SKILTON 1996, p. 121: If you argue: it is the same thing taking on a different guise, like an actor. He too does not remain constant. The one thing has different natures. [We respond that] It has an unprecedented kind of uniformity.

⁶² ĪPVV, vol. III, p. 244.

⁶³ See RATIÉ 2011, p. 559: "Et cette illusion (*bhrama*) [consistant à identifier le corps, etc. avec le sujet] est 'première' [selon Utpaladeva] parce que cette intrigue [théâtrale] (*itivṛtta*) qu'est l'univers (*viśva*) se manifeste en reposant [nécessairement] sur le 'nāyaka' – c'est-à-dire le directeur de la troupe (*sūtradhāra*) qui, [parce qu'il en est le membre] le plus important, est celui qui met en branle l'action, ou le personnage principal de l'intrigue – du cycle des re-

The main point here is not the Lord/Self taking up roles and thus appearing in different ways, although this image is also present in the comparison of the Lord to the actor (*naṭakalpena*). The Sūtradhāra, who is both the “impeller” or producer and the protagonist, personifies the error of identifying the self with what it is not. It is thus this error that is responsible for our perception of multiplicity in the world, for the Lord/actor does not abandon his nature even as he plays multiple roles. By introducing the Sūtradhāra as Error personified here, Abhinavagupta keeps the original idea of the Soul/Lord taking up different roles or manifestations, but puts it in an epistemological perspective.

To summarize the changes this allegory of the actor/dancer undergoes in the course of several centuries, without positing a linear chronological development:

1. The Sāṃkhya uses the image of the actor as standing for the subtle body, which takes up various roles, i.e. various reincarnations. The image is used to express how the one becomes many, in a dualist system, and it is known as such by Buddhist opponents.
2. The ŚŚ take over the image, again to explain the transformation of one into many; but it is put in a nondualist context, in which the Self, identified with the godhead, takes up various manifestations, including the phenomenal world.
3. The philosophical tradition, notably Abhinavagupta, points out that the Supreme Self as the universal subject identical with the godhead manifests itself, with various degrees of limitation, as various cognizing subjects (*pramātr*). These limited cognizing subjects are in turn identified with various rival religious currents and their doctrines. This is done in a context that suggests that one can climb up this hierarchy of subjects and reach full understanding of the ultimate (*śaiva*) truth. This implies, as is explicitly stated, that conversion to śaivism through reasoning is possible.
4. Kṣemarāja synthesizes the image of the ŚŚ with the theory of the cognizing subjects. He describes the Self/godhead as tak-

naissances (*saṃsāra*), lequel, semblable à une pièce de théâtre (*nāṭya*), devient objet de cognition [alors qu'il n'est] pas réel au sens ultime, grâce à la manifestation du Seigneur Suprême (*parameśvara*) semblable à un acteur (*naṭa*) qui ne cesse pas de reposer dans sa nature propre [tout en interprétant tel ou tel rôle].”

ing up roles in the form of these cognizing subjects, which are in turn identified with schools of religious thought. Thus, all religious currents and philosophies are seen as lower manifestations of this divine Self. The context of this inclusivist image remains potential conversion and emphasis is laid on the epistemological rather than the ontological problem the example of the actor represents.

5. Abhinavagupta himself also introduces an important innovation in the allegory: in addition to the Supreme Lord as actor (*naṭa*), he describes the Sūtradhāra as personifying the main error of the cognizing subject. The Sūtradhāra both participates in the play as the protagonist and directs or produces it, just as this fundamental error of cognition both participates in and puts into motion the world of transmigration. In this way, Abhinavagupta's elaboration provides an epistemic perspective while keeping the heritage of the ŚS.

This outline may well lack many important details and does not by any means have the ambition to write the full history of this image. It may, however, identify some significant changes, no matter how roughly, and provides a starting point to examine the occurrence of the image in *śaiva* scriptural sources available to the Kashmirian exegetes.

The Actor Image in Scriptural Sources

An early text (7th-9th cent. CE) in which several occurrences of the image can be found is the BY. This *śākta* text of the *yoginī* cult evokes the image of the actor to prescribe the way in which the practitioner must see himself. It insists in each case on non-duality – but this non-duality, as pointed out by SANDERSON 1992, p. 306 and as I have shown elsewhere (TÖRZSÖK 2013), refers to nondual practice, i.e. the non-distinction between what is pure and impure from the point of view of orthopraxy, and not to ontological non-duality.

evaṃ jñātvā parādvaitaṃ saṃstha[h] syāt sacarācaram |
sādhako [?]nilavad yathā krīḍann api na lipyate ||⁶⁴
aśucitvena deveśi yathārka[h] padmabodhane |
sarvatattvaktātmā vai sa prapañcakṛtāspadā ||

⁶⁴ My conjectures. The MS reads *sādhako nilavadyandha krīḍānnapi na lipyate*.

naṭavat paśya -m- ātmānaṃ sarvabhakṣaḥ kṛtāntavat |
†kharave -- yasvato† yukta[h] kāmabhokṛtvalakṣaṇaḥ ||
saṃsakto 'pi na kāmī syā['] yathā bhāno[r] dīdhīṭayaḥ⁶⁵ |
śāpānugrahakarttāsau sarvaiśvaryaṇavarttakaḥ ||
bhuktvā tu vipulān bhogān etad vai tasya lakṣaṇam | (71.95-99ab)⁶⁶

Knowing in this way the world to have this supreme nonduality,⁶⁷ the practitioner must be established [in this nonduality]. Just like the wind, he is not tainted by impurity even if he is playing, just as the sun is not tainted when it wakes up the lotuses. His self being made of all the levels of the universe, having the visible universe as his abode, he must see himself as an actor, while consuming everything like death. Even if he is attached [to things] and enjoys the objects of his desires (*kāmabhokṛtvalakṣaṇaḥ*), he will not covet anything, just as the rays of the sun [have no attachment to what they touch]. He will bestow his curse or grace and accomplish all acts of power, enjoying multiple pleasures – these will be his traits.

The image of the actor is employed to explain the practitioner's (ritually) nondualist attitude, which is prescribed in almost every chapter of this text. Although he is required to manipulate and consume impure substances, he must not be disgusted or feel impure. He must see himself as an actor in the sense that his real self is outside the reality of the play, which is the world. The same idea is expressed when he is compared to the sun or the rays of the sun and the wind: they can touch anything without being soiled.

This actor image is rather different from that of the Sāṃkhya. It does not intend to explain the dichotomy of the one and the many (as when one actor takes up several roles), but the detachment of the self. In this sense, it is perhaps closest to Abhinavagupta's example involving the Sūtradhāra and emphasizing that the actor/Self is both inside and outside the play/the multiplicity of the world, even if the BY does not describe the godhead but the individual

⁶⁵ The MS reads *dīdhīṭayaḥ*, which is unmetrical.

⁶⁶ Minor corrections I have made to the text are put between square brackets.

⁶⁷ This translation attempts to follow the grammatical structure. It is, however, also possible that *sacarācaram* is not the object of *jñātvā*, but is corrupt for or to be understood as a locative ("he should be established in the world knowing supreme nonduality in this way"). The word *sa-* can also be the pronoun or the prefix to *carācara*. The word *saṃsthaḥ* is probably understood in a compound with *parādvaita-* (i.e. *parādvaita-* is to be read twice, once as the object of *jñātvā*, once in compound with *saṃsthaḥ*).

and does not imply or require an underlying nondualist ontology. Similarly, ritual nondualism is referred to in another occurrence (83.169) of the actor simile:

*advaitabhāvasampannaḥ sarvabhakṣa[ḥ] kṛtāntavat |
naṭavat paśya bhāvena ātmā vai sādhaśvaraḥ ||*

Endowed with non-duality and consuming everything like death, the eminent practitioner must see himself with the help of his imagination as an actor.⁶⁸

Although the image itself is different from the actor of the Sāṃkhya, it echoes to some extent the Sāṃkhya idea of the self/Puruṣa as uninvolved witness (*sākṣin*),⁶⁹ who does not actively take part in any action, and is therefore never tainted. However, a major difference is that the BY's self actually participates in the action, and in spite of that, remains outside it. In this way, the Self as subject is active but without being involved in action, in a way similar to Abhinavagupta's conception.⁷⁰

The closest early parallel to this view is then not found in the Sāṃkhya, but rather in the PSū (5.20), which insist on the fact that the perfected yogin is not tainted by any *karman* or sin: *siddhayogī*

⁶⁸ I understand *paśya* as an imperative standing for the third person singular, or rather that the second and third persons are used alternatively in the prescription, which is meant for the *sādha*. It is also possible that *paśya* stands for *drṣtvā*.

⁶⁹ The idea certainly belongs to a kind of pan-Indian heritage or what TORELLA 1999 calls Sāṃkhya as *sāmānyāśāstra*; Torella mentions on the first page of his paper that the paradigm of spirit-consciousness-inactivity as opposed to matter-unconsciousness-productivity is wide-spread throughout Indian civilization. VASUDEVA 2014, p. 10 also mentions that what appears like a borrowing from the Sāṃkhya in Śaivism may often come from other schools which assimilated Sāṃkhya tenets in their own way. It must also be mentioned that Sāṃkhya itself appears in different forms and what appears in tantric sources may well be closer to various versions of what is called epic Sāṃkhya, which is often theistic. On the problem of epic Sāṃkhya, a discussion of which is beyond the scope of the present study, see for instance BROCKINGTON 1999, who also points out that some tenets we consider to belong to the Sāṃkhya may have been common currency already by the epic period (BROCKINGTON 1999, p. 489). Brockington 1999, p. 485 also mentions that in the *Mokṣadharmā* the perceiving self is not the real doer and enjoyer but simply the pure witness-consciousness.

⁷⁰ For the experiencer as an active entity in Abhinavagupta's works, see VASUDEVA 2014. For an analysis of Abhinavagupta's conception of the actor, who is a "receptacle" (*pātra*), see BANSAT-BOUDON 1992, p. 150 and 430.

na lipyate karmaṇā pātakena vā. This line in turn is also echoed in the *Skandapurāṇa* (52.24), which has a wording rather similar to the BY's (concerning the *sādhaka* who is not tainted even if he is playing): *yogī tu sarvapāpāni kurvann api na lipyate* ("the yogin is not tainted, even if he commits all kinds of sin").

Another scriptural occurrence, from the JY (1.30.19), also seems to stress "detachment in action" of the actor-self, even if in this case, the actor is said to be the "world" (*jagat*). It is less clear what theoretical implications are suggested, for after identifying the world with the actor and the stage with one's own nature, the rest of the image elaborates on the theatrical aspect. But it may not be too far-fetched to assume that, in addition to the actor's detachment, it stresses the multiplicity of the phenomenal world, which is probably understood as the play with various sentiments. Whatever is the case, the verse is unique in that it makes use of aesthetic terms, such as *vṛtti*, *bhāva* and *rasa*.

svabhāvaraṅgamadhye tu nṛtyate naṭavaj jagat |
vṛttitraya[m] samālambya nānābhāvarasāśrayaiḥ ||

The world dances like an actor on the stage, which is its nature, resorting to the three styles of composition and making use of the various feelings and dominant sentiments.

Such technical terms can also be found elsewhere, for instance the word *vibhāva* ("stimulants" which contribute to creating a particular aesthetic reaction)⁷¹ in the following passage, taken from the lost *Triśirobhairava*. Here, however, the purpose of the demonstration is clearly to show the freedom of the enlightened actor-self in his play and suggests a nondualist conception of the self, which is identical with the godhead. In this light, it is possible that the above verse is also intended to stress the same freedom, in which case both citations would imply an underlying nondualist conception, whereby the enlightened Self is the omnipotent godhead playing at will. This enlightened and free actor-Self is contrasted below with the limited Self that does not recognize his identity with the godhead:⁷²

⁷¹ For more on *vibhāva*, translated into French as "déterminants," see BANSAT-BOUDON 1992, pp. 111-114.

⁷² The passage is cited by Jayaratha ad TĀ 1.136. The source, the lost *Triśirobhairava*, was probably a Trika scripture prescribing the worship of a three-headed Bhairava. See TAK III at *trika* citing Sanderson.

anyathā svalpabodhas tu tantubhiḥ kīṭavad yathā |
malatantusamārūḍhaḥ krīḍate dehapañjare ||
samyagbuddhas tu vijñeyah |
nānākārair vibhāvaiś ca bhramyate naṭavad yathā |
svabuddhibhāvarahitam icchākṣemabahiṣkṛtam ||

Otherwise, if one has little awareness, one plays in the cage of the body, locked up by one's [own] impurity, just like a silkworm, which is locked [in its cocoon] by its [own] silk threads.⁷³ But one who has right awareness whirls around like a dancer, with his various forms and conditions, without [being limited by] the [false] creations of his own mind, and being beyond volition or happiness.

In addition to emphasizing freedom, the passage also brings out the detachment of the Self by saying that he is beyond volition and happiness. In doing so, it presents this Self in a way similar to the BY's, albeit the detachment is described not from purity and impurity but from the act of attachment itself, since this divine Self is self-sufficient, being as it is the only truly existing entity.

3. "DRAMATIZED" OBSERVANCES

As pointed out above, the PSū already speak of the yogin as someone who is not tainted by any act or sin. This is an important statement, for several of the *pāśūpata* observances involve contact with impure substances or impure acts. In this context, a later *pāśūpata* text, the *Gaṇakārikāṭīkā* (1.7, p. 57), prescribes that the performer of the *pāśūpata* observance must see himself as an actor, surrounded by other people as his public.

⁷³ It is not possible to retrace the development of the well-known example of the silk-worm. Two texts, however, should be mentioned here. The *Śāntiparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* may have the earliest two occurrences (12.2924-5b and 12.316.28) of this image. In both occurrences, the self locks itself in its own construction like a silk-worm, but in one case the threads represent *guṇas* (*kośakāro yathātmānaṃ kīṭaḥ samanurundhati | sūtratantuguṇair nityaṃ tathāyam aguṇo guṇaiḥ || dvaṃdvam eti ca nirdvaṃdvas tāsu tāsv iha yoniṣu*) and in the other, they represent ignorance (*saṃveṣṭyamānaṃ bahubhir mohatantubhir ātmajaiḥ | kośakāravat ātmānaṃ veṣṭayan nāvabudhyase* ||). Surprisingly, when the image appears in the *Svacchandatantra* (10.361), it is used to demonstrate that one cannot liberate one's self, so hard is the cocoon one has created that Śiva's intervention is needed to remove it (*kośakāro yathā kīṭa ātmānaṃ veṣṭayed dṛḍham | na codveṣṭayituṃ śakta ātmānaṃ sa punar yathā* ||).

evaṃ prathamāvasthāyāṃ vidhim anuṣṭhāya yadā khalu prāptajñānaḥ prakṣiṇakaluṣaḥ kṛtābhyanujñāś ca bhavati tadāvasthāntaraṃ gatvā raṅgavad avasthiteṣu janeṣu madhye naṭavad avasthito vivecya vivecya krāthanādīni kuryāt.

In this way, after performing what is prescribed in the first stage [of his observance], when he has obtained [*pāśupata*] knowledge [from his master] and his sins have been destroyed, after getting the authorisation [of his master], he should proceed to the next stage [of his observance]: in the middle of people around him, as if he were an actor on stage, gradually separating [himself from them],⁷⁴ he should snore etc.

Acting concerns the famous second stage of the *pāśupata* observance, in which the *pāśupata* behaves in an uncivilized way or “like a demon” (*pretavat*): snoring (PSū 3.12ff), pretending he is limp, making gestures of love (or perhaps sexual gestures), thus provoking slander and curse. In this way, he transfers the fruitions of his bad karma to passers-by and takes their good karmas. While doing so, however, he must remain detached: he must, according to the above passage, behave like an actor and provoke disgust in people as if he was acting in a play.

The *pāśupatas* were probably the first *śaivas* who “acted” in their observance. They thus started a tradition of observances which involved a theatrical aspect or at least required the practitioner to disguise himself and play a role. He was always meant to do so in front of people surrounding him, in front of passers-by, he thus also demarked himself from society. The *pāśupatas* played to be repulsive in order to provoke an exchange of karma; but later tantrics appear to do role-playing rather in order to assimilate themselves to their deity. This imitation of the deity must of course be distinguished from other important techniques or ways of identification, such as ritual transformation of the body with mantras (*nyāsa/sakalīkaraṇa*), possession (*āveśa*) and complete merging into the god (at the time of final release, *mokṣa*).

There seem to be three particular roles prescribed in such ritual imitations: the goddess (*devī*), the god of love (*kāma*) and the madman (*unmatta*). These three are listed as three alternative vows in a passage of the JY (1.47.10cd-15ab), which gives a set of general rules to follow when impersonating a deity or a madman. In all

⁷⁴ My understanding of *vivecya vivecya* is tentative.

three cases, the disguised practitioner must behave in an uncontrolled manner and decorate himself excessively, like a woman.⁷⁵

*devīvrataadharo mantrī nitya[m] nepathyakādiṣu ||
 unmattako [']tha⁷⁶ śṛṅgārī cāpavratadharo [']thavā |
 gītālāpavilāsādhyo nānāvārṇoparañjitaḥ ||
 vicitrāmbaramālādhyo mālāhastādyanekadhṛk |
 grāmacatvararathyāsu prabhramet tvaritaḥ sadā ||
 gāyan hasan paṭhan -- oḍaṃ nṛttaṃ⁷⁷ valgan suharṣitaḥ⁷⁸ |
 †vintryaurthy†āropitakaras †tadiṣṭakaḥ†karaḥ sadā ||
 samārañjītavaktraś ca raktasūtrāṅganāsadhṛk⁷⁹ |
 †viṣānāvaṣava†cchannaprakoṣṭhodantakarṇikaḥ ||
 svabhāvasthaś caran maunī kvacid bhāvaṃ samāśrayet |*

The master of mantras may observe the Goddess-vow, the Madman(-like) vow or the vow of the Bow-[Carrying Kāma], in which he is in love,⁸⁰ always in a costume (*nepathyaka-*) and other [insignia]. He must sing, babble and play around a lot, wear various colours, adorn himself with coloured clothes and garlands and hold a garland and several other attributes in his hands. He should always wander around quickly in villages, crossroads and main roads (or: at crossroads and on main roads of villages), singing, laughing, reciting texts, [...] dancing, and bouncing very happily. [...] ⁸¹ With his face coloured, he should look like a beautiful woman wearing a red thread [as decoration?]. He must have earrings

⁷⁵ It is possible that the prescription here describes only the first one, the *devīvrata*. However, while one verse enjoins that one must be like a woman, the rest appears more appropriate for the other vows. Therefore, I understand these verses to describe the three *vratas* in a general and not necessarily systematic way. Subsequently, each of the *vratas* is described separately.

⁷⁶ The MS reads *ṣa* for *tha*.

⁷⁷ The MS reading *nṛttaṃ* is probably to be emended to *nṛtyan*.

⁷⁸ The MS has *svaharṣitaḥ* for *suharṣitaḥ*.

⁷⁹ Perhaps to be understood/emended to *raktasūtro* [']. The word *sadrk* appears in the MS as *sadrk*.

⁸⁰ I understand the compound *cāpavratadharo* to stand for *cāpadhara-vrata-dharo*. The compound and the adjective *śṛṅgārī* suggest that Kāma is to be imitated here, for which there is indeed a prescription elsewhere, as will be shown.

⁸¹ The beginning of the line is corrupt and does not seem to yield sense as it stands, except that hand-held attributes are prescribed. The second compound may be corrupt for *śastrāṣṭakakarāḥ* “holding eight weapons in the hand” as in JY 1.15.86c: *śastrāṣṭakakarā devyaḥ*. There may be, however, some technical difficulties in carrying out this prescription with only two hands.

reaching down to his forearms [covered with...],⁸² and observe his vow while staying in his own natural state or sometimes he may resort to [another] state.

The Goddess Vow

The detailed description of the goddess vow referred to above can be found under the heading of Cāmuṇḍā Vow (*cāmuṇḍāvratā*), in which the practitioner dresses up and behaves like the terrifying goddess (*Yoginīsaṃcāra* as transmitted in the JY 3.31.36cd-42ab, edited by Sanderson).

tataś cared vratavaraṃ triṣaṣṭikulasambhavam ||
bhairavaṃ vā mahābhāge cāmuṇḍāvratam eva ca |
kṛṣṇāmbaradharo nityaṃ kṛṣṇagandhānulepanam ||
kṛṣṇamālāvalambī ca karṇālāṅkārabhūṣitaḥ |
valayābharāṇopetaṃ nūpuradhvanibhūṣitam ||
raktāmbaro raktapādo divyastrīrūpadhāriṇaḥ |
pracchanne nirjane deśe maunī vidyāvratam caret ||
māsam ekaṃ caren mantrī dvādaśāṃ vā mahāvratām |
māsenā tu mahāyogī yoginyāḥ paśyatecchayā ||
tair vṛtam tu caruṃ kṛtvā trailokye vicaret kṣaṇāt |
sarvajñaḥ sarvakarttā ca sṛṣṭisaṃhārakārakaḥ ||
yoginīnāṃ pade devī hartā karttā ca jāyate |

He must then observe the excellent vow of the 63 families also called Bhairava vow and the Cāmuṇḍā vow, o Fortunate One. [First the latter is described:]⁸³ he must always wear black clothes and fragrant paste of black colour, with a black garland and decorated with earrings. He must have bracelets and [other] ornaments and jingling anklets. Dressed in

⁸² The text seems to be corrupt here and I cannot propose any convincing conjecture. The first word of the compound is *viṣāṇa* or *viṣāṇā*, which, provided the word is not entirely corrupt, would imply that the practitioner must wear a horn or a horn-like object.

⁸³ I understand that only two observances are described in this chapter of the text: first the Cāmuṇḍāvratā (given here), and then the Bhairavavratā (also called Triṣaṣṭikula- or Kāpāla-vratā). SANDERSON 2009, p. 134, understands that the Bhairava-vratā and the Triṣaṣṭikula-vratā are two different observances, and that the practitioner can choose between altogether three *vratas*. Since only two are described in the subsequent passage, I understand the *vā* above to refer to alternative names of the same observance; and since the Cāmuṇḍā-vratā is connected with a *ca*, I understand that both *vratas* must be performed.

red, with red feet, having the form of a divine woman, he must perform his preliminary observance in a secret, solitary place. The master of mantras should perform [this] Great Observance for one or for twelve months.⁸⁴ After a month, the great yogi shall see the yoginīs if he wishes. Accompanied by them, he should make a rice offering [including the mingled sexual fluids] and wander in the three worlds in a second. He will become omniscient and omnipotent, performing creation and destruction. He will become the creator and the destroyer, o goddess, in the realm of yoginīs.

The prescription hesitates between prescribing the imitation of the terrifying black goddess or that of a beautiful, divine woman with red ornaments.⁸⁵ In any case, the observance is called a *vidyāvratā*, which is the preliminary observance commonly prescribed before the invocation of *yoginīs*.

The Observance of Kāma

Similarly, pretending to be Kāma is also part of the *vidyāvratas*. I take the following *vratā*, which occurs in *Siddhayogeśvarīmata* (henceforth SYM)10.6cd-8, to be the same as the *śṛṅgārī cāpavratā*, lit. “the amorous observance of the bow” mentioned above in the JY, for the expression seems to suggest that Kāma must be imitated.

dhanurdhara[h] śarāṅś caiva pañca dikpālavat tataḥ ||
raktena bhasmanā snāto raktayajñopavītinah |
raktapuṣpadharo dhīmān hasantocair japet tataḥ ||
śaram ekaṃ kare gr̥hya maunī †neyāt†⁸⁶ paribhramet |
vratam brahmaśirasyaita[t] siddhidam parikīrtitam ||

⁸⁴ It is also possible to understand that the Cāmuṇḍā-vratā should be performed for one month and that the Mahāvratā (as a different observance, implying assimilation to Bhairava) is an alternative, but one which must be done for twelve months.

⁸⁵ Let us note here that other *śākta* texts also prescribe that the practitioner should or can dress up as a woman. See e.g. *Devīpañcaśatikā* 5.54: *strīveśa-dhārī bhūtvāsau nagnavāso mahāmatih | nirvikalpaḥ prasannātmā pūjākarma-viśāradaḥ*.

⁸⁶ Perhaps one should understand *maunīneyāt* as a verb, some kind of irregular optative of a denominative from *mauna* or *maunī* – but this solution is highly conjectural.

The practitioner should hold a bow and five arrows [and remain vigilant?] like a guardian of a direction.⁸⁷ He must be bathed in red ashes and should have a red sacred thread. Holding red flowers, the wise one should recite the mantras laughing loudly. Taking one arrow in his hand, he should remain silent [...] and wander about. This is the observance of the Brahma Head [a protection mantra], which is said to bestow success.

Although Kāma is not named here either, the prescription of the bow and the five arrows together with the red colour clearly imply the imitation of Kāma. Just as the goddess vow, this observance is also part of the *vidyāvratā* series, or preliminary mantra propitiation.

The Madman(-Like) Observance

This *vratā*, unlike the previous ones, goes back directly to a *pāśu-patā* prescription. In PSū 4.6, the practitioner is required to remain alone and act like a madman in the world or towards people (*unmattavad eko vicareta loke*). The commentator explains that it is again performed in order to mislead people about the real identity of the performer.⁸⁸

The same *vratā* is also said to have been practiced by *lākulas* as pointed out in SANDERSON 2006, p. 209. Abhinavagupta mentions in his commentary on NŚ 12.85 that it existed for *lākulas*, in the so-called “stage of the highest yogi.”⁸⁹ A similar *vidyāvratā*, under the name of *gaṇavratā*, but still with the prescription to behave like a madman, is also found in the earliest tantra, the *Niśvāsa*.⁹⁰ Subsequently, it becomes recurrent in *śākta* tantras, often echoing the PSū and their commentary,⁹¹ as in the following passage of the BY

⁸⁷ It is not clear to me what this comparison to a guardian of a direction implies. Since the practitioner takes on the appearance of Kāma, it is unlikely (but not impossible) that he should look menacing (like a guardian of a direction).

⁸⁸ *laukikaparikṣakāñām sammohanārtham uktam unmattavad iti.*

⁸⁹ *paramayogyavasthāyām lākuladarśanapratipannānām unmattavratam apy asti.* Cited in SANDERSON 2006, p. 209.

⁹⁰ *nṛtyate gāyate caiva unmatto hasate bruvan || bhasmāngī cīravāsaś ca gaṇavratam idaṃ smṛtam | (Niśvāsaguhya 3.32cd-33ab).* Note that the *Niśvāsaguhya* also has an observance in which one must be disguised as a woman, as in the *devīvrata*: *gāyate nṛtyate jāpī strīrūpī valabhūṣitaḥ* (3.35cd).

⁹¹ Cf. Kaunḍinya on PSū 4.6 (*tato vaktavyaṃ māheśvaro 'haṃ kaumāro 'ham iti*) with verse 20 above. Parallel identified in KISS forthcoming, p. 30.

(21.18cd-27).⁹² As Kiss points out, the aim here is nevertheless very different compared to the *pāśupata* version, for this prescription “seems to concentrate on the gradual adoption of non-conventional practices (*nirācāra*), which prepares the Sādhaka for the extreme rituals to be performed after this introductory test period” (KISS forthcoming, p. 33).

nagnarūpo bhaven nityaṃ muktakeśas tathaiva ca ||
rudate hasate caiva kvacid geyam udīrayet |
kvacin nṛtyaṃ kvacid valgaṃ kvacid dhāvati sādhaḥ ||
brahmāhaṃ viṣṇurūpo 'haṃ īśvaro 'haṃ bravīti ca |
devāḥ prāptakarāsmākaṃ kiṅkaratvaṃ samāgatāḥ ||
airāvate samārūḍha indro 'haṃ paśya mām bravīti |
indrāṇī mama bhāryā ca śvāno 'haṃ sūkaraṃ hy ahaṃ ||
aśvamūrdho hy ahaṃ caiva ghoṭaviḡrahakam tathā |
rathyāyāṃ śayanaṃ kuryād uttiṣṭed dhāvate ti ca ||
yāgasthānaṃ na laṅgheta pūjāyān manasāpi vā |
mūtreṇa vandayet saṃdhyāṃ kvacin mūrdhni tu prakṣipet ||
striyo dṛṣṭvā namaskṛtya mātā ca bhaginīti ca |
evaṃ sambhāṣāyān mantrī kroṣāṇaṃ tu na kārayet ||
bhramaṇaṃ tu tathaiveha āhnikān tu tathaiva hi |
bhojanaṃ tu divā naiva unmatto 'pi samācāret ||
mastake tu tilāṃ kṣīpya yūkaṃ kṛtvā tu bhakṣayet |
saśabdaṃ mārāyēd vātha lokasammohanaṃ prati ||
unmattakaṃ mahādevi evaṃ saṃcārya sādhaḥ |
nānārūpābhi ceṣṭābhir yogināṃ tu hitāvahaṃ ||

He should always be naked, his hair unbound. He weeps, he laughs, sometimes he bursts out in song. Sometimes the Sādhaka dances, sometimes he jumps up, sometimes he runs [away]. He states, “I am Brahmā! I am Viṣṇu! I am Īśvara! The gods are in my hands! They have become my servants! Look at me – I am Indra, mounted on [his elephant] Airāvata!”, he says. “Indrāṇī is my wife!”. And, “I am a dog! I am a pig! I am horse-headed [?] and my body is that of a horse!”. He should lie down on the road, then get up and run. He should not set foot on the site of pantheon-worship (*yāgasthāna*) and should not perform worship, not even mentally. He should salute the junctions of the day (*saṃdhyā*) by [offering his own] urine. He should sometimes pour some of it on his head. When seeing women, he should greet them thus: “Mother! Sister!”. This is how the Mantrin should engage in conversation. He should not abuse [them]. Roaming (*bhramaṇa*) is [to be performed] in the same

⁹² Edition and translation of this passage are taken from KISS forthcoming.

way in this case (*iha*) [as taught above], as [is the sequence of] the daily rituals (*āhnikā*). He should not eat in the daytime, even though [he behaves like] a madman. He should throw sesamum seeds on his head and, pretending that they are (*kṛtvā*) lice, he should eat them. Or he should kill [the “lice”] with a big fuss in order to delude people. The Sādhaka should, O Mahādevī, pursue the Madman-like [observance] (*unmattaka*) thus, with different patterns of behaviour. This is for the benefit of yogins.

In this *vrata*, “acting” is described much more vividly than in the observances of the Goddess and Kāma. There is also a more detailed and elaborate version of this *vrata* in the JY (3.38.167cd-173cd) which brings out the theatrical aspect of the observance:

atha vonmattakaṃ kāryaṃ vrataṃ paramasobhanam ||
asatyul[l]āpalāpī syād yena kena⁹³ cid †ātaḥ† |
digambaro muktakeśo sarvabhakṣo hy alolupaḥ ||
kṣaṇaṃ hase' kṣaṇaṃ gāye' kṣaṇaṃ rode' kṣaṇaṃ raṭet |
kṣaṇaṃ plavet kṣaṇaṃ narṭte' kṣaṇaṃ dhāve' kṣaṇaṃ lalet ||
kṣaṇaṃ śāntaṃ kṣaṇaṃ vīraṃ kṣaṇaṃ⁹⁴ bībhatsavad⁹⁵ bhavet |
kṣaṇaṃ raudrarasāvastho kṣaṇaṃ eva bhayānakam ||
kṣaṇaṃ śṛṅgārīnaṃ devi kṣaṇaṃ hāsyaiakataparāḥ |
kṣaṇaṃ adbhutasamrū dho kṣaṇaṃ kāruṇyam āsthitaḥ ||
nānārasasamāviṣṭo nānābhāvasamāsthitaḥ |
nānāvilāsasaṃyukto nānāgūtaravākulaḥ ||
rathyāpatitanirmālyam śavanirmālyam eva vā |
dhārayet satataṃ dehe sphuṭec ca bahubhāṣayā ||

Or he should perform the madman-like observance, which is particularly auspicious. He should babble lies [...] ⁹⁶ naked, with his hair undone, eating everything and not desiring anything, he must laugh for a second, then sing then cry and howl. One moment he must leap around, then dance, run or play around. For a moment he must resort to the [aesthetic experience of the] sentiment of tranquility, ⁹⁷ then to the heroic one, to

⁹³ The MS reads *keta*.

⁹⁴ The MS reads *kṣaṭāṃ*.

⁹⁵ The MS reads *bhūtsavad*.

⁹⁶ The MS seems to be corrupt in several places here. The first word could also be considered a crux, but the meaning seems clear. Perhaps the latter half of the line means “he should speak with anyone [without distinction].”

⁹⁷ It is notable that the text already knows of the *śāntarasa*, which appears perhaps only from Udbhāṭa onwards.

that of disgust, wrath, terror, love, humour, marvel, and pathos.⁹⁸ Possessed by various aesthetic experiences and resorting to various dominant sentiments, playing various games and filled with the sound of multiple songs, he must always wear a garland that has either fallen on the road or a garland [that has come] from corpses on his body and express himself in several tongues.

The subsequent part of the text also prescribes that the practitioner must emit the cries of various animals and pretend to be a *kāpālika* and/or an outcaste *caṇḍāla*. Therefore, even though the theatrical aspect of the observance is very prominent here, the point remains the Sādhaka's preparation for impure rites through which he will become Bhairava himself as the master of the universe, both pure and impure. The list of *rasas* must be understood in this light: they are all present in him, preparing him for the experience of totality.

4. THE GREAT PLAY OR MOCK PLAY (*MAHĀKRĪḌĀ*)

Thus far, we have seen various elements of theatre and dramatic theory appearing in tantric contexts. Occasionally, it also happens that the enactment of a play is prescribed in a ritual context. Such a prescription is found in the second half of the BY (54.93cdff.), which is chronologically somewhat later than the first half. The play itself or the rite in which the play is performed seems to be termed *mahākrīḍā* or "great play," which is an unusual name for a theatrical production. The word *krīḍā* is more often used in connection with Bhairava (or the practitioner who becomes Bhairava), who plays freely, at will in the world. It is therefore possible that this play to be performed for Bhairava is in some way related to this notion. However, *mahākrīḍā* may also be the term for the whole ritual that involves the play itself.

The ritual context of the performance is again an observance. Before the prescription of this *mahākrīḍā*, the BY first envisages a more common type of observance, in which the naked practitioner remains silent, wanders around at night in the cremation ground with various bhairavic weapons or attributes, eats meat and drinks alcohol. Then either an alternative is prescribed (in which he wears various clothes as opposed to being naked previously) or a continuation of the previous practice is given, in which he can wear va-

⁹⁸ For *kāruṇya/karuṇā* meaning the pathetic sentiment, see BANSAT-BOUDON 2000, pp. 84ff.

rious clothes and ornaments, he plays drums, shouts and the like. The observance finishes with a drama (*nāṭya*), at the end of which the practitioner becomes a leader of *yoginīs*.

kṛṣṇāmbaro [']*thavā raktā*-⁹⁹ *vastraiś citrais tathā priye* | 93
bhasmasnāto [']*thavā mantrī raktacandanacarccitaḥ*
lalāṭe tilakaṃ kṛtvā pādau laktakarañjitaḥ | 94
kaṇṭhe [*ca*] *kaṇṭhikā*[*m*] *dadyā' kiṅkiṇīśreṇimāliṇaḥ* |
karṇe kare ca bāhubhyāṃ kaṭakābharaṇaṃ tathā | 95
javāmālāvṛto mantrī muṇḍamālāvalambakaiḥ |
ḍamarum vādayen mantrī paṭahikām vā mahātmanaḥ | 96
*śivārāvaṇi prakurvīta kravyādaśābdam*¹⁰⁰ *eva ca* ||
nṛtyārambhaṃ sabhāvātmā śabdāt tatra samārabhet | 97
yoginīsahitaṃ nāṭyaṃ vīrabhāvāvalambanaṃ ||

The master of mantras wears black or red clothes, or clothes of variegated colours, my Beloved, or he is bathed in ashes [and naked?], or covered with red sandalwood paste. He must make a *tilaka* on his forehead, put lac on his feet, a necklace around his neck with rows of jingling bells. He must also put jewels in his ears, on his hands, armlets on his arms and wear a garland of red *javā* flowers, which rests on a garland of heads.¹⁰¹ The eminent master of mantras should play on an hourglass-shaped drum or a kettle drum and emit a jackal's cry or the sound of a demon. Then he should take up there, at the sound [of musical instruments] (*śabdāt*), the starting position in dance (*nṛtyārambhaṃ*),¹⁰² while his self is infused with the [dominant] sentiment.¹⁰³ He must undertake the performance of a play (*nāṭyam*) with *yoginīs*, which is based on the heroic sentiment (*vīrabhāva*-).

The heroic sentiment is probably prescribed with reference to the *Sādhaka* as a "hero," who must be brave and fearless when he invokes *yoginīs* at night in the cremation ground and they suddenly arrive in hordes, with a frightening appearance. The text does not elaborate on the subject further and it remains a question what kind

⁹⁹ This must be intended in the sense of *athavā raktāmbaro*.

¹⁰⁰ This stands for *kravyādaśābdam metri causa*.

¹⁰¹ Because of the irregularities of the Sanskrit, this is a tentative interpretation.

¹⁰² For *nṛtyārambha* denoting a particular position (*avasthānaviśeṣa*) in dance, see e.g. the *Vikramacarita* Southern Recension F3b and the *Nṛtyaśāstra* it cites: *aṅgeṣu caturaśratvaṃ samapādau latākarau | prārambhe sarvanṛtyānām etat sāmānyam ucyate* ||.

¹⁰³ Other interpretations of the compound are also possible, but this seemed to me the most appropriate in the context.

of play is to be performed with the *yoginīs* as actresses. The occurrence of the prescription is, however, not completely unparalleled. The short recension of the SYM (27.20) also enjoins that one must provide the god (Bhairava) with a play (*krīḍā*). Nothing is specified about this *krīḍā*, but it may well be the same play that the BY prescribes, for the BY also calls the whole ritual sequence involving the dramatic performance simply *krīḍana*.

CONCLUSION

Although theatre certainly cannot be considered a fundamental part of tantric prescriptions and texts, elements of acting and performance do appear in various ways as shown above. From the above investigations, it is possible to point out some major shifts as to how theatre and its image play a role in tantric texts. To summarize these changes:

1. The image of the actor, inherited from the Sāṃkhya (perhaps as *sāmānyaśāstra*) and identified there with the subtle body, becomes reinterpreted. The BY uses it not to explain the tension between the one and the many, but the detachment of the self from whatever it manipulates, in order to defend its ritual nondualism (without professing clear ontological nondualism). In this, it remains nevertheless close to the Sāṃkhya-like conception of the self as uninvolved witness (*sākṣin*). Later *śākta* tantras, however, use the image of Śiva as the actor or dancer to show the absolute freedom of the deity-self, as part of a nondualist ontology, in which creation or the phenomenal world is a product of the deity's play, but is identical with Him. This image of freedom, in turn, is reinforced by other images of dancing deities, in particular goddesses, whose dance also expresses their unrestrained character.

At the exegetical level, the nondual image of the divine self as actor is the first to make an appearance (in the ŚS). However, its purpose is not to demonstrate the Self's or Śiva's freedom, but rather the unreal nature of multiplicity. This demonstration about the nature of being is then elaborated by the Kashmirian exegetes and developed into a demonstration about the nature of perception and knowledge. Rather than showing what there is, the image comes to show levels of knowledge: the roles of Śiva represent various cognizing

subjects and thus various religious currents. This representation of rival schools of thought makes it possible to envisage their conversion, whereby they can ascend from their lower position until they reach true (*śaiva*) knowledge.

2. In the *pāśupata* system, observances that involved some form of acting or pretension did so in order to hide the identity of the practitioner and to provoke an exchange of karma between him and his spectators, i.e. passers-by. The aim is thus to mislead others, to elicit slander and curse. While some *pāśupata* observances were taken over in *śākta* Tantric sources, their purpose became different: they prepared the practitioner for the path of ritual non-duality because they required the use of impure substances; and they were one of the ways in which the practitioner enacted his identity with a/the deity. By the time of the JY, an awareness of the aesthetic aspects of this role playing seems to appear and the nine *rasas* are referred to.
3. Contrary to the *pāśupatas*, whose dance (*nr̥tta*) was probably unstructured and free, tantric sources also refer to structured dance and dramatic performance. The offering of a play (*nāṭya*) to Bhairava, although found in a unique prescription of the BY (and in a possible allusion in the SYM), may attest to a practice in which a play was performed as part of tantric ritual.

We cannot know what actual practice involved and some of these prescriptions could be just entirely fanciful, but there seems to be much more awareness of theatre and performing in the tantric sources than in pretantric *pāśupata* practice and particular effort seems to be made to integrate some aspects of theatre into religious practice. Whether this influenced Abhinavagupta or not, this is a remarkable feature in itself.

One of Abhinavagupta's major contributions to dramatic theory concerns the relationship between aesthetic relishing and *kaula* tantric experience, both of which require the suspension or obliteration of the ego. As far as I can see, this is not brought out anywhere in the scriptural sources, for *kaula* and *krama* texts proper I have been able to consult (omitting from this category the JY, which is very heterogeneous) do not appear to deal with *nāṭya* or related subjects, at least not directly. It would seem then that Abhinavagupta's theory of *carvaṇā* bringing together theatre and tantra is entirely his own, a fact that does not come as a surprise. It re-

mains, however, to be seen whether (and how) the description of *kaula* experience in the scriptures is echoed in Abhinavagupta's writings on theatre.¹⁰⁴

It also remains a question whether the above described use of theatre in tantras shows the increasing influence and importance of classical theatre, or rather, it betrays an attempt of the tantric authors to integrate their texts in the cultural framework of an elite. Whatever is the case, it reflects an increasing awareness of the dramatic tradition in an unexpected context: tantric scriptures. This fact in itself implies that theatre, although it was clearly destined to the elite in the form we know it from the classical sources, was perhaps less restricted to the royal court than our classical sources suggest. It is merely hypothetical of course, but more popular theatrical forms such as *Mūṭiyettu* in today's Kerala, which is some way between deity possession and theatre, may well have existed in the past elsewhere in India too, and stood as proof not only of the close relation of ritual and drama, but also of the universal appeal of theatre.

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¹⁰⁴ For the way in which tantric ritual becomes "aestheticised" in Kaulism, see SANDERSON 1988, p. 680. A closer study of the *kaula* scriptures, many unedited, may reveal their influence on Abhinavagupta's aesthetic theory.

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¹⁰⁸ I am grateful to Prof. Sanderson for making his edition available to me in an electronic form.