

Ch. III.3 Enacting affectivity: the psychophysical training of *śṛṅgāra* in Gopal Venu's *Navarasa Sādhanā*

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This chapter introduces *Navarasa Sādhanā*, a training for performers developed by Gopal Venu (1945-), an Indian *kūṭiyāṭṭam* theatre master-teacher, scholar and practitioner. *Navarasa Sādhanā* (NRS from now on) literally means “the practice of the nine *rasas*”, where “*rasa*” is a concept central to Indian aesthetics, often translated as “sentiment” or “aesthetic emotion”. Thus, this chapter offers for the first time to an academic audience a detailed presentation of a training for performers (mainly actors and dancers, but not only) that focuses on the enactment of a variety of affective states (such as emotions and moods). We present this training as an instance of what is known today in theatre studies as “psychophysical acting”—an approach associated with theatre practitioner, actor, teacher and director Phillip Zarrilli (1943-2020). On the basis of Giorgia Ciampi’s direct experience of the training and of her interviews with Gopal and his daughter Kapila (also a renowned performer), we illustrate how *Navarasa Sādhanā* is a practice for learning to enact different affective states by developing a heightened sensitivity to subtle bodily sensations and by harnessing this sensitivity for expressive purposes. After presenting some necessary background for situating the training in its cultural context, we delve into the experiential dynamics of the practice. We first provide a general description of the training, focusing on what it is to undergo and experience it in the first person. We then describe in detail the experience of practising one specific *rasa*—*śṛṅgāra* (love, or the erotic). This detailed description aims to illustrate the richness and sophistication of *Navarasa Sādhanā* as a form of psychophysical training and, more generally, to illustrate the capacity of art to further our understanding of human embodiment—not just as a physical fact but also in terms of the first-personal experience of being alive and inherently animated, with associated feelings of vital energy and their affective dynamics.

Introduction: theoretical and methodological premises

What is distinctive about this training is that it offers a way into the enactment of affective states that does not rely on “emotion memory” (the practice of acting out the emotions of a character by drawing on one’s own personal memories) but rather on a sensitisation of the actor/performer to how affective states feel in the body. As performers become more aware, through this training, of how different bodily movements accompany different affects, they also become more skilful at enacting the latter. Presenting this training in some detail will help underscore—to use Christine Vial Kayser’s words in her call for papers for this volume—how art “may help us reattune with our living body, with our vital energy (...) in the sense of somatic energy (bodily impulse), biological and psychological energy”.

Navarasa Sāadhanā was developed in India by Gopal Venu, a former *kathakali* and *kūṭiyāṭṭam* performer.¹ Venu is the founder and artistic director of the Natana Kairali Research and Performing Centre for Traditional Arts, located in Irinjalakuda (Kerala, India), where he currently teaches. Little has been written about NRS. Venu mentions it only in passing in his books.² There are also a few short online articles by previous NRS trainees, with their testimonies and impressions. The most detailed existing writing to date is an online article by Venu himself, published in 2018 on *Narthaki* (an online forum on Indian dance, including articles by practitioners and teachers), which explains how he came to develop NRS, including its main features and objectives. None of these works, however, describe the training in detail; nor do they describe the lived experience of the performers while undergoing the training—especially how the training gradually changes their relation to their bodies and affective states. The aim of this chapter is to provide such an experiential account based on the first author’s direct knowledge of this training, her daily written records while undertaking it, and interviews she conducted in January 2019 with Gopal and his daughter, performer Kapila Venu (1982-).³

¹ These are traditional Indian performing arts. *Kūṭiyāṭṭam* is the older one, and we describe it in more detail later in the main text. *Kathakali* is a more recent development of *kūṭiyāṭṭam*.

² Venu’s written work includes detailed historical and descriptive accounts of *kūṭiyāṭṭam*, *kathakali* and Natana Kairali’s role in rejuvenating Kerala’s traditional artforms, including the development of a notation system for eye movements and hand gestures (Venu, 2000; 2002; 2005; 2013). He only mentions *Navarasa Sāadhanā* in Venu (2013). In previous works, he talks of “emotion training” but uses different terms.

³ Both have agreed to be named and for the interview material to be used in this chapter.

NRS is a rich and multi-layered training, still evolving. Here we discuss only a few of its aspects (for more detail, see Ciampi, in preparation). We focus on the lived experience of undergoing NRS in order to characterise it as a form of “psychophysical training” for performers. This term, as we use it here, comes from scholar, performer, director and actor trainer Phillip Zarrilli (1943-2020). Zarrilli’s name is associated in theatre studies with the “psychophysical approach to acting”, which he developed since 1976 on the basis of his long-term engagement with various Asian embodied disciplines—particularly the martial art *kalaripayattu*, but also *haṭha yoga* and *taiqiquan* (see e.g., Zarrilli, 2009). He calls these “skilful embodied practices” that allow the actor to develop a “repertoire of sensorimotor skills and ways of being attentive” (Zarrilli, 2009, p. 48).

This approach is designed to help actors (and performers more generally) develop a refined bodily self-awareness by learning how to awaken, shape and deploy “energy” through performance. “Energy” refers in this context to an “enlivening” quality that “*animates and activates* the actor” (Zarrilli, 2009, p. 19, italics in original). Energy, as Zarrilli understands it, is equivalent to *prāṇa* (Sanskrit) and *qi/ki* (Chinese/Japanese)—both usually translated as “breath”, “vital energy”, or “life force”. These are very ancient terms central to traditional South and East Asian medical systems and related embodied disciplines. In psychophysical training, performers practice and learn a sequence of selected exercises from those disciplines, through which they learn to awaken and harness their vital energy, deploy it through gesture and movement, and more generally to develop different modes of awareness and perceptual skills.

Psychophysical training is well established in theatre and performance studies. One aspect that it does not cover in much detail, however, is the enactment of affective states. To be sure, this theme is not absent in Zarrilli’s writings. He presents the concept of “affect” as an extension of the actor’s ability to sense and feel as it becomes increasingly refined because of sustained long-term psychophysical training (Zarrilli, 2011; 2020). However, Zarrilli does not focus in detail on how the enactment of different emotions, moods or drives is accompanied by different energetic qualities and bodily dynamics and on how performers can train their awareness of these qualities and dynamics, as it happens in NRS. The aim of this chapter is to begin filling this gap. Zarrilli himself encouraged our collaboration on this topic, although unfortunately, he did not live to witness it. In conversation with both of us, he expressed the

view that this was a key topic that needed further exploration. He was familiar with the enactive approach to affectivity developed in the philosophy of mind by Colombetti (2014) and was keen to explore its connections with his psychophysical approach. We all agreed that the mind needs to be understood as thoroughly embodied and affective and that specific affective states manifest themselves outwardly in the body (in expressions and gestures) while they also have distinctive felt or experiential dynamics (Colombetti, 2014). NRS is a training that brings all these features to the fore, and in this sense Zarrilli's approach can be productively brought into dialogue with NRS. At the same time, it is useful to draw on Zarrilli's conceptualisation of psychophysical training when examining NRS, as it provides suitable theoretical concepts to articulate how NRS operates.⁴ For example, Zarrilli's concepts of "bodymind" and "embodied imagination", which he employs extensively in all his writings, apply well to NRS too, and provide useful handles for explaining what performers do during this training—not just in terms of visible physical actions, but also in terms of lived experience.

Affective states rather than emotions

We present NRS as a training of the expression of "affective states" rather than just "emotions" because, in line with Colombetti (2014), we understand affectivity as a general and pervasive dimension of our embodied existence, rather than as just a collection of temporary mental states (as emotions such as fear, anger, disgust, jealousy, etc. are often understood). Affectivity, as Colombetti characterises it, is the general capacity of any living body to be affected, touched or moved by a situation. Most generally, affectivity is a lack of indifference. Relatedly, we use the term "affective states" to refer to different ways in which we can be affected or moved by something or someone. During short-term emotions, we are affected, of course, but so are we in more prolonged mood states or when we are driven by desire, pain, pleasure, etc. The concept of "affective states" covers all these possibilities and is thus more

⁴ One will not find this kind of conceptualisation in Venu's written work and not even in his oral teachings. As we illustrate below, Venu's teaching style does not include abstraction and explicit theorisation but proceeds primarily through examples, analogies, myths and anecdotes to provide experiential guidance. This does not mean that there is no theorising behind NRS, but rather that a neat distinction between theoretical conceptualisation and practical teaching does not apply to Venu's approach.

suitable than “emotions” to discuss NRS.⁵ As we explain below, NRS is all about becoming more sensitive to how the living body is affected by the external world and by sensations felt in the body itself, and about how to enact not just emotions but also moods, drives, longings and so on.

In the next section, we introduce contextual elements that are key to understanding NRS, including the concepts of *rasa* and *bhāva*, and the performing art *kūṭiyāṭṭam*. In the third section, we present the main general features of NRS, and in the fourth, we focus on the training of one specific affective state: *śṛṅgāra* (pronounced “shrin-ga-ra”), usually translated as “love” or “the erotic”. We conclude with some brief general considerations about the value of NRS.

I. *Navarasa Sāadhanā* in context

In April 2021, 50 workshops of NRS training have taken place both at Natana Kairali and around the world, with a total of around 1000 participants. The workshops typically last two weeks and are open to performers from all over the world, of all genders, from different backgrounds and of different styles—from traditional Indian performing arts to world contemporary theatre, performance and cinema. Venu (2018, online) writes that “the present system (...) had been codified in a way so that performers from various genres will be able to incorporate [it] (...) into their routine practice”. It is important to emphasise this broad audience and scope so as not to understand the training as entirely or only “local”, “Indian”, or “traditional”. As Venu (2018) recounts, the development of NRS has been influenced by traditional Indian aesthetics and performing arts. Venu trained since childhood, first as a *kathakali* and later as a *kūṭiyāṭṭam* actor (he last performed in 2010), and NRS is grounded in the latter. As he clarifies, however, NRS “is not part of *kūṭiyāṭṭam*, as many people have

⁵ One might observe at this point (as one reviewer did) that we are using a European framework for understanding NRS. We acknowledge that our cultural positionality and philosophical perspective inform our understanding of the experience, specifically of NRS. However, rather than imposing the framework of affectivity on NRS, our aim in this chapter is to put it into dialogue with the philosophical and aesthetic concepts which underpin this acting practice. We propose this framework as a more suitable perspective to be put into dialogue with this practice than the concept of “emotions” as a collection of mental states. We certainly do not claim that our framework for making sense of NRS is the only possible one, but we regard it as one of the possible ways to unpack and illuminate the complexities of this form of actor training. Venu himself read this chapter and expressed his satisfaction with our analysis.

misunderstood it. However, it makes independent use of some its techniques of *kūṭiyāṭṭam*. It is not possible to practice Navarasa Sadhana while strictly adhering to the tenets of *kūṭiyāṭṭam*” (Venu, 2018). NRS indeed includes various elements from *kūṭiyāṭṭam* (explained below). Yet the reason why it is not possible to practice it while strictly adhering to the tenets of this artform is that NRS invites a freedom of movement, facial expression and vocalisation that is not part of traditional ways of performing *kūṭiyāṭṭam*. There are many other sources of influence on Venu, who, in addition to being a traditional master-actor and pedagogue, can be considered a contemporary practitioner familiar with different cultures and performing traditions and with a strong desire to innovate. It is not easy to trace all these influences, although some of them are briefly recorded in his writings through accounts of his numerous collaborations with practitioners from around the world. These influences are also woven into the images, stories and analogies Venu uses in his teachings, rather than as explicit theorising.

As Venu (2018) recounts, the roots of NRS reach back to research he started three decades ago in the acting laboratory that flourished at the Kodungallur *Kovilakam* (the royal palace of the Kingdom of Kodungallur, Kerala) in the 19th century. Central to this approach to acting was a technique called *svavarāvāyu*—literally, “the voice/sound of breath”. In 1992 Natana Kairali became a permanent training centre for researching and teaching this technique.⁶ Venu (2018) says that he continued his enquiry into it “silently and informally, on a practical level” for several years. In 2001, as part of a 3-year workshop project, he also conducted enquiries on the role of the eyes and hands (*netra* and *hasta*) in performance, grounded in his experience as a *kathakali* and *kūṭiyāṭṭam* performer, and based on consultations with the living masters of Kerala (such as his teacher Ammannur Madhava Chakyar). These lines of inquiry all played a central part in the development of NRS. A pivotal moment occurred in 2005 when the co-director of the Singapore Theatre Training and Research Programme (now Intercultural Theatre Institute), Sasitharan Thirunalan, asked Venu “to create a model of actors’ training according to the Indian tradition” (Venu, 2018). In a recent online event (1st March 2021) celebrating the 50th NRS workshop, Sasitharan specified that he had been so impressed by seeing Venu teach how to perform different affective states in *kūṭiyāṭṭam*, that he had asked

⁶ The same year, Venu published a short article on this technique in the *Sunday Supplement of Mathrubhumi*, a leading newspaper from Kerala (now reprinted in Venu, 2000). In this article, he traces the lineage of this technique and explains, among other things, its original connection with music and the idea that different affective states are associated with different sounds and different ways of breathing.

him to develop a training method specifically for that. This request prompted Venu to begin structuring his approach to emotion into a self-contained training system.

NRS is still evolving. Once complete, it should involve eight stages (Venu, personal communication to Ciampi, 7th January 2019). At the time of writing, Venu has developed the first four stages. Most students go through the first stage, and only a few follow through until the fourth one. Ciampi has gone through the first and second stages so far. Our discussion in this chapter refers to the first stage only, on the basis of Ciampi's direct experience.

I.a *Rasa* and *bhava*

Navarasa Sāadhanā literally means the “discipline” or “practice” (*sāadhanā*) of the nine (*nava*) *rasas*. *Rasa* is a complex concept at the core of Indian aesthetics, variously translated as “mood”, “emotional tone”, “sentiment” or, more literally, “taste” or “flavour” (e.g., Chaudhury, 1952; Higgins, 2007). This concept is found already in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*—the Indian foundational text treating the subject of the performing arts in all its aspects, attributed to the sage-priest Bharata Muni (ca. 200-500 CE) (see Unni, 2019). A common way to characterise *rasa* is also as “aesthetic emotion” (Higgins, 2007, p. 44). This understanding comes primarily from the 11th-century Kashmiri philosopher Abhinavagupta and his school (1000-1200 CE) (Pollock, 2006).

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* discusses *rasa* in relation to *bhāva*. The latter term refers both to “existence” (the root *bhū-* means “to be, to become manifest”) and “mental state”, and has been variously translated as “feeling”, “psychological state” and “emotion” (Higgins, 2007, p. 44). Chakrabarti (1999, p. 191) explains that “‘*bhāva*’, the word for emotion in Sanskrit, literally means ‘a manner of making it be’ (from ‘*bhū*’, to be, ...)”. He also emphasises that this term highlights the “felt quality” of affective states. Relatedly, McDaniel (1995, p. 42) specifies that “Bhava is an emotional complex, a form of experience, with connotations of associated perception, thought, movement, and expression. It is a way of being, a sense of identity which may be individual or shared”; she goes on to illustrate different uses of this term. These

definitions are coherent with Zarrilli’s own conceptualisation of *bhāvas* as “states of being/doing” (Zarrilli, 2009, p. 69; 2011).

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* presents *rasa* and *bhāva* as corresponding states. To illustrate their relation, the text compares *rasa* to the taste of a meal prepared by a skilful cook (the artist/performer), and *bhāva* to the ingredients the cook uses to prepare the meal (expressions, gestures, feelings, and so on) (Unni, 2019, Ch. VI).⁷ In the *Nāṭyaśāstra* we find a list of eight *rasas* and eight corresponding *bhāvas* (also called *sthāyibhāvas*)⁸ (Table 1).

<i>rasas</i>	<i>bhāvas/sthāyibhāvas</i>
the erotic - <i>śṛṅgāra</i>	love
the comic – <i>hāsya</i>	mirth
the pathetic - <i>karuṇa</i>	sorrow
the furious – <i>raudra</i>	anger
the heroic - <i>vīra</i>	courage
the terrible - <i>bhayānaka</i>	fear
the disgusting – <i>bībhatsa</i>	aversion
the marvellous - <i>adbhuta</i>	wonder

⁷ In addition to this famous metaphor, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* describes the relation between *rasa* and *bhāva* in different ways, not all compatible with each other. There is a complex debate on how to interpret these concepts and their relation, which we do not address here; our goal in this section is only to provide a brief introduction to key concepts necessary for understanding the roots of NRS.

⁸ *Sthāyibhāva* refers specifically to the “durable emotion” (Higgins, 2007, p. 45) or overarching affective state. The eight *bhāvas* are also *sthāyibhāvas* in the sense that they can be considered underlying durable states made of transient phases (i. e. “love” includes longing in separation). It can also refer to the overarching affective tone of a particular play or phase of a play.

Table 1: The eight *rasas* and *bhāvas/sthāyibhāvas* listed in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (Unni, 2019, pp. 557–558)

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* also provides meticulous lists of expressive codes for different *rasas*. For example, the erotic (*śṛṅgāra*) is described as involving “dexterous movements of the eyes, brows and sidelong glances; graceful movements, sweet dispositions and agreeable words” (Unni, 2019, pp. 568–569). The furious (*raudra*) involves “swelling of the nostrils, rolling of the eyes, biting of lips and throbbing of the cheeks” (Ibid., p. 594), and further differences in expression are described depending at whom the anger is directed.

These codes for expressing *rasa* have influenced various Indian performing arts such as *kūṭiyāṭṭam*, *kathakali*, *mohiniyāṭṭam* and so on; they also form the basis of NRS. Yet these practices today refer not to eight but nine *rasas*. These include the eight *rasas* of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, plus a ninth one—*śāntarasa*, the *rasa* of the blissful, tranquil or peaceful. The addition of this *rasa* to Indian aesthetic theory is often attributed to the 11th-century Kashmiri philosopher Abhinavagupta (e.g., Zarrilli, 2011), yet it might have occurred earlier, around the eighth century CE (Higgins, 2007).

Venu (2018) defines NRS as “the systematic and daily practice of the Nine Rasa-s by the actors, to strengthen their capacities for producing (...) aesthetical experience in the viewers”. NRS is meant to “enhance the acting methodology devised by me for the systematic and daily practice of the nine basic emotions by the actors” (Ibid.). Now, if we take *rasa* to refer exclusively to the aesthetic experience evoked in the audience, it might be difficult to understand why a practice designed to refine and enhance the performers’ experience is called “*navarasa*” (instead of, say, “*navabhāva*”). Venu himself writes that “[t]he Sthayi bhava-s is [*sic.*] a state of mind from which *rasa* is created, that [*is*] communicated directly to the heart and spreads throughout the body of the performer in no time, like fire spreading through a pile of dry logs” (Venu, 2018). He takes this image from the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and then goes on to explain: “When the actor is expressing a particular bhava, he/she should conceive the clear idea behind that *rasa* in his or her mind. They should understand the natural flow of breath associated with each bhava”. The training is called *navarasa* practice because, ultimately, the goal of the performer is to evoke *rasa*; what the performer enacts and experiences (*bhāva*) is done for the

purposes of creating *rasa*, and for this reason, the performer also needs to keep *rasa* in her mind while practising.

In this chapter we follow Venu in using “*rasas*” to refer to the affective states evoked by NRS students during the practice; however, we emphasise that NRS is a practice about the performer’s *bhāva*—her state of being/doing, and what she needs to do with her “bodymind” (to use Zarrilli’s useful term) to evoke *rasa*. Importantly, in this chapter, we do not discuss the audience’s experience. As a training method, NRS is not aimed to be staged, but it is rather a practice to help performers refine their experiential understanding of human affective states and their embodiment. Our focus is thus on the experience of the performer while practising NRS. Hence, we present NRS as an instance of psychophysical training that focuses specifically on the process of coming to enact different affective states.

I.b *Kūṭiyāṭṭam*

As mentioned, Venu has developed NRS out of his experience as a *kūṭiyāṭṭam* actor and teacher. It is thus worth introducing this art in some detail before turning to NRS.

Kūṭiyāṭṭam is a performing art that developed in the 10th century CE in the Indian state of Kerala. It is the only form of staging ancient Sanskrit dramas that has survived to these days (Richmond, 1990; Paulose, 2006). Traditionally, performances took place in a roofed structure (*koothambalam*) built inside a temple.⁹ The *koothambalam* stage is a square-shaped raised platform located on one end of a rectangular semi-open structure that hosts the audience. A full-scale *kūṭiyāṭṭam* performance can last anywhere from 12 to 150 hours, thus unfolding over several days (or rather nights, as performances start in the early evening and continue into the night) (Shulman, 2015).

Kūṭiyāṭṭam performances stage acts of classic Sanskrit plays inspired by the two great Indian epics—the *Mahabharata* (ca. 300 BCE–300 CE) and the *Rāmāyaṇa* (400 BCE)—and by the

⁹ From the 1960s, however, they can take place also outside the temple. Also, until the 1960s, this art could be performed only by actors belonging to the *Cākyār* caste (Johan, 2017, p. 62), whereas now it is open to all (largely thanks to Venu’s efforts to make this art more accessible; see Venu, 2018).

Puranas (500 BCE–1000 CE), a collection of folk stories. The performance is mainly driven by an actor-narrator, who enters on the first night as one of the main characters. He retrospectively recounts the events and stories that contextualise and explain the situation in which the characters find themselves at the beginning (Johan, 2019). The play that is being staged only unfolds in the last one to four nights, when all characters come onstage, and the performance reaches its climax—hence the name “*kūṭiyāṭṭam*”, which literally means “combined acting”.

This narration is highly non-linear, moving back and forth between various layers of the past and the present. Importantly, the role of the narrator is not just to recount events in the third person. He or she also impersonates, in turn, the various characters involved in the recounted events. This impersonation involves enacting and displaying the characters' different viewpoints and crisscrossing perspectives, as well as their affective states and how they change as the story unfolds (the narrator also embodies and communicates the affective states of animals and other aspects of nature). The spoken text constitutes a relatively small part of a *kūṭiyāṭṭam* performance. Text is mainly the point of departure for subsequent (non-spoken) embodied-kinaesthetic explorations, elucidations and amplifications of its meaning. These can take a long time, as each word and associated concepts are explored/elucidated through complex embodiments involving hand gestures, eye movements and various other actions. The enactment of just a few short verses may thus take several hours—partly depending on the performer, who is free to elaborate as he or she wants (within the limits of *kūṭiyāṭṭam* expressive codes) (Shulman, 2016).

As it should be apparent even from such a short description, performing *kūṭiyāṭṭam* is a highly refined skill that requires performers to evoke and sustain increasingly complex unfolding and overlapping imaginary worlds through the whole body. Performers are highly skilled artists (both male and female) who undergo several years of intense training (Pfaff, 2013). Their skills are passed on from generation to generation by highly regarded master-actors. Performers need to learn a precise and highly codified system of rhythmic gestures to recount stories in many details. Particular emphasis is placed on expression through the face (especially the eyes) and hand gestures (*mudrās*) to communicate a rich variety of affective states. The face is richly made up and often entirely painted with bright colours that draw attention to it, and specifically highlights the eyes (**fig. III.3 1**).

Fig. III.3 1 King Dushyanta from the Kutiyattam play *Shakuntala*. Photo by Jukka O. Miettinen. All rights reserved.

In addition, the subtle affective modulations experienced by the characters are revealed and brought into focus through the special dramaturgy of *kūṭiyāṭṭam* performances. In fact, it is often an “affective logic” that guides perspective shifts and temporal effects—such as time jumps, pauses and temporal dilations (see Shulman, 2016 for more details). A famous traditional *kūṭiyāṭṭam* repertory piece, for example, involves the demon sage *Rāvaṇa* lifting a mountain that is blocking his path. This lifting is executed so as to evoke the *rasa* of “the heroic” (*vīra*). The whole piece unfolds as a detailed embodied articulation of *Rāvaṇa*’s state, where the performer enacts the many affective ebbs and flows the demon goes through as he carefully visually explores the mountain and then lifts it.

II. Main elements of NRS

As with many other Asian embodied practices, to describe what is going on in NRS it is useful to draw a distinction between “visible” or “outward” elements of performing and “invisible” or “inner” ones. Admittedly, this distinction is a theoretical abstraction because, in practice, what the performer does “inside” eventually shows up “outside” in how she embodies a specific form; vice versa, the visible elements (hand and eye gestures, movements) influence how the performer feels “inside”. Nevertheless, the distinction is useful to differentiate conceptually between objective features of bodily gestures and movements (such as their shape and speed), and subjectively felt or lived bodily movements and sensations to which the performer can be more or less attuned or sensitised.

In terms of external/visible elements, NRS includes an intensive preparatory daily practice for eye and hand gestures and whole-body exercises to achieve power, flexibility and control (all taken from *kūṭiyāṭṭam* training). This daily practice reinforces the muscles used in

the expression of affective states and other parts of the body involved in sustaining the more strenuous physical aspects of the practice. Students also learn to associate each *rasa* with a distinctive “form”—a series of bodily movements, hand gestures and facial expressions (no spoken language) specific to that *rasa*. Venu has created these forms by selecting and adapting specific extracts of *kūṭiyāṭṭam* performance. Some forms are relatively simple, whereas others are more elaborate. The form for *bhayānaka* (the terrible), for example, is quite simple and involves running around the stage three times, screaming, then stopping and fainting from terror upon imagining an approaching threat. The most elaborate form is that for *vīra* (the heroic), which involves a complex sequence of movements that come from the *kūṭiyāṭṭam* episode of *Rāvaṇa* lifting a mountain (mentioned above) .

NRS students learn the forms for each *rasa* in a specific sequence they practice every day. This sequence begins with a cluster of three positive *rasas*: *śṛṅgāra*, *adbhuta* and *vīra* (the erotic, marvellous and heroic). It continues with three “negative” ones: *raudra*, *bhayānaka* and *karuṇa* (the furious, terrible and pathetic). There is then a transition to *hāsya* (the comic) immediately followed by *bībhatsa* (the odious or disgusting). The sequence ends with *śāntarasa* (the tranquil). Executing this sequence during class training takes about one hour, although performers can choose in their own practice to modify the speed at which they execute it—just as a musician can choose the speed at which to perform a piece. The sequence and its component forms have been devised for training purposes rather than as performance pieces for the stage. The sequence is also said to represent a journey from birth to death, in line with the ancient Indian idea of the human body as a microcosmic replica of the universal macrocosm (e.g., White, 2006).

NRS is also, however, an “internal” training, in that students do not just work on the outward appearance of gestures and expressions but also on cultivating a refined sensitivity for how those gestures and expressions feel to them. Moreover, they work on producing gestures and expressions not (or rather not just) by following an external script or representation but as the outcome of their internal work with subtle bodily sensations and their affective dimensions. In fact, Venu has devised the NRS forms precisely to allow performers to focus in detail on the enactment of affective experiences and their dynamics. Particular emphasis is placed on how

performers can better explore patterns of breath circulation and sensory fluctuations, as well as the relationship between these patterns and specific affective states.¹⁰

Importantly, these internal aspects of NRS presuppose the notion of the *subtle body* (*sūkṣma śarīra*), sometimes also translated as “energy body”. This notion is central to Indian yogic practices, particularly those referred to as *haṭha yoga*.¹¹ During NRS training, Venu also refers to it as “the spiritual body” that has the capacity to transform the physical or “gross” body. The subtle body of *haṭha yoga*, presupposed by NRS, is composed of various energy channels (*nāḍīs*) that spread throughout the physical body, passing through six energy centres (*cakras*). The latter are located along the middle *nāḍī*, which runs vertically along the centre of the body. Along the *nāḍīs* flows *prāṇa*—usually translated as “breath” or “vital energy”. This energy is sometimes also called *prāṇa-vāyu*—“the breath of life”.

At the basis of *haṭha yoga* and related practices is the idea that *prāṇa* can be controlled, circulated and transformed in various ways. The main goal of *haṭha yoga* is to prevent its dissipation by centralising it in the middle *nāḍī*. This practice is said to awaken the *kuṇḍalinī* (“coiled snake”), the feminine energy or force (*śakti*) inherent in the whole universe. In the subtle body, the *kuṇḍalinī* is normally coiled up at the lower end of the spinal column. Controlling one’s breath and concentrating the mind on the *cakra* placed at the root of the navel begins to awaken the *kuṇḍalinī*. *Haṭha yoga* practice involves moving this awakened energy up through each *cakra*, from the lowest to the highest one located on the crown of the head.

The way performers embody and communicate various affective states and processes in NRS is based on this underlying model. Starting from work on the breath, students learn to circulate *prāṇa* in ways appropriate and specific to each *rasa*. NRS also involves exercises aimed at strengthening the *cakra* placed at the root of the navel, preparing the student to sustain

¹⁰ Exploring the relationship between breath patterns and specific affective states is not unique to NRS or *kūṭiyāttam*. It is a feature of many other Indian arts (see Zarrilli, 2011).

¹¹ *Haṭha yoga* developed around the 9th century CE, although probably from much older practices (its best-known text is the *Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā*, from the 14th century CE). *Haṭha yoga* places particular emphasis on self-realisation through the perfection of the body, achieved via various postures (*āsanas*), breathing exercises (*prāṇāyāma*), and other purifying and ethical practices (e.g., King, 1999, Ch. 3). The model of the subtle body we present here (which is also the one Venu refers to in his teachings) is described in King (1999) (for more details, see Mallinson and Singleton, 2017, especially Ch., 5). Notions of a subtle or energy body can be found in other cultures too (Samuel & Johnston, 2013). Zarrilli also discusses the subtle body extensively in all of his writings, as its cultivation is at the core of psychophysical training.

the so-called “basic posture” (from *kūṭiyāṭṭam*). In this posture, the feet are one hand-span apart, the knees bent and turned outward, the spine straight and the chest open (**Fig. III.3 2**).

Fig. III.3 2 The Kutiyattam basic posture. Photo by the Intercultural Theatre Institute, March 2012. All rights reserved.

This posture is said to create the conditions for the optimal activation of the subtle body. Venu explains how this position allows the practitioner to gather a “storehouse of energy at the base of the spine” (oral teaching, 2nd January 2019). It is meant to facilitate a deepening of the breath and to awaken the *kuṇḍalini*, stimulating appropriate circulation of *prāṇa* from the lower *cakra* up through the middle *nāḍī* and then toward the peripheries. Once it reaches the face, *prāṇa* is said to irrigate, brighten and give strength to the eyes. Venu often reminds his students that without practising this basic posture, the eyes will not “come alive”. This posture is also the base for starting to perceive the circulation of *prāṇa* within one’s body—which is crucial to enable performers to become increasingly more sensitive to the different *prāṇa*-patterns associated with each *rasa*. With practice, the student begins to feel the possibility of directing *prāṇa*, locking and releasing it at will in increasingly localised parts of the body.

The NRS sequence is thus not just a series of “external” movements but is designed to guide performers through a specific “energetic path” aimed at sensitising them to the complex lived bodily qualities of each *rasa*, and to lead them through an “affective journey” characterised by experiences that build onto each other, gradually intensifying and eventually calming down until they are extinguished. Experientially, the sequence begins with an opening of the senses and the cultivation of feelings of delight (*śṛṅgāra*, the erotic), followed through in *adbhuta* (the marvellous) by a sense of wonder enacted as a further opening of perception and an intensification of bodily feeling, especially at the skin level. Experiencing the body as larger, brighter, and more attuned and precise in its perceptive faculties is at the core of *vīra* (the heroic). Conversely, *raudra* (the furious) involves an overflowing, overcharging and subsequent blinding of the senses. This is followed by a paralysis of movement and sensing (*bhayānaka*, the terrible) and a downward collapse of energy (*karuṇa*, the pathetic). At this

point, the performer imagines seeing her grieving self and cultivates a feeling of compassion toward this vision. Compassion as a phase of *karuṇa* is a bridge into *hāsyā* (the comic), experienced as iterative outward explosions of energy. This is followed by opposite feelings of repulsion (*bībhatsa*, the disgusting). Finally, in *śāntarasa* (the peaceful), the senses are withdrawn one by one until all one feels is the extinguishing breath. As it may be gleaned already from this short description, the practice of this sequence can have a cathartic effect, as it leads the performer from the highs and lows of pleasant and unpleasant or uncomfortable affects, to a final state of tranquillity and peace.¹²

Improvisation is also central to the internal aspects of the practice. Before learning the specific choreography for each *rasa*, students of NRS are left free to roam around the grounds of the training centre, exploring the natural environment to stimulate their sensorium, noticing their affective responses and how they feel in their body. They are also asked to let the environment stimulate their imagination, and to freely produce sounds and vocalisations/breathing patterns in response to what they sense, feel and imagine, while also paying attention to how these actions feel in their body. This aspect of the training is meant to allow students to explore on their own the specific feel of different breathing patterns. Venu provides brief introductions to the *rasas* as prompts for the students' personal explorations, and only after this initial practice does he move on to teaching the specific forms.

III. The training of *śṛṅgāra*

To illustrate the complex detailed psychophysical work involved in NRS, we focus now on the training of the first *rasa* of the sequence, *śṛṅgāra*, as undergone by the first author both in February 2012 and in January 2019.¹³

¹² This description of the whole sequence is based on Venu's specific instructions.

¹³ In 2019 Venu modified the form for this *rasa* from the 2012 version. He eliminated the execution of the blossoming of the lotus flower we mention below, and the form for this *rasa* now mainly consists of the production of the smile and the fluttering of the eyebrows. This change is a reminder that NRS is an evolving training that Venu keeps adjusting, rather than a finalised "package".

Preliminaries

The training for this specific *rasa* begins with a brief general introduction to its conceptual and cosmological interpretation. Although Venu translates *śṛṅgāra* as “love”, he also defines it more broadly as “what makes us want to continue living” (Venu, oral teaching, 1st January 2019), or the desire and drive to live and feel. He also provides a cosmological account of *śṛṅgāra*, in line with the Indian tradition of tracing homologies between the individual’s body and the cosmos (White, 2006). He explains that *śṛṅgāra* is associated with the notion of the rebirth of the universe after its destruction (according to Hindu cosmology, the universe is cyclically created and destroyed) and that “after total destruction, only water is left. (...) When the wind comes, the water moves, waves appear. The sound is *svavarāvāyu*—sound of your breath. Sound, then wind, then world” (Venu, oral teaching, 1st January 2019) The wind is thus presented as being at the origin of the rebirth of the universe and as having creative energy. It is also said to make a sound linked to the sound of the breath. Therefore, Venu specifically associates *śṛṅgāra* with the creative energy of the wind/breath.

One aim of this conceptual explanation is to move students away from a narrow understanding of *śṛṅgāra* as limited to human relationships, and rather to present it as an affective state that can be directed at all aspects of the universe. This explanation is followed by the invitation to the student to conduct personal sensory explorations specific to this *rasa* (this the improvisational element of the practice). These explorations are conducted only once during the workshop and last between 30 and 60 minutes. Students explore the surroundings of the *koothambalam*, focusing on one sense at a time, and imagining that sense being awakened and attracted by the most pleasant sensorial stimuli. First, they are asked to engage their voice (which Venu considers a sense), and to make sounds they associate with *śṛṅgāra* as a drive toward life. This phase of the practice is important because, by making these sounds, students can understand which quality of *prāṇa* to associate with this affective state. Students then engage other sensory modalities in turn, while maintaining throughout an attitude of pleasure and delight at their sensorial discoveries.

III.a Structure of the performance score and psychophysical training

Personal explorations of sensorial experiences are followed by learning the form of *śṛṅgāra*. This includes the hand gesture (*mudrā*) representing the blossoming of a lotus flower, which in Hindu cosmology symbolises creation.¹⁴ Through the execution of this gesture, the task for students is to “transform themselves”, with their entire bodymind, into a blossoming lotus—making specific external movements but also, importantly, experiencing those movements as an all-encompassing state of being/doing (*bhāva*) characterised by an intense and pervasive drive toward life.

We can identify three phases in the performance score for *śṛṅgāra*: 1) embodying desire/attraction; 2) becoming the lotus flower; 3) offering the lotus to the audience. Each phase involves a complex psychophysical work which is aptly captured by what Zarrilli, in his own writings, calls “embodied imagination” (e.g., Zarrilli, 2020, Ch. 6). This concept refers to an imagination that is not “just” visual and/or representational—as when one visualises an object or scene as an image floating “in front of one’s eyes”, so to speak. Rather, embodied imagination is a whole-bodily way of enacting something one imagines through all the senses, and by which one also feels moved to act. All modalities are involved in embodied imagination, and the body may also move (although the movements can be just subtle or “internal”) to enhance or modulate the experience generated in the process. Moreover, embodied imagination is a thoroughly affective/affecting process, as it involves the performer letting herself be affected or stimulated (by the environment, her sensations, etc.) while also actively responding and modulating what she feels, acting on a situation, and so on.

In each phase of the execution, Venu shows the students what they need to do with their physical and visible body, while also offering experiential details to help them embody the invisible or internal aspects of *śṛṅgāra*. He prompts them to engage in an imaginative process—not so much (or not only) a visual one, but one that engages all the senses and the

¹⁴ “The lotus symbolises creation and is ‘a transformation of a portion of the substance eternally contained within the god’s gigantic body. It is an epiphany of those dynamic forces of the creative process which had been withdrawn into the body (that is into the cosmic waters) at the time of the dissolution’” (Stutley, 2019, p. 543).

energetic subtle body. This teaching helps students learn to guide *prāṇa* through their body, letting it animate and enliven their eyes, face, hands, and whole stance more generally.

Relatedly, the role of the performer's gestures and movements is not simply to depict or represent a lotus flower. Rather, it is primarily to "show" the process of the flower's birth, growth and blossoming as it unfolds. The *mudrā* is not a static hand position "depicting" the flower but a complex sequence of movements extended over time. Its enactment involves embodying the lotus as it grows out from the water, comes into the shape of a bud, and finally blossoms as its petals open to the sunrise. Importantly, this enactment is meant to convey the qualities of love/attraction/desire "from the lotus's perspective", so to speak: the performer aims to show how the lotus blossoms and opens its petals because of "its desire" for the sun. This is the sense in which the actor "becomes" the lotus and, through this becoming, conveys the various layers of meaning of *śṛṅgāra*.

Each of the three phases listed above can be broken down into further sub-phases and their components. We zoom here into the first phase ("embodying desire/attraction"). At a coarse level of description, we can say that, in this phase, the performer imaginatively sees a desired object, lets herself be affected by it, and enacts her attraction by producing the expressive features (codified from *kūṭiyāṭṭam*) associated with *śṛṅgāra*: vibrating eyebrows and a relaxed smile. Venu gives students instructions while they hold the basic posture (Fig. III.3 2). He introduces the instructions gradually to allow the students to be affected simultaneously by the suggested images and by the changing sensations that occur as they embody the gestures and expressions described:

You see the image [of a desired object]... Breathe it in... The breath is calm like a thread... You keep the lips neutral close to the teeth, without any expression, the tip of the tongue pushing against the upper teeth... You feel the tastiest thing on the tip of your tongue, then you go through the process of getting this into the smile... Taste is the secret of the smile... Gradually, gradually, comes the smile... Let the smile come like the opening of a flower... The eyebrows start to dance... (Venu, oral teaching, 1st January 2019)

The practice is thus not only about executing the outward expressive codes for *śṛṅgāra*. Performers are also meant to “achieve” the expression for this *rasa* as part of a psychophysical work involving not just long-trained muscles but also imagination, a certain way of breathing, internal/invisible actions, a heightened proprioceptive sensitivity to them, and a receptivity to how those actions affect them. The aim of this training is, ultimately, to allow students to incorporate into their body (or rather bodymind) a specific feel of *prāṇa* circulation associated with *śṛṅgāra*.¹⁵

The instructions “to see” a desired object and “to breathe it in” are to be understood in relation to the notion of the subtle body and to the importance attributed to the eyes in different classical Indian accounts of perception. A number of Indian philosophies understand perception as an outreaching faculty—an idea already adumbrated in the early *Upaniṣads* (e.g., in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*), where the inner self or *ātman* is defined as an inner light that shines outward through the eyes, illuminating the world (King, 1999, p. 147). This idea is, in turn, in line with the “open model” of the yogic body, according to which rays of perception flow out from every sense organ of the human body, and at the same time bring back something of the object to the perceiver (Zarrilli, 2011). As anthropologist and scholar of Asian languages and civilisations Lawrence Babb notes:

In the Hindu world ‘seeing’ is clearly not conceived as a passive product of sensory data originating in the outer world but rather seems to be imaged as an extrusive and acquisitive ‘seeing flow’ that emanates from the inner person, outward through the eyes, to engage directly with objects seen, and to bring something of those objects back to the seer. One comes into contact with, and in a sense becomes what one sees. (1981, pp. 396–397)

The rays said to flow out from the eyes should thus be understood as two-directional conduits able both to affect the objects seen, and to partake in their qualities. For example,

¹⁵ This process of incorporation is equivalent to what Zarrilli calls “kinaesthetic inscription” (2020, Ch. 6).

according to this conceptualisation of sight, when one looks at a lotus flower, one sends rays of perception out through the eyes to “touch” the lotus and bring back its qualities (colours, shape, luminosity and so on). This way, the seer becomes contaminated by the seen. When Venu tells the students to imagine “seeing” an object and “breathing it in”, he is working with this idea of the eyes being able to “take in” the qualities of the object. The breath aids and participates in this process of “taking in” the object, animating/energising the eyes and their function.

In fact, it is not just the eyes that are meant to be involved in the process of imagining a desired object. Although the eyes are often emphasised, the other senses, too, need to be recruited. This is where the preliminary sensorial explorations mentioned above come into play. Their role is to open up the entirety of the performer’s sensorium. When Venu tells the students to breathe in a desired object, he reminds them to engage other senses as well—to breathe in the desired qualities of the objects not just through the eyes but also through the ears, nose, tongue and skin. Students need to direct their attention to imagined sensations of harmonious sounds, fragrant smells, delicious flavours, pleasant touch and delightful sights. This whole-body sensitisation is distinctive of the psychophysical work for *śṛṅgāra*. As Venu explains, *śṛṅgāra* is the only rasa “where the actor can concentrate on all the senses at once” (Venu, oral teaching, 1st January 2019).¹⁶

Another notable aspect of the instructions for this phase is the reference to the breath being “calm like a thread”. This image is a good example of what Zarilli calls an “active” or “activating” image, whose role is to stimulate the actor’s embodied imagination. Active images are not “contemplated in the mind’s eye” but actively related and affectively responded to, causing the performer to shift or transform how she engages her body: “when embodying the image, the doer enters a relationship to the image and exercise that actively engages both mind and body as one. Active images thereby help awaken and activate energy and awareness while doing the exercises” (Zarrilli, 2009, p. 90).

¹⁶ More generally, Venu makes constant reference—in both teaching and writing (especially Venu, 2002)—to the yogic idea that there is a continuous flux of *prāṇa* between the body and the environment; that one can transform oneself into a different being (e.g., an animal) through *prāṇāyāma* practice; and that *gurus* can project themselves into their disciples through their eyes. These references all assume a conception of the body (the subtle body) as open and in continuous exchange with the environment.

Venu's invitation to breathe calmly like a thread helps students focus on how the breath needs to move and feel for this specific *rasa*. The thread does not have to be visualised (although it can); rather, the aim is for the breath to acquire a specific experiential quality, becoming sensed as a thin, even and continuous current of air in the throat. This instruction is meant to build on the previous one so that the process of "breathing in the desired object" through the sensorium acquires a specific "thread-like" quality—it is calm, thin and continuous. This practice produces in the performer a specific mode of attention, in which all the senses are enlivened, open/opening and sensitive to the tiniest modulations in the perceptual environment. We can describe this practice as the performer "drinking in" the desired object through the whole body (senses, breath), as if through a thin straw—thereby becoming imbued with the object's attractive qualities and, at the same time, enhancing the feeling of love/attraction developing in the performer as *bhāva*. The process of transformation of the performer into something other (eventually, the lotus) begins with this particularly calm, thread-like way of bodily-taking-in the qualities of a desired object.

After a progressive accumulation of these feelings of "taking in", Venu invites the performers to let out a visible smile while releasing *prāṇa* through vibrating eyebrows (with practice, this use of facial muscles comes to be felt as spontaneously "growing out" from the breath/body). The process of producing a facial expression is gradual and, once again, involves the use of active images. It builds onto the previous moment of sensorial opening to the imagined object and is a partially overlapping and complementary movement—from "drinking/taking in" to "breathing/letting out". The instructions guide the actor's attention to the lips, teeth and tongue, providing a bridge to the following invitation to "feel the tastiest thing"—an active image that stimulates in particular the sense of taste and enlivens the whole mouth, activating tactile sensations (especially on the tip of the tongue) and imbuing them with an alluring affective quality. Immediately after comes the suggestion that this quality will generate a smile, but this process is slowed down by a further instruction—"taste is the secret of the smile"—that gives the performer the time to sense the imagined taste and to let her smile be driven by this sensation, so that the enactment of the smile is rooted in the imaginatively sensed pleasure. Before the smile is outwardly manifested, the performer rests in a liminal moment of quasi-expressionlessness, keeping the smile "hidden" on the tip of her tongue. This moment is not very long (it can be compared to the rising cusp of an in-breath about to release

into an outbreath), but is key for preparing the opening of the smile. At this moment, the performer is actively sustaining the calm thread-like breath, while letting her bodymind become imbued with the sensations generated by imagining/sensing “the tastiest thing”. Her lips are still neutral and the eyebrows are not yet fluttering. The smile is not visible yet but is already present in the actor’s bodymind.¹⁷

Then, gradually (as instructed), the smile needs to “come” as a result of the energetic build-up; and to come “like the opening of a flower”—another activating image that, among other things, provides the bridge towards the second phase of *śṛṅgāra*, the transformation of the performer into a lotus. The blossoming of the smile should have a quality of radiating outward, complementary to the immediately preceding (and ideally still present) movement of “taking in”, and at the same time be symbolically/culturally connected to the meaning of *śṛṅgāra* as (re)birth and drive to live. Moreover, the thread-like quality of the breath, evoked earlier, is meant to continue into this sub-phase—so that, just as the desired object is gradually breathed-in as if through a thread, the opening of the smile is also breathed-out as if through a thread, i.e., with the same qualities of subtlety, calmness and graduality.

Slightly following (but mostly overlapping with) the flowering of the smile, the fluttering eyebrows then need to come into play. At this point, Venu suggests to the students that they experience an intense desire to move their whole body as a result of the sensations built up in the previous phases. Yet he invites them to *not* move their whole body but to channel the build-up of energy into “dancing eyebrows” (another active image). In the first author’s experience, restraining the whole-body movement and channelling it through the eyebrows produces a further intensification of the performer’s state, which generates a kinaesthetic potential in preparation for the next phase (becoming the lotus).

This type of work continues into the second and third phases of the practice of *śṛṅgāra*, which we describe only coarsely here. In the second phase, the performer makes the *mudrā* of the blossoming of the lotus (found in *kūṭiyāṭṭam* and other performing arts)—bringing her

¹⁷ In fact, Venu here mentions that the smile is already present “in the chest”: “The smile always happens here [points to his chest], then it comes here [points to his lips].” (oral teaching, 1st January 2019). We do not go into these details here, but it is important to note that when specific bodily sensations are foregrounded, the rest of the body does not entirely disappear from awareness (for the differentiation of foreground/background bodily feelings, see Colombetti, 2014, Ch. 5). Hence the possibility for the smile to be felt in the chest while simultaneously being evoked and generated in the mouth and on the lips.

hands together to touch at the back of the wrists (Fig. 3a), and then coiling them up to enact the birth of the flower—with the two hands forming the two halves of the bud (Figure 3b). She then opens up her fingers to undergo the blossoming, which completes her transformation. Her gaze keeps playing an important role throughout, together with various processes of visualisation and embodied imagination aimed at supporting the process of “taking in” or incorporating/inscribing the qualities of the lotus in the performer’s bodymind. In the third phase, the performer looks up at the horizon and offers the flower—or rather herself-as-the-flower—to the audience, radiating the lotus qualities outward from her eyes, face and hands (Fig. 3c).

Fig. III.3 3 (a,b,c) Giorgia Ciampi practicing the opening of the lotus as part of executing *śrīgāra* during Kutiyattam presentation at Singapore Intercultural Theatre Institute, March 2012. Photo by the Singapore Intercultural Theatre Institute. All rights reserved.

Concluding remarks

Very little has been written about NRS, and our aim has been to introduce it to an academic audience with no previous knowledge of Indian performing arts, theatre studies and psychophysical acting. We can extrapolate three general points from the above discussion.

First, the practice is based on an understanding of the living body not just as a physical moving body but as a feeling or lived body (a “bodymind”) animated by a vital energy that can be harnessed and channelled for expressive aesthetic purposes. Whereas this particular principle has been emphasised many times already in Zarrilli’s work on psychophysical acting, in this chapter we have shown how it can also apply to the practice of affective states. NRS teaches performers to enact different affective states not just by following a certain script for bodily movements and facial expressions but, importantly by “achieving” those changes by working “internally” with a variety of subtle bodily sensations. Through NRS, performers learn to associate different affective states with distinctive experiences of embodiment.

Second, and closely related, NRS is distinctive because it does not rely on the widespread practice of using personal memories to enact “genuine” emotions. The basis for the enactment

of affective states in NRS is the development and incorporation of a detailed understanding of how the body feels in those states. Once this understanding is integrated and sedimented in the performer's practice (something that happens through repetition and training), she can harness it in a variety of acting contexts.

Third, although the practice is grounded in Indian culture and in Venu's own training and research in Indian traditional performing arts, to characterise it narrowly as "traditional Indian" would be misleading. As we saw, Venu does draw on Indian culture and aesthetics in his teachings, but he also invites students to ground his instructions in their own experience and self-understanding, and he thinks of NRS as a general training for performers of different styles and backgrounds, who can use it for their own purposes. Although the nine forms practiced with NRS are grounded in a specific cultural context, the presupposition is that any performer can find something in the training they can recognise from their own experience. For example, the demon *Rāvaṇa* and the blossoming lotus have specific meanings in Indian culture, but the concepts of lifting a mountain, or of the blossoming of a flower, can be powerful catalysts for any students' imagination, irrespective of their background and knowledge of the original sources (although of course, such knowledge will deepen the practice and its understanding).

Much more could be said about this training—for example, about the practice of the other *rasas*, the other stages of the training, how NRS compares to other approaches to acting and emotion (including whether and how it could be incorporated into them), and possible uses of NRS beyond acting/performing. We hope we have at least given the reader a taste of how much we can learn about embodiment and affectivity from an existing approach to performance and, thus, more generally, how important art can be for the general project of understanding the complexity of our embodied mind.

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(NB: All websites are active as of June 2022. Some publishers' locations are indicated to facilitate their identification).

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