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**The Emotional and Aesthetic Experience of the Actor.
Diderot's Paradoxe sur le comédien in Sanskrit
dramaturgy**

Daniele Cuneo, Elisa Ganser

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'Verità e bellezza'
Essays in Honour of Raffaele Torella

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Edited by
Francesco Sferra and Vincenzo Vergiani



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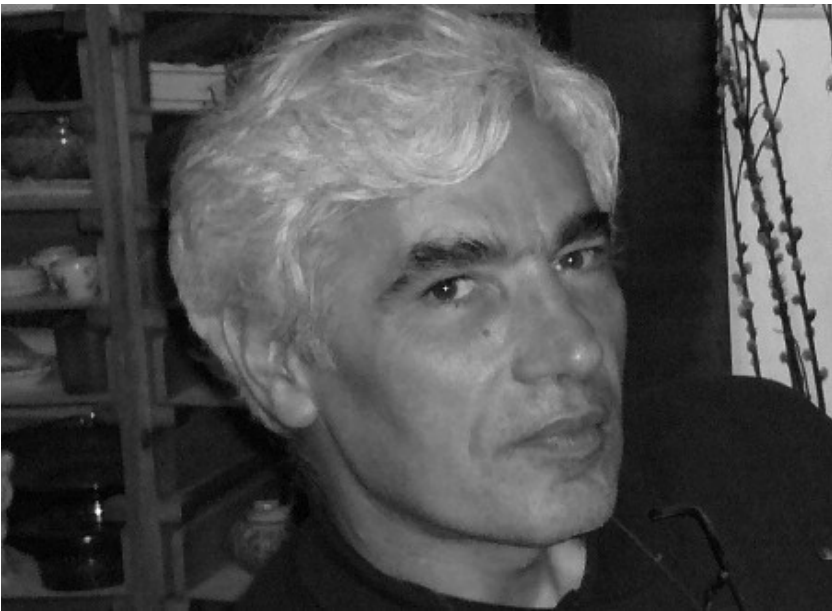
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Raffaele Torella

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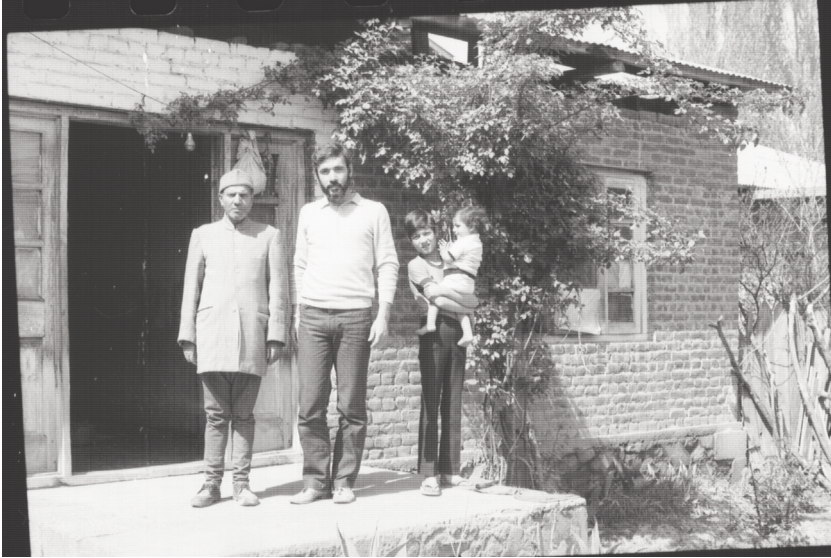
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Dinanāth Yach and Raffaele Torella in Śrīnagar in the mid-1980s



Raffaele Torella in the countryside near Bracciano with students

*The Emotional and Aesthetic Experience of the Actor.
Diderot's Paradoxe sur le comédien
in Sanskrit Dramaturgy**

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'Moins on sent, plus on fait sentir'
Diderot, *Le paradoxe sur le comédien*

'Everyone at every minute of his life must feel something.
Only the dead have no sensations.'
Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*

The figure, role and personal experience of the actor have been the object of practical and theoretical scrutiny across latitudes and cultures since the very beginning of the various dramaturgical traditions across the globe. Famously enough, with regard to the actor's emotional involvement within the enactment of the play, the positions at the two extremes are represented by Diderot's paradigmatic refusal of any affective relation of the actor to the

* This paper is the fruit of a close and lasting collaboration between the two authors, Elisa Ganser and Daniele Cuneo, the former being responsible for the first half, and the latter, the second. Elisa Ganser wishes to express her gratitude to the Swiss National Science Foundation, whose generous contribution made the research for the paper possible within the framework of the project 'Performing Arts and Religious Practices in Classical and Medieval Sanskrit Literature' (Department of Indian Studies, University of Zurich).

character he is portraying and by Stanislavski's relentless focus on his complete emotional engrossment within the fictional scenery being performed. Accordingly, Diderot argued that a psychological distance is needed between the performer's mental states and the emotions that the characters are portrayed to experience in the fancied world of drama.¹ On the other hand, Stanislavski maintained that the actor's mental focus should be directed on an empathetic immersion in the affective states of the portrayed characters.²

A similar debate, including extreme positions as well as some bold intermediate stances can be found in Sanskrit dramaturgical sources since the beginnings of their production, although it has received comparatively little attention among modern scholars. This neglect may be due to a conception of the Indian artist that became prevalent at the beginning of the 20th c. with the celebrated studies of Coomaraswamy.³ On the basis of some late technical treatises on architecture and sculpture, Coomaraswamy argued that the Indian artist should be compared to a detached yogin who contemplates in meditation an idea before transforming it into a devotional image or religious work of art. Such an impersonal process of art production could not possibly involve any interference from the artist's personal emotions, not even from an actor.⁴ With these considerations, Coomaraswamy was responding to a critique

¹ Diderot identifies two sorts of actors, the one that plays from the heart and the one who plays from the intellect. As is well known, Diderot privileged the latter, the actor who does not feel the emotions of the characters while playing a part: 'In my view he must have a deal of judgment. He must have in himself an unmoved and disinterested on-looker. He must have, consequently, penetration and no sensibility; the art of mimicking everything, or, which comes to the same thing, the same aptitude for every sort of character and part' (Diderot 1883: 7).

² See, for instance, the following statements in *An Actor Prepares*: 'An actor is under the obligation to live his part inwardly, and then give to his experience an external embodiment' (Stanislavski 1936: 15).

³ For a recent take on the debate about Indian art in the early 20th c. and the role of Coomaraswamy in it, see Ganser 2018.

⁴ See, e.g., Coomaraswamy: '[T]hose principles which have with great consistency governed all other Oriental arts until recently, have also governed dramatic technique. The movements of the Indian actor are not accidentally swayed by his personal emotion; he is too perfectly trained for that. His body, if you will, is an automaton; while he is acting, there is nothing natural... that is to say accidental or inartistic... in his movements or changes of expression. The movement of a single finger, the elevation of an eyebrow, the direction of a glance... all these

of modern theatre advanced by one of his favourite interlocutors, the English theatre director and critic Edward Gordon Craig. In a very influential essay on the history of Western theatre, Craig conceived the idea of the ‘super marionette’ (*Über-Marionette*), or the actor-puppet completely in control of his mind and body, striving for a mechanical perfection from which all accident, namely the haphazard irruption of emotions or the whimsical display of personality, had to be banned.⁵ That the very figure of Diderot was still lingering on the horizon of the critique of modern theatre at the turn of the century is beyond doubt: Craig had read and annotated several times his own copy of *The Paradox of Acting*,⁶ the English translation of Diderot’s *Paradoxe* that came out in 1883 with an enthusiastic preface written by one of Craig’s protégés, the renowned actor Henry Irving.⁷ On the other hand, the debate about the actor in the West had prompted Craig to start looking at India for novel models of actoriality with a stronger focus on technique. Craig’s conversation with Coomaraswamy in this regard is well documented, but it is perhaps less known that Craig’s idea of the *Über-Marionette* had been also inspired by *The Home of the Puppet Play*, an essay written by the Indologist Richard Pischel, popular in Western theatre circles at the beginning of the 20th c.⁸ It was the Indian ideal of the actor as presented in the texts of Pischel and then Coomaraswamy—the detached technician inheritor of a longstanding tradition—that was heralded as a solu-

are determined in the books of technical instruction, or by a constant tradition handed on in pupillary succession’ (Coomaraswamy 1913: 123).

⁵ The essay in question is ‘The Actor and the *Über-Marionette*,’ which was published in *The Mask* in 1908.

⁶ Craig even wrote the initials ‘Ü-m-’ on his copy of the *Paradoxe*, connecting thus his idea of the *Über-Marionette* with Diderot’s words: ‘My friend, there are three types—Nature’s man, the poet’s man, the actor’s man. Nature’s is less great than the poet’s, the poet’s less great than the great actor’s, which is the most exalted of all. This last climbs on the shoulders of the one before him and shuts himself up inside a great basket-work figure of which he is the soul.’ On Diderot’s influence on Craig, see Le Boeuf 2010: 105, and n. 29.

⁷ In Craig’s words, ‘the very nearest approach that has ever been to the ideal actor, with his brain commanding his nature, has been Henry Irving’ (Craig 1911: 12).

⁸ The essay was published in German in 1900 and translated into English in 1902.

tion to the impasse of the debate on the actor's emotions, so persistent in Europe from Diderot to Stanislavski and beyond.⁹

Beyond this briefly outlined historical entanglement, how would Indian authors of dramaturgical texts have responded to the debate about the actor's emotional experience? It must be clarified from the outset that within Indian sources the issue of the emotional contribution of the actor to the performance and its aesthetic result is never conceptualized as a question about the actor's personality and transitory moods interfering with the work of the playwright and the theatre director during the staging of a play. On the contrary, the various opinions on the role of the performer are defended and refuted according to both more narrowly aesthetic and more broadly philosophical arguments concerning the human mind in its emotional make-up and psycho-somatic connections.

In what follows, we will try to pin down some of the main arguments advanced in this regard, starting with the seminal treatise of Bharata, the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, and its close connection to acting practices as testified by its avowed role of technical manual on performance. However, the key figure in our investigation will be Abhinavagupta (10th–11th c.) and his masterful, grand theory of aesthetics. No better way can be conceived to understand his theoretical position than to situate it intertextually against the theories of his predecessors (i.e. Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa), with whom he rarely agrees, and the ideas of some of his loyal followers (i.e. Hemacandra) and staunch adversaries (i.e. Rāmacandra and Guṇacandra).¹⁰ Beyond

⁹ For a history of the debate in the West from classical sources to the beginning of the 19th c., see Vicentini 2012; on the still contemporary importance of the issue of the actor's sensibility, among many others, see the synthesis in Haumesser *et al.* 2008, and on the influence of Diderot and Stanislavski's models of acting on contemporary theatre directors, see Meyer-Dinkgräfe 2005.

¹⁰ We discuss the views of post-Abhinavagupta authors on the actor's experience in Cuneo and Ganser forthcoming. In the history of the conceptions of the actor's experience, a pivotal moment that however lies beyond the scope of the present article is represented by the speculations developed in the second-millennium Bengali Vaiṣṇavism or Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism. In the theories of figures such as Rūpagosvāmin, Jivagosvāmin and their followers, aesthetics and theology merge in the intentionally paradoxical figure of the actor-devotee-spectator. The boundaries between theatre and life, religious worship and aesthetic delectation, story-world of the characters and real-life of the spectators are completely detornated and then fused together in the human reproduction of Kṛṣṇa's divine play.

our focus on Abhinavagupta's ideas, this historical and philosophical inquiry also aims at tracing the plurality of opinions and their soundness with regard to the various theoretical declensions of the wider aesthetic and metaphysical theories propounded by the various authors.¹¹ Finally, we will investigate how the very figure of the actor, with his special skills at embodiment and mental control, gets intertwined with theatrical and religious speculations in the works of the masters of non-dualistic Śaivism.

1. *The ABC of rasa aesthetics*

na hi rasād yte kaścid arthaḥ pravartate
Bharata, *Nāṭyaśāstra* 6, prose after 31

Before delving into the various theories concerning the emotional involvement of the actor, it is necessary to survey some features of Sanskrit aesthetic theories,¹² especially with regard to the various understandings of the central concept of *rasa* 'aesthetic emotion' and the issue of its locus (*āśraya*), i.e., the object(s) or the person(s) where it is supposed to be located when it occurs as a consequence of a successful aesthetic process. The only possible starting point is the text of Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the seminal work on Sanskrit dramaturgy, in which the concept of *rasa* features for

For a now classic introduction to this dramatic change in theatrical theory and practice, see Haberman 1988, which also prompted the present authors to investigate the inner *Erlebnis* of the actor according to Sanskrit authors who do not belong to this intrinsically religious theatrical tradition. For a translation of the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*, a seminal work by Rūpagosvāmin, see Haberman 2003, to be read with the cautionary remarks expressed in Graheli 2009. On Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, cf. also Pollock 2016: 285–310 and Wohlschlag 2018.

¹¹ Contemporary theory and practice of Indian theatre and dance represents both a potentially invaluable foil and litmus test for the speculations of Sanskrit dramaturgical sources. However, the anthropological and psychological analysis of the lived experience of actors and dancers lie beyond the scope of the present contribution. As an introduction, see Johan 2014, an exhaustive ethnosce-nology of Kūṭiyāṭṭam that includes insightful remarks about the emotional experience of the Cākhyars and its tight link with their bodily training and socially-embedded experience. An interdisciplinary take on the actor's consciousness in Kūṭiyāṭṭam is Madhavan 2010.

¹² The whole intellectual history of *rasa* is now made available to an English audience through the impressive work of translation and systematisation offered by Pollock 2016, whose bold interpretations often succeed in both finding novel answers and opening up more questions.

the first time as an aesthetic notion.¹³ It is endlessly repeated in secondary literature that, according to Bharata's text, *rasa* is the purpose and the organizing principle of any theatrical performance. As briefly stated in the renowned *rasasūtra*¹⁴ and profusely evidenced throughout the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, *rasa* results from the successful combination of all the different elements in the play, and in particular the adequate representation of the emotional situation on the part of the actors.

It is useful to repeat some details of the theory starting with the quotation and translation of the celebrated *rasasūtra*: *vibhāvānubhāvavyabhicārisamyogād rasanīṣpattiḥ*, namely, 'Rasa is produced by the union of determinants (*vibhāvas*), consequents (*anubhāvas*) and transitory states (*vyabhicāribhāvas*).'¹⁵ What Bharata calls *vibhāvas* ('determinants') are the factors that provoke the arousal of an emotion, the elements that determine it in a causal sense. Therefore, they include both the subject and the object of the emotion, as well as the whole constellation of secondary 'environmental' factors or external circumstances, one might say, that stimulate one's emotional sensibility. For instance, in the representation of a scary situation supposed to generate fear, the frightened person, say, the heroine, and the source of fear, say, a snake, are the subject and the object of the emotion, while the stimulating factors are the chilling noises heard in the night, the very fact

¹³ As is the case with most ancient texts from South Asia, the date of the NS is uncertain. Scholarly opinions in this regard go hand in hand with arguments about the composite nature of the text. For a detailed summary of the early debate, see Kuiper 1979: 119–120, n. 44. There is a certain agreement among scholars, he concludes, on the 1st or 2nd c. CE as the time of redaction for the older parts, with the exception of Bharata's first translator Manomohan Ghosh, who assigned the text to 500 BCE. Later dates were also proposed: Sylvain Lévi (1902) considered the NS a text of the 3rd c. CE of the Scythian/Kṣatrapa period, while Sircar (1974: 22–23) dated it to the Gupta age, not much earlier than the 5th c. CE, when the text was clearly acknowledged by Kālidāsa. According to Pollock (2016: 47), the text was re-edited, and partly rewritten in Kashmir around the 8th or 9th c. CE, at the time when it was first commented upon by Udbhaṭa (ca. 800). As for the evidence of early dramaturgical theory and practice before the NS, see the mention of a *Naṭasūtras* in Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī* 4.3.110.

¹⁴ NS 6, prose after 31, vol. 1, p. 271.

¹⁵ We prefer to hold to these time-honored translations of the 'aesthetic factors' (*vibhāvādi*) rather than following the new terminology proposed in Pollock 2016.

of wandering alone in the wilderness, and so forth. The *anubhāvas* ('consequents') are the consequences, the reactions and the effects or, one might say, the 'symptoms' of an emotion, namely, in the case of fear, both voluntary acts, such as crying for help or running away, and involuntary responses, such as horripilation, change of colour in the visage, etc.¹⁶ The *vyabhicāribhāvas* ('transitory states') are a group of thirty-three transitory and complementary emotional states accompanying and nuancing the stable state or stable emotion,¹⁷ fear (*bhaya*) in our example, such as preoccupation, bewilderment, gloominess, terror, death, etc.¹⁸ According to Bharata's *rasasūtra*, it is the combination of all these elements on the stage that determines the 'production' of *rasa*.

A crucial issue in the history of the concept of *rasa* 'aesthetic emotion' is its relation to the twin concept of *bhāva* 'emotion.'¹⁹ As

¹⁶ By 'involuntary responses' are meant the *sāttvikabhāvas*, which are eight in number and are listed in NŚ 6.22 as paralysis (*stambha*), perspiration (*sveda*), horripilation (*romāñca*), stammering (*svarabheda*), tremor (*vepathu*), change of colour (*vaivarnya*), tears (*asru*) and fainting (*pralaya*). For a more extensive discussion of this concept, see Section 5 below.

¹⁷ NŚ 6.17 enumerates eight stable emotions (*sthāyibhāva*): delight (*rati*), amusement (*hāsa*), sorrow (*śoka*), anger (*krodha*), valour (*utsāha*), fear (*bhaya*), disgust (*jugupsā*), wonder (*vismaya*). The term *bhāva* derives from the root *bhū-*, 'to be,' and it is potentially polysemic as it can refer to emotions but also to states of being, dispositions or conditions of any kind. On the wide semantic field covered by the word *bhāva*, see Ali (2004: 185–188) epitomized in this sentence: '[t]he general consensus of both philosophical and aesthetic theory was that *bhāvas* arose within the "mind" or *manas*, an internal "organ" (*karana*) whose function was discriminatory, constructive or analytic (*saṃkalpa*) in relation to sense faculties (*indriyas*). (Ali 2004: 186).' On the possibility to confront modern and contemporary psychological and philosophical theories with Bharata's classification of 'stable' (or 'primary') and 'transitory' (or 'secondary') emotions, see Cuneo 2007 and Pollock 2012a.

¹⁸ The transitory states are listed in NŚ 6.18–21. On a closer inspection, the list is extremely heterogeneous, including what we would call 'emotions,' such as envy (*asūyā*) and shame (*vrīḍā*), as well as 'mental states,' such as remembrance (*smṛti*) and preoccupation (*cintā*), and 'physical or physiological conditions,' such as sickness (*vyādhi*) and even death (*maraṇa*). For a discussion about the inadequacy of translating the word *bhāva* in Bharata simply as 'emotion,' see Malinar 2010: 9–12.

¹⁹ On the untenability of a waterproof divide between emotional and cognitive phenomena both in the Indian context and in general terms, see again Cuneo 2007. For emotions in Indian culture and in a transcultural perspective, see Lynch 1990, Marks and Ames 1995, Torella and Boccali 2007, MacDaniel 2008, Bilimoria and Wentz 2015 (especially the contribution by Torella).

argued in Cuneo 2013, although the precise position of Bharata on the issue is hard to pinpoint clearly, it is a sound simplification to divide the field of the numerous commentators and epigones in supporters of an ‘intensification theory,’ represented by Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa (see below) and many later authors, and supporters of a ‘sublimation theory,’ spearheaded by Abhinavagupta (although quite possibly already introduced by Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, as argued in Pollock 2010). For the former, *rasas* are nothing but enhanced *bhāvas*, heightened emotions that can be appreciated fully thanks to the presence of the complete array of determinants, consequents, and transitory states that are meant to accompany the dominant state (*sthāyibhāva*). For the latter, *rasas* are sublimated or distilled *bhāvas*, somehow less than ordinary emotions. Insofar as they are elicited by a fictional representation, they are apprehended as uniquely generalized specimens of emotions unconstrained by space and time, and therefore savoured in themselves as aesthetic objects, beyond the pale of common feelings of pleasure and pain that are connected with an individual situation.

As already argued in a seminal article by Pollock (1998) and then elaborated by him in 2012b and 2016, the intensification theory is strictly linked to the identification of the locus of *rasa* in the portrayed character—say, Rāma—and its secondary presence in the spectators.²⁰ On the other hand, the sublimation theory is connected with the revolutionary move from a text-centred understanding of the aesthetic phenomenon to an exclusively viewer/reader-centred conception of the aesthetic experience,

²⁰ As argued in Cuneo (2013: 59, n. 28), Pollock’s focus on Bhoja’s *Śṛṅgāra-prakāśa* has possibly overshadowed the importance of the spectators’ role and affective response within the *rasa* process, already present and crucial in Bharata’s text (and possibly in all his interpreters up to Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka). In other words, it was the shift in the ontology of *rasa*—from an intensified to a rarefied emotion—that triggered the epistemological shift, the change of focus towards the spectator’s psychological experience to the exclusion of the character, and not vice versa as argued by Pollock (see also n. 42). To be clearer, the 9th-10th-c. Kashmirian revolution in aesthetics is not the inclusion of the viewers/readers in the experience of *rasa*, as they were always part and parcel of such an *Erlebnis*, but the exclusion from it of the characters of the storyworld and the persons in real life, as the ontology of *rasa* changed by way of its sole ascription to the realm of artistic appreciation, a fully-fledged recognition of the autonomy of the ‘aesthetic experience’ as completely separated from any other form of consciousness.

which was spawned by the increased focus on the cognitive and responsive aspects of the process of artistic appreciation that developed in 9th-c. Kashmir and held sway over the speculations on drama and poetry in the following four centuries or so.²¹

In addition to these two extreme positions on the locus of *rasa*, the portrayed character on the one hand and the audience on the other, other possibilities have been argued for by Sanskrit authors, not necessarily to the exclusion of other loci. That *rasa* is primarily situated in the dramatic text seems to be a conceivable corollary of a text-centred declension of the *rasa* theory, as it is ultimately the text itself that contains and triggers the *rasa* and must therefore be its primary locus. Although already implicitly present in Bharata's image of the tree as a metaphor for the aesthetic process,²² it is the reception-centred understanding of the *rasa* theory that highlights how *rasa* begins as an aesthetic experience already in the poet, which becomes its first locus,²³ and is then transferred to the viewer via the text being staged by actors. Within the aesthetic process triggered by a stage performance, the last conceivable option for the locus of *rasa* is the performer. Such option, i.e. the actor's potential participation in the savouring of the *rasa* or, more generally, his emotional involvement in the play, will be the topic of the following sections.

²¹ On these and related issues, see McCrea 2008, the best history of Kashmirian aesthetics to date; Pollock 2001, 2010b, 2012a, 2012b, 2016; and Bronner 2016.

²² The metaphor of the tree is famously used in NS 6.38: *yathā bijād bhaved vṛkṣo vṛkṣāt puṣpaṃ phalaṃ yathā | tathā mūlaṃ rasāḥ sarve tebhyo bhāvā vyavasthitāḥ* || 'Just as the tree comes from the seed, and from the tree the flower and the fruit, so the *rasas* are the root, and all the [other] states are established from those.' According to Abhinavagupta, this indicates that the *rasas* are the aim in theatre, in poetry, and in the cognition of the spectators/readers: the root is the *rasa* belonging to the poet that, like a seed, develops into the poetic text, which is similar to a tree. With regard to the latter, the activities of the actor, consisting in the enactments (*abhinaya*), are like flowers, and the tasting of the *rasas* by the spectators are the fruits. Hence the whole is pervaded by *rasa* (cf. ABh *ad* 6.38, vol. 1, p. 288).

²³ The *locus classicus* is the account of Vālmīki, the *ādikavi* ('first poet'), who created poetry out of sorrow by watching the sad destiny of two curlews, as narrated in *Rāmāyaṇa* 1.2.16b-18b. The episode becomes paradigmatic with Ānandavardhana's *Dhvanyāloka* 1.5 (*krauñcadvandvaviyogotthaḥ śokāḥ ślokatvam āgataḥ*) and Abhinavagupta's *Locana* on it. For a translation of the passage, see Ingalls *et al.* 1990: 113–119.

2. Tracing Bharata's position on the actor and his emotional involvement

As profusely argued in Ganser and Cuneo 2012, the actor has an ambiguous position in the text of Bharata. He is exalted as far as his activity is essential for the production of the drama, but he is socially denigrated as a consequence of the curse pronounced by the seers.²⁴

The famed narrative on the origins of theatre illustrates, shapes and somewhat resolves this very ambiguity. After Brahmā's creation of the fifth Veda, i.e. theatre, Bharata and his sons, i.e. the theatre master with his troupe of actors, are entrusted with the divine knowledge and instructed to put it into practice. Their performances are said to utterly please the gods in heaven, who bestow opulent gifts on them and even pronounce eloquent speeches in defence of their art in order to protect it from the assault of a personified group of stubborn obstacles. This state of affairs lasts until the actors start misusing their arts to ridicule the sages, i.e. the incarnation of the cultural establishment and the power structures, and as a result of this they are cursed to become *śūdras* and be reborn on earth. It is only after accomplishing the necessary expiation that the actors are readmitted into heaven, regaining their original status of *brāhmaṇas* and leaving theatre and their progeny behind on earth. The generally low status of theatre actors and other kinds of performers, for which this narrative provides an ex-post rationalization, is confirmed by numerous other contemporary sources, such as the *Mānavadharmasāstra* and the *Arthasāstra*, as well as some early Smṛtis. As a consequence, scholars argued that the *Nāṭyaśāstra* as a whole, or at least its narrative frame—pregnantly combining the account about the origins of theatre with the curse-and-atonement episode—had been conceived as a direct response to those vilifying opinions about the actors, as well as an attempt at raising the status of dramatic art through the prestige bestowed by its textualization as *śāstra*.²⁵

²⁴ As mentioned before, the composite nature of the text casts a shadow upon any attempt to trace a precise and all-rounded doctrine within the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. However, the clear signs of a redaction allow a tentative search for coherence and systematicity of thought.

²⁵ This opinion was first put forward by Kane 1971 [1923]: 22. The whole curse-and-atonement episode is thoroughly analyzed in Ganser and Cuneo 2012,

Apart from bearing the signs of a widespread social criticism towards the performer, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* also contains several passages that eulogize actors, including socially connoted epithets and moral qualities. In the first chapter, for instance, Brahmā asks Indra, hinting at the gods, that ‘this Veda named theatre be passed by you to those who are skilful, learned, bold and unwearied’ (NŚ 1.20: *kuśalā ye vidagdḥās ca pragalbhās ca jitaśramāḥ | teṣu ayam nāṭyasaṃjñō hi vedāḥ saṃkrāmyatām tvayā ||*), to which the lord of the gods replies that the gods are themselves inapt for theatrical action. Theatre should rather be passed, he continues, to the actors whom he qualifies in praiseworthy words as ‘those seers who know the secrets of the Vedas and have fulfilled their vows, capable to receive, maintain as well as perform this [theatre]’ (NŚ 1.23: *ya ime vedaguhyajñā ṛṣayah saṃśitavratāḥ | ete ’sya grahaṇe śaktāḥ prayoge dhāraṇe tathā ||*).

To the actors are thus attributed intellectual, ritual, social, moral, and practical skills.²⁶ But it is especially their skills as technicians of theatre and their mastery over the complexities of the staging craft that are more often thematized across the different chapters of this text. Accordingly, apart from the framing narrative of the origins, couched as a dialogue between Bharata and a group of Ṛṣis, and the questions of the latter giving place to a few excursus about ancillary topics,²⁷ Bharata’s treatise presents itself as a technical and sometimes obscure ensemble of rules, by which the most minute details of the staging process are laid down. The undisputed master of these techniques and addressee of most of the rules about performance, hence the focus of most chapters in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, is the actor. Yet Bharata’s actor remains throughout the text a rather elusive figure.

As mentioned above, it is the adequate representation of the emotional situation on the part of the actors that guarantees the successful accomplishment of a theatrical performance. To repre-

which also contains several quotations on actors and performers from the texts mentioned in this paragraph.

²⁶ We will come back to such qualities and their implications concerning the actor’s experience as interpreted by Abhinavagupta in Section 5.3.2.

²⁷ For instance, the chapters on the construction of the theatrical building (NŚ 2), its consecration (NŚ 3), and the procedures for the ritual preliminaries preceding a play (NŚ 5).

sent the emotions, the actor disposes of a sophisticated technique that involves four registers of acting, the so-called fourfold *abhinaya*, including a bodily (*āṅgika*), a vocal (*vācika*), a psychophysical (*sāttvika*) and an ornamental (*āhārya*) enactment. As their names indicate, these acting means are differentiated according to the particular medium by which the representative function is carried out: the body, the voice, the *sattva* and the costume.²⁸ The concept of enactment was closely connected with the dramatic representation of emotions since the first record of its complex expressive codes in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, and some of its categories were indeed fashioned after the catalogue of the stable and transitory states as well as the *rasas*.²⁹ The general definition of *abhinaya* is given in NŚ 8.6, following the etymological formation:

The root *nī-*, preceded by [the prefix] *abhi-*, has the sense of determining the meanings (*artha*) [of the dramatic text] as directly manifested in front (*ābhimukhya*) [of the spectators]. It is called *abhinaya* because it carries (*nayati*) the objects (*padārtha*) [of theatre to the audience]. And it has been called *abhinaya* since it determines the different meanings, according to practice, in association with the twig-limbs (*śākhā*), the bodily limbs (*aṅga*) and the facial expressions (*upāṅga*).³⁰

Acting is thus named and defined according to its crucial function in theatre, which is to communicate the textual meanings, prima-

²⁸ Cf. NŚ 6.23: *āṅgiko vācikaś caiva hy āhāryaḥ sāttvikas tathā | cātvaro 'bhinayā hy ete vijñeyā nāṭyasaṃśrayāḥ ||*. For the latitude of the term *abhinaya* with respect to the means, as opposed to the narrower Western concept of 'acting' or 'reciting,' see Ganser 2007: 65–67. For a thorough discussion of *sattva*, a term we leave untranslated here, see Section 5.

²⁹ For instance, out of the thirty-six types of looks (*dṛṣṭis*) that are classified in NŚ 8.40–44 as part of the *upāṅgābhinaya* ('acting through the secondary limbs'), eight correspond, by a rather artificial parallelism, to the eight *rasas*, eight to the eight *sthāyibhāvas*, and the remaining twenty to some of the *vyabhicāribhāvas*. As mentioned above, for many authors prior to Abhinavagupta there was no qualitative difference between *bhāvas* and *rasas*, the latter being just regarded as intensified forms of the former.

³⁰ NŚ 8.6–7: *abhipūrvas tu nīndhātur ābhimukhyārthanirṇaye | yasmāt padārthān nayati tasmād abhinayaḥ smṛtaḥ || vibhāvayati yasmāc ca nānārthān hi prayogataḥ | śākhāṅgopāṅgasamyuktas tasmād abhinayaḥ smṛtaḥ ||*. In NŚ 8.6c, some manuscripts read *yasmāt prayogaṃ nayati*. However, given Abhinavagupta's insistence elsewhere on the fact that *abhinaya* carries the meanings, the reading *padārthān* can well be preferred here. On the the twig-limbs (*śākhā*), see Bansat-Boudon 1992: 375–376.

rily conceived in terms of emotions, to the audience. For instance, the term *abhinaya* is used as follows in NŚ 1.119, a verse that Abhinavagupta regards as containing the very definition of theatre: ‘That nature proper to the ordinary experience, associated with pleasure (*sukha*) and pain (*duḥkha*), is called theatre (*nāṭya*) when it is conveyed through the registers of acting such as the bodily and the others (*aṅgādyabhinaya*).’³¹ An even more specific link between the means of representation to be mastered by an actor and the emotions is provided in the definitions of the *bhāvas* in the seventh chapter: ‘the states (*bhāva*) [are so called, since] they, associated with the voice, the body and the *sattva*, bring the contents of poetry (*kāvyaṛtha*) into being (*bhāvayanti*).’³²

The treatment of the acting techniques and their different registers and combinations covers indeed the largest portion of Bharata’s treatise (roughly from the eighth to the twenty-sixth chapter). Besides being described with reference to the various emotions that can be enacted through them, the practical application of the different acting registers and their subdivisions are often grounded in a typology of characters, called *prakṛti* (lit. ‘nature’). Male and female characters are broadly divided into superior, middle and lower natures. Characters of different status are assigned different postures for the entrances, as well as different tempos for placing their steps in the codified gaits with which the various characters are supposed to enter and move around the stage. Superior natures like kings and gods, for instance, should walk in a slow tempo with wide steps, whereas the gaits of inferior characters have quick and short steps. The gaits are then declined on the basis of the peculiar emotive situation. The character in love should walk with steps following the tempo and the body gracefully relaxed, his hands regularly following the feet, while going to meet a messenger. But in case of concealed love, his steps will be slow and stealthy, his eyes constantly moving around with apprehension, his body trembling in a faltering gait.³³ The body

³¹ NŚ 1.119: *yo ’yaṃ svabhāvo lokasya sukhaduḥkhasamanvitaḥ | so ’ṅgādyabhinayopeto nāṭyam ity abhūdhyate ||*.

³² NŚ prose before 7.1: *vāgaṅgasattvopetān kāvyārthān bhāvayantīti bhāvā iti*.

³³ The different gaits (*gati*) and their uses are described in NŚ 12. The gait connected to *śṛṅgārārasa* is described in NŚ 12.40cd–48ab.

was certainly a major vehicle to convey meaning in theatre, and the actor had to undergo a strenuous physical training, including regular body massage with oil and an adequate dietary regime, in order to acquire grace (*sauṣṭhava*) and beauty (*śobhā*) in the bodily movements and limbs necessary for acting.³⁴ The delivery of speeches is likewise subject to the use of notes and intonations according to the different *rasas* to be conveyed and the various emotional states. The ornamental acting includes the costume replete with ornaments, but also the painting of limbs, all of which is supposed to help the spectators identify the type of character, its social status and emotive condition.

Along with several qualities such as beauty, knowledge of the rhythms and of emotions, curiosity, etc.,³⁵ it is the development of a complex code of acting and the stress on exercise and body-mind integrity on the part of the actor that fundamentally match-

³⁴ The concepts of *śobhā* and *sauṣṭhava*, here tentatively translated as ‘beauty’ and ‘grace’ are closely related, as suggested by several verses in the chapter on the *cārī*-movements. These involve mainly the displacements of legs and feet and are used during the physical training (*vyāyāma*) as well as during the performance. Cf. NŚ 10.89cd, 90cd–91ab: *sauṣṭhave hi prayatnas tu kāryo vyāyāmaivedibhiḥ* || [...] *śobhā sarvaiva nityaṃ hi sauṣṭhavaṃ samupāsritā* || *na hi sauṣṭhavahināṅgaḥ śobhate nāṭyanyttayoḥ* | ‘The experts in physical training should make an effort with respect to grace. [...] All beauty is always based on grace, for a body devoid of grace does not shine either in theatre or in dance.’ The definition of *sauṣṭhava*, achieved through physical exercise, is repeated twice in the Gaekwad Oriental Series edition of NŚ (4.60cd–61ab, 10.92cd–93ab): *kaṭī karṇasamā yatra kūṛṇā rāṃsaśīrasa tathā* || *samunnatam uraś caiva sauṣṭhavaṃ nāma tad bhavet* |. ‘When the hips are aligned with the ears, and the elbows, shoulders and head [are aligned with one another], [and] the chest is lifted up, one speaks of “grace”.’ Bansat-Boudon translates *sauṣṭhava* as ‘la grâce des membres’ (1992: 264–265, n. 27). From its definition and from the occurrences of this term in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* as observed by Bansat-Boudon, it appears that *sauṣṭhava* refers to a position of the body that appears natural, but is in reality acquired through exercise and requires harmony and equilibrium to be maintained. The utmost embodiment of *sauṣṭhava* is represented by the archer.

³⁵ See, e.g., NŚ 27.99–100, two verses describing the qualities of an actor, indispensable for the success of a performance: *buddhimattvaṃ surūpatvaṃ layatāla-jñatā tathā* | *rasabhāvajñatā caiva vayahsthatvaṃ kutūhalam* || *grahaṇaṃ dhāraṇaṃ caiva gātrāvaiśālyam eva ca* | *jitasādhasatotsāha iti pātragato vidhiḥ* ||. ‘The rule regarding the actor is [that he should have] intelligence, a beautiful appearance, knowledge of tempo and rhythm, knowledge of the *rasas* and the states, youth, curiosity, [ability to] understanding and retainment [of the teachings], absence of physical defects, and courage in conquering one’s fear [of the stage].’

es with the declared status of theatre as an art regulated by the *sāstra*. This also excludes the possibility that acting might be equated to a series of casual and uncontrolled actions, which would render it more akin to religious phenomena of ritual possession. However, in the chapter on *āhāryābhinaya*, in order to describe the importance of the costume for the process of impersonification of a given character, Bharata employs the metaphor of transmigration:

Just as a living being, having abandoned its own nature [takes on] another body and, resorting to that other body, partakes of that [other] nature, so a man covered with a costume and makeup, achieves the nature of another one, whose costume he has put on.³⁶

With several lexical overlaps, an analogous metaphor is again used in the chapter on the distribution of roles, after listing the characteristics that have to be considered by the theatre director for assigning different roles to different actors. These cover mostly bodily features or natural dispositions of the actors, which should correspond as far as possible to those of the role assigned. This general principle, one can assume, is meant to help the spectators identify the characters by way of resemblance with the actors impersonating them.

Just as a living being, having abandoned his own nature, achieves the nature of another one grounded in another body and resorts to that other nature, in the same way an intelligent [actor], by mentally contemplating 'I am that one' shall adopt another nature by their gestures, consisting in speech, bodily movement and playful behaviour.³⁷

Statements such as these show that there is something more about theatrical impersonation than the mere donning of external paraphernalia. An actor has to speak, move and behave just like the character he is impersonating, so that he may take on his nature.

³⁶ NŚ 21.89cd–91ab: *yathā jantuḥ svabhāvaṃ svaṃ parityajyānyadaiḥikam || tat svabhāvaṃ hi bhajate dehāntaram upāsritaḥ | veṣeṇa varṇakaiś caiva chāditaḥ puruṣas tathā || parabhāvaṃ prakurute yasya veṣaṃ samāsritaḥ |*.

³⁷ NŚ 26.7–8: *yathā jīvat svabhāvaṃ hi parityajyānyadehikam | parabhāvaṃ prakurute parabhāvaṃ samāsritaḥ || evaṃ budhaḥ param bhāvaṃ so 'smīti manasā smaran | yeṣāṃ vāgaṅgalābhiś ceṣṭābhis tu samācaret ||*.

The quotes also resonate with another early text that uses the same sort of metaphor, although the other way around, by comparing the transmigrating soul to the actor: the *Yājñavalkya-smṛti*. This work, commonly ascribed to around the 4th–5th c. and close to the *Nāṭyaśāstra* in many a way,³⁸ features one of the early instantiations of this metaphor:

For, as an actor displays his body with makeup, so the self produced by action, while performing various kinds of actions, displays its body.³⁹

This verse responds to the questions posed to Yājñavalkya in 3.129 about the *puruṣa*, seen as a primordial god who assumes even the lowliest of conditions: ‘If he is like that, o Brahman, how can he take birth in evil wombs? How can he, being the Lord, be united with disagreeable natures?’⁴⁰ After using the metaphor of the actor to explain how the karmic self displays indeed a body performing different actions (or different bodies, as per the vulgate, cf. n. 39), the passage concludes thus: ‘I have described to you the way the self creates the self, the result of the three kinds of actions, even though he remains the lord.’⁴¹ Although the accent here is certainly on the contrast between the *ātman* acting through a body and the *ātman* as the lord, the reference to makeup in *Yājñavalkya-smṛti* 3.162, by which the actor displays a different body, reminds

³⁸ In the third chapter on expiation, *Yājñavalkya-smṛti* 3.112–116 prescribes for the ascetic a kind of yoga that involves the singing of certain songs and the playing of musical instruments, which shares some technical musicological terminology with the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

³⁹ *Yājñavalkya-smṛti* 3.162: *yathā hi bharato varṇair varṇayaty ātmanas tanum | nānārūpāṇi kurvāṇas tathātmā karmajas tanum ||* (tr. Olivelle 2019: 255). The passage has been also translated by Bansat-Boudon, on the basis of a slightly different text, the one of the vulgate: *yathā hi bharato varṇair varṇayaty ātmanas tanum | nānārūpāṇi kurvāṇas tathātmā karmajās tanūḥ ||* « De même que l’acteur colore de couleurs son propre corps, produisant des formes diverses, de la même façon l’*ātman* [produit] des corps issus du *karman*. » (Bansat-Boudon 1992: 395, n. 38).

⁴⁰ *Yājñavalkya-smṛti* 3.129: *yadi evaṃ sa kathaṃ brahman pāpayaṇiṣu jāyate | īśvaraḥ sa kathaṃ bhāvair anīṣṭaiḥ saṃprayujyate ||* (tr. based on Olivelle 2019: 247). Olivelle translates *bhāva* as ‘mental state,’ however it could be understood as ‘nature,’ as we have translated it in the passages of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* comparing the actor to a transmigrating soul.

⁴¹ *Yājñavalkya-smṛti* 3.182: *yathātmānaṃ sṛjaty ātmā tathā vaḥ kathitaṃ mayā | vipākas triprakāraṇāṃ karmaṇām īśvaro ’pi san ||* (tr. Olivelle 2019: 259).

us of the first quotation in *Nāṭyaśāstra* 21.89cd–91ab, with its emphasis on the role-taking that acting involves.

Coming back to Bharata's text and the emotional experience of the actor, the passages exposing the parallel between actor and transmigrating soul highlight the role of acting techniques in taking on a role, by way of the whole sphere of gestures, and not merely the costume. Even a mental component appears to be required in the construction of that 'other' personality. The formula 'I am that' Rāma, Rāvaṇa, etc., which the actor mentally contemplates (*so 'smṛti manasā smaran*), suggests that some sort of identification process is taking place, giving rise to a certain degree of ambiguity with regard to the experience of the actor: does the performer possibly lose his own personality, or does he undergo a possession-like phenomenon such as is common to many ancient societies? The continuous accent on technique and the necessity of sticking to the rules, however, pleads for a dismissal of such possibility. Moreover, Abhinavagupta's remarks on these verses insist on the actor's mastery and control over the mind, but at the same time they are reminiscent of the *Yājñavalkya-smṛti* parallel between the self, the Lord and the actor, as we will show in the conclusions.

Another way to go about the issue of the actor's sharing in the emotional sphere of the character (or in that of the poet and the audience) in early dramatic thought would be to look at contemporary examples in the world of Sanskrit poets and playwrights. The latter are believed to have been influenced by dramatic theories—as Kālidāsa's familiarity with Bharata's treatise indicates—although they were most certainly also developing their own viewpoints on drama.⁴² A most famous example is the failure of

⁴² In this regard, see Sathaye's study of Kālidāsa's metatheatrical statements about *rasa*. As argued by Sathaye, Kālidāsa might have anticipated and prefigured the aesthetic revolutions of Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka and Abhinavagupta, in that he 'seems to have understood the *rasa* experience as involving a bivalent transference of real emotions (*bhāvas*) between artist and audience within the space of the artistic work' (Sathaye 2019: 43–44). In our view, the emphasis that recent secondary literature has laid upon the occurrence of a proper reader-oriented theoretical turn in 9th–10th c. Kashmir might just be slightly overstated (or differently assessed, see n. 20), as the text of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* already clearly entails a focus on the emotional experience of the audience as a necessary requirement for theatrical success (see NS 27.61cd–63ab: *yas tuṣṭau tuṣṭim āyāti śoke śokam upaiti ca || kruddhaḥ krodhe bhaye bhītaḥ sa śreṣṭhaḥ preṣakaḥ smṛtaḥ | evaṃ bhāvānukaraṇe yo*

Urvaśī's performance in the second act of *Vikramorvaśīya*, as the personal feelings of the nymph-actress for king Purūravas intervene and interfere with her performance spoiling the aesthetic effect, despite the audience's previous engrossment in the various *rasas* (Act 3, interlude: *teṣu teṣu rasāntareṣu tanmayāsīt*). As Sathaye (2019: 47, n. 30) remarks, Urvaśī's state is described as *ba-ddhabhāva*, 'having her feelings tied up with,' or 'fixed upon' Purūravas. Her slip of the tongue, when she pronounces the name of her real-life beloved instead of Puruṣottama, her character's beloved, really answers the question: 'In whom are your feelings absorbed?' (*katamasmimṣ te bhāvābhiniṣeṣa iti?* *ibid.* n. 29.) Urvaśī is obviously immersed in her own worldly emotions while acting, a mistake so serious that it earns her a curse from Bharata Muni and the banishment to the earth.⁴³

To wrap up, although an actor's engrossment in his own worldly passions can invalidate the performance in Kālidāsa's eyes, and it is generally condemned by Bharata as well, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* seems to maintain an ambiguous position with regard to the emotional experience of the actor. While we do learn in detail, chapter after chapter, how a performer is supposed to render an emotive situation by applying the whole spectrum of technical rules, we are never actually told how he is supposed to handle his own emotional sphere and sensibility to impersonate the character in its most intimate sphere. Is he completely absorbed in his role, even from an emotional standpoint, or does he rather tap into his own feelings to empathize with the character? Does he feel what he enacts? Some clues to answer these questions will be investigated later while analysing the concept of *sattva* in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and its commentary by Abhinavagupta. But first let us have a look at the theoretical speculations on this topic before Abhinavagupta's time.

yasmin praviṣen naraḥ || sa tatra prekṣako jñeyo guṇair ebhir alaṅkṛtaḥ: 'He is considered the best spectator who feels satisfaction when satisfaction is [portrayed], sorrow when sorrow is [portrayed], anger when anger is [portrayed], and fear when fear is [portrayed]. In such a re-creation of the [emotional] states, the man who can penetrate them is to be known as "spectator" in their respect, as he is endowed with these features'). Along these lines, Kālidāsa's view on the shared emotional experience between artist and audience would just confirm and maybe develop a theme already crucial in the NS.

⁴³ On this episode, see Bansat-Boudon 1992: 148.

3. *Reconstructing the theory of Lollaṭa, the Stanislavski of medieval India*

Although a number of authors and commentators focused on the text of Bharata before Abhinavagupta (10th–11th c.), none of their works is extant today. Thus, in order to reconstruct their thought and opinions, we need to rely on the limited quotations and paraphrases contained in the *Abhinavabhāratī* and a few later works. One of our foci is possibly one of the earliest among these commentators, Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa, a Kashmirian author about whom very little is known.⁴⁴ In his most important quotation, he seems to maintain that *rasa* is nothing but an intensified emotion and that it is present both in the portrayed character and in the performing actor: (*tena sthāyy eva vibhāvānubhāvādibhir upacito rasaḥ | sthāyī bhavatu anupacitaḥ | sa cobhayor api anukārye ’nukartary api cānu-saṃdhānabalāt—iti* |⁴⁵). ‘Therefore, *rasa* is nothing but the stable [emotional state], enhanced by determinants, consequents and so on.⁴⁶ It does remain a stable [emotional state], if not enhanced. Furthermore, this⁴⁷ is present indeed⁴⁸ in both the imitated

⁴⁴ Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa, active around 825 CE, composed a number of works, now all lost: a commentary on Bharata’s *Nāṭyaśāstra*, as evidenced by the testimony of the *Abhinavabhāratī*, another work on literary criticism called the *Rasavivaraṇa*, mentioned by Hemacandra (Pollock 2016: 74) and a commentary on the *Spandakārikā*, as credited by Kṣemarāja (*ibid.* pp. 347–348). Beside ‘a dozen short citations on technical questions of dramaturgy’ (*ibid.* p. 74), Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa’s position on *rasa* is known from a few passages, all recently translated in Pollock (*ibid.* pp. 76–77).

⁴⁵ ABh *ad* 6, *rasasūtra*, vol. 1, p. 272. This is the reference to the second edition, whose text we follow only for this passage, as it features a wording that is probably free from textual additions (see following discussion and n. 49).

⁴⁶ As already noted by Gnoli (1968: 27, n. 3), a similar view is held in the *Agnīpurāṇa* 339.4: *abhimānād ratiḥ sā ca pariṣoṣam upēyūṣī | vyabhicāryādisāmānyāt śṅgāra itī gṛyate* ||. In particular, Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa follows what we called the ‘intensification theory’ upheld by the ancients (*cirāntanānām cāyam eva pakṣaḥ*: ABh *ad* 6, *rasasūtra*, vol. 1, p. 266), i.e. a view that does not recognise any qualitative or ontological distinction between everyday emotions and aesthetic emotions, but only a quantitative distinction.

⁴⁷ Since in Lollaṭa’s theory there is only a difference of degree between *rasa* and *bhāva*, and no qualitative distinction, the deictic pronoun can equally refer to *rasa* or *bhāva*. Therefore, in the case of Lollaṭa, the issue is the actor’s emotional involvement *tout court*, without any further qualification.

⁴⁸ The emphatic meaning of *api* after the dual *ubhayor* cannot be disregarded and simply left untranslated (as in Pollock 2016: 76), as it underlines the fact that the actor too shares in the experience of *rasa*. An alternative and less likely translation would be to understand the expression *ubhayor api* as ‘also in both,’ which

[character]⁴⁹ and the imitator [i.e. the actor], thanks to the force of correlation (*anusamdhāna*).’

Clearly enough, from the few lines we can ascribe to Lollaṭa, the term *anusamdhāna* (‘connection,’ ‘unification,’ etc.) represents the theoretical linchpin of his conception of the actor’s emotional involvement. The simplest interpretation of this passage is that it stands for the correlation between the actor and the character determined by the performer’s mindfulness and concentration on that emotive focus. Gnoli (1968: 26) translates ‘realisation’ and comments:

Anusamdhī—that literally signifies recollection, memory and even something more than this, i.e., consciousness, awareness, reflec-

would mean that *rasa* was understood to have a third, original and somewhat obvious locus. The possibilities would be several (the poet, the poetical text, the real-life character, the character of the story-world, or indeed the audience!), and open to anyone’s guess, which would radically change our understanding of Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa’s theory of *rasa*. For instance, on the basis of the enlarged rephrasing by Mammaṭa, Kamimura (1986) argues that Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa’s theory considers *rasa* an experience shared by character, actor and spectator, which is not impossible *per se* (see again Cuneo 2013: 59, n. 28 and, from a cultural perspective, Ali 2004: 201–206).

⁴⁹ All editions of the *Abhinavabhāratī*, most probably following Mammaṭa’s paraphrase and the enlarged text given by Hemacandra, add here two crucial words, *mukhyayā vṛtṭyā*, which might lead to a more univocal interpretation of Lollaṭa’s theory, and some more explicative glosses. To a first approximation, the meaning of Hemacandra’s passage becomes: ‘Furthermore, it is present indeed in both the imitated [character] such as Rāma and the like, in a primary sense, and in the imitating actor, thanks to the force of correlation with the nature of Rāma and the like (*sa cobhayor api mukhyayā vṛtṭyā rāmādav anukārye ’nukartari ca naṭe rāmādirūpatānusamdhānabalāt*).’ Kamimura (1986) argues that the expression *mukhyayā vṛtṭyā* means ‘originally,’ ‘primarily’ or ‘directly,’ denying any reference to *abhidhā* as the linguistic function of denotation, as argued in Sastry 1965–66. Given the divergences among Mammaṭa’s commentators, Pollock (2016: 348 n. 172) is non-committal about it: ‘It is not clear whether this pertains to reference (‘literal sense’ [...]) or ontology (‘in actual fact’ [...]).’ In any case, this version of the text points to the character as the primary locus of *rasa* and puts the actor in a clearly secondary and derivative position (this seems to be the understanding of Chattopadhyaya 1977: 178). However, this clear-cut distinction may not go back to Lollaṭa, whose position was possibly more nuanced. In fact, the early partial edition by De (1925), the text of Gnoli (1968), and—most crucially—the manuscripts that contain the sixth chapter (M₁, T₂, T₄, T₆ and T₇) only have the shortest version of the text, which thus seems to be a more reliable witness to Lollaṭa’s view. It seems safe to assume that the phrase *mukhyayā vṛtṭyā* was just a gloss that crept into the text of the *Abhinavabhāratī*, probably based on the passages of Mammaṭa and Hemacandra.

tion, etc. and I have tentatively rendered by ‘realisation’—is at the same time the power thanks to which the actor ‘becomes’ for the time being the represented or imitated personage (e.g. Rāma), feels himself as Rāma, and the faculty through which he nevertheless does not forget his real nature of actor.⁵⁰

On this topic Pandey (1959: 39) remarks:

The actor identifies himself with the (dramatised?) historical character and, therefore, is able to unify the elements of his experience so as to produce the momental construct which corresponds in every way to that of the original hero.

Pollock (2016: 76) follows the enlarged text of the fourth edition and translates: ‘by force of the complete identification with the part.’⁵¹ In the Pratyabhijñā texts, *anusamdhāna* is ‘the unifying power of the mind which links together a group of *ābhāsas* by making them subordinated to a predominant one’ (Torella 2002: 90). Or, again, Torella (*ibid.*, p. 178, n. 11) elaborates:

The term *anusamdhāna* is used in this school with various meanings. Sometimes it means ‘unification, connection’ often referring to the unifying function of thought which establishes relations between things (it is then glossed with *ekikaraṇa*), pervading them with its own dynamism. In other cases [...] it has the meaning of

⁵⁰ Gnoli 1968: xviii. This is approximately also the understanding of Hemacandra, who expands the text slightly and reads: *rāmādirūpatānusamdhānabalāt*. Another possible and similar meaning, suggested by H. C. Bhatt (personal communication), is ‘practice,’ that is, the repeated practice of the actor. In a note, Gnoli (1968: xviii) adds: ‘According to some later commentators, the meaning of *anusamdhāna* is visualization or something like that; cf. Prabhākara, *Rasapradīpa*, Benares 1925, p 23: *anusamdhānaṃ ca kavivivakṣitasayārthasya vāsanāpātāvavaśāt sākṣād iva karaṇam*.’ The position of Lollaṭa is restated and rephrased also in Mammaṭa’s *Kāvyaaprakāśa*.

⁵¹ On the basis of Kumārasvāmin’s *Ratnāpana* (c. 1430), a commentary on Vidyānātha’s *Pratāparudhīya* (c. 1320), Filliozat (1963: 332) attributes the *anusamdhāna* to the spectator: ‘Le *rasa* est cet état émotionnel durable intensifié (*upacīta*) par le concours des *vibhāva*, etc. Le porteur du *rasa* est le héros représenté. Le spectateur appréhende l’état émotionnel du héros représenté, sous forme intensifié, c’est à dire sous forme du *rasa*, par la force de la recherche (*anusamdhāna*) qu’il fait de ce personnage dans l’acteur qui l’imite.’ This interpretation is most probably mistaken, but it is worth repeating that it is difficult to establish Lollaṭa’s theory with any absolute certainty.

‘intentionality, straining towards a particular objective.’ These two levels of meaning may also coexist simultaneously.⁵²

To sum up, in our opinion, *anusamdhāna* probably indicates both the connection of the actor’s focused mind with the character’s emotive situation as well as his striving towards the realization of an intense representation of the intended *bhāva*.

Therefore, if we try and synthesize Lollaṭa’s conception of the emotional involvement of the actor, it would probably resemble a version of the modern theories based on Stanislavski’s ideas about the actor’s necessity to train his own emotional capacity to be completely engrossed in the emotional life of the portrayed character and thus have the very same affective experience during the performance.⁵³ Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa’s position, tentatively reconstructed here, can be better understood by surveying the opposite theory in the spectrum of possibilities and the arguments raised for and against both conceptions of the actor’s experience.

4. The position of Abhinavagupta, the Diderot of medieval India

At face value, some crucial passages in the *Abhinavabhāratī* clearly show Abhinavagupta’s position with regard to the experience of *rasa* or of any emotional experience for the actor: its complete and utter denial. The actor is considered a mere *pātra*, a vessel, which cannot savour the juice of the *rasa* it contains. The actor is just the means of its transfer: ‘And it is for this reason [i.e. because *rasas* only exist in the world of theatre] that there is no *rasa* in the actor. [...] What is in the actor then? He is just the means of savouring [...] and this is why he is called vessel. In fact there is no savouring of wine on the part of the vessel, yet it is an instrument for it.’ (*ata eva ca naṭe na rasaḥ. [...] naṭe tarhi kim? āsvādanopayaḥ. [...] ata eva ca pātram ity ucyate | na hi pātre madyāsvādaḥ, api tu tadupāyakaḥ*).⁵⁴

⁵² The meanings of ‘investigation’ and ‘research’ probably derive from the wider semantic field of ‘connection,’ ‘focus’ and ‘effort.’

⁵³ On Stanislavski’s ideas on the acting process and the actor’s emotional involvement, with a view to their reception in contemporary theatre, see Meyer-Dinkgräfe 2005, ch. 3. For a contrastive approach between Stanislavski and traditional Indian acting, especially concerning the place of the actor’s personal emotions in acting, see Schechner 2001.

⁵⁴ ABh ad 6.32–33, vol. 1, p. 289.

Another passage of the *Abhinavabhāratī* gives the psychological and theatrical reason why the actor cannot be experiencing the *rasa* or the *bhāva* as he is acting on stage: ‘If the actor had *rasas* or *bhāvas*, he would be compenetrated with the reality [of the portrayed character] in the case of [representing] death and the like, and an interruption of the [theatrical] tempo and so forth would ensue’⁵⁵ (*naṭasya hi rasabhāvayoge maraṇādau tattvāveśo layādi-bhaṅgaś ca syāt*).⁵⁶

As it is clear from what immediately follows, the critique is directly aimed at Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa’s conception of the actor’s experience: ‘According to Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa this is not sound, because both *rasas* and *bhāvas* are present in the actor on account of his being immersed in the latent impressions [of his own emotions], and because he follows the tempo, etc. by force of the correlation [with the portrayed character]’ (*naitad iti bhāṭṭalollaṭaḥ | rasabhāvānām aṅgī vāsanāveśavaśena naṭe sambhavād, anusam̐dhibalāc ca layādyanusaraṇāt |*).⁵⁷ The term *anusam̐dhi*, a synonym of *anusam̐dhāna* discussed above, must thus refer to an active and con-

⁵⁵ Slightly differently translated into French in Bansat-Boudon (1992: 430): ‘Si l’acteur était assujetti à l’expérience du *rasa*, il serait pénétré par des émotions réelles au moment de jouer la mort, etc., et s’ensuivrait une interruption du tempo, etc.’

⁵⁶ See also Abhinavagupta’s remarks in his commentary on the *Dhvanyāloka* (*Locana ad* 2.4, p. 183): *anukartari tadbhāve layādyananusaraṇam syāt*, ‘[On the other hand] if *rasa* were to lie in the actor, he would be unable to follow the tempo (*laya*), etc.’ (tr. Ingalls *et al.* 1990: 222). This reasoning parallels what Diderot argued for in his famous *Paradoxe sur le comédien*: ‘If the actor were full, really full, of feeling, how could he play the same part twice running with the same spirit and success? Full of fire at the first performance, he would be worn out and cold as marble at the third. [...] What confirms me in this view is the unequal acting of players who play from the heart. From them you must expect no unity. Their playing is alternately strong and feeble, fiery and cold, dull and sublime’ (Diderot 1883: 8). The following would happen to the actor losing his self-control: ‘Let a consummate actor leave off playing from his head, let him forget himself, let his heart be involved, let sensibility possess him, let him give himself up to it [...] it will be on condition of not breaking through his system of declamation; of not injuring the unity of the performance; otherwise you will say that he has gone mad’ (Diderot 1883: 100). Contrast Stanislavski’s statement that ‘the very best that can happen is to have the actor completely carried away by the play. Then, regardless of his own will he lives the part, not noticing how he feels, not thinking about what he does, and it all moves of its own accord, subconsciously and intuitively’ (Stanislavski 1936: 13).

⁵⁷ ABh *ad* 6.10, vol. 1, p. 258.

trolled capacity of the actor to correlate his own emotional experience with the portrayed emotions of the characters, including the tempo that characterizes the type of character and his emotive situation.⁵⁸ Otherwise, Lollaṭa's reply to the critique concerning the lack of tempo on the part of an artist overwhelmed by emotionality would make no sense.

Despite such a *prima facie* denial of any emotional involvement on the part of the actor in Abhinavagupta's criticism of Lollaṭa, a positive and succinct description of what the actor does and indeed feels is found in the long passage that Abhinavagupta attributes to his teacher of dramaturgy, Bhaṭṭa Tauta. The text is part of a complex reply to the theory of *rasa* as imitation attributed to Śāṅkuka, but it is important for our reasoning as it lists the elements of the internal and external experience of the actor. 'Moreover, thanks to the force of his expertise, that is, thanks to the sympathetic response due to the generalization of the consciousness mode that is brought about by the recollection of his own determinants, the actor merely performs by displaying the consequents and by reciting the poem with the support of the appropriate intonation and so forth. Such is the extent of which he is aware, but he does not have the experience that [what he is doing] is an imitation' (*kiṃ ca naṭaḥ śikṣāvaśāt svavibhāvasmaraṇāc cittavṛttisādhāraṇibhāvena hṛdayasaṃvādāt kevalam anubhāvān pradarśayan kāvyam *ucitakākuṇḍaprabhṛtyupaskāreṇa* [M₁ KA Gnoli : *upacita*° Ed.] *paṭhaṃś ceṣṭata ity etāvanmātre 'sya pratītir na tv anukāraṇ vedayate*).⁵⁹

⁵⁸ See above our remarks on the use of different tempos in the gaits of different characters and their variation according to the emotive situations, as already codified in Bharata's treatise.

⁵⁹ ABh *ad* 6, *rasasūtra*, vol. I, pp. 269–270 (the same text is found in the *Kāvyaṇūsāsana* [KA], *Viveka ad* 2.1, p. 96 in Parikh's edition). The reading of the editions, though less likely, could also be viable: 'with the support of a full intonation and so forth (*upacitakākuṇḍaprabhṛtyupaskāreṇa*):' Although it is also possible and maybe easier to interpret the three ablatives as separate causes and not as an interconnected chain of reasons, we opted for this harder interpretation, because it allows us to reflect on the function of memory and training. In this reading, the actor's expertise (*śikṣā*) is nothing but the capacity to attune his mind to the emotions to be portrayed. Moreover, such attunement would ensue from a training that consists, among other things, in the recollection of one's own emotional 'determinants' (his own beloved, for example). But this recollection must happen only during training, as the performance would be hindered if it

To fully appreciate the specificity of the actor's experience here outlined, we need to survey Abhinavagupta's understanding of the three-layered path that the spectator must walk to achieve the savouring of *rasa* (*rasāsvāda*).⁶⁰ Famously, the first step in the appreciation of an artistic performance is the 'generalization' of the portrayed emotions, the *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*. The emotions become generalized, i.e. devoid of all spatial and temporal characterisation as well as bereft of any reference to a specific individual, be it the historical character, the character of the story-world, the actor, the spectator himself or anyone else.⁶¹ The result of this process is that the emotion is experienced, as it were, in a position of 'unrelatedness,' beyond any actual situational context.⁶² Emo-

happened then (see above the example of Urvaśī). In any case, it makes sense that the active work on one's emotional life represents part and parcel of the training that the actor must go through in order to master his body and mind (see later on the crucial missing point that is *sattva*). For a more straightforward rendering, see Bansat-Boudon (1992: 149 n. 348): 'Bien plus, l'acteur faisant voir les *anubhāva* et récitant le texte à l'aide notamment des intonations appropriées, etc., joue seulement grâce à sa technique, grâce au souvenir qu'il a de ses propres *vibhāva* et grâce à la sympathie [qu'il éprouve pour son personnage], laquelle résulte de la généralité du sentiment. Son expérience se limite à cela, et il n'a pas conscience d'imiter.' See also the similar interpretations in Gnoli 1968: 40 and Pollock 2016: 186.

⁶⁰ In Abhinavagupta's theory, the aesthetic path actually starts with the poet's *pratibhā*, his inspired genius, which allows him to transform a common emotional experience (*bhāva*) into a generalized object of delectation (*rasa*) and to turn it into poetry (*kāvya*). The most commonly cited definition of *pratibhā* in Abhinavagupta's theory is the following (*Locana ad DhĀ* 1.6, p. 92): *pratibhā apūrvavastunirmāṇakṣamā* 'Genius is [an intellect] capable to create unprecedented objects.' The secondary literature on poetic *pratibhā* is relatively vast. Without any attempt at exhaustiveness, see Sreekantiya 1937, 1980; Krishnamoorthy 1944, 1980–1981; Gonda 1963: 318–348; Sen 1965; Jhanji 2003; Shulman 2008, 2012: 80–108, as well as the recent Furlinger 2018, although its scope is larger than just the poetical *pratibhā*.

⁶¹ See, for instance, ABh *ad* 6.32–33, vol. 1, p. 289: *deśakālapramātybhedānīyantrito rasa iti* ('*rasa* is not delimited by the differentiations of space, time and knowing subject').

⁶² In Abhinavagupta's own words, ABh *ad* 6, prose after 31, *rasasūtra*, vol. 1, p. 278, such an emotion is experienced by means of 'a cognition devoid of obstacles, different from cognitions full of obstacles such as "I am afraid, he—my enemy, my friend, someone indifferent to me—is afraid," as these are bound by the rise of other ideas such as abandoning[, accepting, or disregarding as indifferent to me], determined as they are by pleasure and pain' ('*bhīto 'haṃ bhīto 'yaṃ śatruṃ vayasyo madhyastho vā' ityādipratyayebhyo duḥkhasukhādīkṛtāhānādibuddhyantarodayanīyamavattayā vighnabahulebhyo vilakṣaṇaṃ nirvighnapratitigrāhyaṃ*).

tions become as if ‘elevated to a different plane of reality, removed from the ordinary world of pleasure and pain and freed from individuation and limitation. The fetters of the various “empirical” selves are temporarily shattered: emotions shine, unconnectedly, in their own generalized essence’ (Cuneo 2013: 64).⁶³

The second step consists in the *hṛdayasaṃvāda*, the emotional correspondence. The alluring beauty of the representation and the persuasive force of the narrated story induce the emotional involvement of the spectators. They excite their empathy to the highest degree.⁶⁴ Albeit aware of the fictional nature of the represented

⁶³ In Gerow’s pithy summary (1994: 187), the issue at stake is that ‘we experience, in art, not love for X, but love as such.’ A discussion of the cognitive clash and the aesthetic competence that are the psychological and philosophical trigger of *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* is found in Cuneo (2013: 64–66). Famously, Abhinavagupta seems to have borrowed the much-discussed concept of *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* from Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka. On this pivotal figure, see Pollock 2010 and 2016, whose views should be integrated and emended by David 2016, its rejoinder by Ollett 2016, and Reich 2018, an insightful treatment of Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka’s religious and philosophical affiliation as a Vedāntin.

⁶⁴ Abhinavagupta’s term probably comes from a verse in Bharata’s treatise (*Nāṭyaśāstra* 7.7): *yo ’rtho hṛdayasaṃvādī tasya bhāvo rasodbhavaḥ | śarīram vyāpyate tena śuṣkaṃ kāṣṭham ivāgninā ||*. In Abhinavagupta’s works, there seems to be no direct definition of *hṛdayasaṃvāda*, but the term is said to be a synonym of *sahṛdayatva*, ‘empathy’ (*Locana ad DhĀ* 1.18, p. 155: *hṛdayasaṃvādāparaparyāya-sahṛdayatva*° [...]). We would like to suggest that the *hṛdayasaṃvāda* is the acme of *sahṛdayatva*. The celebrated definition of the ‘ideal connoisseur,’ the *sahṛdaya*, is translated in Ingalls *et al.* 1990: 70: ‘The word *sahṛdaya* (lit. ‘having their hearts with it’) denotes persons who are capable of *identifying* with the subject matter, as the mirror of their hearts has been polished by the constant study and practice of poetry, and who respond to it sympathetically in their own hearts’ (*Locana ad DhvĀ* 1.1: *yeṣāṃ kāvyānuśīlanābhyāsaśād viśadībhūte manomukure varṇanīyatanmayībhavanayogyatā te svahṛdayasaṃvādabhājah saṅgṛdayāḥ*). For other similar definitions of *sahṛdaya* as well as *ahṛdaya* and some secondary literature, see Cuneo 2013: 64–65, n. 46. While in poetry the literary connoisseur gains a mirror-like heart thanks to the study of famous works, in theatre the function of ‘polishing the mirror’ is assigned to a number of elements that are defined as *hṛdya*, lit. ‘hearty,’ ‘pleasant’ in the sense of beautiful (*sundara*, *śubha*) and alluring (*uparañjaka*) as they are also called. These are, famously, the group including instrumental music, vocal singing, and dance, by which even those spectators who might still be under the sway of their own worldly preoccupations can obtain a mirror-like heart and be turned into sensitive spectators, *sahṛdayas*. See, for instance, ABh *ad rasasūtra*, vol. 1, p. 275: *ahṛdayānāṃ ca tad eva nāirmalyādhāyī yatra pratīṭā gītavādyaḥkādāyo na vyasanitāyāi paryavasyanti nātyopalakṣaṇāt* ‘But for those devoid of sensibility, that (i.e. theatre) alone can confer such a limpidity, in which singing, music, courtesans, and the like do not culminate in evil behavior, since they are features of drama.’ See also p. 281: *ātodyagānavicitra-*

story, the spectators cannot but care and be enthralled by what happens on the scene. However, the aloof impartiality offered by the power of generalization allows the audience not to fall completely for the emotional snare of theatrical make-believe. Involvement and detachment are kept in balance in an affective experience bereft of any unreserved abandonment to emotionality.

The third and last step on the path that leads to the appreciation of *rasa* is the complete identification (*tanmayībhāva*) with the narrated emotional situation. The very self of the spectators is temporarily suspended, as if dissolved in the experience of the performance, merged with the subject at hand, fused with the now purified emotion that was the object of representation and has been transformed into pure emotionality without place, time and subject. The complete identification between subject and object cuts the pragmatic-egoistic bonds of the empirical ego and the harness of desire, the cause of all suffering in the real world. Safe distance and total absorption make the aesthetic experience *alaukika*, that is unique and, therefore, completely different from the common worldly experience, as Abhinavagupta never tires of repeating.

In other words, the closely interlinked three steps of the aesthetic process progressively pull away from the common emotional experience of the ordinary man, from the *bhāva*, which is *laukika*, worldly *par excellence*. Proceeding backwards, the experience of an ordinary emotion is, first of all, the response of an embodied individual, aware of himself as an individual (the opposite of ‘identification’ with the aesthetic object of an artistic experience). Second, the intentional focus of the *bhāva* cannot but be one’s own wellbeing, related as it is but also unmistakably detached from the situation of others’ wellbeing (the opposite of the emotional peak of empathy). Third, the workaday emotion is always situated

maṇḍapapadavidagdhagaṇikādibhir uparañjanam samāśritam, yenaḥydayo 'pi hṛdaya-vaimalyaḥprāptyā sahydayīkriyate, '[...] [Bharata] has resorted to the charming action (uparañjana) due to vocal and instrumental music, well-adorned playhouses, courtesans skilful in eloquence and so on, by means of which even a person devoid of any sensibility is turned into a connoisseur by obtaining a limpidity of the heart.' On the role of dance in preparing and furthering the aesthetic experience, see Ganser 2013. For a fuller treatment of the 'psychagogic' effect of the charming elements in theatre, see Ganser forthcoming.

within a determined space, time and cognizing subject, i.e. it is personal, it is particularized (the opposite of generalized).

Therefore, the emotional state of a blissful spectator who is contemplating a dramatic performance immersed in the experience of *rasa* is arrived at by the progressive overturning of the experience of the common man, immersed as he is in pleasure and pain and thus actively intent in the preservation of the former and the avoidance of the latter.⁶⁵ The reason for this analysis of some well-known aspects of Abhinavagupta's aesthetics is our contention that the actor's experience should be tentatively situated in a middle position between the two extremes that are the experience of the spectator and the experience of the common man.

In our interpretation of Bhaṭṭa Tauta's passage, whose ideas seem to be wholeheartedly shared by Abhinavagupta, the experience of the actor becomes a unique liminal experience, for which the aesthetic theory seems to offer a relatively detailed conceptualization, but no proper name. Thus, the performer does enjoy the emotional sympathy of *hrdayasaṃvāda* already built upon the distancing in which the phenomenon of *sādhāraṇībhāva* consists. Nevertheless, thanks to his strenuously achieved *śikṣā* the actor does not move on to the last stage of identification (*tanmayībhāva*), and thus he does not savour *rasa*.⁶⁶ He is still sympathetically engrossed in the performance, but not to the point of losing himself in the aesthetic experience to the detriment of tempo and so on (*layādibhaṅga*) laid out by the poet.⁶⁷ As noted

⁶⁵ See ABh *ad* 6, *rasasūtra*, vol. 1, p. 276: 'according to the principle that [everyone] hates to be in contact with pain and is eager to savour pleasure' (*duḥkha-saṃśleṣavidveṣi sukhāsādanasādharaṇī itī nyāyena*).

⁶⁶ Our current research was kick-started by an intuition of Bansat-Boudon (1992: 150): 'Expérience limitée que celle de l'acteur, souligne encore Abhinavagupta [...], car circonscrite aux deux premières phases du processus esthétique—distanciation et sympathie—, garantes de la vérité de son jeu, quand il est donné au poète et au spectateur d'en connaître les deux dernières: l'identification (*tanmayībhāva*) et le ravissement (*rasa*) où elle culmine.' However, we will show how the apparent 'limitation' of the actor's experience determines his unlimited freedom.

⁶⁷ It is the generalized emotional experience of the poet that remains the 'first mover' of the aesthetic process, and the actor must in principle adhere to the text composed by the playwright. See ABh *ad* 6.38, p. 288: *kaviḡatasādhāraṇībhūtasamvīnmūlas ca kāvyāpurassaro naṭavyāpāraḡ* ('Furthermore, insofar as it is rooted in the generalized consciousness of the poet, the activity of the actor is

above, there is no *rasa* in the actor, and yet the first chapter of the *Abhinavabhāratī* contains an ambiguous passage that seems to point to the actor's emotional engrossment.⁶⁸ Since the *tanmayībhāva* does not occur, the actor can keep a full control of his emotionality without yielding to the untamed and overwhelming flow of the aesthetic experience.⁶⁹ Therefore, the actor seems to remain free from his own emotional engrossment, although his emotional organ, so to speak, is active in the empathy (*hṛdayasaṃvāda*) with the emotions of the portrayed character, which have reached a generalized state (*sādhāraṇībhāva*). The metaphor of the *pātra*, the cold vessel that is just an instrument to transfer the *rasa*, begins to exhibit its expressive limits. Even if a crucial distance is kept, the heart (*hṛdaya*) of the actor is somewhat part and parcel of the performance.⁷⁰ The paradox about the actor's

guided by poetry.') The poet and the spectator have and must have the same experience of *rasa*, as Abhinavagupta often repeats (see again ABh ad 6.38, p. 288: *tad evaṃ mūlaṃ bijasthāyinaḥ kavigato rasaḥ | kavir hi sāmājikatulya eva* 'Thus in this way the *rasa* present in the poet is the root, which is, so to say, the seed, for the poet is just like a spectator').

⁶⁸ See ABh ad 1.44, vol.1, p. 20: *rasānām bhāvo bhāvanā kavinaṭasāmājikaḥḥṛdayavyāptiḥ* 'The essence of *rasas*, i.e. their capacity to permeate, is the pervasion of the poet, the actor and the heart of the spectators.' The actor is said to be pervaded by *rasa*, but one may interpret this passage as just pointing to the fact that the actor is the necessary instrument for the transfer of *rasa*.

⁶⁹ On the contrary, Abhinavagupta seems to contemplate the possibility that the vocalists might undergo identification with the emotion while deeply engaged in the task of singing. See ABh ad NŚ 4.263cd–264ab, vol. 1, p. 173: *gāyatām* [E₁₍₄₎^{pc}; *gīyadā* M₁ T₁; *gīyatā* E₁₍₄₎^{ac}] *padārthasaṃvādakṛtatanmayībhāvadagdhānām* [conj. ; *dagdhāyās* M₁ T₁ E₁₍₄₎^{ac} ; *baddhāyās* E₁₍₁₎ E₁₍₄₎^{pc}] *ca sphuṭam eva sāttvikāṅgatāvalokanāt* (text based on the critical edition in Ganser forthcoming). 'Moreover, one clearly sees that singers, who are consumed as by fire through the identification [with the subject matter] (*tanmayībhāva*) based on the attunement (*saṃvāda*) [of their hearts] with the meaning of the lyrics [expressed in their songs], resort to the *sāttvika* [type of enactment].' Note again the reference to the second step, *hṛdayasaṃvāda*, on which the third one, the *tanmayībhāva*, is based.

⁷⁰ The term *hṛdaya*, 'heart' is liable to be misunderstood along the lines of an 'emotivistic' aesthetics, i.e. a theory of art that emphasises the role and the importance of emotions in opposition to reason and knowledge. However, the Sanskrit *hṛdaya* does not convey all the 'emotional' connotations and overtones that the term 'heart' and its cognates in other European languages do. On the contrary, the physical *hṛdaya* is often believed to be the abode of *manas*, the 'mind,' the organ of any mental activity. Otherwise, it is the place of, and a common metaphor for, the self or consciousness. For a survey on the history of this concept, see

emotional experience resurfaces at the very moment when it seemed to be dissolved. The analysis of the passage attributed to Bhaṭṭa Tauta shows that what is at stake is not the presence or absence of emotional involvement in the performer, but the active dimension of the actor's mastery over his own emotions, his capacity to emotionally mould his own consciousness in the service of the performance. Phenomenologically, this faculty already seems to imbue the activation of the first two steps of the aesthetic process which the actor partakes in, but it appears to be even more crucial as it impedes the culmination of the emotional response in a complete identification, in favour of a free, conscious, and only partial identification: the unique emotional experience of the actor.

The following table displays the steps of the emotional experience for the ordinary man, the actor, and the spectator (or possibly the poet). The actor's faculty we have so far mentioned only cryptically finds its name in the table — *sattva*, a crucial concept in Sanskrit dramaturgy, which we are going to analyse in greater depth below.

Ordinary Man	Actor	Spectator
Immersion in personal experience	Generalization (<i>sādhāraṇībhāva</i>)	Generalization (<i>sādhāraṇībhāva</i>)
Preoccupation for one's own wellbeing	Emotional correspondence (<i>hṛdayasaṃvāda</i>)	Emotional correspondence (<i>hṛdayasaṃvāda</i>)
Identification with one's own limited self	Active, partial, and voluntary identification by way of <i>sattva</i>	Identification (<i>tanmayībhāva</i>)
Ordinary emotional experience	Unique experience of the actor	Aesthetic emotional experience
<i>bhāva</i>	[no Sanskrit term]	<i>rasa</i>

Muller-Ortega 1989: 25–81. For its significance in Abhinavagupta's philosophical teaching, see Muller-Ortega 1989. For a non-emotivistic and fully cognitive interpretation of Abhinavagupta's aesthetic theory, see Cuneo 2007 (somewhat outdated).

5. The concept of *sattva* in Bharata and Abhinavagupta

« [L]’acteur doit être sensible—c’est la notion centrale de *sattva*—s’il veut être vrai. Cependant, c’est d’une sensibilité active qu’il s’agit, d’une sensibilité travaillée et maîtrisée, d’une sensibilité en quelque sorte distanciée. » Bansat-Boudon (1992: 29)

However revealing the theory of the three steps in the aesthetic experience may be (including the lack of the third step in the experience of the actor), it does not suffice to properly evaluate the performer’s sympathetic but still in-control attitude towards the emotional material of the play, and the mechanism regulating it. So far, we have purposefully postponed the treatment of the crucial missing piece in the conception that Bharata and Abhinavagupta have of the actor: the idea of *sattva*. To anticipate some of our conclusions, we aim to argue that this pivotal concept offers the basis for the formulation of a theory of ‘detached sensibility,’ a somewhat paradoxical middle-ground between Stanislavski’s immersion and Diderot’s utter dispassion, a form of trained emotionality without emotional involvement.

5.1 Bharata

In two famous verses, Bharata affirms that theatre is based on *sattva*, and that acting can be judged excellent, provided it is based on *sattva*:

The harmonious acting (*sāmānyābhinaya*)⁷¹ is known as born from voice, body and *sattva*. An effort should be made in this respect [i.e. in *sattva*], since **theatre is based on *sattva***. When the acting has an exceeding *sattva*, it is said to be superior; when the *sattva* is average it is medium; and when there is lack of *sattva* it is inferior.⁷²

What is this *sattva* on which theatre is based, the preminence of which determines an excellence in acting? As we know it from

⁷¹ On the concept of *sāmānyābhinaya*, see Bansat-Boudon 1989–1990, and 1992: 341–387, which contains a discussion of the different meanings assigned to this term.

⁷² NŚ 22.1–2: *sāmānyābhinayo nāma jñeyo vāgaṅgasattvajah | tatra kāryah prayatnas tu nātyam sattve pratiṣṭhitam || sattvātirikto ’bhinayo jyeṣṭha ity abhidhīyate | sama-sattvo bhaven madhyaḥ sattvahīno ’dhamaḥ smṛtaḥ ||*.

other domains of Indian speculation, the word *sattva* is highly polysemic and can refer to a number of loosely related concepts. As an abstract noun, it is formed on the present participle of the verb ‘to be’ (*sat*, from the root *as*), and can be literally translated as ‘the fact of existing,’ thus designating a living being and the life principle itself, or something that is in existence, and thus reality itself. However, with a slight semantic shift, it can also refer to what is good, right and pure, based on one of the core meanings of *sat*⁷³ as a neuter noun.⁷⁴

It is not an easy task to answer the question of what Bharata meant by the *sattva* of theatre and whether theatrical *sattva* does connect semantically to any or all of the senses just evoked, because of the composite nature of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and because it is generally not easy to interpret Bharata eschewing Abhinavagupta’s commentary. Moreover, our enquiry into Bharata’s *sattva* is motivated by the main focus of this article, namely Abhinavagupta’s analysis of the actor’s experience and its contextualization within the field of dramaturgy and in relation to non-dualist Śaivism. However, we should strive at present to keep Bharata’s and his commentator’s views as far as possible separate from each other, if only to give full credit to Abhinavagupta’s innovative take.

Now, in order to tackle the concept of *sattva* in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and its use in theatre, we will deal briefly with a constellation of technical terms of dramaturgy, all connected to *sattva*. These are: the *sāttvika-bhāvas*, the *sāttvika-abhinaya*, the *sāttvika-alaṅkāras*, and the *sāttvatī-ṛtti*.

5.1.1 *Sāttvikabhāva*

The ideal starting point of our unavoidably cursory enquiry is the only passage where Bharata makes some explicit statements about the nature of theatrical *sattva*. The prose passage in question is meant to explain the special status of a group of *bhāvas* that is mentioned for the first time in the summary of theatrical topics,

⁷³ Van Buitenen 1957: 88 recalls the common meaning of *sattva* as ‘goodness’ from the adjective *sat* meaning ‘good.’

⁷⁴ On *sattva* in Sāṃkhya, see, for instance, van Buitenen 1957 and Larson 1979. On the wide semantic spectrum of *sattva* in the medical tradition, see Roşu 1978: 190–191.

squeezed between the list of the thirty-three transitory states (*vyabhicāribhāva*) and the four means of dramatic representation or acting registers (*abhinaya*):

Paralysis, perspiration, horripilation, stammering, tremor, change of colour, tears and fainting. These are the eight known as *sāttvika*.⁷⁵

As their names indicate, they are the *bhāvas* that are *sāttvika*, i.e. related to, based on, originating in, participating in *sattva*, all possible senses contemplated by the adjective formed by the *vyddhi* of the initial syllable and addition of the secondary suffix *-ika*. This term evidently covers the whole array of physical symptomatology of emotions that actors across cultures can display on the scene: weeping, sweating, blushing, and the like. As often repeated in the secondary literature, the *sāttvikabhāvas* correspond to the spontaneous and uncontrolled expressions of strongly felt emotions, and their representation on stage has often been understood to require from the actor a process of identification with his role.⁷⁶ However, while in ordinary life these bodily symptoms are the signs of strong emotions that escape the control of individuals and reveal their hidden intentions,⁷⁷ in theatre they have to be produced by actors at will, according to the requirements of the dramatic situation. This seems to be the point made by Bharata as he explains that the actor needs *sattva* to produce those bodily symptoms, and that is achieved by means of mental concentration:

On this point it is said: Can the other *bhāvas* be enacted without *sattva* so that we can say that these are the *sāttvika* [*bhāvas*]? It is

⁷⁵ NŚ 6.22: *stambhaḥ svedo 'tha romāñcaḥ svarabhedo 'tha vepathuḥ | vaivarnyam aśru pralaya ity aṣṭau sāttvikāḥ smṛtāḥ ||*.

⁷⁶ For references to a mainstream interpretation in the relatively few works on Indian theatre dealing explicitly with the *sāttvikabhāvas* in Bharata's treatise, see Malinar 2010: 7. As Malinar's analysis reveals, much of the confusion in modern scholarship about the interpretation of the actor's emotional experience was due to a different reading in the prose passage after NŚ 7.93, coupled with a possible ambiguity in Bharata's words themselves, on which see below.

⁷⁷ In the Dharmasāstras the manifestation of this symptomatology stands as a criterion for judging the truthfulness of a witness in a legal case. See Piovano 1997–1998: 648–649. Among the reactions betraying a fraudulent intention on the part of a witness one can clearly recognize some of the *sāttvikabhāvas* listed by Bharata.

answered: Here [i.e. in theatre], indeed, what is known as *sattva* originates in the mind. And it is so called thanks to the concentration of the mind.⁷⁸ When the mind is concentrated there is production of *sattva*. And its proper nature, which is characterized by horripilation, tears, change of colour etc.—obtained in accordance with the *bhāva*—cannot be produced by somebody whose mind is absent. Since theatre is a reproduction of the nature proper to the world, *sattva* is required [in it]. What is the paradigmatic example? Here [in theatre], the emotions made of pleasure and pain, brought about through the theatrical convention (*nāṭyadharmī*),⁷⁹ have to be refined by *sattva* in order to become similar [to worldly emotions]. Among those [emotions], how could pain, consisting in crying, be represented by someone not in pain, or pleasure, consisting in rapture, by someone not happy? This alone is his⁸⁰ *sattva*, thanks to which [an actor] can show tears or thrills of the hair, be he in pain or happy.⁸¹ On this basis they are defined as *sāttvikabhāvas*. And they are: paralysis, perspiration, horripila-

⁷⁸ It would also be possible to read the abstract as containing a *bahuvrīhi*, which would amount to the fact that it is in somebody whose mind is concentrated that *sattva* arises, with a slight change of meaning. The syntax of the sentence might also point to some kind of implicit traditional etymology (*nirukti*) between *sattva* and *samādā-*.

⁷⁹ NŚ 13.70–82 lists two conventions, or manners of performance (*dharmī*, or *dharma*, glossed by Abhinavagupta as *itikartavyatā*), used for representing things on the stage. The first is called *lokadharmī*, the ‘worldly convention,’ which is the way of enacting things in a realistic fashion or following the way things are in the world. The second is called *nāṭyadharmī*, the ‘theatrical convention,’ which involves a greater degree of stylization and dramatization, and follows ways that are proper to theatre. Besides a profuse usage of dance and songs, this convention includes the enactment of female roles by men, or those of old characters by young actors. On *lokadharmī* and *nāṭyadharmī*, see Bansat-Boudon 1992: 155–169 and Raghavan 1993: 201–241.

⁸⁰ The interpretation of the pronoun *asya* is uncertain. We follow the idea of Malinar (2010: 15) that it refers to the actor, but it might also refer simply to ‘theatre’ or to the ‘mind,’ with only a slight change of emphasis.

⁸¹ As noted by Malinar, the editions by Ghosh and Unni have a slightly different text at this point: *aduhkhitena prahṛṣṭena vāśruromañcau pradarśayitavyau*, which she translates: ‘Tränenfluss und das Aufrichten der Körperhaare müssen von einem zur Erscheinung gebracht, der weder unglücklich noch glücklich ist’ (Malinar 2010: 15). Accordingly, she interprets *sattva* as the actor’s capacity for intense concentration on the dramatic situation, so as to produce physical reactions that are similar to real-life ones, although not authentic: ‘In dieser Version des Textes besteht die Kunst des Schauspielers darin, dass er *sāttvika-bhāvas* produzieren kann, ohne die Gefühle zu erleben, die im gewöhnlichen Leben Auslöser für den Tränenfluss etc. sind’ (ibid.).

tion, stammering, tremor, change of colour, tears and fainting. These are the eight *sāttvika*[*bhāvas*] (NŚ 7.94).⁸²

This all-important but critically controversial passage assigns a special status to a group of states, significantly named *sāttvika* as they require the intervention of *sattva* in order to be visibly manifested as physical reactions on the actor's body. And this *sattva* is produced by the actor through mental concentration, which already suggests an emotional detachment between the actor and the character portrayed: the actor needs mental concentration in order to produce the *sāttvikabhāvas* on his own body, independently from his personal and contingent emotive mood ('be he in pain or happy'), whereas in real life these symptoms are produced spontaneously but only in concomitance with a corresponding emotion (for instance, sorrow can be manifested by tears, and joy can be manifested by horripilation).

In the terse formulation of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, it would be possible to envisage some emotive state intervening between the actor's mental concentration and his display of symptoms such as tears and horripilation, if only because *sattva*, just like emotions, is a product of the mind. Moreover, Bharata does not specify how this mental concentration is carried out practically and what its object is, whether it involves a concentration on the dramatic situation⁸³ and the emotive condition of the character (as Lollaṭa would have probably interpreted this passage), or on the actor's own emotions as recollected in the phase of training (the stance of Bhaṭṭa Tauta against Śaṅkuka), or on both, one leading to the other: the

⁸² NŚ prose after 7.93: *atrāha kim anye bhāvāḥ sattvena vinābhiniyante yasmād ucyate ete sāttvikā iti? atrocyate—iha hi sattvaṃ nāma manaḥprabhavam | tac ca samāhitamanastvād ucyate | manasaḥ samādhau sattvanīṣpattir bhavati | tasya ca yo 'sau svabhāvo romāñcāśruvaivarnyādilakṣaṇo yathābhāvopagataḥ sa na śakyo 'nyamanasā kartum iti | lokasvabhāvānukaraṇatvāc ca nātyasya sattvaṃ īpsitam | ko dṛṣṭāntaḥ? iha hi nātyadharmipravṛttāḥ (corr. °dharmi°?) sukhaduhkḥakṛtā bhāvās tathā sattva-vīśuddhāḥ kāryā yathā sarūpā bhavanti | tatra duḥkhaṃ nāma rodanātmakam tat katham aduhkhitena sukham ca prahaṣātmakam asukhitena vābhineyam? etad evāsya sattvaṃ yat duḥkhitena sukhitena vāśruromāñcau darśayitavyau iti kṛtvā sāttvikā bhāvā ity abhivyākhyatāḥ | ta ime—stambhaḥ svedo 'tha romāñcaḥ svarabhedo 'tha vepathuh | vaivarnyam aśrupralaya ity aṣṭau sāttvikā matāḥ || (NŚ 7.94).*

⁸³ Cf. Filliozat 1963: 339: 'ce qui permet à l'acteur de pleurer, c'est une activité particulière de sa sensibilité qu'il acquiert dans la concentration de son *manas* sur l'objet à imiter.'

actor concentrates on the emotion pervading a dramatic situation and this activates his own corresponsive emotion by a sympathetic process, which does not however culminate in complete identification (the position we have attributed to Abhinavagupta).⁸⁴ In all these possible scenarios, we cannot completely rule out some kind of emotional involvement on the part of the actor. On the contrary, the other option would be to consider it simply a question of technique, requiring a specific tuning of the actor's mind, just as in the enactment of the other *bhāvas*, for which a complete array of techniques—bodily stances and gaits, ways of delivering one's speech with the appropriate accent, voice and the like, conventional costumes and make up—is available to the actor. As we have shown in the previous section, the answer to this question needs to be seen as intrinsically connected with the various aesthetic theories propounded in the history of Sanskrit dramaturgy. But, since in the seminal text of this tradition we do not get a clear-cut version of a precise aesthetic theory, we are bound to tread lightly and tackle the issue from several angles.

The point at stake is that in theatre there is no spontaneous or uncontrolled emotional outburst on the part of the actor, but rather an intentional and controlled activation of *sattva*, through mental concentration (*samāhitamanas*), which allows him to produce the *sāttvikabhāvas* as *voluntary* physical reactions. The principle underlying the need for *sattva* is that theatre is a reproduction of the world (*lokasvabhāvānukaraṇa*), where people are seen crying when they are sad and having goose-bumps when happy.

⁸⁴ Some translations seem to go in the direction of a deeper emotive involvement of the actor, like the one given by Bansat-Boudon (1991: 203), who translates the end of the passage (same version as the text given by Kavi) as follows: 'En pareil cas [celui des *sāttvikabhāva*], le *sattva* consiste en ceci : les larmes [de tristesse] et l'horripilation [de joie] doivent être [respectivement] montrées par quelqu'un de triste ou par quelqu'un de joyeux (*etad evāsya sattvaṃ yat duḥkhitena sukhitena vāśruromāñcau darśayitavyau*).' Such interpretation is indeed possible, as Malinar argued, only with the version of the text given by Kavi and provided one takes the question '*tatra duḥkhaṃ nāma rodanātmakam tat katham aduḥkhitena sukhaṃ ca praharṣātmakam asukhitena vābhineyam?*' as a rhetorical one, implying that one must indeed become actually sad or happy to produce tears or goose-bumps (Malinar 2010: 17). Along similar lines, Raghavan (1981: 36) explained: '*Sattva* means the mental capacity of the actor to identify with the character and his feelings. [...] One who is not truly, or deeply in sorrow cannot shed tears; one who does not feel excitement or fear does not perspire.'

Thus, the actor needs a method to display those symptoms if the dramatic situation demands it. Moreover, these artificially induced physical reactions are in no necessary one-to-one relation with any internal emotional state that may be invariably inferred from their display. Bharata lists a plurality of causes in fact for each of these bodily reactions: tears can be caused by antithetical emotions such as joy and indignation, but also by external factors like smoke, collyrium, yawning, etc.⁸⁵ In this case, the *sāttvikabhāvas* are clearly the physical reactions to either emotive or environmental factors, to be displayed by an actor through *sattva*. However, just as in the case of other *bhāvas*, Bharata also lists the actions by which an actor should represent each of them: weeping should be enacted by rubbing the eyes or shedding tears, perspiration by grasping a fan, wiping off sweat, longing for breeze, etc.⁸⁶ It is important to remark in this connection that the *sāttvikabhāvas* function just like the other internal states that belong to the characters and are endowed with their appropriate *anubhāvas* or theatrical expressions achieved through the mimetic play of the body and voice, which however does not always coincide with the display of the corresponding external reactions, also called *sāttvikabhāvas*.

From Bharata's description of the *sāttvikabhāvas*, their causes and physical effects, we infer the implicit but important principle that the *sattva* of the actor has to be used to produce tears or other symptoms, even when these are caused by an external cause, for instance smoke. We also deduce that the presence of a *sāttvikabhāva* in the character does not always culminate in the external display of some involuntary symptoms, since to convey such states the actor can also have recourse to a simple action—grasping a fan to show perspiration—instead of mobilizing his own *sattva*.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ NŚ 7.97: *ānandāmarṣābhyāṃ dhūmāñjanajṃbhañād bhayāc chokāt | animeṣa-prekṣaṇataḥ sītād rogād bhaved aśru ||*.

⁸⁶ NŚ 7.106: *bāṣpāmbuḥplutanetratvān netrasammārjanena ca | muhur aśru-kañāpātair āsraṃ tv abhinayed budhaḥ ||*; NŚ 7.102: *vyajanagrahaṇāc cāpi svedāpana-yanena ca | svedasyābhinayo yojyas tathā vātābhilāṣataḥ ||*.

⁸⁷ The *sāttvikabhāvas* are also listed among the consequents of some *sthāyibhāvas*: tears, stammering, and change of color are listed among the *anubhāvas* of grief, for instance. Bharata also specifies that there are tears due to joy, affliction or jealousy. But, in order to become *anubhāvas* of those emotions, they need to be associated with specific theatrical characters: in a situation entailing sorrow, tears can only be displayed by women and by characters of the inferior type, since superior characters will show endurance in its stead.

The *sāttvikabhāvas* have therefore clearly a double nature: they have a psychic component that functions just as other emotions, endowed with causes and outer expressions, and they are themselves an outer, physical expression of inner states.⁸⁸ A possible translation for *sāttvikabhāva* could then be psychosomatic or psychophysical states, since they participate in both planes, the mental and the physical. As the examples of the *sāttvikabhāvas* as internal states or as visible reactions make clear, they are grounded in the character and the dramatic situations imagined by the poet, just like the other states and their symptomatology. However, their external form has to be artfully produced by an actor through the control of his mind. Now, in order to understand how *sattva* affects acting more generally, even outside the production of the *sāttvikabhāvas*, and to highlight the fundamental tension between *sattva* as a feature of the actor and/or a feature of the character, we will now examine the category of *sāttvikābhinaya*.

5.1.2 *Sāttvikābhinaya*

The *sāttvikābhinaya* is one of the four *abhinayas*, means of dramatic representation or acting registers in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, listed together with bodily (*āṅgika*), vocal (*vācika*), and ornamental (*āhārya*) acting.⁸⁹ While specific chapters in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* are devoted to illustrating the technique for the other *abhinayas*, there is no single chapter to present an exclusive and systematic treatment of the *abhinaya* called *sāttvika*. Therefore, scholarly opinions about what *sāttvikābhinaya* is diverge, ranging from a simple equation with the enactment of the *sāttvikabhāvas* alone, to that of all *bhāvas* and *rasas*, to a general interpretation of this *abhinaya* as concerning the capacity of the actor to emote, mirroring the whole gamut of possible interpretations given to the word *sattva* in the crucial passage above.⁹⁰ As Bharata states at the beginning of his treatment

⁸⁸ As noted in Kulkarni 2003: 92, ‘A careful look at Bharata’s treatment of *karuṇa*, *vīra* and *adbhuta* would show that Bharata gives some of the *sāttvikabhāvas* as *anubhāvas* and some others as *vyabhicārins*. This treatment implies that according to Bharata they partake of both characters—they are both *vyabhicāribhāvas* and *anubhāvas*.’ On the dual nature of the *sāttvikas*, see Section 5.2.1.

⁸⁹ NŚ 8.10: *āṅgiko vācikaś caiva hy āhāryaḥ sāttvikas tathā | jñeyas tu abhinayo viprās caturdhā parikīrtitaḥ ||*.

⁹⁰ Bansat-Boudon (1992: 146) translates *sāttvikābhinaya* as ‘jeu émotionnel.’

of the *āṅgikābhinaya*, the treatment of the *sāttvikābhinaya* is given prior to it, in connection with the *bhāvas*, i.e. in chapter seven.⁹¹ Even in the chapter on the harmonious acting (*sāmānyābhinaya*, NŚ 22), which combines the different acting registers as applied to concrete dramatic situations, we are told that the *abhinaya* produced from *sattva* was treated first, before proceeding to the complex protocol of the harmonious acting produced by the body and voice.⁹² One can thus surmise that, in the hierarchy of the types of acting announced at the very outset of chapter 22, by superior acting was specifically intended the *sāttvikābhinaya*, i.e. the acting with an exceeding *sattva*. An allusion to the twofold nature of *sattva*, internal and external, which we have seen to be the foundation of the *sāttvikābhāvas*, may be at the basis of another verse in chapter 22, which follows the stated hierarchy of acting based on *sattva*:

Sattva in its unmanifest form (*avyaktarūpa*) is known as based on the *bhāvas*; through its qualities (*guṇa*) such as horripilation, tears and the like, it is connected to the *rasas*, according to their locus (NŚ 22.3).⁹³

However, the rest of the *sāttvikābhinaya* described as part of the harmonious acting covers mainly a group of ornaments that are said to be produced from *sattva*. In them, *sattva* appears to belong to the character.⁹⁴

5.1.3 **Sāttvikālaṃkāra*⁹⁵

The *sāttvikālaṃkāras* are a group of twenty ‘ornaments’ that are said to affect the body in connection with *bhāvas* and *rasas*. They

⁹¹ NŚ 8.11: *sāttvikaḥ pūrvam uktas tu bhāvaiś ca sahito mayā | āṅgābhinayam evādaḥ gadato me nibodhata ||*.

⁹² This is made clear in NŚ 22.40, at the end of the treatment of the *sāttvika-sāmānyābhinaya*: *sattvajo 'bhinayaḥ pūrvam mayā prokto dvijottamāḥ | sārīram cāpy abhinayaṃ vyākhyāsyāmy anupūrvasaḥ ||*.

⁹³ NŚ 22.3: *avyaktarūpaṃ sattvaṃ hi vijñeyaṃ bhāvasaṃśrayam | yathāsthānaraśo-petaṃ romāñcāsrādibhir guṇaiḥ ||*.

⁹⁴ This ambiguity as to the locus of *sattva*, which we shall explore further, is reflected in Bansat-Boudon’s statement: ‘Le *sāttvikābhinaya* se définit comme le registre de jeu capable de rendre le *sattva* du personnage grâce au *sattva* de l’acteur’ (1991: 202).

⁹⁵ The term *sāttvikālaṃkāra* does not appear, to the best of our knowledge, in the treatises of the Nāṭyaśāstra tradition. However, this is a useful expression to talk

are particularly evident in young women, in which they manifest as bodily modifications (*vikāra*) affecting their facial expression and limbs.⁹⁶ The first three—*bhāva*, *hāva* and *helā*—are called ‘bodily’ (*aṅgaja*) and said to proceed from an embodied condition of *sattva*: *dehātmakaṃ bhavet sattvaṃ sattvād bhāvaḥ samutthitaḥ | bhāvāt samutthito hāvo hāvād dhelā samutthitā* (NŚ 22.6). They are exhibited in the character, a young woman, and produced on her body as modalities of *sattva* (*sattvabheda*).⁹⁷ Although the exact significance of the three bodily ornaments is difficult to grasp, they, as well as the other ornaments, seem to be based on the different degrees of a young woman’s involvement in the amorous sentiment. Depending on her age and situation, these variously affect her body as well as her behaviour. It is tempting to translate these *alaṅkāras* as ‘coquetries,’ which translate theatrically into a play of love and seduction.⁹⁸ The remaining ornaments are called ‘natural’ (*svabhāvika*) and ‘effortless’ (*ayatnaja*). The former includes flirtatious behaviours connected to a love situation, such as the playful imitation of the beloved by the woman (*līlā*), or the confusion due to love and excitement (*vibhrama*). The latter covers more stable qualities such as beauty (*śobhā*), sweetness (*mādhurya*) or audacity (*prāgalbhya*), which affect the outer behaviour of women and thus lend themselves to theatrical display. Although this is not stated anywhere in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the *sāttvikābhīnaya* required by an actor in order to show the flirtatious behaviour of women, or their natural graces, cannot be equated *tout court* with the display of the *sāttvikabhāvas*, but needs to be intended in a broader way. One may tentatively understand the *sāttvikasāmānyābhīnaya* as the harmonious enactment of the *sattva*

about a group of ornaments (*alaṅkāras*) related to the temperament of women and men. We borrow it from Bansat-Boudon 1991. Although *sattva* is explicitly mentioned only in relation to the first three *alaṅkāras* (*bhāva*, *hāva*, *helā*), and to the eight *alaṅkāras* of men, one might safely claim that all of them—i.e. the three ‘bodily’ (*aṅgaja*), the ten ‘natural’ (*svabhāvika*) and the seven ‘effortless’ (*ayatnaja*) ones—are *sāttvika*, since they are described in the section on the *sāttvikasāmānyābhīnaya*, as confirmed at the end of this section in NŚ 22.40 (cf. n. 92).

⁹⁶ NŚ 22.4: *alaṅkāras tu nāṭyajñair jñeyā bhāvarasāśrayāḥ | yauvane ’bhyadhikāḥ strīṇāṃ vikārā vaktraḡātrajāḥ ||*

⁹⁷ NŚ 22.7: *bhāvo hāvas helā ca parasparasamutthitāḥ | sattvabhedaḥ bhavanty ete sarīre prakṛtisthitāḥ ||*

⁹⁸ On the theatricality of the *sāttvikālaṅkāras*, see Bansat-Boudon 1991: 210–225, drawing on Abhinavagupta’s commentary.

of the character rather than the harmonious acting by the *sattva* of the actor.

5.1.4 *Sāttvatī*

Sāttvatī is the name of one of four *vyttis*—‘manners’ or ‘styles,’ as they are often translated—along with the *bhāratī*, ‘the verbal or vocal,’ the *kaiśikī*, ‘the gorgeous or graceful,’ and the *ārabhaṭī*, the ‘dynamic or violent,’ whose origin is traced in NŚ 20 to the combat of Viṣṇu with the demons Madhu and Kaiṭabha.⁹⁹ The *vyttis* are linked to separate moments in this mythical martial combat: the vigorous stepping of Viṣṇu on the earth to the *bhāratī*, his moving around with the bow, full of *sattva*, to the *sāttvatī*,¹⁰⁰ the graceful tying up of his hair to the *kaiśikī*, and the hand-to-hand violent fighting to the *ārabhaṭī*. In theatrical practice they translate into features that concern both particular moments in the storyline of a play, as well as the ways these are represented on stage. With regard to the *sāttvatī*, *sattva* is implicitly given as one of its main features, in the form of a mental quality (*guṇa*), together with other traits such as an excessive excitement and the removal of sorrow.¹⁰¹ Its further link with some particular *rasas*—heroism, marvel, and fury—and vehement characters (*uddhatapurusa*)¹⁰² suggests that here *sattva* is intended as the character’s *sattva*, presumably understood as one of the three *guṇas*, which determines a certain temperament in male characters. In a similar vein we can also understand the ornaments of men—since there are also eight modalities of *sattva* for men, listed in NŚ 22.33 as beauty, playfulness, grace, firmness, depth, charm, magnanimity, and ar-

⁹⁹ On the *vyttis*, see Wright 1963, Bansat-Boudon 1992: 169–180 and 1995, and Lidova 2014.

¹⁰⁰ NŚ 20.12: *valgitaiḥ śāringadhamuṣas tīvrair dīptatarair atha | sattvādhikair asaṃbhṛāntaiḥ sāttvatī tatra nirmitā ||*. Here *sattva* could be understood as the mental concentration of Viṣṇu, compared to an archer, or as a temperamental attitude connected to vehemence and heroism, as the theatrical *vytti* requires, see below. The term *sāttvatī* with geminate ‘t’ is used in most primary and secondary sources. However, *sātvatī* is the form closer to the etymology (*sat-vat* → *sātvata*), as also given by Abhinavagupta (cf. § 5.2.5).

¹⁰¹ NŚ 20.41: *yā sātvatenēha guṇena yuktā nyāyena vyttena samanvitā ca | harṣo- ktaṭā saṃhytaśokabhāvā sā sāttvatī nāma bhavet tu vyttiḥ ||*.

¹⁰² NŚ 20.43: *vīrādbhutaraudrarasā nīrastaśṛṅgāarakaruṇanīrvedā | uddhatapu- ruṣapṛāyā paraspārādharṣaṇakṛtā ca ||*.

dour¹⁰³—as the outer expressions of an inner temperament, affecting the character’s behaviours and actions.

5.1.5 *Bharata’s sattva unravelled*

To sum up, as far as Bharata’s text is concerned, a certain hesitation remains as to whether we should connect *sattva* with the character or the actor, or both. Or rather, the same term *sattva* is used with different nuances of meaning when it refers to the sphere of real life that encompasses the characters and their fictional world or to the sphere of theatrical acting that encompasses the art and the experience of the actors.

As far as characters and thus human beings in general are concerned, all the theatrical components that have to do with *sattva* pertain to the connection between mental and physical processes. Thus, *sattva* appears to be a universal human component that affects or even determines both the inner temperament and the physical appearance. It can sometimes escape its unmanifest condition and affect the bodily plane: this is the case of the momentary outburst of intensely felt emotions and their manifestation as tears, perspiration, etc., which is normally the affair of unconscious or uncontrolled processes of the order of the *lapsus corporis*.¹⁰⁴ Or it can manifest in the form of a diffused general pattern of behaviour that pervades the body and reveals a certain temperament, mainly a controlled or ‘staged’ behaviour. It is a kind of middle ground between the affects and their effects, and, as Abhinavagupta explains, it constitutes the necessary bridge between the different planes of an emotion, the unmanifest and the manifest.

For the actors and their performance during a play, conversely, *sattva* is a voluntary product of mental concentration, as

¹⁰³ NŚ 22.33: *śobhā vilāso mādhyamā sthāiryam gāmbhīryam eva ca | lalitaudāryatejāmsi sattvabhedās tu paurnasāh ||*.

¹⁰⁴ This phrase is borrowed from Pancer 2011, which explores the physiological and bodily expression of emotions in western medieval literature in its twofold dimension of a spontaneous and involuntary display—the *lapsus corporis*—and a voluntary and public one, which the author compares to a performance. These psychophysical expressions, such as tears, smiles, blushing, trembling from rage or fear, are called by Pancer somatic gestures, either involuntary or controlled, which remind one of the *sāttvikabhāvas*.

Bharata tells us. It originates from an effort to display those physical manifestations that in ordinary life escape the individual's control, but that must be rendered on stage in order to reveal the emotional upheavals of a fictional character.¹⁰⁵ To understand how this actor's feat is achieved from a technical point of view, we now shift our attention to Abhinavagupta's commentary.

5.2 *Abhinavagupta*

As is the case with other elements that look disparate in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, possibly because of the composite nature of this text, Abhinavagupta attempts to reconcile the different uses of *sattva* we have discussed in the previous section. The underlying rationale appears to be, even more explicitly than in Bharata, the twofold nature of theatrical *sattva* as the character's *sattva* and the actor's *sattva*. What Abhinavagupta also achieves is bringing together these different dimensions of *sattva* in a coherent way by introducing a new concept, that of *prāṇa*, by means of which he manages to combine all the other aspects of *sattva* (as temperament, and as a quality of the mind), in a single theory, capable to do full justice to the emotive experience of the actor.

5.2.1 *Internal and external sattva*

As mentioned above, already for Bharata the *sāttvikabhāvas* possess a dual nature: on the one hand, they are listed as emotional states belonging to the characters and expressed by some actions; on the other, those eight physical symptoms are listed among those very actions that give them outer expression, that is, as consequents of emotions, thereby falling under the sphere of enactment. The *sāttvikabhāva* 'trembling' (*kampa*, a synonym of *vepathu*), for instance, can be caused by cold, fear, joy, fury, touch, and old age, and is expressed by trembling, quivering and shaking.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ In quickly summarising the various aspects of *sattva*, Filliozat (1963: 339) adds a level that we have not touched upon here yet, although it is implicit in the recognition that *sattva* is a universal human component: also the spectators can partake in the *sāttvikabhāvas* as a feature of their emotional response to art. For more on *sattva* in the spectator, see Cuneo and Ganser 2022.

¹⁰⁶ NS 7.96cd: *śītabhayaharṣarōṣaṣparsajarōgajaḥ kampaḥ* ||; NS 7.104cd: *vepanāt sphuraṇāt kampaḍ vepathuṃ sampradarśayet* ||.

Abhinavagupta discloses what was latent in Bharata, namely that ‘the *sāttvika* [*bhāvas*] partake of both the nature of transitory state and that of enactment.’¹⁰⁷ Besides this twofold dimension of the *sāttvikabhāvas* as mental phenomena (primarily belonging to the character) and bodily signs (theatrically displayed by the actor), Abhinavagupta suggests that there are also intermediate manifestations. With regard to the change of colour, tears, and breaking of the voice, listed first among the consequents of *karuṇarasa* and then again among its transitory states, Abhinavagupta states that the *sāttvikabhāvas* participate in both since they have an inner, mental nature as well as an outer, physical one, although there is no invariable concomitance between the two:

Change of colour, tears, and breaking of the voice are taken in this passage as mental modes (*cittavṛttī*), whose [inner] nature has been manifested outwardly. To illustrate: there are people who say: ‘his throat is full of tears, but there is no water in his eyes.’ In fact, as we have already said and as we will state again, these [*sāttvikabhāvas*], such as tears and the others, have been illustrated[, in the summary of the topics of theatre (NŚ 6.22)], between the transitory states and the enactments, so as to show that they partake in the nature of both.¹⁰⁸

Evidently, the *sāttvikabhāva* ‘tears’ (*aśru*) here belongs to the character in a particular situation, whose emotional intensity—as well as the inner temperament proper to the role, as we shall see—determine its outer display either as real tears, or just as a lump in the throat. The actor’s enactment will conform to this worldly state of affairs, the difference being that, as Bharata already put it, his physical tears are produced through mental concentration, that is to say, they are an artifice. However, we will see that this ‘art’ requires more than a cold, mechanical technique. So, how does this happen?

¹⁰⁷ Abh *ad* 6.22, vol. 1, p. 269: *sāttvikā vyabhicāriṅvṛttam abhinayavṛttam copajīvanti*. The equation of the *anubhāvas*—the consequences of an emotion—with the *abhinayas*—the enactments or stage rendering of these very consequents by an actor—is typical of Abhinavagupta’s exegesis.

¹⁰⁸ ABh *ad* prose before 6.62, vol. 1, p. 312: *vaivarnyāśrusvarabhedā atra bahirudbhinnasvabhāvās cittavṛttyātmāno grhyante | tathā hi vaktāro bhavanti ‘aśruṇā pūrṇo ‘sya kaṅṭho na ca nayanajalam dṛṣṭam’ iti | ete hy aśruprabhṛtayo vya-bhicāritvābhineyatopajīvanāyaiva madhye nirdiṣṭā ity avocāma vakṣyāmaś ca |*.

5.2.2 *Sattva* as mindfulness

Abhinavagupta explains that this concentration requires a special effort (cf. NŚ 22.1cd: *tatra kāryaḥ prayatnas tu nāṭyam sattve pratiṣṭhitam*) on the part of actors, and not just the mastery of a technique through training, as is required by the other acting media. Abhinavagupta identifies this effort with mental concentration:

If [theatre] were produced from the voice and body alone, it could be accomplished even without an effort; but this [*sāmānyābhinaya*] is born from voice, body and *sattva*, theatre is based on *sattva*, and *sattva* is issued from the concentration of the mind (*manasamādhāna*). Therefore, it is said that it cannot be accomplished without a superlative effort.¹⁰⁹

Clearly enough, resounding in the background of the commentator's mind is Bharata's explanation in NŚ 7.94 on how the *sattva* needed to display the *sāttvikabhāvas* is produced by the actor (*manasaḥ samādhau sattvaniṣpattir bhavati*).¹¹⁰ If *sattva* is presented here as what is issued when the mind is concentrated, in another passage Abhinavagupta glosses *sattva* as that very concentration, using the word *cittaikāgryam*, 'mental intentness,' most likely a synonym of *manasamādhāna*: '*Sattva* means mental intentness, what is produced out of that (i.e. the internal *sāttvikabhāvas*), and also the artifice that consists in the state in which tears and so forth (i.e. the external *sāttvikabhāvas*) ensue. This has to be evaluated according to circumstances' (*sattvaṃ cittaikāgryaṃ tajjanitaṃ ca kṛtakaṃ bāṣpādiprāptyaavasthātmakaṃ ceti yathāyogaṃ mantavyam*, ABh ad 7.2, vol. 1, p. 340). In all such cases, *sattva* is intended as a qualifier of that type of enactment designated as *sāttvikābhinaya*, the psychophysical acting of which *sattva* is the main instrument.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ ABh ad 22.1, vol. 3, pp. 149–150: *yadi vāgaṅgajam eva syāt prayatnaṃ vināpi siddhiḥ syāt, vāgaṅgasattvajo 'sau, sattve ca nāṭyaṃ pratiṣṭhitam, sattvaṃ ca manasamādhānajaṃ | tasmād bhūyasā prayatnena vinā (na) siddhyatīti* |. We do accept what seems to be a conjecture '(na)' on the part of the editor.

¹¹⁰ Bharata's definition and possibly Abhinavagupta's interpretation resonate in the *Nāṭyadarpaṇa* (p. 169): *avahitaṃ manasā sattvaṃ tatprayojanaṃ hetur asyeti sāttvikaḥ | mano 'navadhāne hi na śakyanta eva svarabhedādayo naṭena darśayitum* |.

¹¹¹ In this connection, see Bansat-Boudon's comment about Bharata's statement that theatre is based on *sattva*, read in the light of the *Abhinavabhāratī*: 'il faut lire : *nāṭyaṃ sattve pratiṣṭhitam* [NŚ XXII 1b] et comprendre: *sāttvike tv abhinaye nāṭyaṃ pratiṣṭhitam*' (Bansat-Boudon 1992: 364 n. 366).

This *sattva* coincides, at the beginning of the process, with mental concentration or intentness, which we can now translate as ‘mindfulness.’

According to Bharata, the enactment that excels in *sattva* guarantees a superior performance (NŚ 22.2ab: *sattvātirikto ’bhinayo jyeṣṭha ity abhidhīyate*). Abhinavagupta explains it as the enactment where the *sāttvikābhinaya* prevails over the vocal and the bodily elements, i.e. the enactment that is aptly brought to excellence, to a state of presence before the audience, because pleasure culminates in *rasa* (ABh *ad* 22.2, vol. 3, p. 150: *suṣṭhu samyag abhimukhābhāvaṃ sauṣṭhavaṃ nīto bhavati rasaparyantatvāt prīter iti bhāvah*). A performance in which the *sāttvikābhinaya* is less developed than the other two, on the contrary, does not produce an enactment in the fullest sense. Abhinavagupta explains that to enact dramatically means to produce a cognition similar to a direct perception, whose soul is the occurrence of the generalization of the emotion. That is why theatre is said to be based on *sattva*.¹¹²

Abhinavagupta’s explanation of the *sattva* of theatre, characterizing the *sāttvikābhinaya*, draws on a well-known etymology of *abhinaya* as that which brings the objects directly in front of the spectator. In this sense we can understand the *sāttvikābhinaya* as that which communicates the emotions in a particularly intense way.¹¹³ This is achieved through the actor’s mindfulness, his privileged instrument for producing the visible signs of those emotions, which renders them vividly present and life-like, triggering the aesthetic experience of the spectator, where the generalization of the emotion (*cittavṛttisādhāraṇatā*, working here as a synonym of *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*), artfully achieved through the enactment, is followed by the sympathetic response and identification of the spectators, culminating in *rasa*.¹¹⁴

¹¹² ABh *ad* 22.2, vol. 3, p. 150: *yadi tv itarāpekṣayā sāttviko nyūnas tarhi abhinaya-kriyā svarūpenāpūrṇā saṃpadyata ity arthaḥ | sāttvikābhāve hy abhinayakriyā nāmāpi nonmīlati | abhinayanam hi cittavṛttisādhāraṇatāpattiprāṇasākṣātkāraṇakāpādhyava-sāyasamṃpādanam iti, ata evoktam sattve nātyam pratiṣṭhitam iti*].

¹¹³ For a close parallel in Kumārasvāmin’s commentary on the *Pratāparudrīya*, see Cuneo and Ganser forthcoming.

¹¹⁴ Another mention of the taxonomy of acting based on the degrees of *sattva* is found in the chapter on acting through hand gestures. It clarifies that the presence of *sattva* depends first of all on the type of scene to be enacted, the actor’s mindfulness being only its necessary consequence. See ABh *ad* 9.173.

Let us now move to the other dimensions of *sattva* evoked above and turn to the procedure by which an actor transforms this mental concentration from its unmanifest form to its outer manifestations, tears, orrillation, etc., conceived as its qualities.

5.2.3 *Sattva as prāṇa*

The explanation of the physiology of *sattva* is found in the commentary on Bharata's verse about the unmanifest *sattva* and its visible symptoms.¹¹⁵ The link between the internal *sattva* and the external one is in fact explained there in clear terms as the transfer of a purely mental phenomenon (*cittavyṛtti*) that ends up pervading also the body.

What Bharata calls *sattva* is this psycho-somatic element that has the capacity to cross the boundaries between inner feeling and outer expression: 'In this [passage] the mental mode itself [resides] on the plane of awareness. Once it is transferred, it ends up pervading also the body. And that very [mental mood that gets transferred] takes the name of *sattva*' (*iha cittavyṛttir eva saṃvedanabhūmau saṃkrāntā deham api vyāpnoti. saiva ca sattvam ucyate*, ABh ad 22.3, vol. 3, p. 152).¹¹⁶ The whole difficulty of this passage lies in understanding how a mental mood can move from the psy-

¹¹⁵ NS 22.3: *avyaktarūpaṃ sattvaṃ hi vijñeyaṃ bhāvasaṃśrayam | yathāsthānara-sopetaṃ romāñcāsṛādibhir guṇaiḥ ||*

¹¹⁶ It is indeed tempting to read *saṃvedanabhūmau* with *saṃkrāntā*, '[the *cittavyṛtti*] transferred to the plane of awareness,' were it not for the likely equation of *saṃvedana* with *saṃvit*, the term used immediately thereafter to describe the specifically *initial* condition of the unmanifest *sattva* (later followed by *prāṇa*, and finally the body). The sense would rather require an ablative of provenance, **saṃvedanabhūmeḥ*: '[the *cittavyṛtti*] transferred from the plane of consciousness [it pervades also the body].' This ablative meaning finds indeed a parallel a few lines below, in a passage that resumes the same position and introduces another type of *sattva* (see below): *saṃvedanarūpāt prasṛtaṃ yat sattvaṃ tad vicāritam, anyat tu dehadharmatvenaiva sthitaṃ sāttvikam* (ABh ad 22.3, vol. 3, p. 153). Perceiving the difficulty, Filliozat (1963: 341) seems to take *saṃvedana* as a larger term including a series of mental processes that end up in the body: 'Ce qui est appelé ici *sattva* est cette activité de la sensibilité qui ayant parcouru tout le terrain de la conscience pure pénètre même le corps.' Malinar (2010: 20) understands *saṃvedana* as sensibility, a sort of middle ground between the mental and the bodily. Reaching the plane of *saṃvedana* works here as a sort of *conditio sine qua non* for the mental state to be felt and consciously realized, i.e. to become *sattva* and therefore permeate the body and produce reactions on it.

chic to the physical plane. Here this is equated with a transfer of *sattva*. Abhinavagupta provides an indication when he adds *prāṇa* as a new element:

In this regard, moreover, the unmanifest *sattva*, not descended from the two planes of consciousness and vital breath, has to be known only on the basis of the chapter on the *bhāvas* (i.e. NS 7). And its qualities that have attained the limits of the body—horripilation and the others—have also been stated to some extent there [in the chapter on the *bhāvas*].¹¹⁷

The *prāṇa*, or vital breath, functions here as an intermediate element between the mental mood and the bodily manifestation, and *sattva* is said to abide in these three planes and to move between them. The direction is always from a subtle, mental plane, to the physical one, passing through the *prāṇa*. If *sattva* is a mental mood (*cittavytti*)—namely an emotional state (*bhāvasaṃśraya*)—that pervades also the body, one may say that the physical reactions to those internal moods are also ultimately emotional in nature. From the point of view of the spectator, the specific emotion of the character can be understood only with reference to a particular *rasa*, since their display alone can be traced to various causes, as pointed out earlier.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ ABh ad 22.3, vol. 3, p. 152: *tatra cāvyaaktaṃ saṃvītprāṇabhūmidvayānīpatitaṃ yat sattvaṃ tad bhāvādhyāsaṃśrayatvenaiva vijñeyam | tasya ca ye guṇā dehāpariyantāṃ prāptā dharmā* [Ēd. dharmā^o] *romāñcādayaḥ te 'pi tatraivoktāḥ kiṃcīt |* Considering that the unmanifest *sattva* should abide on the plane of consciousness alone, in the form of the eight *sāttvikabhāvas* before they turn into their physical attributes, Bansat-Boudon (1991: 204–205) proposes to correct the text and read *saṃvītprāṇa[deha]bhūmidvayānīpatitaṃ*, ‘Quant au [*sattva*] non manifesté (*avyakta*) qui, [du niveau] de la conscience (*saṃvīt*), n’est pas descendu au double plan du souffle (*prāṇa*) [et du corps] [...]’. We think, instead, that the *avyakta sattva* should include the double plane of consciousness and *prāṇa*, as is known from the chapter on the *bhāvas*. This could be an allusion to a further discussion on *sattva* as *prāṇa* in Abhinavagupta’s lost commentary on this chapter. Part of these lost developments might have found their way into Hemacandra’s *Kāvyaṇuśāsana* (see Cuneo and Ganser forthcoming).

¹¹⁸ See Abhinavagupta’s explanation of the compound *yathāsthānārasopetaṃ*: ‘The expression “according to the place” (*yathāsthāna*) means “a locus in relation to a *rasa*,” as for example, a (superior) man and woman in relation to *śṛṅgāra*, Demons and Dānavas in relation to *raudra*, an inferior character in relation to *bhayānaka*. That *sattva* is accompanied by, i.e. connected with, the various *rasas* without transgressing that [locus]. In [Bharata’s] verse the word *bhāva* [in *bhāvasaṃśrayam*] means “[based on] the chapter on the *bhāvas*”.’ (*yathāsthānam iti*

The vital breath, although sharing the unmanifest dimension of *sattva*, is set at the frontier between the purely mental and the bodily *sattva*, and allows indeed the communication between the two spheres (ABh *ad* 22.3, vol. 3, p. 153: *cittavyṭtirūpaṃ yat sattvaṃ tad bhūkāyasamkrāntapṛāṇadehadharmatāvasād bhavad api* [...] ‘That *sattva*, consisting in a mental mood, exists also on account of its being a property of the body, when *pṛāṇa* is transferred to the gross body [...]’). The specification that *sattva* is, in its first unmanifest stage, a *cittavyṭti* may suggest that a general theory of how emotions assume a physical form is intended here. The term ‘*cittavyṭti*’ is normally used by Abhinavagupta to designate the various states (the *sthāyi-*, the *vyabhicāri-*, and the *sāttvika- bhāvas*) in their outmost generality: emotions in the world and in the fictional world of drama. As we have seen, actual worldly emotions do not belong in the experience of the actor, unless we understand that this emotive state is indeed the first product of mindfulness and itself a form of *sattva* in its subtlest form of *cittavyṭti*.

In any case, from the point of view of the actor, not only is the production of *sattva* a conscious process, achieved through the control of the mind (and hence of his own emotionality), but it is also the result of a ‘semi-yogic’ technique that involves the conscious control over the breathing processes, the *pṛāṇa*, in order to obtain the visible signs of the emotions required by the dramatic situation. In the first chapter of the *Abhinavabhāratī*, we find one clear hint to a technique for fixing the *pṛāṇa* in the body and obtain the visible manifestations of the *sāttvikabhāvas*.

Should one place the breath between the eye-brows, one has paralysis; tears relate to the eyes; perspiration, in the heart; tremor, in

yasya rasasya yat sthānaṃ, tadyathā śṅgārasya (uttamau) strīpūṃsau raudrasya rakṣodānavādīḥ, bhayānakasyādhamaprakṛtiḥ, tadanatikrameṇa rasesūpetam sambaddham tat sattvam | bhāvasābenātra bhāvādhyāyaḥ (uktaḥ), ABh *ad* 22.3, vol. 3, p. 152). This passage clarifies that the internal manifestations of *sattva* are known through their external symptoms only in relation to a certain character and to the whole emotional configuration, here indicated by the word *rasa*. The reference to the chapter on the *bhāvas* shows that the actor should be acquainted with the complex emotional configurations that are determinant for his choice of the right display of the *sāttvikabhāvas*. Chapter seven lists the various *sāttvika-* and *vyabhicāri-bhāvas* appropriate to the *rasas* (NS 7.108–118). Abhinavagupta’s interpretation of NS 22.3 is a response to a very different understanding of the same passage by Śrī Śaṅkuka and others (*ibid.* pp. 150–152), partly translated in Pollock 2016: 84.

the anus; horripilation, in the forehead; change of colour, in the face; breaking of the voice, in the throat; fainting, in the interior of the nose.¹¹⁹

Interestingly, this verse is not given in connection with the description of acting techniques, but in the commentary on Bharata's verse justifying the teaching of the knowledge of theatre to actors, who are said to be 'seers who know the secrets of the Vedas' (*vedaguhyajñā ṛṣayah*, NŚ 1.23ab). The secrets, explains Abhinavagupta, are those of the inner self, and the ability of actors in this regard consists in their capacity to bring about the psychophysical reactions. Again, their achievement through the *sattva* and the mental effort required from the mind—*sattvaṃ manahprayatnanirvartyam*—are stressed with regard to the actor's technique of breath control, worthy of a yogin.¹²⁰

The ideal actor is therefore credited to be in complete mastery of his emotionality, including the capacity to turn his mind to any part of the body, via a controlled directionality of the breath, in order to obtain the affective effects that in ordinary life escape one's conscious control. It should moreover be stressed that Abhinavagupta links this capacity of self control, investing the mind and cultivated through the greatest efforts, to the possibility for an actor to achieve the supreme goal of mankind when he states in the same passage: *naṭasyāpi paramapurūṣārthalābho dhāraṇādivasāt*.¹²¹

5.2.4 *Sattva as temperament*

We start to get the clear impression that *sattva*, in its threefold dimension of mental mood, breath, and bodily reaction, should actually relate to the character too, or, better even, to the real-life person and, only by reflection, to the fictional character that the actor impersonates on stage.

¹¹⁹ ABh *ad* 1.23, p. 17: *nyasyet prāṇaṃ bhruvor madhye stambho bāṣpaś ca cākṣuṣaḥ | svedo hṛdi gude kampaḥ pulako mūrdhni vaktrataḥ | vaivaraṇyam svaritaṃ kaṇṭhe pralayo nāsikāntare ||*.

¹²⁰ As noted above, the verse of Bharata at the basis of these considerations was among the many eulogistic statements on the actor found in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, for which see Ganser and Cuneo 2012.

¹²¹ ABh *ad* 1.23, p. 17.

There is yet another *sattva*, says Abhinavagupta, which manifests exclusively on the body in the form of ‘ornaments of gesture’ (*ceṣṭālaṃkāra*), the already mentioned twenty ornaments, or *sāttvikālaṃkāras*, to follow the Sanskrit designation coined by Bansat-Boudon. These are given by Bharata in the chapter on *sāmānyābhinaya* in the verses on the *sāttvikālaṃkāras* (NŚ 22.4–6):

alaṃkāras tu nāṭyajñair jñeyā bhāvarasāśrayāḥ |
yauvane ’bhyadhikāḥ strīṇāṃ vikārā vaktragātrajāḥ ||
ādau trayo ’ṅgajās teṣāṃ daśa svābhāvikaḥ pare |
ayatnajās punaḥ sapta rasabhāvopabryṃhitāḥ ||
dehātmakaṃ bhavet sattvaṃ sattvād bhāvaḥ samutthitaḥ |
bhāvāt samutthito hāvo hāvād dhelā samutthitā ||

But the ornaments based on *bhāvas* and *rasas* are known by the experts on theatre as the additional modifications of women during youth, arising on their face and limbs. Among them, the first three are ‘bodily,’ the successive ten are ‘natural,’ and the next seven are ‘effortless.’ These are enhanced by *rasas* and *bhāvas*. *Sattva* will be centred in the body, from *sattva* arises *bhāva* (‘feeling’), from *bhāva* arises *hāva* (‘excitement’), and from *hāva* arises *helā* (‘passion’).

According to Abhinavagupta, these verses introduce a further sense of *sattva* that is part of the gross or manifest *sattva*, and thus differs from the unmanifest *sattva*, the one that travels all the way from the mental plane, passing through the *prāṇa* and attaining the limits of the physical body. First Abhinavagupta recalls the primary meaning of *sattva*, before explaining the *sattva* of the ornaments of gesture:

That *sattva* in the form of a mental mood, which exists also on account of being a property of the body, when the *prāṇa* is transferred to the gross body (*bhūkāya*), has been described in detail in the chapter on *bhāvas* and in the one on *rasas*.¹²² Why then mentioning this [*sattva*] again? Why should the form of this material *sattva* (*bhūsattva*) be stated? Bharata answers with the fourth

¹²² The compound *bhūkāyasamkrāntapṛāṇadehadharmatāvāsād* is not straightforward, but we would like to keep *prāṇa* on the side of the unmanifest *sattva*, or as a middle way between the mind and the body. Bansat-Boudon translates differently and reads this passage in support of a twofold materiality that is opposed to the *avyakta-sattva*: ‘Bien qu’[on perçoit qu’il existe du fait d’attributs qui, se transférant [du plan de la conscience] à [celui de] ce corps terrestre, relèvent du souffle et du corps [...]]’ (see also n. 117).

verse. The intention is: that *sattva*, which is displaced from the form of consciousness, has already been discussed. But that *sāttvika* that abides as a property of the body alone is different, since it is seen only in superior [characters] that are *sāttvika*. In this regard, superiority for women culminates in the amorous *rasa*, while for men it rests on the valorous *rasa*.¹²³

This second form of material *sattva* characterizing the *sāttvikā-lamkāras* finds its justification and basis first of all in the *sattva* of superior characters, which Abhinavagupta explains as the predominance of *sattva* over *rajas* and *tamas*, hence as part of the triad of *guṇas*: ‘The ornaments of gesture do not find another support than the form of superior women, made of *sattva*. They are called *sāttvika*, in the first place, since they are not found in bodies affected by *rajas* and *tamas*.’¹²⁴ With regard to their primarily physical nature, this is connected in more explicit terms to the lack of an intermediate stage which, in the case of the *sāttvikabhāvas*, was represented by the plane of *prāṇa*: ‘[The ornaments] arise on their face and limbs, i.e. they consist of mere bodily modifications. Regarding the ornaments of gesture (*ceṣṭālamkāra*), in fact, no further form has been indicated, such as an obstruction in the throat on the plane of the internal breath in the case of tears and the other [*sāttvikabhāvas*].’¹²⁵ Similarly, that which was the first stage of development for the *sattva* of the *sāttvikabhāvas*, i.e. their nature of consciousness modes, is excluded from the *sāttvikālamkāras*:

¹²³ ABh, *avataraṇikā ad 22.4*, vol. 3, p. 153: *cittavyতিরূপম যত সত্ত্বাম তদ বহু-
কায়সাম্করান্তপ্রাণেহাদহর্মাতবাসাদ ভবাদ অপি ভব্বাদধ্যয়ে রাসাধ্যয়ে চা বিতাত্যা
নিরূপিতম ইতি পুনঃ কিম তদাবহিধানেনা | কিম তস্য বহুসত্ত্বাস্যা রূপম বক্তব্যম ইতি
আহা অলম্কারস তু নাত্যজ্ঞানৈর ইত্যাদি | অয়ম অভিপ্রায়ঃ—সমবেদানরূপত প্রসত্যম যত
সত্ত্বাম তদ বিচারিতম | অন্যত তু দেহাদহর্মাতবেনািবা স্তহিতম সাত্ত্বিকম, যতঃ সাত্ত্বি-
কেশ্ব এবত্তমেসু দৃশ্যতে, তত্র স্ত্রীণাম উত্তমাত্বম স্রীগীরারাসাপর্যন্তম এবা, পুরু-
শাণাম তু বীরারাসাবিশ্রান্তম |.*

¹²⁴ ABh, *avataraṇikā ad 22.4*, vol. 3, p. 153: *na ca sattvamayam uttamastrirūpam
vimucyānyatrāmī ceṣṭālamkāra viniveśam labhante | sāttvikās tāvad rājasatā-
masaśarīreṣu asaṃbhavāt |.*

¹²⁵ ABh *ad 22.4*, vol. 3, p. 154: *vaktragātrajā iti dehavikāramātrārūpā eva param
na hi yathā bāspādīnām antahprāṇabhuvi kaṅṭharodhādīrūpam lakṣyate tathā ceṣṭā-
lamkāraṇām |.* We already saw the example of tears stopping in the throat in 5.2.1,
when talking about the twofold nature, internal and external, of *sattva*. The
example is clearly working on the level of ordinary people/fictional characters,
not of the actor, who is not really sad and will rather obtain tears by consciously
placing the *prāṇa* in the eyes, as seen in section 5.2.2.

The ornaments of gesture [are stated in this chapter, not in the one on the *bhāvas* or *rasas*, unlike the *sāttvikabhāvas*,] since they belong merely to the body, and they do not have the nature of mental modes. Saying that “they are the support for the *bhāvas*” means that they enact (*abhinayanti*) the state of delight (*ratibhāva*) in a general form. For they are seen profusely in youth, they are still unmanifest in childhood, and disappear in the old age.¹²⁶

The theatrically displayed *sāttvikālaṃkāras* thus reveal the characters’ *sattva* (their superior status) and hence their fitness for the two main sentiments assigned in Indian theatre to men and women: heroism and love.¹²⁷

Saying that the *sāttvikālaṃkāras* are not mental moods, yet enact a *bhāva*, amounts to saying that their status is just that of consequents (*anubhāvas*), although of a very special type, since they can be found even in the absence of a determinant (*vibhāva*) that normally provokes the character’s emotion. The way the bodily *sāttvikālaṃkāras* find their first manifestation in the heroine during youth is explained in fact through her *sattva*, which awakens her internal predisposition to love. Abhinavagupta clearly interprets NŚ 22.6ab from the point of view of the character as the awakening, through the *sattva* of the young heroine, of the residual traces of the emotion that manifest on her body in the form of the first three ornaments, while the others need an appropriate *vibhāva* to manifest:

And these [bodily modifications] arise from the sole presence of the body, through a general state of delight, experienced in the previous life [and presently] awakened by the *sattva*. These alone are called *aṅga*, i.e. *bhāva*, *hāva* and *helā*. But others appear in the body when it is penetrated by the emotion of delight, which becomes evident on account of the appearance of a particular *vibhāva* appropriate to the present life.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ ABh ad 22.4, vol. 3, p. 154: *yata ete kevalam alaṃkāra dehamātraniṣṭhāḥ, na tu cittavyṭtīrūpāḥ | bhāvasaṃśrayā iti ratibhāvamātram abhinayantīty arthaḥ | te hi yauvena udriktā dṛśyante bālye tv anudbhinnā vārdhake tirobhūtāḥ |*

¹²⁷ As Bhaṭṭa Tauta explains it: *te ca dṛṣṭāḥ santaḥ uttameyaṃ śṛṅgārasamucitēti [...] na tu lāvanyādivad anabhineyā eva śarīravikārā anubhāvā eva* (ABh ad 2.4, vol. 3, p. 153) ‘When they are seen [on stage] they convey the idea that “this superior woman is fit for love.” [...] However, unlike charm and other qualities that cannot in any way be an object of enactment, these bodily modifications [that are the ornaments of gesture] are just consequents.’

¹²⁸ ABh ad 22.6, vol. 3, p. 154: *te ca prāgjanmābhyastaratibhāvamātreṇa sattvo-*

Without delving into the distinctions of the *sāttvikālaṃkāras* for male and female characters,¹²⁹ it should be stressed again that the bodily *sattva*, from which the first ornaments arise, is the *sattva* that has ‘reached’ the body of women of a superior type, the heroines that are the subject and object of love in Sanskrit drama.¹³⁰ From a theatrical viewpoint, this is all that matters. This *sattva* can now be understood as the temperament that determines the behaviour of superior women, marked as it is by coqueries and grace. However, the specification that this *sattva* has attained a bodily condition in certain characters said to be *sāttvika* strongly suggests a transfer of *sattva*, possibly from the mental plane—the *sattva* that predominates in those people less affected by *rajas* and *tamas*—as it shapes their body and behaviours. This *sattva* may also have an inner, unmanifest component,¹³¹ but it is never experienced by the character as an emotion circumscribed to a definite set of causes and effects. On the contrary, it reveals a generalized and innate capacity to feel and display the emotions appropriate to superior natures, a kind of basic sensibility that pervades the whole life in its various ages, just distinguished into a feminine and a masculine type, as Bansat-Boudon notes: ‘Avec les *sāttvikālaṃkāra*, au contraire, le corps cesse d’être le vecteur transitoire de l’émotion

dbuddhena [sattvād buddhena E₁₍₄₎] dehamātre sati bhavanti, ta evāṅgajā ucyanṭe, tathā bhāvo hāvo helā ca | anye tv adyatanañjanmasamucitaviśiṣṭavibhāvānupraveśasphuṭibhavadratibhāvānuviddhe dehe pariśphuranti]. Bansat-Boudon points out the specificity of the first three *alaṃkāras* as follows: ‘Les trois *aṅgaja*: *bhāva*, *hāva*, *helā*, se définissent ainsi comme les premières manifestations d’un sentiment qui lentement se fait jour à travers les cœurs et les corps. Au reste, tout le temps qu’il fait l’expérience de la triade des *aṅgaja*, le sujet amoureux attend que se présente un objet—un *ālambanavibhāva* dans la terminologie du théâtre—digne de son amour. C’est donc qu’on peut aimer absolument, en l’absence même d’un être à aimer’ (Bansat-Boudon 1991: 210).

¹²⁹ The only analysis so far attempted is Bansat-Boudon 1991.

¹³⁰ ABh *ad* 22.4, vol. 3, p. 155: *dehātmaṃ bhavet sattvaṃ iti | śarīrasvabhāvaṃ tāvat sattvaṃ sambhāvyaṭe uttamaśarīratāṃ prāptam ity arthaḥ* |.

¹³¹ In suggesting the possibility of a twofold dimension of *sattva* in the production of the *sāttvikālaṃkāras*, although mainly from the point of view of a character, we wish to nuance the interpretation proposed by Bansat-Boudon that the *sāttvikabhāvas* are always on the side of the *avyaktasattva* and the *sāttvikālaṃkāra* on that of the *vyaktasattva* (Bansat-Boudon 1991: 205). However, the focus of the actor’s effort might well be the emotional component of a character’s *sattva*, on which the actor will eventually calibrate a conscious activation of *prāṇa* while his focus in the *sāttvikālaṃkāra* will be on their display through the various actor’s means, with a predominance of the *sāttvikābhīnaya*.

pour devenir le lieu où elle s'inscrit durablement, la scène où— nous y reviendrons—elle est théâtralement exhibée' (1991: 206).

Following Bansat-Boudon's intuition, whereby the body of the actress becomes a theatrical scene on which to exhibit the play of love, it is worth noting that, just as *sattva* is clearly attributed to the character, so is *abhinaya* in Bharata's definition of *bhāva*, the first of the three *aṅgajāsāttvikālaṃkāra*: *vāgaṅgamukharāgaiś ca sattvenābhinayena ca | kaver antargataṃ bhāvaṃ bhāvayan bhāva ucyate || NŚ 22.8 ||*. Abhinavagupta interprets *bhāva* as the *alaṃkāra* that indicates the emotion (again *bhāva*) of the young girl, in the form of a disposition (*vāsanā*).¹³² More crucially, Abhinavagupta interprets the *ca* in *sattvenābhinayena ca* to indicate that the ornament called *bhāva*, characterized by voice, body movement, colouring of the face, and *sattva*, becomes a real-life 'enactment,' as it were, of that emotion still latent in the female character (*caśabda eka ivaśabdārthe, abhinayatulyo vāgādibhir lakṣito bhāva ity arthaḥ, ABh ad 22.8, vol. 3, p. 156*). Being a property of the body, what the *sattva* of the *sāttvikālaṃkāra* has in common with the *sattva* of the *sāttvikabhāvas* in their gross form—their *anubhāva* aspect of tears, etc.—is that it enacts an emotional state, even if just a latent and general 'emotivity,' as if in a theatrical performance. The only difference, as noted before, is that in theatre the display of women's coquetties and of sudden emotions is a matter of control and conscious effort, always at a distance from real feelings.

5.2.5 *Sattva as guṇa and sattva as mind*

As mentioned before, some very common senses of the term *sattva* in Sanskrit literature at large include the subtle principle of reality in Sāṃkhya philosophy and the mind itself, because it is in the mind that *sattva* as a subtle principle is found in its purest form. These semantic threads are skillfully woven together by Abhinavagupta in the etymological derivation of *sattva* taken up on two occasions while commenting on the formation of *sāttvatī*, the 'Grand Manner.'

In the chapter on the *vyttis*, the *sāttvatī* is explained as the locus of *sattva*, namely the mind in which *sat* resides: 'The quality rela-

¹³² For the text and translation of this passage, see Bansat-Boudon 1991: 215, n. 53.

ted to that which contains *sat* is the function of the mind. That in which there is *sat* (being), i.e. the *sattva* that is light, is the *sattva* that is the mind. [*Sāttvatī*] is that which concerns it' (ABh ad 20.41, vol. 3, p. 96: *sātvato guṇaḥ mānaso vyāpāraḥ | sat sattvaṃ prakāśaḥ tad vidyate yatra tat sattvaṃ manaḥ, tasmīn bhavaḥ*). The term *sattva* in the definition of *sāttvatī* was related by Bharata to the *sattvaguṇa*. This probably referred to a characteristic of the character, a valorous hero, rather than of the actor. In this case, *sattva* is given as a synonym of the mind and, as Abhinavagupta explains, the abode of *sat*, or light (*prakāśa*), a significant term in the Pratyabhijñā system. We may interpret it in the light of another gloss of *sat*, always in the explanation of the Grand Manner: '*Sāttvatī*, the Grand Manner, is related to the psychophysical [domain] and consists of the function of the mind. The word *sat* [in the term *sattva* "mindfulness"] means awareness, which consists in clarity.¹³³ *Sattva* is the place where such [awareness that is *sat*] occurs, i.e. the mind. This [*sāttvatī*] is the [Manner] of such [a *sattva* that is the mind]' (ABh ad 1.41: *manovyāpārarūpā sāttvikī sāttvatī | sad iti prakhyārūpaṃ samvedanam | tad yatrāsti tat sattvaṃ manaḥ | tasyeyam iti* |). The terms *prakāśa* and *prakhyā* appear together in a passage of the *Īśvaraṇpratyabhijñāvivṛtivimarśinī* that comments on ĪPK 1.2.8, where the sentient nature of the *buddhi* is maintained against the Sāṃkhya view that the *buddhi* is insentient but reflects the light of the *puruṣa* to cognize its object. There (ĪPVV, p. 150) Abhinavagupta quotes the definition of *sattva* in the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* as part of the triad of *guṇas* (*sattvaṃ laghu prakāśakam*, SK 13), and the one in the *Yogasūtrabhāṣya*, where the *sattva* of the mind is characterized as luminosity (*prakhyārūpaṃ hi cittasattvam*, YBh ad 1.2), which is opposed to activity (*pravṛtti*) and stasis (*sthiti*), the characteristics of *rajas* and *tamas* with which *sattva* gets mixed up. Besides confirming the view that *sattva* in the *sāttvatī vṛtti* is intended in the sense of *guṇa*,¹³⁴ the interesting point in these inter-tex-

¹³³ Bansat-Boudon (1991: 202, n. 13) translates: 'Par 'sat' [il faut entendre] la conscience en tant qu'elle est conscience de soi (*prakhyā*).' Our translation differs in that it takes into account the use of the term *prakhyā* in the definition of *cittasattva* of the *Yogasūtrabhāṣya* that Abhinavagupta implicitly borrows here, as shown below.

¹³⁴ Independently from the *sāttvatī*, the concept of *sattva* is understood as the *guṇa* of Sāṃkhya in Viśvanātha's *Sāhityadarpaṇa* as he states in his autocommenta-

tual uses of some of the terms related to *sattva* in other traditions is that Abhinavagupta associates it closely with the mind, just as in the case of the actor's *sattva*.

That formidable capacity by which a performer is able to direct the mind, and thereby control his psychophysical production, is not the exclusive appanage of the trained actor. Even a 'common' person can master it, when the quality of *sattva* predominates in his mind. Thus, Abhinavagupta explicitly assigns *sattva* as mental concentration to certain characters who can feign the appropriate emotions at will, even when or precisely because their superior nature makes them immune to the lowest emotive states, such as fear. This is confirmed in a passage that talks about the expression of feigned fear, or fear arisen from *sattva* (*sattvasamuttham* in NS 6.71). The discussion revolves around how to interpret this *sattva*: is it the actor's *sattva* or the character's *sattva*? Let us look at Bharata's verses describing the enactment in the *rasa bhayānaka*:

Fear [is to be enacted] by contractions of the limbs, mouth and eyes, by paralysis of the legs, unsteady glances, agitation, weariness, dryness of the mouth, palpitation of the heart, and horripilation. This should be natural fear. The one arisen from *sattva* has to be enacted in the very same way. However, this feigned [fear] is to be rendered by these same states, [acted out] with graceful gestures.¹³⁵

Abhinavagupta comments:

[By fear] 'arisen from *sattva*' is intended [the fear] that has its origin in psychophysical intentness (*sattva*), i.e. in mental concentration. Such is the actor's skill, and this is the object of the whole [treatise], according to the Ṭikākāra. However, this is untrue. All this section [on the *rasas*] is aimed indeed at the skill of both the actor and the poet, because in the world such words as determinants, consequents, enactments and so forth are not commonly used. Therefore, this is the meaning here: to begin with, this is the natural fear, which pertains to inferior characters, whose nature is

ry called the *Sudhākara ad 3.134*: *sattvaṃ nāma svātmaviśramapṛakāśakārī kaścanāntaro dharmah* |.

¹³⁵ NS 6.70–71: *gātramukhadṛṣṭibhedair ūrustambhābhivīkṣaṇodvegaiḥ | sannamukhaśaḥḍayaśpandanaromodgamaś ca bhayam || etat svabhāvajam syāt sattvasamuttham tathāiva kartavyam | punar ebhir eva bhāvaiḥ kṛtakam mṛduceṣṭitaiḥ kāryam ||*.

pervaded by *rajas* and *tamas*. Moreover, even for those [characters] in whose mind *sattva* predominates, [the fear] arisen from *sattva*, i.e. determined by an effort, can be brought about by these very consequents. However, they are [rendered] with graceful gestures, because [in their case] that [fear] is feigned. The word ‘but’ suggests the specificity [of this kind of feigned fear].¹³⁶

Following a recognizable pattern, Abhinavagupta builds on the contrast inaugurated by Bharata between a genuinely felt and uncontrolled emotion, such as fear with its involuntary bodily reactions, and a fictive emotion arisen from *sattva*. He qualifies the latter as occasioned by mental intentness, brought about through effort. However, unlike in his previous analyses of the actor’s *sattva*, and against the *Ṭikākāra*, Abhinavagupta attributes the capacity to feign emotions and their symptoms—including those that are usually the result of a *lapsus corporis*—to the character, and therefore to humans in general. Those superior natures whose minds abound in *sattva* can in fact display the symptoms of an emotion at will if the situation requires it, even if the predominance of the *guṇa* characterized by clarity and awareness would actually make them impermeable to the uncontrolled sway of their intellectual organ, the mind, towards the lowermost emotions. On the contrary, lower natures dominated by *rajas* and *tamas* will be naturally prone to emotions such as fear and their unbridled display.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Abh *ad* 6.71, vol. 1, pp. 321–322: *sattvasamuttham iti | sattvaṃ mānaḥsamādhānaṃ tajjanmakam iti naṭasyeyaṃ śikṣā. sā ca sarvaviṣayeti ṭikākārah | tad idam asat | kavinaṭasīkṣārtham eva sarvam idaṃ prakaraṇam | loke vibhāvānubhāvābhīnayādīvyavahārābhāvāt | tasmād ayam atrārthaḥ—etat tāvat bhayaṃ svabhāvajam rajastamahprakṛtīnām nīcānām ity arthaḥ | ye ’pi ca sattvapradhānās teṣāṃ sattvasamuttham prayatnaktam ebhir evānubhāvaiḥ kāryam | kintu mṛduceṣṭitaiḥ yatas tat kṛtakam | punaḥśabdo viśeṣadyotakaḥ |*

¹³⁷ Abhinavagupta is clear about this point, as he comments in the same passage about another kind of fear, described by Bharata as ‘a feigned fear that derives from offending the teacher or the king’ (*gurunṛpayor aparādhāt kṛtakaś ca bhayānako jñeyah || NS 6.69cd*). Abh *ad loc*, vol. 1, p. 320: *bhayaṃ tāvat strīnīcābālādīṣu vakyate | nottamamadhyamaṃ prakṛtiṣu | te ’pi tu gurubhyo rājñaś ca bhayaṃ darśayeyuḥ tadabhāve [E₁₍₂₎; tadbhāve E₁₍₄₎] ’pi | evaṃ sutarām uttamatvaṃ bhavati | ‘To begin with, fear will be said to pertain to women, inferior characters, children, etc., and not to characters of middle and superior type. But even these should show fear for the teachers and for the king, even if that [fear] is absent [in them]. In this way, their superior nature results indeed augmented.’ The external signs of this feigned fear, continues Abhinavagupta, look genuine to the onlookers, although they are artfully produced. Ibid., pp. 320–321: *anubhāvāś ca**

The parallel is just intimated in the passage, but can now be spelled out: just like actors, noble natures are in control of their *sattva*, i.e. their mental sphere including the emotions that extend up to the limits of the body, through the vital breath. And just like actors, they will not refrain from expressing outwardly the whole spectrum of emotions, but they will render them as on a theatre stage, with a certain grace and detachment, displaying at will and in a controlled fashion the right emotion in the right situation.¹³⁸ This reminds us of the ideal of the *sahjādaya* or *rasika*, the aesthetically sensitive man, whose lack of effort is typically praised by Abhinavagupta and his predecessor Utpaladeva as an expression of ‘aristocratic nonchalance,’ an attitude that applies even to the spiritual path. Actually, an effort is required by the actor and by the noblest of natures in taming one’s mind, just as on a spiritual path. However, the skilfulness lies in concealing this exertion under a certain elegance of movements, a kind of enacted sensibility characterized by grace.¹³⁹ Apart from savouring the world like a theatrical performance, the ideal aristocratic man is also a skilled actor who is performing his role in the world-theatre.

5.2.6 *Abhinavagupta’s sattva unravelled*

To wrap up what we have learned about *sattva* in the grand synthesis of Abhinavagupta, we may say that all the nuances of this highly polysemic term are kept in balance and in tension through the hermeneutical feat that is the *Abhinavabhāratī*. Although no real chro-

tathā sliṣṭās tatra kriyante loke yena satyata eva bhīto ’yam iti gurvādīnām pratītir bhavati | asvābhāvikatvāc ca kṛtakatvam | ‘Moreover, in such a case, the consequents are so fittingly produced in the world that the teacher and the like have the cognition: “this one is really afraid.” And since it is not spontaneous, [this fear is said to be] fictitious.’

¹³⁸ Interestingly, Abhinavagupta also mentions courtesans as an example of individuals displaying fictitious emotions. See ABh *ad* 6.71, vol. 1, p. 322. The difference lies in the grace exhibited by superior natures in the display of the symptoms of the emotions, including the psychophysical reactions such as trembling, paralysis and the like.

¹³⁹ To quote Torella’s words about the attitude of the ‘aristocratic’ yogin, ‘[n]o slow and painful ascent step by step, but only an elegant, powerful and effortless jump is effective. [...] The portrait of this very special religious man resembles more and more to that of the Indian ideal gentleman: in both we find an innate gracefulness, elegance, aesthetic resonance, disdain for plebeian efforts, easiness’ (Torella 2020: 848).

nology of the semantic shifts can be traced, and no actual genealogy of meanings with a clear origin and linear path can be reconstructed, we can now take stock of what we have achieved so far.

As we have seen, *sattva* is the highest quality of *prakṛti*, the principle of nature in the philosophy of Sāṃkhya. *Sattva* is the epitome of all that is good, pure and luminous, and —somewhat simplifying— it is thus the main constituent of the highest evolute of *prakṛti*, i.e. the mind. Thus, ‘mind’ becomes one more sense of *sattva*. The etymology of the Sanskrit term crosses the philosophical and psychological routes, and *sat-tva*, the fact of being, the essence, becomes the nature of the mind, its innate temperament, the very character of living beings (*sattva*, again). This innermost essence of the mind is its capacity to understand and feel by changing in accordance to the objects of perception, but also its capacity to direct one’s attention and intention towards specific objects without being led astray. It is but a short step from this to self-mastery. The term *sattva* now embraces both the psychological and emotional organ (*manas* or *hṛdaya*) and its faculty of self-mastery, to the point of controlling its state of excitation and activity in both quality and degree. This *sattva* becomes at the same time the origin of intention, the intention itself and the intentness, i.e. the fact of focusing one’s attention completely on something: mind and mindfulness. This semantic jumble culminates in theatrical *sattva*, the actor’s complete mastery over the mind and its faculties, the ability to feel everything, to conceive everything, and therefore to become and to be everything in ‘a free play of its faculties,’ to misquote Kant slightly.

The search for a solution to the conundrum of the actor’s sensibility has led us well beyond the promised middle-ground between Diderot’s glacial dispassion and Stanislavski’s fiery enthrallment, beyond a theory that merely accounts for ‘a trained emotionality without emotional involvement.’ The mastery of the actor’s mind over itself elevates the actor far above the persons of high nature, the heroes and noblemen who can partially control their own emotions in the service of moral and social norms. Overcoming the boundaries of societal normativity with his full self-transparency, the actor shines as a figure, a metaphor, or maybe a full-fledged incarnation of the supreme being, the non-dualist lord Śiva, who is pure, free and dynamic self-awareness.

6. Conclusion: the actor as the Lord

All the world's a stage.
Shakespeare, *As You Like It*

The ideal actor as conceptualized in Abhinavagupta's theory (or, at least, in our reconstruction thereof) represents a paradigmatically free agent, capable of controlling his actions and emotions completely thanks to his full mastery on the faculty of *sattva*, this sort of performative mindfulness that is the cornerstone of his art. Utterly different from the spectator passively immersed in the beatific contemplation of *rasa* and from the ordinary man constantly under the thrall of the vagaries of pleasure and pain, the actor freely plays. In this crucial intuition,¹⁴⁰ Abhinavagupta's aesthetic theory comes full circle to his philosophical and religious background. In the *theatrum mundi* that is *samsāra*, Śiva is the supreme actor. He plays all the roles in his wondrous *krīdā*, the Play.¹⁴¹

The metaphor of the *theatrum mundi* is well known across times and cultures. In the Sanskrit episteme, the metaphor of the universe as an artistic creation, often but not always a dramatic performance,¹⁴² is common in many religious and philosophical domains. The most frequently quoted instance is verse 59 of the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* where the *prakṛti* is compared to a female dancer (*nartakī*). The commentator Gauḍapāda clarifies that the text refers to an actress in a theatrical performance, as he mentions the *rasas*, singing and music, etc.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Scholars have often highlighted the parallels, the convergences and sometimes the divergences between Abhinavagupta's aesthetic speculation and his synthesis of non-dualistic Śaiva thought. On the convergence between aesthetic experience and mystical experience, and especially on *sāntarasa*, see Raghavan 1967; Masson and Patwardhan 1969, 1970; Bhattacharya 1972; Tubb 1985; Gerow and Aklujkar 1972; Bhattacharya 1976; Gerow 1994; and Timalina 2020. On larger consonances and dissonances between aesthetics and Śaiva thought, see Larson 1974: 1976; Patnakar 1993; Bäumer 1995, 1997, 2003, 2008; Fernández 2001; Cuneo 2016; Wenta 2018; and Torella 2020 and forthcoming.

¹⁴¹ The double entendre on the word *play* can be allowed to resonate freely in this case. See Bäumer 1995.

¹⁴² On the metaphor of *jagaccitra*, the painted canvas that is the universe, see Cuneo 2016: 46–49.

¹⁴³ *Sāṃkhyakārikā* 59 reads: *raṅgasya darśayitvā nivartate nartakī yathā nṛtyāt | puruṣasya tathātmānam prakāśya vinivartate prakṛtiḥ ||*. The relevant portion in the commentary is the following: *yathā nartakī śṛṅgārādirasair itihāsādibhāvaiś* [possibly to be corrected into *ratihāsādibhāvaiś*] *ca nibaddhagṛītavāditravṛttāni raṅgasya*

If the image of the world as a performance is by no means confined to Śaiva texts, it is within Śaiva thought that this metaphor finds its fullest development and seemingly its *raison d'être*, in terms of freedom, creativity, playfulness, detached involvement, joyful marvel, etc. The Sanskrit term *jagannāṭya* is sometimes used to refer to the metaphorical identification of the world and theatre, in which the supreme deity is both the playwright and the actor. For the sake of our argument, we may say that the metaphor has these two varieties, one in which the godhead is compared to the poet/playwright/stage-director and the other where he is compared to the actor. From a cursory survey, the former variety seems to be more common.¹⁴⁴ As an exemplification, we cite Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇa's *Stavacintāmaṇi* 59:

You have initiated the drama of the three worlds,
containing in its womb the seed of the numerous entities emitted
[by you].
Is there any other poet but you, O Destroyer [i.e. Śiva],
who might be capable of bringing it to its conclusion?¹⁴⁵

Another famous verse that refers to Śiva as the poet of the *jagannāṭya* is attributed to the lost work of Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, Abhinavagupta's predecessor in reshaping Sanskrit aesthetics.

darśayitvā kṛtakāryā nṛtyān nīvartate [...]. Commenting on *Sāṃkhyakārikā* 42, Gauḍapāda compares the subtle body that transmigrates to an actor: *yathā naṭaḥ paṭāntareṇa praviśya devo bhūtvā nirgacchati punar mānuṣaḥ punar vidūṣakaḥ, evaṃ liṅgaṃ nimittanaimittikaprasaṅgenodarāntaḥ praviśya hasti strī pumān bhavati*. This passage is translated in Bansat-Boudon 1992: 457: 'Exactement comme un acteur retiré dans la coulisse en surgit sous la forme d'un dieu, puis d'un homme et, enfin, sous celle d'un bouffon, ainsi le corps subtil, grâce à la connexion entre la cause et l'effet, s'introduit dans une matrice et en surgit sous la forme d'un éléphant, d'une femme ou d'un homme.'

¹⁴⁴ To this same variety we might also ascribe the reverse metaphor in which it is the poet with his absolute power over his subject matter who is compared to a creator god. Cf. the renowned verse found in the *Dhvanyāloka*, *vṛtti ad 3.42*: *apāre kāvyasaṃsāre kavir ekaḥ prajāpatiḥ | yathāsmāi rocate viśvaṃ tathedaṃ parivartate ||*, 'In poetry's endless worlds / the poet alone is God; / the universe revolves / according to his nod' (tr. Ingalls *et al.* 1990: 639).

¹⁴⁵ *viśvānēkaśādbijagarbhaṃ trailokyanāṭakam | prastāvya hara saṃhartuṃ tvatāḥ ko 'nyaḥ kaviḥ kṣamaḥ ||*. As highlighted in Kṣemarāja's partially lacunose commentary, Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇa is playing on the double meaning of some terms such as *bīja* and *prastāvanā*, which have both cosmological and theatrical referents. On these parallels, see Marjanovic 2011: 203–204 and Cuneo 2016: 47 n. 32.

Homage to Shiva, the poet who creates the whole universe.

Thanks to him, people every moment enjoy the *rasa* of the world's dramatic performance.¹⁴⁶

But it is the second variety of the metaphor of *jagannāṭya*, in which the actor takes centre stage, that interests us here. The *Śivasūtra* contains four aphorisms (3.9–3.12) that revolve around the parallel between the world of theatre and the world of *samsāra*.

- 3.9 The self is an actor (*nartaka ātmā*)¹⁴⁷
- 3.10 The inner self is the stage (*raṅgo 'ntarātmā*)
- 3.11 The senses are the spectators (*prekṣakāṅīndriyāṇi*)
- 3.12 Thanks to the power of insight, *sattva* is obtained (*dhīvasāt sattvasiddhiḥ*)

The commentary of Kṣemarāja (11th c.) on these *sūtras* is a mine of insightful remarks. The text has been studied and translated several times.¹⁴⁸ But it is worth mentioning that Kṣemarāja identifies the *ātman* of 3.9 with Śiva.¹⁴⁹ He also quotes the verse of Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇa cited above, and then concludes the commentary on the *sūtra* 3.9 by citing a passage that most probably comes from the lost *vivṛti* of Utpaladeva: 'When the universe is asleep, only the supreme Lord, the stage-director of the world-drama is awake.'¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Pollock 2016: 149. ABh ad 1, p. 6: *namas trailokyānirmāṇakavaye śambhave yataḥ | pratikṣaṇaṃ jagannāṭyaprayogarasiko janaḥ ||*.

¹⁴⁷ The term *nartaka* here must refer to the actor, and not a dancer, as some renderings of the passage suggest.

¹⁴⁸ Two now classic renderings are the English translation (Singh 1979) and the French one (Silburn 1980). The most reliable is Torella's updated Italian translation (Torella 2013).

¹⁴⁹ His acting is interpreted as a manifestation of the totality of the states of consciousness, all of which ultimately rest on the foundation of his truest, concealed nature (*antarvighñitasvarūpavaṣṭambhamūlam*). On the recurrence of the term *avaṣṭambha*, see below.

¹⁵⁰ *Śivasūtravimarśinī* ad 3.9, p. 90: *samsāranāṭyapravartayitā supte jagati jāgarūka eka eva parameśvaraḥ*. This phrase is likely a quotation from the lost *Vivṛti* ad *Īśvara-pratyabhijñānikā* 2.4.19, since the terminological references (*samsāranāṭya*-, *pravartayitā*- and *parameśvara*-) show that this is the passage Abhinavagupta was commenting upon in the corresponding portion of his *Vivṛtīvimarśinī* (IPVV, vol. III, p. 244): *sa ca bhramo nāṭyatulyasyāparamārthasato 'tyaktasvarūpavaṣṭambhananaṭakalpena parameśvaraprakāśena pratīgocarīkṛtasya samsārasya nāyakaḥ sūtradhārah pradhānabhūtaḥ pravartayitetivṛtte nāyako vā, yallagnaṃ viśvetivṛttam ābhāti; tata eva prathamah*. The text, which further illuminates the parallel between the actor and

Kṣemarāja's gloss on 3.10 and 3.11 further explains the metaphor of the world-theatre (*jagannāṭya*) by mobilizing the terms of aesthetic theory such as *rasa* and *camatkāra*, fully meaningful at both the cosmological and the dramaturgical level of interpretation, insofar as Śiva, in the non-dualist understanding of the different levels of manifestation, is at once the playwright, the stage-director, the performer and even the spectator of the world-drama.¹⁵¹ But it is the last of these *sūtras* that deserves a detailed treatment as it concerns *sattva*. As a first approximation we translated: 'Thanks to the power of insight, *sattva* is obtained.' Kṣemarāja comments: *dhīḥ tāttvikasvarūpavimarśanaviśāradā dhiṣaṇā tadvaśāt sattvasya sphurattātmanah sūkṣmasya āntaraparispandasya siddhir abhivyaktir bhavati | nāṭye ca tāttvikābhinayasiddhir buddhi-kauśalād eva labhyate*: 'Insight is the intellectual capacity able to reflectively cognize one's own true and real form. Thanks to this there is the obtainment, the manifestation, of *sattva*, the subtle internal vibration whose essence is refulgence. Furthermore, in theatre it is thanks to the aptitude of the intellect that success in the psychophysical enactment is reached.'¹⁵² Kṣemarāja then connects the previous *sūtra* with the following one (ŚS 3.13) through this crucial line that repeats the definition of *sattva*: *evaṃ sphurattātma-*

the supreme Lord, is translated by Ratié (2011: 589): 'Et cette illusion (*bhrama*) [consistant à identifier le corps, etc. avec le sujet] est 'première' [selon Utpaladeva] parce que cette intrigue [théâtrale] (*itivyṛtta*) 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 renaissances (*samsāra*), 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 (*nāṭa*) qui ne cesse pas de reposer dans sa nature propre [tout en interprétant tel ou tel rôle]'. Cf. also Bansat-Boudon 2016: 44.

¹⁵¹ For a full treatment of this passage, see Bäumer 1995: 38–41 and Torella 2013: 210–218.

¹⁵² Singh (1979: 158) observes: 'In the commentary on this *sūtra* also, there is *double entendre* in *Sattva* and *dhī*. *Sattva* in this context does not refer to the constituent of *Prakṛti*, but the throb of the perfect I-consciousness and *dhī* does not mean mere intelligence but *ṛtambharā prajñā*, inward awakening laden with truth. The Yogī realizes the *Sattva* (the light of the essential nature of the Self) through *dhī* (the spiritual intuition), just as the actor can act out the *sattva* (mental state) only through *dhī* (talent).' Our contention is that it is indeed the same *sattva*, the supreme power of the purified mind, which is the mind itself in full control, without the obstructing conditions that are the various unbridled emotional states.

sattvāsādanād eva asya yoginaḥ ‘It is by thus obtaining *sattva*, whose essence is refulgence,¹⁵³ that such a yogin [obtains the state of freedom].’¹⁵⁴ Hence, the term *sattva* represents the true essence (*sattva*) of the purified mind (*sattva*), which is the consciousness of both the ideal actor in complete control of himself and of the ideal yogin absorbed in a complete non-duality with Śiva.¹⁵⁵

Within a Śaiva setting, one might easily quote dozens of passages connecting the actor’s plane with the tantric, spiritual plane.¹⁵⁶ For example, Törzsök 2016 has drawn our attention to a passage from the *Triśirobhairava*, a lost text quoted by Jayaratha *ad Tantrāloka* 1.136. In the few lines cited by the celebrated commentator, the awakened individual is compared to an actor. As pointed out in Törzsök 2016: 474, an investigation of the image of the actor in tantric sources, the text employs a technical term of dramaturgy, *vibhāva*. The passage reads as follows:

samyagbuddhas tu vijñeyaḥ |
nānākārair vibhāvaiś ca bhramyate naṭavad yathā |
svabuddhibhāvarahitam icchākṣemabahīṣṭam ||

‘But one who has right awareness whirls around like a dancer with various forms and conditions, without [being limited by] the [false] creation of his own mind, and beyond volition and happiness.’¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ A note by the editor in the printed text of the Kashmir Series explains: *svātantryasaktivishpuraṇātmanah sattvasya prāpter ity arthaḥ* ‘the sense is that what is obtained is the *sattva* that consists of the refulgence of the power of freedom.’

¹⁵⁴ The text in brackets is a rendering of *sūtra* 3.13: *siddhaḥ svatantrabhāvaḥ*.

¹⁵⁵ The text of Bhāskara’s commentary is translated in Dyczkowski 1990. Bhāskara interprets these four aphorisms as describing ‘la condizione del sé pienamente illuminato e il rapporto in cui esso si pone nei confronti del corpo e in generale dell’attività mentale e sensoriale’ (Torella 2013: 217). Here is our rendering of the verses dealing with *Śivasūtra* 3.12: ‘When sensory activity, whose objects are sounds, etc., is intent upon the nature of consciousness, it is on it that the intellect effectuates its determinative role. At first it thus become pure, which is called “power of insight.” As it is freed from any substratum, it becomes the canvas of being, which is called “attention.” Thanks to it the [highest] state of being can be attained. This is what the aphorism has described’ (*śabdādiviṣayā vṛttis cidrūpābhiniवेशinī | yadā bhavet tadā buddhis tatraivādhyavasāyinī || pūrvam bhavaty ataḥ śuddhā saiva dhīśaktir ucyate | tyaktāśayatvāt sattvasya bhītiḥ so ’vadhīr ucyate || tadvaśāt sattvasiddhiḥ syād ata eva nirūpitam || 3.12 ||*).

¹⁵⁶ For instance, see *Tantrāloka* 1.332, quoted and commented by Abhinavagupta in *Locana ad Dhvanyāloka* 1.13, examined in Bansat-Boudon 2016.

¹⁵⁷ Tr. Törzsök 2016: 474.

It is certainly possible to interpret at least one more word as a technical term from dramaturgy: *bhāva*, the real-world emotion of the represented character. The awakened person, like the actor, is devoid of any real emotion. The conception of the actor in this passage comes very close to Abhinavagupta's view, to which we can now finally return.

To come full circle, Abhinavagupta himself embraces the theological parallel between the actor and the Supreme Being while commenting on the already discussed passage where Bharata uses the metaphor of the transmigrating soul to talk about the process of impersonification in theatre.¹⁵⁸ Abhinavagupta's gloss explicates the comparison between the actor and the Supreme Lord. First of all, the living being that is none other than a manifestation of consciousness freely takes on different bodies:

With the first verse, [Bharata] states the purpose of changing [costume and makeup]. Living being means an individual soul, which moreover is a manifestation of the beatitude of consciousness, which is pure, spotless and infinite. Having himself, in the form of freedom, abandoned his own nature, though invariable, he [takes on] another body that is separate, and partakes of that [other] bodily nature, appropriate to the bodily senses, since he has resorted far and wide (*ā=āsamantāt*) and intimately (*upa=samīpe*) to another body, i.e. to that particular body [he has taken on]. The meaning is that he has obtained it by extreme proximity, i.e. by identifying with it.¹⁵⁹

This passage calls to mind the concept of *samsāra* as *theatrum mundi* where Śiva is the supreme actor, impersonating all the roles in his free play. However, this time it is the actor who is equated with the Lord. Similar to the Supreme Self, the actor is attributed the capacity to show by his free will the various appearances (inclu-

¹⁵⁸ NS 21.89cd–91ab: *yathā jantuh svabhāvaṃ svam parityajyānyadaiḥikam | tat svabhāvaṃ hi bhajate dehāntaram upāśrītaḥ || veṣeṇa varṇakais caiva chādītaḥ puruṣas tathā | parabhāvaṃ prakurute yasya veṣam samāśrītaḥ ||*. See above, § 2, n. 36.

¹⁵⁹ ABh ad 21.89–90, vol. 3, p. 123: *vartanasya prayojanam āha yathā jantuh svabhāvaṃ svam iti | jantur iti jīvātmety arthaḥ, sa ca suddhanirmalānantacidānanda-prakāśaḥ svāntantriarūpaṃ svam anapāyīnam api svabhāvaṃ parityajyānyad vyatīrīktaṃ api daiḥikam dehābhavaṃ sarīrakaraṇocītaṃ tat svabhāvaṃ bhajate, yato dehāntaram taddehaviśeṣa upa samīpe ā samantāt śrītaḥ atinaikaṭyena tadātmaṃvytyā pratīpanna ity arthaḥ |*.

ding the costume, movements, and mental states) of the characters he plays, without losing his own individuality.¹⁶⁰

This is explained as follows: just as the supreme self, although he does not relinquish the light of his own consciousness, shows an individual form affected, as it were, by the mental states appropriate to the cuirass that is the body, so the actor as well, **without relinquishing his foundation in his own individuality**,¹⁶¹ as he turns into the appearance [of the character] through the [appropriate] movements, etc.—as [the self did with] the body—shows his own self to the audience. [And] since he is intent in such activities as following the rhythm and tempo as the dramatic situation requires, [his own self is] embraced, as it were, by the nature appropriate to that [character]. In the perspective of the audience, there is no idea of ‘actor,’ for it is the idea of Rāma that is there. This is what [Bharata] shows [with the second verse]. With this same intention [in mind] we have explained the very cognition of [actor] and [character] in the chapter on *rasas*, etc.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka is a forerunner in comparing the *nāṭa* to the *brahman*, although his perspective is clearly Vedāntin and as such his vocabulary differs from Abhinavagupta’s markedly Śaiva use of notions such as *krīḍā*, *svātantrya*, etc. See ABh *ad* 1.1, vol. 1, p. 5: *yad udāhṛtam avidyāvīracitaṃ nissārabhedagrahe yad udāharaṇīkṛtaṃ nāṭyaṃ tad vakṣyāmi | yathā hi kalpanāmātrasāraṃ tata evānavasthitāikarūpaṃ kṣaṇena kalpanāśatasahasrasahaṃ svāpnādivilakṣaṇaṃ api suṣṭhutarāṃ hṛdayagrahanidānaṃ atyaktasvāmbanabrahmakalpanaṭoparacitaṃ rāmarāvaṇādīceṣṭitam asatyam kuto ’py abhūtādbhūtaṣṭīyā bhāti [...]* ‘That is to say, drama is exemplary in enabling us to grasp the barren, dualistic perception produced by our innate nescience. Consider the doings of Rama and Ravana. These are in essence merely imaginary, and precisely for this reason they do not have one single stable form, but rather can all of a sudden produce countless new imaginings. Although they are indeed different from a dream, just like a dream, they can be the source of profound emotional attachment **without giving up their illusory character**. When produced by an actor—and **herein the actor is like the supreme being**—these doings, however unreal, seem as if actually coming into existence out of some source, albeit a nonexistent one [...] (tr. in Pollock 2016: 148). In line with the metaphor of the actor as the supreme being who takes on different roles without abandoning his own nature, we propose to understand the compound *atyaktasvāmbanabrahmakalpanaṭoparacita-* (in bold in Pollock’s translation) differently, with *svāvalambana* roughly corresponding to our *svāvaṣṭambha*: ‘[The unreal deeds of Rāma, Rāvaṇa and the like], are **reproduced by actors who, similar to the brahman [the Absolute or Brahmā as creator], have not abandoned their own individuality.**’ On the non-dualist Vedānta terminology in this passage, see Reich 2018.

¹⁶¹ On the term *avaṣṭambha*, see the passage of the ĪPVV in n. 150.

¹⁶² ABh *ad* 21.89–90, vol. 3, p. 124: *etad ukaṃ bhavati—yathā paramātmā svacaitanyaparakāśam atyajann api dehakañcukocitacittavṛttirūṣitam iva svarūpaṃ ādarśayati, tathā nāṭo ’pi ātmāvaṣṭambham atyajann eva sthāne layatālādyanusaraṇādyaṅyogād*

If, in Bharata's formulation, the comparison of the actor with the transmigrating soul was liable to multiple interpretations, including the soul's uncontrolled transition from one form of existence to the other, and the actor's almost possession-like immersion into the character, it is absolutely clear that for Abhinavagupta the actor is in utter control of himself since he never ceases to be rooted in his individuality. The importance of this foundation is again stressed in the commentary on the second passage of Bharata, where a similar vocabulary and imagery is employed:

Just as a living being, having abandoned his own nature, achieves the nature of another one grounded in another body and resorts to that other nature, in the same way an intelligent [actor], by mentally contemplating 'I am that one' shall adopt another nature by their gestures, consisting in speech, bodily movement and playful behaviour.¹⁶³

Abhinavagupta connects the reasoning on this verse to a previous passage in chapter 21, referring back to the discussion about the actor's emotional involvement with arguments similar to those used for excluding the actor from the abandonment to the experience of *rasa*.

In order to show the importance of the union with [one's own] foundation, [Bharata] recalls with the first verse the reason given in chapter 21. The construction is: he should adopt another nature, such as the one of Rāma, etc., by means of the costume, etc. By saying 'I am that,' [Bharata] teaches that **the foundation in one's own self should not be relinquished**. Otherwise it is impossible to keep with the tempo, [rhythm,] and so on.¹⁶⁴

The success of the metaphors connecting the fictional world of theatre and the all too real world of *saṃsāra* with their two protagonists, the actor and Śiva, is well attested in dramaturgical specu-

dehasthānīyena vartanādīveṣaṇaparivartane(na) taducitasvabhāvāliṅgitam iva svātmānam sāmājīkāṇ prati darśayati | prekṣakapakṣe na natābhīmānas tatra hi rāmābhīmāna itī darśayati. etadāśayenaivāsmābhis tatra tatra pratitir eva vyākhyātā rasādhyāyadau |.

¹⁶³ NS 26.7–8: *yathā jīvat svabhāvaṃ hi parityajyānyadehikam | parabhāvaṃ prakurute parabhāvaṃ samāśritaḥ || evaṃ budhaḥ param bhāvaṃ so 'smīti manasā smaran | yeṣāṃ vāgaṅgalīlābhis ceṣṭābhis tu samācaret ||.*

¹⁶⁴ ABh ad 26.7–8, vol. 3, p. 213: *avaṣṭaṃbhayogasya prādhānyam darśayitum ekavimśatyadhyāyoktam hetum smarayati yathā jīva[t]svabhāvaṃ iti | param bhāvaṃ rāmādikam veśādibhiḥ samācared iti sambandhaḥ | so 'smīty anena svātmāvaṣṭaṃbhasyatyajyatām āha | anyathā layādyanusaraṇam aśakyam |.*

lation, although this is normally considered as a field without any sectarian commitment.¹⁶⁵ This is why they are sometimes relegated to the benedictory verses, of which the *maṅgalaśloka*s from the chapters of the *Abhinavabhāratī* are a typical example. One can quote the opening verse of chapter 25 on the ‘variegated acting’ where Śiva triumphs as the leading actor in the drama of the world, who skilfully combines the various means of acting into his performance (*vāgaṅgasattvaceṣṭābhinayaprayogaracanacaṇaḥ | saṃsāranātyanāyakaḥ puruṣākāraḥ śivo jayati ||*).¹⁶⁶

The freedom and the capacity of the actor to take up different roles with a mixture of detachment and involvement become the paradigmatic image of the non-dualistic activity of the supreme self, Śiva, in his power to manifest the world and transcend it at the same time. As mentioned above, the notion of ‘play’ (*krīḍā* and its relatives)¹⁶⁷ is crucial in bringing together the actor and the Lord. Yet another figure, the king, is associated with the same metaphorical configuration. A metaphor in the *Śivadṛṣṭi* may be indicative of the larger context in which the ideal of the playful yet fully in-control actor takes shape. There Śiva’s free play is compared to the king-actor’s: ‘Just as a king over the whole earth, in the joyous and startled intoxication of his sovereignty can play at being a simple soldier, imitating his behaviour, so, in His beatitude, the Lord amuses Himself by assuming the multiple forms of the whole.’¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ For an example of the productivity of the metaphor of the *theatrum mundi* in later non-dualist Śaiva sources, see Wenta 2018 on Maheśvarānanda’s *Mahārthamañjarī*, where many of the quotations from the Śaiva sources reviewed above are rearranged to fit into a theological configuration influenced by the growing cult of Śivanatarāja among Cola kings. On the non-confessional and somewhat ecumenical formulation of Abhinavagupta’s aesthetic theory, see Cuneo 2016.

¹⁶⁶ Other *maṅgalaśloka*s in the *Abhinavabhāratī* contain the expression *saṃsāranātya* and develop the theme further, see the opening verses of NŚ 2, 5 and 36. Later treatises on dramaturgy make the same connection time and again. A well-known example is the *maṅgalaśloka* in the chapter on dance of the *Sanḡītaratnākara*, a text indebted to the *Abhinavabhāratī*: *āṅgikaṃ bhuvanaṃ yasya vācikaṃ sarvavainmayam | āhāryaṃ candratārādi taṃ numahḥ sāttvikaṃ śivam ||*. This verse is borrowed by a treatise on dance called *Abhinayadarpaṇa*. On the relationship between the *Abhinavabhāratī*, the *Sanḡītaratnākara* and the *Abhinayadarpaṇa*, see Ganser forthcoming.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Ali 2008: 84.

¹⁶⁸ Tr. Gnoli 1957: 21; *yathā nṛpaḥ sāvabhaumaḥ prabhāvāmodabhāvitaḥ || krīḍan karoti pādātadharmāṃs taddharmadharmataḥ | tathā prabhuḥ pramodāt mā*

This comparison between the highest of lordships, Śiva and the earthly king—both depicted as actors in their free and multifaceted demeanour—should be understood within the hermeneutical background suggested by Ali’s analysis of the medieval courtly culture of South Asia. This was the context in which ‘courtly’ ideals of refinement, playful nonchalance and cultivated spontaneity were conceived, created, reproduced, and extolled through all artistic and cultural creations as the visible sign and the implicit legitimation of aristocratic superiority and highborn lordship itself.¹⁶⁹ In connection with the dimension of playfulness that these ideals entail, Ali speaks of the existence of ‘aristocratic body techniques,’ which closely resemble those of an actor, covering as they do both ‘a sort of physical inclination and behavioural disposition,’ characterized by ‘exuberant playfulness, mirthful spontaneity, or a charming insouciance’ (Ali 2008: 84). This characterization of the aristocratic attitude, including an apparently antithetical constellation of terms—with ‘one set indicating the values of majesty, solemnity, and authority, and the other its opposite ease, play, and abandon’—embraces the highest members of the court and the gods in a common ‘irenical conception of lordship’ (ibid. p. 85). In Śaiva, non-dualistic terms, Śiva is both the greatest aristocrat and the actor *par excellence*.

Now that we are the furthest away from any denigration of the actor’s practice, we are ready to draw one last parallel and argue for one last identification: our teacher Raffaele Torella, to whom this article is dedicated, is himself an incarnation of the actor supreme. Playfully and nonchalantly, he takes on different roles: the creative scholar, the meticulous researcher, the generous tea-

krīdatyevaṃ tathā tathā || (1.37ab–38). *Krīḍā* is defined by Utpaladeva in his *Vṛtti ad Śivadyṣṭi* 1.38: *tathā paramēśvaraḥ pūrṇātvāt svata ānandaghūṛṇitais tair bhūtabhedātmabhiḥ prakārair evaṃ etat sadṛśaṃ krīḍati* | *harṣānusāri spandaḥ krīḍā* ‘In the same way the highest Lord, due to his fullness plays spontaneously by imitating the ways of the separate beings, having become each of them due to his reeling under the intoxication of bliss. (For) play (*krīḍā*) is the vibration accompanying joy’ (tr. Bäumer 1995: 38).

¹⁶⁹ As Cuneo (2013: 260–261, n. 34) argues, quoting Ali 2004: 158, the ‘cultural ideal of mirthful behaviour was the symbol of “authority” and “lordship” as such, for the symbolic construction of “power” entailed “an ideological emphasis” on enjoyments and pleasures as the representative marks of “the court’s image of itself”.’

cher, the strict examiner, the expert cook, the wine connoisseur, the art lover, the pipe smoker, and many more. We have witnessed all these roles and learnt from him that to be a full human being and a true scholar one must behave like an actor, always ready to assume different roles and move across continents and institutions in the guise of a wandering jongleur. Within but also well beyond scholarship, Raffaele Torella taught us that life should be lived with paradoxically detached commitment and care, and with openness to its apparently contradictory aspects, at the same time preserving the strongest *avaṣṭambha* in one's true self in the whirlpool of change.

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