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DISINTERESTED JUDGMENT
AND ITS SOCIAL INTERESTS
IN KANT AND ABHINAVAGUPTA:
A NEW APPROACH
TO COMPARATIVE AESTHETICS

Hugh B. Urban

Since the time of the first European contact with Indian literature and the
first British Orientalist scholarship in the 18th and 19th centuries, the concept of
a 'comparative aesthetics' has generated a huge number of conflicting interpreta-
tions, on the Eastern and Western sides alike.¹ Both European and Indian schol-
ars have been eager to point out the many similarities between, for example,
Kant's aesthetic judgment and the Indian theory of Rasa, or between
the
Romantic ideal of Creative Imagination and the Indian concept of pratibha. But
unfortunately, despite a wide array of studies on the subject of Comparative
Aesthetics, this enterprise has proven surprisingly disappointing and unsatisfy-
ing. Most authors have contented themselves with simple point–for–point com-
parisons of abstract theories and concepts; and most importantly, there has been
little attention given to the more subtle historical contexts which produced these
theories, or to the ways in which aesthetic theory is manipulated in relation to
specific social and political interests.

In this essay, I shall attempt to forge a new approach to the project of com-
parative aesthetics, by suggesting that we make an important methodological
shift: instead of looking merely at similarities in substance and content, I suggest
we look at the processes and strategies — to use the terms of Pierre Bourdieu
(1977: ch.3) — by which aesthetic theories are used to support specific social and
political interests (cf. Ferry, 1993; Chytry, 1989; Eagleton, 1991).

Specifically, I will compare the theory of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) with
that of the Kashmir philosopher, mystic and aesthetician, Abhinavagupta Bharati
(ca.950–1050). For my reading of Kant, I will be relying in large part on the
work of Bourdieu and of the Marxist literary critic, Terry Eagleton. As Bourdieu
argues, Kant's ideal of 'disinterested' aesthetic judgment represents a sublimated
pleasure, a 'pleasure purified of pleasure' which transcends the vulgar gratifica-
tion of the senses. Although it claims to be 'disinterested' and free of any utilitarian end, it in fact has very specific social interests, as part of the emerging
European bourgeoisie and their attempt to 'distinguish' themselves from both the
lower classes and from the courtly aristocracy (1984: 485ff). Similarly, Terry
Eagleton has argued that the new discourse of aesthetics in the 18th century was
inextricably tied to the ambitions of the growing middle class, its rejection of the
aristocratic powers, and its search for a new kind of rational autonomy and self-determination (1991). Now, obviously Bourdieu's subtle sociological reading is not identical with Eagleton's explicitly Marxist one; however, as Bridget Fowler suggests, the two are in many respects complementary and may be used together fruitfully (1994:153).

Abhinavagupta's aesthetic theory has long been an object of fascination and study for Western scholars of Indian literature — in large part because of its curious resemblance to that of Kant. Hailed as the foremost of all Indian aestheticians and 'the greatest name in Sanskrit criticism,' (Masson and Patwardhan 1969:3), Abhinava was among the first to be studied by Western scholars, and remains to this day the object of an enormous amount of discussion. And perhaps most commonly, his theory of Rasa or aesthetic taste has been compared to the Kantian ideal of disinterested aesthetic contemplation (ibid.1970:20; Pandey, 1956: II.292).² But unfortunately, virtually no attention has been given to the social and political context of Abhinava's work. The sole exception is Alexis Sanderson, who has devoted several important essays to the relation of Kashmir Tantra with the social order. As Sanderson suggests, Abhinava and his followers represent a 'socially ambitious avant-garde' movement in competition with the orthodox Saiva Siddhanta* who dominated most of the patronage and power in 10th-century Kashmir. Hence, Abhinava appropriated certain practices of the unorthodox Kaula Tantrics, adapting them for his own interests. Specifically, he drew upon the dangerous but powerful symbolism of eroticism and physical pleasure as used in the Tantric sects, as a source of esoteric power which transcended the exoteric purity and social order of the orthodox Saivite tradition (1989, 1984).

Unfortunately, however, Sanderson focuses exclusively on Abhinava's Tantric and philosophical writings, ignoring his large body of works on aesthetics. What I hope to do here is to extend Sanderson's insights, combining them with those of Western critics like Bourdieu and Eagleton, in order to analyze the complex inter-relation of Abhinavagupta's aesthetic theory with his social ambitions.

This paper will have two primary tasks: First I hope to reveal some unexpected similarities between Kant and Abhinavagupta, by looking at the question of 'disinterested judgment' and its relation to specific social interests. Using Kant, together with Bourdieu's and Eagleton's interpretations, I hope to shed new and unexpected light on Abhinavagupta's aesthetic theory and its social context. Secondly, I will move beyond a simple examination of similarities, to a more nuanced comparison of the differences in the broader moral and religious implications of Kant's and Abhinava's theories. Here we will see that, despite common strategic maneuvers, Kant and Abhinava each employed their aesthetic theories for very different ends in relation to the social context. Whereas, for Kant, aesthetic judgment is intimately related to his ideal of an Enlightened community

*Diacritical markers on Sanskrit terms have been omitted in this article.
of rational moral subjects, for Abhinava, it is related to his Idealist metaphysical system and his highly elitist Tantric sect, which practiced secret rituals and ecstatic meditation.

I. Aesthetics and "Distinction" in Early Modern Europe

Not only did Immanuel Kant, with his *Critique of Pure Reason* and his *Critique of Practical Reason* turn the entire course of metaphysical and ethical inquiry in modern Western philosophy, but in his third major work, the *Critique of Judgment*, he marked a critical turning point in the history of aesthetics, as well. As such, this text is easily among the most complex and most thoroughly studied texts in the history Western aesthetics; I need not attempt to summarize its content and arguments here, nor will I address all of the various scholarly interpretations of this difficult text. Rather, I will simply highlight a very few of the more relevant aspects which are of interest from a comparative perspective, focusing solely on the Critique of Aesthetic Judgment, while ignoring the critique of Teleological Judgment, and referring primarily to the interpretations of Bourdieu and Eagleton.

As John Zammito (1992) has argued in his study of this text, the origins of Kant's Third Critique must be understood both in terms of its socio-historical context and in relation to Kant's greater system. On one hand, in its historical context, this text was a key part of the broader intellectual, social and political agendas of the German Enlightenment. It is part of the new discourse of aesthetics in 18th century Europe, and the new turn to the realms of art, the body, and sensual pleasure, which we see in Shaftesbury, Burke, Baumgarten, Winkelman and Herder. As Luc Ferry suggests, Kant's aesthetic theory is inseparable from the newly emerging democratic and bourgeois ideals of the Enlightenment; it is part of the attempt to carve out a new social space for an autonomous and harmonious community of rational moral subjects, liberated from the oppressive authority of the ruling aristocracy (1992; cf. Eagleton, 1991:76). Contrary to many popular conceptions, Kant was by no means a mere intellectual recluse; rather, he was very much interested in the cosmopolitan ideals of the Enlightenment, in educational reform and in radical politics. Born to a poor saddlemaker, but gradually working his way up through the academic system of the University and the cultivated society of Koenigsberg, Kant reflects what Norbert Elias calls the 'upward mobility' of the late 18th century middle class intellectuals. He is part of a movement among the emerging Enlightenment bourgeoisie, who wished to legitimate and distinguish themselves from the courtly – aristocratic upper class above them. Thus he makes the key distinction between 'cultivation' and Kultur, based on real virtue and 'taste,' as opposed to the mere external 'civility' of the aristocratic court (1978:10–30; cf.
Moreover, as the leader of the Aufklärung in the 1780s, Kant also was competing for recognition, intellectual prominence and royal patronage with the rival German movement of the *Sturm und Drang* school. In the late 18th century, under the reign of Frederick II and Frederick Wilhelm II, the Enlightenment was in danger of losing its royal favor to Herder, Hamman and the other leaders of the *Sturm and Drang*.

The contextual origins of the *Critique of Judgment* lie in the polemical concern of Kant to drive forces of the *Sturm and Drang* movement from their prominence in German intellectual life in 1780's and to establish the complete hegemony of the Aufklärung ... The Aufklärung must be understood ... as a movement ... struggling on several fronts for intellectual eminence in Germany (Zammito, 1992:8).

Against the *Sturm und Drang* emphasis on irrationalism, mysticism, imagination and emotion, Kant wished to argue in the *Critique of Judgment* that the realms of 'feeling' and art also fall under the legislation of intellectual judgment — that is, under the legislation of the rational sensibilities of the Enlightenment (ibid.).

On the other hand, on the strictly philosophical level, Kant had also turned to the realm of judgment in the hope of overcoming the troubling dichotomy left after the completion of the first two Critiques. With the first Critique, pure reason had demonstrated that the ultimate nature of reality is unknowable; with the second Critique, practical reason had nevertheless shown that freedom and morality do still exist. Finally, with the *Critique of Judgment*, it remained for aesthetic and teleological judgment to show that, even though unknowable, Nature (the realm of necessity) actually does correspond to and harmonize with human freedom. An aesthetic judgment (*Urteilskraft*), or a judgment of taste (*Geschmack*), is distinguished from logical judgments by the fact that it refers, not to some object, but rather to the subject and its subjective 'feeling of pleasure or pain' (CAJ 45; Beardsley, 1975:211). It is the feeling of satisfaction at the harmony between our own subjective experience and the external world, which assures us that phenomenal experience is not a vain illusion, but actually corresponds to a meaningful external reality.

At the same time, however, Kant was also faced with the problem of demonstrating that a judgment of beauty — which occurs within an individual subject — is at the same time valid for all men equally — that is, inter-subjectively. To do so, he suggests that the judgment of beauty occurs as a result of the harmony and free play of our faculties of imagination and reason; because this harmony is inherent in all cognition, it can be attributed to all human beings universally (CAJ sect.7; Guyer, 1982:23–4).

In order not to degenerate into mere sensualism or hedonism, however, a true
judgment of aesthetic taste must be 'disinterested' and 'free,' that is, concerned not with desire or possessiveness, but merely with detached satisfaction (CAJ 45-7). As Bourdieu points out, such 'taste' is based on a strict separation between rational, autonomous, detached pleasure and base, vulgar carnal pleasure. This is the mark of true 'distinction,' cultivation, civility and refinement: a "denial of lower, vulgar, common pleasures and an affirmation of sublimated, refined, pleasures." It is the fundamental difference between the 'taste of sense' and the 'taste of reflection,' or alternatively, the 'pleasure of sense' as opposed to a 'sublimated pleasure, purified of pleasure, a symbol of moral excellence' (1984:7, 6). The latter is a mode of rational "disinterestedness" and detached contemplation, unobscured by personal interest or worldly desire; but the former is only the 'barbaric' appetite and self-gratifying pleasure of the working-class man or the 'vulgar' (das Vulgäre). For 'that taste is always barbaric which needs a mixture of charm and emotions in order that there be satisfaction, and still more so if it makes these the measure of its assent' (CAJ 58, 136).

At the same time, precisely because it is disinterested and purified of selfish desire, aesthetic pleasure is also characterized by its 'universality' or 'common validity' (Gemultigkeit). Because it transcends individual desire, it is rooted in our sensus communus (Gemeinsinn), or the common ground for the validity of taste, which links us with all other human beings (CAJ 150-1; cf. Taminiaux, 1993:14). Aesthetic judgment is a unique form of experience which is simultaneously 'individual' — insofar as it is the experience of a single autonomous subject — and yet mysteriously 'universal' — insofar as it is impersonal and free of all contingency. Herein, the subject is 'absolved of all contingent particularity,' and freed from 'this or that' (Cassirer, 1981: 318). It is not an abstract kind of universality, like that of pure reason, but rather a uniquely concretized and particularized kind of 'subjective universality,' or even a 'transcendental sociability' rooted in the experience of a single mind. By rising to the universal level of the 'collective reason of humanity,' genuine taste transcendent the merely 'vulgar' and 'common' desires of particular individuals:

... by the name 'common' ... we understand 'vulgar', that which is everywhere met with, the possession of which indicates absolutely no merit or superiority. But under the sensus communus we must include the idea of a sense common to all, i.e. of a faculty of judgment which ... takes account of the mode of representation of all other men ... to compare its judgment with the collective reason of humanity (CAJ 136).

However, as we will see below, true aesthetic taste — although theoretically universal — is by no means immediately accessible to all men equally. It requires proper "cultivation," education, social and moral refinement in order to rise above the selfish interests of the 'vulgar' (CAJ 195, 143; Guyer, 1982: 54; Bourdieu, 1984: 508-9).
This judgment of taste takes two primary forms: the experience of the beautiful, in which the subject feels the pleasurable harmony of its faculties, in conformity with the artistic object; and the experience of the sublime, in which the subject is overwhelmed by the majesty of its object, which utterly transcends the capacity of its own imagination. In the sublime, the infinity of the object dwarfs the human imagination, revealing the universal laws of Reason which transcend our finite capacities. But at the same time, the subject is also reassured and comforted, because he discovers that these awesome, universal laws of Reason lie within itself. Although the aesthetic experience of the sublime is initially threatening to the individual self, it ultimately confirms the rational autonomy of the self (0:46–9; CAJ: 126f).

The 'Aesthetic State': Aesthetic Taste in Relation to Morality, the Social Order and the "Cultivation" of the Social Being

As many critics have pointed out, Kant's ideal of disinterested aesthetic judgment contains a basic tension and recurring paradox: throughout his work, Kant insists that aesthetic judgment is purely detached and independent from anything else—including morality or social concerns (CAJ sect.7). But at the same time, this judgment has an undeniable connection with Kant's greater system and specifically his moral ideals: there is 'an implicit appeal ... to extra-aesthetic or ethical values' (Coleman, 1974:146). As Kant himself suggests, beauty (die Schönheit) is a symbol of the good (die Güte) and of the moral order (Sittlichkeit), for it raises man above selfish individual pleasures; it reveals the goodness and purposiveness in existence; it shows the harmony between man's faculties and the natural world; and it makes the mind 'conscious of a certain ennoblment and elevation above the mere sensibility to pleasure achieved through sense. 'Hence, to take an immediate interest in the Beauty of Nature ... is always a mark of a good soul' (CAJ 251, 249).

Moreover, both aesthetic and ethical judgment share a similar structure: they are both based on 'disinterest' and denial of selfish concerns. According to the Critique of Practical Reason, ethical judgment is the free conformity of the rational being to the moral law—embodied in the categorical imperative—which he discovers within his own mind; hence it means denial of individual selfish interest, and a desire to act disinterestedly and harmoniously with the universal laws of reason: 'liberty,' like aesthetic taste is 'the power to resist the nature within us, as the capacity to act disinterestedly' (Ferry, 1993: 254–6). As Beardsley summarizes this paradox: even though 'the main drive of Kant's philosophy of art is to establish the autonomy of the aesthetic, its independence...of moral duty;' nevertheless, he ultimately strives to reconcile aesthetics and morality, by claiming that to enjoy the beauty of nature we must find in nature a purposiveness ...
that we recognize as the expression of a cosmic Reason akin to that within us which expresses itself in the moral law' (1975:224–5).

This paradoxical relationship between aesthetics and morality is still more apparent in the judgment of the sublime: in the face of the awesome grandeur of nature, the subject becomes aware of the pitiful finitude of his imagination and the towering transcendence of the laws of Reason; but at the same time, he also realizes that these laws of Reason lie within his own rational nature, and are manifest in the form of his moral judgment. Thus we discover 'our infinite superiority as moral beings, our spiritual inviolability in the midst of natural perils' (Beardsley, 1975:220; CAJ, 125).

As our capacity to transcend our egotistical interests, to judge disinterestedly and inter-subjectively, and to discover the universal laws of reason within ourselves, the cultivation of aesthetic 'taste' is therefore necessary to the 'cultivation' of the social individual, who can act morally and harmoniously with other human beings. It is 'the condition under which man develops as a social being' (Guyer, 1982: 54). As Kant suggests, the arts 'cultivate' or 'supply culture to the mind;' the perception of the beautiful is an integral of part of human society, in which a man rises above the merely animal level and becomes 'more refined after the manner of his kind (the beginning of civilization)' (CAJ 195). In Elias' terms, the development of aesthetic taste is a critical part of the 'process of civilization': 'Beauty develops social behavior by furthering empathy with other beings ... Its cultivation of taste and good manners makes for individual and collective harmony' (Chytry, 1989: 93; Bourdieu, 1984:598–9).

Finally, Kant also suggests that aesthetic judgment is critical, not only to man's moral and social nature, but also to the political order. Kant, as is well known, was also one of the most important political thinkers of the late 18th century, often regarded as 'the philosopher of the American and French revolutions and of the bourgeoisie who carried them to victory' (Friedrich, 1949: xlii). Against the political absolutism and despotism of 18th century Europe, Kant laid the philosophical basis for a new form of autonomy and self-legislation — a form of government based, not on a coercive set of external laws, but rather on the free conformity of the individual to the universal laws of reason which it discovers within itself:

Since the Prussia of Frederick the Great ... was built on an explicit ... denial of both peace and freedom, Kant was ... confronted with the task of lifting the entire world of ... despotism off its axles. The result was ... the construction of the most profound philosophical foundation for a regime of freedom under law for all men that the bourgeois age produced (ibid.: xxxvi).

The structure of aesthetic judgment is a kind of subjective and internal mirror of the structure of the proper political order just as, in the perception of beauty, the mind experiences the free play and harmony between its faculty of imag-
ination and the laws of reason, so too, in the just polity, each individual acts freely and harmoniously in conformity with the universal laws of reason which form the basis of morality and society. As Taminaux concludes, 'for Kant judgment is ... at the core of both aesthetic and political philosophy' (1993:14-5; cfCAJ sect.23).

Interpretations: Aesthetic Taste and Social Distinction in Early Modern Europe

Now, we have seen above that Kant's Critique of Judgment cannot be understood apart from the social context of the German Enlightenment, in its rivalry with the Sturm und Drang for social and intellectual eminence, and its 'struggle to establish the complete hegemony of the Aufklärung' (Zammito, 1992:8). However, as Pierre Bourdieu has convincingly argued in his 'Vulgar Critique of Pure Critiques of Judgment', the Kantian ideal of pure aesthetic pleasure also has more subtle sociological implications within the context of 18th century Europe, and specifically, as part of the social interests of the emerging middle class (1984:485). The intellectual bourgeoisie of the late 18th century, he suggests, occupied an uncomfortable position in social space — in Norbert Elias' words, 'an elite in the eyes of the people, it has a lower rank in the eyes of the courtly aristocracy' (1978:9). And Kant, as Bourdieu suggests, is a particularly clear representative of the professorial class among the bourgeoisie — 'an economically powerless fraction of the dominant class' (Fowler, 1994: 132–3; Bourdieu, 1984:494). As such, Kant reflects the paradox at the heart of the Enlightenment bourgeois aesthetic as a whole: Despite its liberated, democratic and humanistic ideals, the bourgeois aesthetic also served to perpetuate social divisions and hierarchies. Even though the Kantian discourse professes to be "disinterested" and detached from all worldly and social concerns, in fact, 'it is neither pure nor disinterested' (1984:5). On the contrary, the notions of 'disinterest,' de–individualized aesthetic sensitivity, and the cultivation needed for proper aesthetic judgment, bear some very direct social implications: they serve to identify and separate the special qualities that distinguish one class from another, the man of higher taste from the man of uncultivated desire. In the 18th century, these ideals helped to elevate the new middle class above, and distinguish themselves from, the coarse and vulgar realm of the "animal enjoyment" of the lower classes: 'Kant's principle of pure taste is nothing other than a refusal, a disgust — a disgust for objects which impose enjoyment and a disgust for the crude, vulgar taste which revels in this imposed enjoyment' (1984:488).

The denial of lower, coarse, vulgar ... enjoyment, which constitutes the sacred sphere of culture, implies an affirmation of the superiority of those who can be satisfied with the sublimated, refined, disinterested ... pleasures forever closed to
the profane ... art and cultural consumption are predisposed ... o fulfill a social function of legitimating social differences (1984:7; cf.1993:234).

At the same time, however, this highly rational and intellectual ideal of aesthetic pleasure also served to distinguish the emerging bourgeoisie from the courtly aristocracy above them. For it grounded aesthetic taste, not in nobility, birth, wealth or power, but rather in a highly intellectual judgment and cultivated taste. In short, Kant's aesthetic actually disguised a very subtle and double-edged social ideal, uniquely suited to the intellectual and 'professorial' members of the late 18th century middle class:

The social categories of aesthetic judgment can only function for Kant ... in the form of highly sublimated categories, such as the oppositions between ... pleasure and enjoyment or culture and civilization, euphemisms which ... enable social oppositions to be expressed...in a form conforming to the norms of expression of a specific field. What is hidden, that is, the double social relationship — to the court (the site of civilization as opposed to culture) and to the people (the site of nature and sense) — is both present absent; it presents itself in the text as a guise (ibid.: 493-4).

In his study of early modern European aesthetics, Terry Eagleton takes this argument a step further, by examining the more direct political and ideological implications of this new aesthetic discourse: 'The category of the aesthetic,' he argues, 'assumes the importance it does ... because in speaking of art it speaks of...matters which are at the heart of the Middle Class's struggle for political hegemony. The construction of the modern ... aesthetic artifact is inseparable from ... the dominant ideological forms of modern class society' (1991:3). In Germany of the 18th century, political power lay almost entirely in the hands of the ruling aristocracy, in the form of feudal–absolutist states, who dominated an exploited peasantry and an impotent middle class. Reacting against this repressive regime, a small number of educated bourgeoisie began to initiate a new kind of intellectual discourse — a discourse based on a shared consensus of reason and cultured critique. As Eagleton suggests, aesthetic theory not only helped the middle class to 're–draw the social boundaries' of 18th century Europe, now on the basis of rational discourse rather than simple hereditary power; but it also became the basis for the vision of a new political order, which is separable from the Enlightenment democratic ideal and its opposition to the ruling aristocracy (Ferry, 1993:256). For it marks the birth of a new kind subject — an autonomous subject who governs himself by discovering the laws of reason within its own conscience:

This bourgeois public sphere breaks decisively with the privilege ... of the ancien regime, installing the middle class ... as a truly universal subject ... What is at stake is ... the production of an entirely new kind of subject — one which,
like the work of art ... discovers the law in the depths of its own free identity, rather than in some oppressive external power. This liberated subject ... has appropriated the law as the very principle of its own autonomy (1991:19).

Moreover, on the basis of this new ideal of subjectivity, the bourgeois aesthetic also laid the foundations for a new kind of political community — a community of rational beings, each of whom discovers the universal moral law within his own mind, and so freely conforms to the laws of society as a whole. The aesthetic paradigm offered the rising middle class a form of freedom from the coercive power of the ruling aristocracy and a new kind of self-govern-ment — 'a utopian community of subjects, united in the structure of their being: 'the aesthetic in Kant ... ensures between human subjects a non-coercive consensus...a self-determining autonomy ... It thus offers an ideological paradigm for both individual subject and social order' (ibid.:98).

At the same time, however, this new aesthetic ideal also served to obscure and mask the real social and political ambitions of the emerging middle class: it disguised their jealousy of aristocratic power; it gave a philosophical justification for their scorn for the 'vulgar' lower classes; and it reified and mystified the laws Reason into a universal moral order. In short, the discourse of early modern aesthetic discourse is inherently Janus-faced, double-edged and deeply ambivalent:

... this concept of autonomy is radically double-edged .... The aesthetic is at once ... the secret prototype of human subjectivity in early capitalist society and a vision of human energies as radical ends in themselves ... It signifies a creative turn to the sensuous body, as well as the inscribing of that body within a subtly oppressive law ... It offers a generous utopian image ... it also blocks and mystifies the real political movement towards such community (1991:9).

Obviously, Bourdieu's and Eagleton's interpretations cannot claim to do full justice to the complexity of Kant's aesthetics, nor does they take account of the many other philosophical and cultural factors involved. Nevertheless, I do believe that they provide some very useful insights into the broader socio-political implications of aesthetic theory — not only in early modern Europe, but, as I now hope to demonstrate, in the Indian context, as well.

II. Purity, Power and Aesthetics in 10th Century Kashmir

Renowned in his own time as a master of philosophy, Tantra and aesthetics, and praised in our time as a kind of 'Indian Thomas Aquinas,' Abhinavagupta is undoubtedly one of the most ambitious and wide-ranging minds that the Indian world has ever produced. Born a high class, wealthy Brahmin in Kashmir during the mid-10th century, Abhinava produced a vast corpus of writings and forged a
highly original synthesis of all the main speculative currents of his day. Not only did he attempt, in his massive treatise, the Tantraloka, to systematize all the Saivite schools known to him; and not only did he construct a vast synthesis of non-dual Idealist philosophy, the Trika or Triadic school, by combining the monistic system of Advaita Vedanta with the idealist Saivite Tantric systems; but he also composed some of the most important works on aesthetics, including his famous commentary on the Dhvanyaloka, which revolutionized the development of sanskrit poetics (Pandey, 1963).

As Alexis Sanderson has convincingly argued, Abhinava's writings emerged out of a very complex socio-religious context, and were intimately connected with his own social and political ambitions. 10th century Kashmir, Sanderson suggests, was largely divided between two competing ideals of the religious life: the paths of Purity and Power. On one side, there were the orthodox Saiva Siddhanta Brahmins, who upheld the ideals of ritual purity and social order, and who saw the goal of life as the pure transcendent Self beyond all change. Their world was one with clearly defined social hierarchies and boundaries, based on the ideals of purity and authority, legitimated by ritual and knowledge of the Vedas (1989:192f).

But on the other side, there were the highly unorthodox, antinomian Tantrics, such as the Kali-worshipping Kaulas and Kramas. Transgressing the boundaries of ritual purity and social order, the Tantrics turned instead to the uncontrolled power of impurity, violence and sexual freedom. Through the very impurity which threatened orthodox authority, they hoped to gain an 'unfettered super-agency through the controlled assimilation of their lawless power in occult manipulations of impurity' (Sanderson, 1989:200–1) If orthodox Brahminical purity was based on social hierarchy, male authority and a non-violent ritual order, then the Tantrics turned to precisely the opposite forces — to caste-free relations, female power and rituals charged with violent and erotic symbolism. By employing impure forces outside the boundaries of the social order, such as meat, wine, and sexual intercourse, the Kaulas and Kramas hoped to achieve an awesome, liberating power, which transcends the dualities of the conventional social order and laws of purity (ibid.:201).

Abhinavagupta and his school represent yet a third force in this complex religious milieu. In Sanderson's words, the Trika sect represented a 'socially ambitious avant-garde' movement of high-class Brahmins, in competition with the orthodox "Saiva Siddha" nta tradition, and contending for patronage among the brahmins and the wealthy middle class householders (grhastah) (1984:202). Abhinava was born of a high class, learned and affluent Brahman family, which had been generously patronized by the Kashmiri royalty since the time of King Lalita ditya, and had been granted a sizable piece of land and a mansion in Pravarapura (modern Srinagar). Highly respected among the aristocracy of his time, Abhinava was praised by many as the head of all Saiva sects (Ingalls,
1990:30–1). At the same time, however, Abhinava was also interested in the wilder, unorthodox Tantric sects, in which he saw a source of dangerous but extremely potent esoteric power which surpassed the exoteric dualities of purity and impurity. While borrowing heavily from Tantric ritual and symbolism, he also encoded it within an extremely sophisticated metaphysical system, giving it a 'new catholicity': he 'presented the new idealism to a wider public by clothing it in the philosophically reasoned...discourse of high Brahmanism;' and at the same time, he constructed an elaborate hierarchical system to organize all the philosophical schools known to him, placing his own school at its summit (Sanderson, 1989:203; Pandey, 1963: 590ff).

The Trika or 'triadic' system which Abhinava promulgated represents the synthesis of a number of different systems which had converged in 10th century Kashmir. The basis of this monistic system is the ideal of the Absolute (Anuttara) which is pure Consciousness (samvit), the limitless freedom of Awareness beyond all duality. Within this supreme Consciousness, there are two aspects: Lord 'Siva, who is the pure, passive light of consciousness (prakasa) or the supreme T, and his Sakti or feminine energy, who is the "reflection" (vimarsa) or active self-awareness of this eternal 'I.' Because of its innate tendency to self-manifestation and 'vibration' (spanda), this supreme Consciousness generates the illusion of the phenomenal universe, which is an externalized form of Lord 'Siva through the medium of Sakti. As such, the ultimate nature of Awareness pervades all phenomenal experience, underlying the illusory multiplicity of the cosmos, including our own finite ego-consciousness. The goal of yogic meditation is, therefore, to realize this supreme I-consciousness within ourselves: in the supreme moment of 'recognition' (pratyabhijna), the individual knower breaks the bonds of its limited subjectivity and realizes its own oneness with the absolute knower, Lord Siva. Then, united with the Supreme T which pervades all existence, the self becomes identified with Lord Siva's creative powers, participating in his divine "play" which creates and destroys all things (Dyckzowski, 1992a:35).

As Sanderson argues, Abhinavagupta combined his highly sophisticated philosophical system with the unorthodox practices of the Kaula Tantrics, exploiting the dangerous power of Tantric worship in order to assert the ultimate superiority of his own school. A practicing Tantric himself, he held regular esoteric gatherings (cakras) for ritual caste-free intercourse and consumption of meat and wine (TA 29:64; Muller–Ortega, 1986:53). At the same time, in order to make such practices more appealing to his middle and upper class householder (grhastah) patrons, which formed the principal part of his following, he also downplayed the violent aspects of Tantric worship, emphasizing instead the sensual and erotic aspects. Having appropriated the powerful ritual practices of the Kaulas, he transformed and reinscribed them within his own system: for Abhinava, the wild, duality-devouring power of Tantra is reserved for the inner, esoteric realm, the world of secret rites, behind the outward illusion of orthodox
purity. On the outward level of society, caste-divisions and hierarchies of purity are by no means called into question; and on the esoteric level of the Tantric cult, very often more elaborate and more rigid hierarchies and power structures come into play. Hence, as Brooks suggests, the Tantric holds a Janus-faced attitude and 'a double norm — one esoteric and private, the other esoteric and public,' which actually masks and recodes social divisions (1990:26–7). As Goudriaan and Padoux have argued, the Kashmir Tantrics, despite their egalitarian rhetoric, actually subtly reinforced social divisions and Brahminical power; for Tantric ritual limits the breaking of class distinctions and taboos to a highly controlled ritual environment, in which Brahmans still maintain their ritual power and authority. Although women and outcastes are admitted, they are generally little more than 'tools' used by high class males in sexual rituals; and real power remains pretty much where it always has been — in the hands of Brahmans, supported by the political power of Ksatriyas and the financial backing of merchants and householders (Gupta, 1979:32; Padoux, 1990:35–6n).

Such a strategic balance between esoteric power and exoteric purity was especially attractive to the wealthy upper and middle class householders of Kashmir society, who supported Abhinavagupta with a large and generous patronage. The Trika system offered the individual a new esoteric identity and absolute freedom, behind his 'illusory' outward social identity. As Sanderson explains, 'the visionary power of the heterodox self is encoded within the orthodox social identity ... it reveals the latter as the lower nature within the one person' (1989:191). But on the esoteric plane of Tantric ritual, this social identity is annihilated in the deifying light of pure consciousness:

We witness the strategies by which ... radical sects were brought in from the visionary fringes to...areas of orthodox self-representation ... the visionary power of the heterodox self is recoded ... to be inscribed within the orthodox social identity...in such a way that it reveals the latter as a lower nature within the one person ... the tradition sustains its 'power' behind the appearance of conformity (Sanderson, 1989: 191)

Abhinavagupta's Aesthetic Revolution

Unfortunately, despite his insights into Abhinava's philosophical works and the role in his social context, Sanderson does not address the question of what role Abhinava's aesthetic works might have played in his greater enterprise. If his Tantric practices were intended to realize this supremely liberated identity, why did he bother to develop an extremely sophisticated system of poetics and dramaturgy? By incorporating some of the insights of Bourdieu and Eagleton, I will argue that Abhinava's social ambitions are reflected, not only in his philosophical writings, but also in his works on poetics and dramaturgy.
The tradition of aesthetics in Kashmir had long had a close relationship with the aristocracy and ruling classes: many of the great Kashmiri kings like Lalitaditya (reg.725–61) and Jayadipa (reg.776–807) had been famous patrons of literature and art, granting large stipends and inviting the greatest aestheticians and artists to their court Abhinava's predecessor, Anandavardhana (9th c.), for example, had been patronized by King Avantivarman, and Abhinava's own noble family had long been patronized by Lalitaditya and his successors (Ingalls, 1990:2-30). However, as in the case of his philosophical and Tantric writings, Abhinava's aesthetic works also hoped to appeal to a wider social group, targeting in particular the wealthy upper and middle class householders — although in a more public, less esoteric and secretive social arena. Hence, his aesthetic works also appear to have served a similar strategic function within the social and intellectual ambitions of his avant-garde movement — namely, to offer an alternative source of freedom and autonomy, which might circumvent the rival authority and social power of the orthodox Saiva Siddhanta.

Together, Anandavardhana and Abhinavagupta, his greatest commentator, developed the theory of rasa–dhvani — an idea which revolutionized the sanskrit poetic tradition. Earlier Indian aesthetics had usually been limited to two main levels of linguistic meaning: the primary level of denotation, abhidha, and the secondary level of laksana, whose most important examples are metaphor and metonymy. According to the predominant view of the Alamkara or 'figurative' school, poetic discourse had been characterized by the use of the secondary meanings of metaphor and metonymy, to 'adorn' or 'ornament' language (Chari, 1990:37). Anandavardhana, however, argued that the true essence of poetic language cannot be reduced to either the literal or the secondary levels of meaning: rather, it resides in a tertiary level of meaning, which he called vyanjana or dhvani, 'the suggestive power of language' (Dhv 3.3 L; Raja, 1963). As the very 'soul' of the poem, this deeper suggested meaning cannot be reduced to any particular word or metaphor within the poem, but rather it is the sum product of the total context of the work — the setting, atmosphere, mood, and all its individual elements working together. The power of suggestion lifts the viewer to a totally new plane of meaning, beyond the literal or metaphorical realm of language. Now, dhvani may be further divided according to its basis (based on secondary or primary meaning), and subdivided, according to what it suggests (ideas, figures, emotions, etc.) — details which I cannot explore here. All that is necessary here is to note that dhvani was set forth as an entirely distinct kind of verbal operation, beyond literal or metaphoric denotation, and that it emerged as a revolutionary and powerful rival to the dominant tradition of early Sanskrit criticism (Chari, 1990:75).

The essence of dhvani, and the end to which it leads, is a kind of feeling known as rasa — literally, the 'taste' or 'relish' of the aesthetic object. Now, the notion of rasa or 'dramatic taste' is a fairly ancient one in Indian aesthetics, dat-
ing back to Bharata (5th c. BCE – 3rd c. CE); in his classical treatise on drama, the Natya-sastra, Bharata had identified eight primary rasas, which arise from eight corresponding emotive states (sthayi-bhavas): amorous (srngara), humorous (hasya), furious (raudra), compassionate (karuna), heroic (vira), amazing (adbhuta), odious (bibhatsa) and terrible (bhayanaka). In the 10th century, the rasa theory was further elaborated by the Kashmiri, Bhattanayaka, who developed the aesthetic experience in terms of the spectator's own inward state, and who also compared the aesthetic experience to the tasting of the Absolute Brahman (Gnoli, 1956:xxi; Chari, 1990:9ff).

However, it was Abhinava who elaborated the rasa theory in its most sophisticated and influential form. Rasa, he tells us, is the special kind of bliss (ananda) which arises within the spectator's heart due to suggestion. As a kind of 'magical break' in the ordinary laws of causality, rasa is not 'caused' by the poetic word, but is simply manifested by suggestion, and it has no other end apart from pure pleasure. Rasa is emotion in its purest state, freed of time and space; it allows the spectator, through a process of 'involved sympathy,' to transcend his own finite experience of joy or grief, and enter into a larger experience of compassion for the emotion (bhava) depicted in the text or on the stage (Dhv 1.18 L). His experience is colored only by the 'latent impressions' (vasanas), which lie within his mind as residual traces left form his past experiences, and which are aroused by the action depicted on the stage. It is these latent impressions which allow him to identify with the emotions expressed in the work of art and to taste its particular rasa (Masson and Patwardhan, 1969:50).

In addition to working out the details of the rasa theory, moreover, Abhinava is credited with the addition of a ninth and most important rasa — santa-rasa, the emotion of tranquillity — which he suggests is the foundation or root of all the others. This experience of tranquillity is unique, transcending the ordinary realm of emotion, for its basis lies in the tranquil repose of consciousness, the Atman. It is this feeling of harmonious repose which lies at the heart of all the rasas, and into which they all resolve (ibid.: 1969).

However, the revolutionary innovation of Abhinava's aesthetics was not simply the rasa-dhvani theory; rather, it was also his shift in the locus of the aesthetic experience itself. Rasa is not the experience of the character of a drama, nor is it the experience of the actor. Instead, it is the unique experience of the spectator, the sahrdaya, or the one of a sympathetic heart. This shift, as Delmonico suggests, 'amounts to a Copernican revolution in Indian aesthetics' (1990:110); for it means that the true essence of rasa does not take place in the active and passionate person of the actor, but rather in the detached, distant and passive mind of the observer. Only the spectator has the proper 'artistic distance' to separate himself from the ordinary world, to identify sympathetically with the portrayed action in his imagination, and yet to maintain his detachment and contemplative equanimity (De, 1963:63). Not just anyone, however, is capable of
such an experience. One can only enjoy *rasa* if he has the proper cultivation and the necessary aesthetic sensibility: a true aesthete must have the proper 'latent impressions' (*vasanas*) from past experiences, which will allow him to respond sympathetically to the actions and emotions portrayed on the stage. In Bourdieu's terms, he must have cultivation and 'distinction.'

sahrdaya ... denotes persons who are capable of identifying with the subject matter, as the mirror of their heart has been polished by constant study of poetry and who respond to it sympathetically in their hearts (Dhv 1.1 L; cf. Delmonico, 1990:92).

Indeed, Abhinava explicitly states that even learned scholars and brahmans cannot experience *rasa* unless they have the proper cultivation: 'Vedic scholars ... have no poetic sensitivity, for their hearts lack any proclivity (*vasana*) toward such emotions'" (Ingalls, 1990:73n)

For the truly cultivated sahrdaya, on the other hand, the pleasure of *rasa* is an utterly unique experience, a pleasure which cannot be compared to any other sensual or spiritual feeling. It is said to be "disinterested" and non–affective, that is, detached from any mundane physical desires or gratifications. In Abhinava's words, "Detachment from all kinds of pleasure leads to tranquility" (ABh 340).

Owing to the absence of any possible (longing for earning, etc) this pleasure is different form the forms of bliss of practical life...it is called tasting, ... the rest in the nature of the knowing subject...This liberty is inseparable from the very nature of consciousness (Abh; Gnoli, 1956:xliii–iv).

Not unlike Kant's disinterested judgment, this is a pleasure which is 'absolutely pure,' 'divorced from personal interests' and 'free from all limitations of common pleasure" (Hiriyanna, 1954:32). In Bourdieu's terms, we might say that it is 'pleasure purified of pleasure.'

This detachment and disinterest is achieved through a kind of universalization (*sadharani-karana*) or de–individualization of the aesthetic experience. Because the actor is a neutral figure, being neither identical with the spectator, nor merely an insentient object, the emotive state which he portrays is non–specific or generalized, something which can then be experienced, not by just one individual, but by all of the spectators (Delmonico, 1990:72, 232).

That singular mental state ... is freed from identifications such as 'one's own or another's ... having become generalized, it enters the spectators ... as being present in them ... it is distinct from the ordinary mental states belonging to others that are the object of knowledge of neutral knowers and that are known through inference, received knowledge, etc. (Abh 266–7).
But because this fear is without objective reality, because it does not personally affect the spectator himself, the emotion becomes universalized and is experienced as the bhayanaka-rasa (Abh; Pandey, 1956:v.II,569).

Because it is de-individualized and universal, the aesthetic experience brings about a unique form of liberation from the ordinary limitations of the self. The viewer's individual subjectivity is in fact dissolved or 'melted away,' and the experience of his limited existence disappears. He is able to know a temporary form of liberation:

Watching a play or reading a poem ... entails a loss of the sense of time and space. All worldly considerations cease ... Our hearts respond sympathetically but not selfishly ... The ego is transcended and ... the normal I is suspended .... The hard knot of selfishness has been untied ... The purity of our emotion ... takes us to a higher level of ... clear undifferentiated bliss (Masson and Patwardhan, 1969: vii; Abh 53).

Indeed, this experience is even said to remove all the ordinary obscurations which conceal one's own inner nature, to reveal the true nature of the Self. As a kind of inner illumination, it brings a supra-mundane bliss: for 'bliss is nothing but a full illumination of one's own being, accompanied by a cognition which pervades all one's own nature' (Gnoli, 1956:xlii). For a brief time, the self is 'unfettered' and so comes to taste 'its own inherent joy,' experiencing a state of 'repose whose nature is unobstructed consciousness' (Abh 266–7).

Aesthetics, Religious Experience and Mystical Ecstasy in Abhinavagupta

Like Kant, Abhinavagupta is equally ambivalent about the relationship between aesthetics and his greater religious system (though there are many different scholarly opinions as to the precise nature of this relationship). On one hand, with Kant, Abhinava insists that aesthetic judgment is independent of anything else, including religion; but on the other hand, there is an undeniable affinity between these two domains.

The direct comparison of these aesthetic tasting and knowledge of the Absolute reality had already been made by Bhattanāyaka in the 10th century: like yogic ecstasy, he tells us, the tasting of poetry or drama brings a kind of freedom from all particular desires, a liberation from time, space and individual identity (Gnoli, 1956:xxi). Although Abhinava is somewhat more reserved about comparing aesthetic and mystical experiences, he too acknowledges that they bear a certain 'family resemblance.' The experience of santa-rasa or tranquillity, which is the bedrock of all the rasas, is said to be a kind of liberation or release from the limitations of the ordinary self, which is similar in kind to the tranquillity of Brahman.
The enjoyment of rasa is like the bliss that arises from realizing one's identity with the highest Brahman, for it consists of repose in bliss which is the true nature of one's own Self (Dhv 2.4 L).

Aesthetic enjoyment, which is a melting, expansion and radiance...comes about from the cessation of the obscuration of the true nature of the self (ibid).

However, Abhinava is reluctant to take this analogy too far, and in fact objects to Bhattanāyaka's mystical identification of rasa with Brahman—knowledge (Ingalls, 1990:229). As Gnoli points out, he is also careful to show the fundamental differences between aesthetic and mystical states: aesthetic experience is, first of all, not enduring, but can last only a short time; nor can it permanently change the life of the spectator. Moksa, on the other hand, is permanent, bringing about a real and lasting change in the yogin. Moreover, aesthetic experience still partakes of the world of illusion, while moksa is said to be beyond all illusion. Whereas the aesthete seeks a detached, pacified, self-sufficient form of sensation and emotion, the yogin seeks the total absence of all passion and sense perception in the pure 'I' of consciousness (1956:xxiv–v). Hence the aesthetic experience is a 'foretaste' or 'a cloudy window into a reality beyond illusion' (Haberman, 1988:22).

However, Abhinava's aesthetic also reinforces the superiority of his own Tantric path, and the higher form of liberating experience which comes only through esoteric ritual. For the aesthetic experience, like the orthodox Brahmin's experience of pure Being and detached Selfhood, is still always inferior to the true experience of liberation, which can only be attained through Tantric initiation and secret practices. The higher Tantric experience is one that utterly surpasses a simple static and passive state of Being, exploding the lower orthodox notions of selfhood and purity altogether, and realizing an ecstatic, orgasmic and lawless bliss (Sanderson, 1989:216n). It is an experience that can only be known through esoteric initiations (diksa) and secret rites (kulayaga), involving meat, wine, and ritual acts of sexual intercourse. Tantric practices, like art and drama, employ sensual pleasure as an instrument to awaken a higher and more universal kind of bliss, the pure, detached and disinterested pleasure of the Self. Above all, sexual pleasure is used in order to arouse the higher experience of the union of the divine couple, Siva and Sakti, or the pure light of awareness (Prakasa) and its eternal self-reflection (Vimarsa) (TA 5.58b–60a; Muller Ortega, 1986:123ff). In the ecstasy of this internalized sexual union, the sadhaka experiences the highest unity of pure I–consciousness, the wedding of Siva and Sakti, subject and object, the radiance (prakasa) and reflection (vimarsa) of thought, in which the raging fire of awareness consumes all duality and every trace of sensible experience. When all the 'fuel' of experience is devoured within this burning radiance, when all opposites are fused, then the yogin attains the supreme 'I' which is the origin and goal of Abhinava's entire metaphysical system (TA 3.259; Muller
Now, this Tantric experience is also often described with the metaphor of the aesthetic experience. As Masson and Patwardhan point out, descriptions of Abhinava portray him as being surrounded by women, drinking wine and engaged in secret sexual rituals, which unfold around him like a "dramatic performance: 'The ritual is an elaborate play...The goal is the same as in a...drama, to reach a state of...blissful repose' (1969:40). However, the Tantric experience also goes a step beyond the aesthetic experience, into a realm of bliss which transcends the sympathetic emotion of the spectator. Unlike the aesthete, the Tantrika uses sensual pleasure not as an end in itself, but as a means to absolute Consciousness, in which the very duality of subject and object implodes. Unlike the aesthetic experience, Tantric ecstasy is not only more permanent, but it is also utterly free of all the latent impressions (vasanas) of experience, which give the aesthetic rasa its unique coloring (Gnoli, 1956:xxiv–v). A 'duality-devouring expansion of consciousness,' it is like a blazing fire, which consumes all the 'kindling' of latent impressions, and leaves nothing but radiant Self-awareness. 'Because of the dissolution of all that could be burned, and the destruction of even the remaining latent impressions, the entire universe is dissolved ... in that consciousness. Consciousness shines alone, free of objects ... causing the universe to become absorbed in his own consciousness ... the practitioner would become the supreme Bhairava' (TA 527b–53; Muller Ortega, 1986:199).

Having recognized its ultimate identity with the pure T of consciousness, the self ceases to be a mere passive "spectator" of the cosmic drama, and in fact moves to center stage. Indeed, in some of Abhinava's descriptions of the Tantric ritual, the focus of subjectivity shifts, and the yogin assumes the role of the divine "actor" at the center of all things. Contrary to the opinions of Haberman, Delmonico and others, it would appear that Abhinava does not in fact limit the aesthetic experience to the spectator alone; rather, there are indications that the supreme Tantric experience itself may be identified with the aesthetic experience of the actor in a great cosmic drama, a kind of divine player, for whom 'all the world is a stage.' Just like the experienced actor,' who experiences the transcendent joy of rasa by watching a play, so too 'The Self ... is an actor because it assumes every state of being. Inebriated with the juice of supreme bliss, the Self sports in the world of daily life like an actor' (Dyczkowski 1992b: 113).

The new Saiva was to see himself as an actor with his individuality as a stage and his faculties as an audience of aesthetes initiated into the appreciation of the outer world, not as a system of external values exacting the impotence of a contentless consciousness, but as the experience of the self's infinite inner autonomy, pervaded by vibrant beauty (Sanderson, 1989:205).

In the state of liberation, the yogin recognizes his own intrinsic identity with the Supreme 'I' of consciousness; he understands that it is the Supreme "Actor".
Lord Siva Himself who dances and plays, creates and destroys the drama of samsara, in and through the individual self (TA I.45). For the deified man, the social world itself is nothing but a great stage, in which the divine Self dons the outward 'mask' of his orthodox social role, playing like 'an actor concealed within his lower nature as an agent on the path of purity' (Sanderson, 1989:204).

III. Comparative Comments: Disinterested Judgment and Social Interests

Based on our previous examination of Kantian aesthetics, along with Bourdieu's and Eagleton's insights, let us now summarize the parallels and differences between these two theories, and then speculate about some of the social implications of Abhinava's poetic theory:

1) For both Kant and Abhinava the aesthetic experience is supposed to be purely disinterested and detached, free from all selfish pleasure or egotistical interest.

2) It is an experience at once 'private' or individual, and yet also 'generalized' or even 'intersubjective,' shared through bonds of sympathy between the poet and his public and between the community of cultivated aesthetes.

3) As in the case of the Kantian sublime, which reveals to the spectator the awesome and universal laws of Reason that lie within himself, the tasting of Rasa reveals to the Sahrdaya the innate luminosity and bliss of his own Self.

4) Hence it is closely tied to a new conception of human subjectivity, based on the pure freedom and autonomy of the self, which finds its repose in disinterested and harmonious contemplation.

Beyond these purely doctrinal similarities, however, I would follow the lead of Bourdieu and Eagleton by arguing that the aesthetic theories of Kant and Abhinava also played a similar strategic role as part of their own broader social and political ambitions. First of all, for Abhinava, as for Kant, aesthetic taste depends on proper cultivation and distinction, an elitist and cultured form of experience which serves to distinguish the cultivated Sahrdaya from the gross and vulgar mass of mankind. Like Kant, moreover, Abhinava sees in the aesthetic experience a kind of non-coercive, non-utilitarian pleasure, free from the limitations of established religious or political structures (Chari, 1990:32). It offered a new freedom from all other forms of political or religious authority — such as the orthodox 'Saiva Siddhânta Brahmins who held most of the sacred and secular power in 10th Century Kashmir — and a recentering of authority within the individual self. Bypassing the orthodox Brahminical religion, it offers a means of transcendental experience which does not depend on Vedic learning or traditional ritual. Indeed, the aesthete 'relishes the same rasa for which yogins take to hard penance, while the poet relishes it without going through penance' (Deshpande, 1992:126). Like the Brahmins on the path of purity, the sahdaya
can experience a form of detached, disinterested contemplation, a resting in the pure Being of the Self; but he can do so without the requirements of Brahminical laws or the orthodox Saiva Siddhanta. In short, realm of aesthetic taste is the basis of a different kind of 'society,' an 'intersubjective' community of aesthetes, joined by common aesthetic cultivation and 'distinction' (ibid.:26).

But at the same time, like Kant's aesthetic, Abhinava's helped to support his greater philosophical system and specifically his ideal of the Subject: aesthetic contemplation is a foretaste of the eternal, liberated, pure Awareness of the supreme Self, which is the heart of Abhinava's non–dual Idealist system. By identifying this disinterested, liberated consciousness as the essence of aesthetic taste, Abhinava was also subtly asserting the superiority of his own philosophical system above that of his rivals, the orthodox, dualist Saiva-Siddhanta.

In short, I wish to draw two general conclusions from the foregoing discussion: first, on the aesthetic plane, I submit that, like Kant's, Abhinava's aesthetic ideal involves a rhetoric of "disinterest" which in fact masks and recodes very real social interests. Second, on the philosophical and tantric plane, I submit that Abhinava's aesthetic theory and his Tantric metaphysical system represent two complementary strategies in his socially ambitious avant–garde movement and his quest for religious power. But they operate on two different planes — the exoteric and the esoteric, the public stage and the inner chamber of secrecy. Like his Tantric practices and his Idealist metaphysical system, this theory would have fit in nicely with his "socially ambitious avant–garde movement" (Sanderson, 1989), and would have been extremely attractive to Abhinava's aristocratic patrons and his large following of supporters among the wealthier Kashmiri middle class householders (grhastas): it offered a new form of social cultivation and taste which distinguished the cultivated aesthete both from the vulgar tastes of the common man and from the orthodox authority of the traditional Saiva-Siddhanta Brahmins; and it affirmed the autonomous freedom and supramundane pleasure which is discovered within the individual subject's own detached awareness consciousness. Like the ritual sphere of his Tantric practices — though on a less esoteric or secretive plane — the realm of drama and aesthetics opened an alternative 'social space,' a new 'private sphere;' to use the phrase of Jurgen Habermas (1989:50–2). It offered a new space of freedom and autonomy, outside the confines of ordinary society, in which the cultivated aesthete could enjoy a new kind of liberty from all existing political and religious structures.

However, in addition to this basic strategic similarity, our comparison has also highlighted the many enormous differences between Kant and Abhinava. Although they share many formal similarities, these two aesthetic theories were used in very different ways in relation to their greater social context and their broader moral and philosophical systems. For Kant, the individual aesthetic experience must be subordinated to the higher, universal laws of reason, just as the free individual must voluntarily subject himself to the laws of society. The
Kantian aesthetic judgment is a means of reconciling human freedom with natural necessity, of harmonizing the world as it is with our moral obligation as it ought to be, and the free play of imagination with the immutable laws of the understanding. Hence it is inseparable from his greater ethical system and social ideals. For Abhinavagupta, on the other hand, the aesthetic experience is subordinated neither to the power of reason nor to any ethical judgment, but is rather a pure non-utilitarian feeling of pleasure. Abhinava's aesthetic, moreover, is much more obviously elitist and individualistic. It makes no claim to support a specific social ethic or communal ideal, but is exclusively an affair of the individual spectator in the detached contemplation of the Self. Finally, Abhinava's aesthetic experience is inseparable from his philosophical ideal, based on a model of the Self as inherently identical with the supreme absolute Self of Siva, who dwells eternally in its own innate bliss and pre self-awareness. The aesthetic experience brings a melting of individual consciousness and a liberation from time and space which goes far beyond even the Kantian notion of the Sublime.

Conclusions

In this essay I have attempted to suggest a new and more fruitful approach to a comparative aesthetics, by focusing not on simple doctrinal parallels, but rather on common strategies and ways of using aesthetics in relation to the greater social context. By using the insights of Bourdieu and Eagleton, I have argued that the concept of 'disinterested judgment' played a similar strategic role for both Kant and Abhinavagupta: namely, that of providing a source of legitimation and distinction for a socially ambitious, upwardly mobile class of men, and of opening up a new social sphere of discourse and aesthetic experience, freed from the constraints of established religious or political authorities. But at the same time, beyond these simple similarities, I have also shown that ways in which these strategies were played out in relation to their larger social contexts and philosophical systems were very different indeed.

Finally, I would also hope that this type of study might have some broader implications for further comparisons between Eastern and Western aesthetics and religion as a whole. This could potentially offer us a new way of drawing analogies and "seeing similarities," not only between different cultures, but also between different realms of discourse, between art, religion and philosophy, between poetics and the social order, between the dramatic arena and the political stage.
Abbreviations


K  Karika verses of Anandavardhana

A  Commentary of Anandavardhana

L  Locana subcommentary of Abhinavagupta


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**Endnotes**

1See for example Pandey (1956), Chaudhary (1991), Coomaraswamy (1956), Deutsche, (1975), among many others.

2On the general scholarly bias toward Abhinavagupta, often to the exclusion of other important Indian theorists, see Delmonico, 1990: 9–13. Pandey also compares Abhinava's aesthetics with the Absolute Idealism of Hegel (1956:357–61) and the "voluntarism" of Schopenhauer (466ff).


4"In a German of that epoch, the mark of "taste" was Aufklärung, a cosmopolitan acquaintance with the best of foreign thought. Kant was an untraveled man...Yet he strove to achieve cosmopolitanism, to widen his intellectual horizons...Kant had a very strong desire ...to be a fashionable man, to show his "taste"...he was often called the "galant master"—a spruce dresser, a popular teacher, and a welcome guest in the best society of the city' (Zammito, 1992:23).
I borrow this phrase from Chytry (1989), who examines the 18th and 19th century German ideal of society as a harmonious aesthetic order, based on the model of the Golden Age of Greece. The ideal of an aesthetic ethos, a beautiful democracy or a religion of art, were inspired by Enlightenment thinkers like Herder, Winckelman and Kant, and later flowered in the Romantics and Idealists.

According to Zammito, shortly before the last revision of the Critique of Judgment was sent to the publisher in 1790, Kant made an 'ethical turn,' adding suggestions as to the moral, social and religious implications of aesthetic judgment in an attempt to 'defend his metaphyscial commitments to the free will and moral duty of human beings and to the idea of a transcedntental and personal Divinity on Christian lines' (1992:264).

Because of the general lack of archeological evidence, it is admittedly very difficult to grasp the social situation of 10th century Kashmir. However, as Sanderson and others like V.N.Drabu argue, there is a sizeable body of literary evidence from this period, from which they believe it is possible to reconstruct the political and economic context. Sanderson uses the works of the Kashmir Saivite school, together with those of their Brahmin rivals, like the Nyayamanjari of Jayanta Bhatta and the works of Ramakantha (1989: 208–9n). Drabu (1990) uses the following literary sources: the Rajatarangini of Kalhana (12th c.), the Nilamata (6–7th c.), the Srikantacarita, the Mankhakosa (12th c), the Harivijaya of Ratnakara, and the many writings of the satirist and critic, Ksemendra. He also uses the large body of Saivite Agamas and the writings of Abhinavagupta and his school.

The term 'Trika' refers to the three highest realities which exist in non–dual unity: Para (which in turn consists of the triad, Siva, Sakti and their union), Parapara (which is the union of Para, Parapara, and Apara), and Apara (which consists of Siva, Sakti and Nara [Man]) (Pandey, 1963:p.591). The Trika school flourished in Kashmir between 900 and 1400 CE. Abhinava represents the third and final stage in the development of the school, during which it tried to integrate the orthodox Saivite dualism with the unorthodox monism of the Tantrics. Hence, Abhinava used the erotic symbolism of the Tantrics, but 'deodorized' it and re–inscribed it with a sophisticated philosophical system (Sanderson, 1986).

For a good summary of the different types of dhvani see Raja, 1963. As Chari explains, suggestion is first divided into that based on secondary meaning and that based on primary meaning. The former may be subdivided into the suggestion of an idea and the suggestion of a figure; the latter may be subdivided into paronomastic expressions with embedded figures, implications from literal statements, and emotive meanings (96ff).
There are many views on the relation to Abhinava's aesthetics and his Tantric works: At one extreme are scholars like Pandey (1956) or Coomaraswamy (1956), who see the aesthetic experience as a limited form of the meditation on the Self, in which the Self is liberated from time and space, and reposes in blissful consciousness. At the other extreme are those like Chari, who sees the aesthetic as the experience of pure pleasure, in and for itself alone, clearly distinguished from yogic contemplation (1990:6, 11f). Finally, Gnoli takes a more moderate position, suggesting that the two experiences are related, but also fundamentally different in content; whereas aesthetic experience depends on latent impressions from past experience, yogic ecstasy destroys all latent impressions in the light of pure consciousness (1956:xxiv–v)