

"A five-trunked, four-tusked elephant is running in the sky" : how free is imagination according to Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta?

Autor(en): **Ratié, Isabelle**

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“A FIVE-TRUNKED, FOUR-TUSKED ELEPHANT IS RUNNING IN THE SKY”

How Free is Imagination According to Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta?

Isabelle Ratié, EPHE, Paris
Équipe de recherche «Monde indien»

*Abstract*¹

According to the Śaiva non dualists Utpaladeva (*fl. c.* 925-975) and Abhinavagupta (*fl. c.* 975-1025), imaginary objects, far from being a mere rearrangement of previously perceived elements, are original creations resulting from consciousness’s free creativity. The present article examines how the Pratyabhijñā philosophers defend this thesis against Naiyāyika and Mīmāṃsaka theories of imagination, but also how they link it with their idealism, since Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta contend that the phenomenal world is created by a universal consciousness through a process similar to the individual subject’s activity of imagination. They thus state – as the Advaita Vedāntins or the Buddhist Vijñānavādins – that the world is an imaginary construction, but they refuse to draw from this the conclusion that it is unreal: paradoxically, they consider that the world is real insofar as it is imagined, and they see imagination as an experience capable of leading the individual subject to liberation.

Is imagination the experience of consciousness’ freedom to create a world of its own at will? Or are the so-called creations of imagination nothing but memories of elements that the imagining subject has perceived in the past and that he merely combines in a different fashion? And do we imagine because we are determined to build certain mental images by a mechanism of residual traces left by previous experiences – or because, in that “kingdom of the mind” (*manorājya*) that constitutes the domain of imagination, consciousness exercises its sovereign power by manifesting whatever it pleases to invent? In other words:

1 I would like to thank Alexis Sanderson, with whose generous help I read many of the passages of the ĪPV presented here; David Shulman, for sharing some of his forthcoming works on imagination in classical India in general and in Indian aesthetics in particular; and Marie-Claude Porcher, who read an earlier version of this paper, for her kind words of encouragement.

how free is imagination? I would like to examine here the philosophical answer given to this question by two Kashmirian Śaiva non-dualists, Utpaladeva (*fl. c.* 925–950 AD) and Abhinavagupta (*fl. c.* 975–1025 AD), in those of their works that belong to the Pratyabhijñā corpus.² In doing so, I wish to emphasize that for these philosophers what is at stake here is much more than a correct epistemological understanding of the way individuals can create imaginary entities: for them as for their opponents the answer to the question “how free is imagination?” is crucial in determining the nature of consciousness in general and the relation between consciousness and the world of our perceptions.

1. Imagination According to Utpaladeva: A Spontaneous Act of Creation

Utpaladeva’s position regarding the extent of imagination’s freedom is unambiguously stated in his ĪPK:

*sa naisargika evāsti vikalpe svairacāriṇi / yathābhimatasamsthānābhāsanād buddhi-gocare ||*³

The [conscious manifestation] is perfectly spontaneous (*naisargika eva*) in [the case of] a mental construction (*vikalpa*) that wanders autonomously (*svairacārin*), since [it] manifests [this or that] configuration (*samsthāna*) at will (*yathābhimata*) in the realm of the intellect (*buddhi*).

The verse is implicitly referring to a distinction between perception (*pratyakṣa*), in which we are simply and immediately aware of something’s presence, and mental construction (*vikalpa*), in which the mind elaborates or builds its object instead of merely being aware of its presence. But Utpaladeva is also distinguishing here between two types of mental constructions: according to him, some of them are not spontaneous insofar as they are entirely determined by some other mental event, whereas others are free of such a determination. For instance, when we remember, we are indeed elaborating an object that is not present *hic et nunc*; but our capacity to remember is not free, for according to

2 That is, Utpaladeva’s ĪPK and their commentaries (which include Utpaladeva’s *Vṛtti* as well as Abhinavagupta’s ĪPV and ĪPVV). The text of the ĪPV quoted here is that of the KSTS edition, but several manuscripts (and the *Bhāskari* edition) are also quoted within brackets whenever an emendation is proposed (“p.n.p.” means “the passage is not preserved in...”).

3 ĪPK I, 6, 10.

most Indian philosophical schools (including the Pratyabhijñā), this memory is in fact triggered by a mechanism of residual traces (*saṃskāra*). Thus when seeing a certain cup, I remember having drunk a cup of coffee this morning: the sight of the cup triggers the remembrance of the past experience by provoking the “awakening” (*prabodha*) of a thus far latent trace left in my consciousness by the past experience.⁴ In this regard, remembering is not a free or autonomous (*svatantra*) activity: it is determined by a complex mechanism of residual traces. As Abhinavagupta has already explained while commenting on the previous verse,⁵ a number of cognitions are not autonomous insofar as they thus depend on the residual trace of a previous perception that makes them possible and shapes them. These cognitions include not only memory (*smaraṇa*), but also a kind of poetical fancy (*utprekṣā*) which we could be tempted to classify under the Western category of “imagination” and through which we playfully see something as what it is not in reality,⁶ or the determination (*adhyavasāya*) which arises immediately after a perception and conceptualizes it.⁷

- 4 On the role played by residual traces in memory according to Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta, see RATIÉ 2006, pp. 49 ff.
- 5 See ĪPV, vol. I, p. 267: *smaraṇa utprekṣaṇe pratyakṣapṛṣṭhabhāviny adhyavasāye ca yo ’ntarnīlādyavabhāso bāhyatayāvabhāsayitavyo nāsau svātmīyo’pi tu pūrvānubhava-saṃskārajo ’sau*. “In memory (*smaraṇa*), fancy (*utprekṣā*) and the determined cognition (*adhyavasāya*) which occurs following a perception, the manifestation of [the object] – the blue for instance –, which is internal [and] must be manifested as external [insofar as it is distinguished from the subject,] is not autonomous (*na[...svātmīyah]*); rather, it is produced by a residual trace (*saṃskāra*) [left] by a previous experience.”
- 6 Thus, as a figure of speech (*alaṃkāra*), *utprekṣā* is defined by Daṇḍin in the following way (KĀ II, 221): *anyathaiva sthitā vṛttis cetanasyetarasya vā / anyathotprekṣyate yatra tām utprekṣām vidur* // “[Good poets] know that *utprekṣā* occurs in a case where the way of being (*vṛtti*) of [something] – be it sentient or not –, which happens in a certain manner, is fancied (*utprekṣyate*) as [happening] otherwise.” In later works of poetics it becomes more difficult to distinguish it from comparison (*upamā*), but the notion of imagination or fancy remains; see e.g. KP X, 92ab, which describes it as “fancying (*sambhāvana*) the described object [as being] a similar [object]” (*sambhāvanam athotprekṣā prakṛtasya samena yat*); cf. Śrīvidyācakravartin’s commentary, *Ibid.*: *upamānatvenopameyasya sambhāvanam utprekṣā*. “*utprekṣā* is fancying the compared as being the comparing.” Mammaṭa gives an example from the *Mṛcchakaṭika* (I, 34) of such playful identifications: *limpatīva tamo’ngāni varṣatīvāñjanam nabhaḥ*. “Darkness anoints bodies as it were; the sky showers a black collyrium as it were.” M. C. Porcher has emphasized the importance of *sambhāvana* as the activity of imagination essential in this figure (see PORCHER 1978, p. 99); cf. SHULMAN forthcoming, p. 5: *utprekṣā* “assumes a certain imaginary leap” and involves “an imaginative reconfiguration of reality”. However, according to the Pratyabhijñā philosophers, there is a crucial difference between this kind of fancy and an imaginary construction

However, some mental elaborations are spontaneous (*naisargika*) or free (*svatantra*). Everybody has the banal and marvellous power of imagining things that have never been perceived at all (so that these things cannot be suspected of being simply determined by some residual trace): we may imagine “a white, two-trunked, one-hundred-tusked elephant”,⁸ or “a ten-tusked elephant”,⁹ or “a white elephant whose head has three trunks and ten tusks”,¹⁰ or “a five-trunked, four-tusked elephant running in the sky”,¹¹ or indeed, any other impossible creature of this sort – and in doing so, we all experience freedom (*svātantrya*):

(*manorājyasamkalpa*): the former is still very much dependent on perception insofar as it focuses on a *perceived* object with which it plays, whereas the latter creates its own object. From this point of view, it is quite meaningful that some poetics such as Ruyyaka consider *utprekṣā* as a kind of “determination” (*adhyavasāya*; see SHULMAN forthcoming, p. 9): Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta also consider that *utprekṣā* and *adhyavasāya* have a particular affinity insofar as they determine a pre-existing object instead of creating it (see the following fn. for the notion of *adhyavasāya*).

- 7 According to the Buddhist epistemologists (whose terminology is borrowed here by the Pratyabhijñā philosophers), perception (*pratyakṣa*), which apprehends the ineffable presence of a strictly singular and momentary entity, is usually immediately followed by a mental construction (*vikalpa*) that determines it for instance as “this is blue” through a process of exclusion (*vyāvṛtti*), and perception becomes useful in practical life (and constitutes a valid means of knowledge, *pramāṇa*) only insofar as it triggers this determination. See e.g. NBT, pp. 83–85: *anīlabodhavyāvṛtṭyā ca nīlabodharūpatvaṃ vyavasthāpyam. vyavasthāpakaś ca vikalpapratyayaḥ pratyakṣabalotpanno draṣṭavyaḥ. na tu nirvikalpatvāt pratyakṣam eva nīlabodharūpatvenātmanam avasthāpayitum śaknoti. niścayapratyayenāvyavasthāpitam sad api nīlabodharūpaṃ vijñānam asatkalpam eva. tasmān niścayena nīlabodharūpaṃ vyavasthāpitam vijñānam nīlabodhātmanā sad bhavati. tasmād adhyavasāyam kurvad eva pratyakṣam pramāṇam bhavati.* “And through the exclusion (*vyāvṛtti*) of whatever is not the cognition of blue (*anīlabodha*) it might be established that [a perception] consists in the cognition of blue (*nīlabodha*). And what establishes [it] is the cognition [consisting in] a mental construction (*vikalpa*) that can be seen to arise because of perception (*pratyakṣa*). But perception alone, [without any mental construction,] cannot establish itself as consisting in the cognition of blue, [precisely] because it is devoid of mental construction (*nirvikalpa*): a cognition that has not been established by a cognition [consisting in] a judgement (*niścaya*) as consisting in the cognition of blue, although existing, is as good as non-existent (*asatkalpam eva*). Therefore a cognition that has been established to be the cognition of blue by a judgement exists as this cognition of blue; [and] as a consequence, perception is a means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) only insofar as it produces a determination (*adhyavasāya*).”

8 ĪPV, vol. I, p. 270, quoted below.

9 ĪPVV, vol. III, p. 381, quoted below.

10 ĪPVV, vol. II, p. 331, quoted below.

11 ĪPV, vol. II, pp. 264–265, quoted below.

*yaḥ pratyakṣavyāpāram anupajīvan vyākṣepasāratayā manorājyasamkalpādivikalpaḥ sa svairam kṛtvā svapreraṇena parapreraṇanairapekṣyeṇa svātantryeṇa caraty udeti vyayate ca, tatra yo bahiravabhāso nīlāder antarābhāsamayasya sa naisargika eva. tathā hy aparidṛṣṭapūrvam apī svetam daśanaśatakālitakarayugalayuktaṃ dantīnam antaḥ pramātrbhūmau sthitaṃ bahir antaḥkaraṇabhūmau svacchadhīdarpaṇātmikāyāṃ sa vikalpas tātkālikam evābhāsayati.*¹²

The mental construction (*vikalpa*) that is, for instance, imaginary construction (*manorājyasamkalpa*), being independent from the activity of perception since it has as its essence a mental distraction (*vyākṣepa*), [“wanders autonomously” (*svairacārin*) according to Utpaladeva’s verse. The compound *svairacārin* means that] it “wanders” (*-cārin = carati*), [i.e.,] it arises and roams about “with respect to itself [only]” (*svaira- = svairam kṛtvā*), [that is to say,] while being prompted by itself, without depending on anything else that would prompt it – out of freedom (*svātantrya*). The external manifestation [of objects,] such as blue, which consist in internal manifestations, is perfectly spontaneous (*naisargika*) in the [case of imagination]; for this mental construction manifests externally, [i.e.,] in the internal organ which is the immaculate mirror of intellect (*buddhi*), an [object] that resides inside the subject¹³ [and] that, [contrary to a remembered object,] belongs to the time of the [cognition itself] (*tātkālika*) – [for instance,] a white, two-trunked, one-hundred-tusked elephant – although it has never been perceived before.

2. Imagination as a Path towards Self-recognition

Why do the Pratyabhijñā philosophers thus emphasize the freedom of imagination? The reason for this insistence is to be found in the core of their metaphysics. Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta defend a kind of idealism according to which whatever we perceive, far from existing independently of consciousness, is in fact the mere product of the creativity of a single, all-encompassing consciousness; and they consider that each of us *is* this infinite consciousness constantly engaged in playfully creating the world by manifesting itself in the form of an external world (just as when we imagine, our imagining consciousness playfully manifests itself in the form of this or that imaginary object). Under these conditions, freeing oneself from the suffering of *samsāra* can be

12 ĪPV, vol. I, pp. 270–271.

13 Abhinavagupta often insists on the paradoxical location of the imaginary object. It is both *internal* (insofar as it does not exist at all outside of the consciousness that produces it) and *external* (insofar as consciousness manifests it outside of itself, on the internal organ that is the intellect, *buddhi*, presented as a clear mirror capable of reflecting any object): in order to produce the representation of an object instead of remaining just a mere self-awareness, consciousness somehow needs to distance itself from the object by projecting it out of itself.

nothing but fully realizing one's identity with this omnipotent consciousness: according to them, liberation is nothing but the Recognition (*pratyabhijñā*) of oneself as “the Lord” (*īśvara*) understood as this absolutely free consciousness. Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta therefore consider that imagination – that is, the capacity to create mentally at will – is a privileged experience, because in it, all sentient beings, however weak or enslaved, experience the absolute freedom and creativity which constitute the essence of the universal consciousness, since they can conjure up at will entities that have no existence whatsoever outside of them. Thus, immediately after the verse stating that imagination is free, Utpaladeva adds this verse:

ata eva yathābhīṣṭasamullekhāvabhāsanāt / jñānakriye sphuṭe eva siddhe sarvasya jīvataḥ //¹⁴

Precisely for this reason – [that is,] because of this manifestation of a representation (*samullekha*)¹⁵ of [an object] as [we] want it [to be] (*yathābhīṣṭa*), it is [now] established that the knowledge and action of each living being is absolutely evident.

The most ordinary experience of imagination is a possible path towards the absolute. However trivial – or rather, precisely because of its triviality –, it is capable of bringing about the Recognition that constitutes the supreme goal of the treatise,¹⁶ since in it, the individual subject knows in the most indubitable

14 ĪPK I, 6, 11.

15 Literally, something like an act of “picturing up” (the term is derived from the root –LIKH, “to draw”).

16 See Abhinavagupta's introduction to this verse in the ĪPV, vol. I, p. 271: *asmāc cāntarābhāsaśaṃbhavasamarthanaprasaṅgāgatād ābhāśabhedavicārāc chāstre yat prayojanaṃ mukhyatayābhisaṅghitaṃ svātmanīśvarapratyabhijñānarūpaṃ tad adhikaraṇasiddhānta-nūyānāyāsasiddham iti darśayati*. “And [Utpaladeva now] shows that thanks to this examination of the differences [between types of] manifestations that followed from the demonstration of the possibility for phenomena [of being] internal, the goal (*prayojana*) essentially pursued in this treatise – namely, the Recognition of the Lord (*īśvarapratyabhijñāna*) in oneself (*svātman*) – has [just] been established effortlessly, through the use of a conclusion [that is the basis for the establishment of another] matter (*adhikaraṇasiddhānta*).” Cf. ĪPVV, vol. II, p. 335: *antarābhāsaśaṃbhavopapādanaprasaṅgāyātād ābhāśavaicitryavicārāt tad apy ayatnasiddham jātaṃ yatsiddhāv anyaprakaraṇasiddhir ity adhikaraṇasiddhāntalābhād yad iha śāstre svātmanīśvararūpatāpratyabhijñānopāyaprakāṭikaraṇaṃ nāma mukhyaṃ prayojanaṃ iti nirūpayati sūtreṇa*. “Through the examination of the variety of manifestations undertaken as a result of [our] demonstration of the possibility of internal manifestations, the [following] also is now effortlessly established thanks to the obtainment of a conclusion [that is the basis for the establishment of another] matter (*adhikaraṇasiddhānta*),

way that he possesses the powers of action and knowledge (*kriyā-* and *jñānaśakti*) ascribed to Śiva himself by various sources (including non-dualistic Śaiva scriptures and Purāṇic stories).¹⁷ Thus in his *Vṛtti*, Utpaladeva goes as far as presenting imagination as the very experience of Śiva's omniscience and omnipotence,¹⁸ and in his *ĪPV*, Abhinavagupta explains:

*yad idam yathābhīṣṭasya bahirasattvād ananubhūtasayāpi samyag ullekhanam avabhāsanam ca vikalpasya prasaṅgād darśitam asmād eva hetor idam api siddhyati: yaḥ kaścit kīto vā brahmā vā jīvanakriyāviṣṭas tasyāvabhāsanarūpā jñānaśaktir ullekhanarūpā ca kriyāśaktir naisargikī, tatas tasyām bhūmau vyatirikteśvaropakalpitapūrvasiddhasṛṣṭyupajīvanasambhāvanāpi nāstīti svam evaiśvaryaṃ sphuṭam pratyabhijñeyaṃ jānāti karoti ceti jñānakriyāsvātantryalakṣaṇam. ekavacanena sarvasya jīvajātasya vastuta ekeśvararūpatām sūcayati.*¹⁹

The mental construction involves a [*samullekha*”, i.e.,] a complete (*sam-* = *samyak*) act of representation (*-ullekha* = *ullekhana*) and a manifestation (*avabhāsa*) of [an object] as [we] want [it to be], although [this object] was never experienced [before], because it does not exist outside [of the subject's mind]. For this very reason – expounded as a consequence [of our current examination] –, this too is established: the power of knowledge (*jñānaśakti*) (in the form of the manifestation [of the imagined object]) and the power of action (*kriyāśakti*) (in the form of its representation) are spontaneous (*naisargikī*) for whoever – whether a worm or Brahmā – is a [“living being”, i.e.,] is pervaded by the action that is life. Therefore, in that realm, one cannot even imagine (*-sambhāvanāpi nāstīti*) a dependence with respect to the already existing creation that was [supposedly] constructed by a Lord separated [from the individual subject]. Therefore it is *one's own* sovereignty (*svam evaiśvaryaṃ*) that is “evident” – [i.e.,] that may be recognized (*pratyabhijñeya*) as consisting in the freedom (*svātantrya*) to know and act – [a freedom expressed in the verbal

in accordance with [the definition formulated in NS I, 1, 30: ‘the *adhikaraṇasiddhānta* is that] the establishment of which leads to the establishment of another matter’: the main goal of this treatise – namely, making evident the means (*upāya*) of a Recognition of the identity with the Lord (*īśvararūpatāpratyabhijñā*) in oneself. This is what [Utpaladeva] explains in [the next] verse.”

- 17 On Recognition as the synthesis of an abstract knowledge concerning *īśvara* – contained in the Purāṇas, the Āgamas, common knowledge (*prasiddhi*), etc. – with one's immediate intuition of oneself, and on the fact that this recognition can only be brought about by making evident that the individual subject possesses the powers (*śakti*) traditionally ascribed to *īśvara*, see e.g. RATIÉ 2006, pp. 97–99, and RATIÉ 2007, pp. 360–363.
- 18 See *Vṛtti ad ĪPK* I, 6, 11, p. 31: *apūrvārthanirmāṇajñānasāmarthyāc ca vikalpa eva sarvasya sarvajñatvaṃ sarvakartṛtvaṃ ca sphuṭam*. “And because of the power to create and know objects that are new (*apūrva*) in the mental construction itself, the omniscience (*sarvajñatva*) and omnipotence (*sarvakartṛtva*) of all is evident.”
- 19 *ĪPV*, vol. I, pp. 272–273.

forms] “he knows and does”. By using the singular [in “the knowledge and action of *each living being*”, Utpaladeva] suggests that in fact, all living beings without exception consist in the unique Lord.

Abhinavagupta emphasizes once again the freedom (*svātantrya*) of imagination and its paradoxes. Imagination is so free that one cannot even *imagine* it to be dependent on the world of perception; and since it is thus totally independent of the perceived universe considered as the creation of the Lord (*īśvara*) by the Śaivas, what imagination reveals is *one’s own sovereignty* (*aiśvarya*) – literally, the “fact of being the Lord (*īśvara*)”: because imagination is the freedom of consciousness, the individual subject himself must be the absolutely free consciousness that the Śaiva scriptures designate as Śiva. For the individual subject, imagination is therefore a means of recovering one’s own identity – of obtaining the self-realization or the “Recognition [that one] is the Lord” (*īśvarapratyabhijñā*).²⁰

- 20 Cf. the parallel passage in ĪPVV, vol. II, pp. 335–336: *bahir atyantāsattvād ananubhūtasya samyag ullekhanam *nirmāṇapūrvakaṃ ca [conj. nirmāṇapūrvakaṃ KSTS] yad avabhāsanaṃ prasaṅgavaśena darśitam, asmād eva hetoḥ sarvasya brahmāder api kīṭaparyantasya vedyarūpadehādīdyātmanānitayā prāṇadhāraṇavato jīvato jñānam avabhāsanātmakam, kriyā ca svollekhanīnirmāṇarūpā svātantryeṇeti śaktiyugalakam api siddham iti. tad idānīm suṣṭhutām dṛḍhībhūtaṃ yad avocāma: sarvasyātmā maheśvaro jñānakriyāyogād itīti sūtrārthaḥ.* “For the very reason – shown as a result [of our reasoning] – that is the [*sam-ullekha*’, i.e.,] the complete (*sam-* = *samyak*) act of representation (*-ullekha* = *ullekhana*) of an [imaginary object] that had not been experienced [before] – since it has absolutely no existence outside [the subject’s imagination] – and the manifestation (*avabhāsana*) preceded by this act of creation (*nirmāṇa*), ‘knowledge’, which has this manifestation as its essence, and ‘action’, which consists in this creation that is a representation in oneself, belong to ‘each living being’, from Brahmā himself to a worm – [that is,] to anyone endowed with life insofar as [he or she] identifies [him- or her-]self as a [particular] body for instance, [whereas in fact this body] is an object; [and they thus belong to each living being] as being free (*svātantryeṇa*); so both of these powers are [now] established. Therefore now, what we had [already] stated is made all the more certain – namely that the Self (*ātman*) of all is the Great Lord, because [all] possess [the powers of] knowledge and action. This was the [general] meaning of the verse.” Later, as he is commenting on Utpaladeva’s lost *Vivṛti* on this verse, Abhinavagupta insists again that imagination is a means of accomplishing Recognition (*Ibid.*, p. 336): *yatheti yena prastutaprasaṅgaprakāreṇedam āyātaṃ yat kṣetrājño na kevalam smṛtyaiva buddhibhūmau vedyatvena bāhyatvenārtham ābhāsayati, yāvat svatantravikalpanavyāpāreṇāpīti, tena prasaṅgaprakāreṇa yadartho ’yaṃ śāstrārambhodyamaḥ so ’pīśvararūpatāpratyabhijñāpanopāyanirūpaṇakramo ’vasīto labdhaḥ. katham? āhāneneti svatantravikalpanātmakavyāpāraprakāreṇoktenety arthaḥ.* “[In the passage of the *Vivṛti* beginning with] ‘just as...’, [Utpaladeva explains the following:] from the particular

3. An Objection:

Imagination Merely Combines Pre-existing Elements

However, from the point of view of many Indian philosophers, there is an obvious objection to this claim that in imagination, the individual subject enjoys freedom. Abhinavagupta does not mention it in his ĪPV, but it appears in his more detailed ĪPVV:

*nanu nāsau naisargikas tatrāpi hi tad gavāśvaṃ pūrvānubhavaviśayīkṛtam eva vikalpyate.*²¹
 [– An objector:] But this [imaginary construction] is not spontaneous (*naisargika*), because in this case [of imagination] as well, [and not only in the case of memory for instance,] cows and horses, [when imagined,] are mentally constructed only insofar as they have been the objects of some past experience!

Who is this objector? Nothing in the text allows us to conclude that he belongs to this or that particular school. However it is worth noting that this argument is a *topos* in the controversy between, on the one hand, the Brahmanical philosophers who believe in the existence of an external world revealed by our perceptions, and on the other hand, the Buddhist Vijñānavādins, according to whom the objects of our perceptions have no more reality than the objects of our dreams, so that, just as dream objects, perceived objects are not entities existing outside of our cognitions but internal aspects taken on by consciousness.²² Thus, according to the Naiyāyikas and Mīmāṃsakas, even dream objects necessarily have an external substratum (*ālambana*, *pradhāna*), because the objects that we see in our dreams are in fact nothing but *objects that we have perceived in the*

consequence drawn from the subject at hand, it follows that the individual subject (*kṣetrajñā*) manifests the object as external [to his subjectivity, i.e.] as an object of knowledge, in the realm of the intellect, not only through the sole memory (*smṛti*), but also through an activity of mental construction that is free (*svatantra*); thanks to this particular consequence, the goal that prompted [Utpaladeva] to undertake this treatise, [namely,] the progressive explanation of the way to bring about the recognition that [one] is the Lord (*īśvararūpatāpratyaabhijñāpana*) is also ‘completed’, [i.e.], obtained. How? [Utpaladeva answers] ‘by this [...]’ – i.e., by this particular activity that [he] has been describing, consisting in a free mental construction (*svatantravikalpana*).”

21 ĪPVV, vol. II, p. 331.

22 On dream as a model for the Vijñānavādins’ explanation of perception, see e.g. Vasubandhu’s *Viṃśatikā*; on the Brahmanical critical interpretations of this “dream-argument”, see TABER 1994.

past. Dreams are therefore considered as memories – but memories that, because of a “defect” (*doṣa*) due to the state of the body during sleep, are not apprehended as such; and because dreams present as actual some objects that were in fact experienced in the past, they are considered as belonging to the category of errors (*bhrānti*).²³ One could object to such a theory that our dreams sometimes show us entities or events that we have never experienced before, so that they seem to betray some kind of free power of imagination.²⁴ The Mīmāṃsaka Kumārila answers that these things only *seem* new to us for the reason that they were experienced in some previous life that we have forgotten.²⁵ But dream

23 See ŚV, *Nirālambanavāda*, 107cd-108ab: *svapnādīpratyaye bāhyaṃ sarvathā na hi neṣyate // sarvatrālambanaṃ bāhyaṃ deśakālānyathātmakam /* “For in a cognition occurring in a dream (*svapna*) or [any other illusion, it is] not [true] that no external object is required at all. In every [cognition], there is an external substratum (*ālambana*), [although] it appears differently as regards place and time.” Cf. NR *ad loc.*, p. 174: *bāhyam eva deśāntare kālāntare vānubhūtam eva svapne smaryamānaṃ doṣavaśāt sannihitadeśakālavattayāvagamyaite, ato’trāpi na bāhyābhāva iti*. “In a dream, it is an external [object] that has indeed been experienced in another place or time that is remembered (*smaryamāna*). Because of a defect (*doṣa*), it is apprehended as having the actual place and time; as a consequence, even in this case [of dreams,] it is not the case that the object is non-existent.” Cf. ŚV, *Śūnyavāda*, 159cd-161ab: **atītatvānuviddho [corr.: atītvānuviddho ŚV] hi smṛtyā grāhyo’nubhūyate // tadvad eva bhaved atra svapne na sgād viparyayāt / tatra hy avartamāno’pi grhyate vartamānavat // bādhaññānād idaṃ bhrāntam [...]*. “For [the object] apprehended by memory (*smṛti*) is experienced as being pervaded by [the property of] being past; in this case it must be exactly thus, [but] in a dream (*svapna*), it is not the case, because of its falseness (*viparyaya*). For in a [dream, the object,] although it is not present (*avartamāna*), is apprehended as if it were present (*vartamānavat*); [and] because of the cognition that contradicts it [when one wakes up], it is erroneous (*bhrānta*).”

24 See e.g. NR, p. 174: *nanv ananubhūtam api kvacit svapne’vagamyate!* “But sometimes, [an object] is apprehended in a dream whereas it has never been experienced before!”

25 See ŚV, *Nirālambanavāda*, 108cd-109ab: *janmany ekatra bhinne vā tathā kālāntare’pi vā // taddeśo vānyadeśo vā svapnajñānasya gocaraḥ /* “The dream cognition has as its object [something that was perceived] either in some other life or in the same [life but] at another time, [and that can be] associated to the place of this [past perception] or to some other place.” Cf. NR, p. 174: *anantaradivaśānubhūtasya svapne varttamānavad avagamāt smṛtir eva tāvat svapnajñānam iti niścīyate, anyatrāpi smṛtīvam evāyuktam, tatas cāsmiñ janmany ananubhūtasypī svapne drśyamānasya janmāntarādāv anubhavaḥ kalpyata iti*. “Because [we] apprehend in a dream what [we] have [already] experienced the day before as if it were happening now, it is established that the dream cognition is nothing but a memory (*smṛti*). In other cases, [the dream] cannot be just a memory, and as a consequence, [we] assume that there has [already] been an experience of [the object] perceived in the dream, although it was not experienced in this life – in some other life for instance.”

objects do not appear spontaneously: they are “produced by the sole residual traces” (*saṃskāramātraja*) left by previous experiences;²⁶ and because the dreamer does not produce his objects *ex nihilo*, he only fashions or shapes them, but he does not create them in the full sense of the term.²⁷

For the same reasons, the Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā also contend that just as in the case of dreams, the so-called creations of imagination are not genuine creations: imaginary constructions, too, are nothing but the product of a mechanism of residual traces, and they are made of elements that were first perceived. Thus the NS and their commentaries state that “just as memory (*smṛti*) or [imaginary] construction (*saṃkalpa*)”, dreams actually concern objects already perceived at

26 See ŚV, *Śūnyavāda*, 206 (*evaṃ ca naiva vaktavyam atyantābhavanaṃ kvacit / anyathānupapattyā hi siddhā janmāntare'stitā //* “And thus, one cannot state the absolute non-existence (*atyantābhavana*) [of the object] in any [circumstance] whatsoever; for the existence (*astitā*) [of the object] is established, [even though only] in another life, because of the impossibility [for the cognition] of taking place if it were not the case”), and NR *ad loc.*, p. 233: *svapnajñānaṃ tāvat pratyutpannakāraṇābhāvād anantaradivasānubhūtasya ca svapne varitamānavad ābhāsāt saṃskāramātrajaṃ smaraṇam eva, tataś ca yad apy asmiñ janmany ananubhūtaṃ svapne'nubhūyate tasyāpy anyathānupapattyā janmāntare'nubhavakalpanāt siddham astitvam iti.* “As for the dream cognition, it is nothing but a memory (*smaraṇam eva*) produced by the sole residual trace (*saṃskāramātraja*), because there is no present cause [of this cognition], and because in a dream, there is a manifestation of an [object] as if it were present, [whereas this object] has been experienced the day before. And as a consequence, [we] have established the existence (*astitva*) of the [object] that, [although] not experienced in this life, is experienced in a dream, for it is assumed that [this object] was experienced in some previous life, because of the impossibility [for this cognition] of taking place otherwise.”

27 See ŚV, *Śūnyavāda*, 210: *tasmād bhrāntir api tv eṣāṃ kalpayanty artham eva naḥ / kalpayaty anyathā santaṃ na tv ātmānaṃ vyavasyati //* “As a consequence, there is [indeed] an error (*bhrānti*) [in dreams and other illusions]; however, [this error], although fashioning (*kalpayanti*) the object for us, fashions this existing [object] so as to make it different [from what it is], but does not determine its very essence (*ātman*).” Cf. NR *ad loc.*, p. 234: *yasmād evaṃ sarvatra bāhyam asti tasmād api kalpayanti kalpanārūpāpi sad artham evānyathā sihitam anyathā kalpayati, tena ca rūpeṇa vidyamānam eva vidyamānatayā kalpayati na tv ātmānaṃ bahiṣṭvena, nātyantāsantaṃ sattveneti.* “Since thus, in all cases, there is an external [object, the error,] while fashioning an object that exists – [i.e.,] although it consists in a mental construction (*kalpanā*) –, fashions it so as to make it different [from what it is]; and it fashions in this form [the object] of which [we] are aware as [the object] of which we are aware, but certainly not the very essence (*ātman*) [of the object] as an external [object] – [i.e., it does not construct an object] absolutely non-existent as if it existed.”

some point in the past.²⁸ Similarly, Kumāriḷa considers that imaginary objects are mere combinations of elements previously perceived: even objects that are obviously confined to the realm of imagination – such as one of India’s classical examples of non-being: a hare’s horn – are actually entirely made of existing, perceived elements.²⁹

28 See NS IV, 2, 34 (*smṛtisaṃkalpavac ca svapnaviṣayābhimānaḥ*. “And the belief (*abhimāna*) in the dream object [actually regards an object previously perceived,] as in the cases of memory (*smṛti*) and [imaginary] construction (*saṃkalpa*)”), and NSBh *ad loc.* (p. 274): *pūrvopalabdḥaviṣayaḥ. yathā smṛtiś ca saṃkalpaś ca pūrvopalabdḥaviṣayau na tasya pratyākhyānāya kalpete, tathā svapne viṣayagrahaṇaṃ pūrvopalabdḥaviṣayaṃ na tasya pratyākhyānāya kalpata iti. evaṃ dṛṣṭaviṣayaś ca svapnānto jāgaritāntena*. “[One should supply:] ‘regards an object previously perceived’. And just as memory and [imaginary] construction regard an object that was previously perceived, [so that] they cannot be used for the refutation of [the very existence of] this [object], in the same way, in a dream, the apprehension of the object, which regards an object previously perceived, cannot be used for the refutation of the [existence of] this [object]. And thus, thanks to the waking state, the dream state possesses an object that has been perceived.” Cf. NBhV, p. 490: *ye caite svapnādiḥpratyayāḥ puravimānodyānāyānādibhedānuvidhāyinas te mithyāpratyayā iti mithyāpratyayānāṃ ca jāgradavasthāpratyayasāmānyād bhāvaḥ. mamāpi sarva eva mithyāpratyayā bhavantīti bruvāṇaḥ pradhānaṃ anuyoktavyaḥ; na niṣpradhānaṃ viparyaya-pratyayaṃ paśyāma iti*. “And these cognitions in dreams and [other illusions,] which imitate (*anuvidhāyin*) the variegation of a journey through cities, palaces and gardens for instance, are false cognitions; and false cognitions have an existence by virtue of their community (*sāmānya*) with the cognitions of the waking state. He who says ‘But for me, all [cognitions] without exception are false cognitions!’ must be asked about the substratum (*pradhāna*) [of these false cognitions]; for we do not see any object of a false cognition that would be devoid of substratum (*niṣpradhāna*).”

29 See e.g. ŚV, Śūnyavāda, 111cd-112ab, where, having shown that all perceptual illusions, far from arising *ex nihilo*, have an external object as their substratum, Kumāriḷa adds: *dravyāntare viṣāṇaṃ ca śaśasyātmā ca kāraṇaṃ // śaśaśṛṅgadhiyo maunḍyaṃ niṣedhe śiraso’sya ca /* “And the cause of the cognition of a hare’s horn is a horn [that was perceived] in some other individual substance [such as a cow], and the nature of a hare [also perceived in the past]; and [the cause] of the negation [of the existence of a hare’s horn] is the [perceived] baldness of the [hare]’s head.”

4. Utpaladeva's First Element of Answer: The Combination itself is Spontaneous

Here is how, according to Abhinavagupta, Utpaladeva was answering this objection in his lost *Vivṛti*:

*iti codye nirūpayati yatheti: śvetam dantadaśakākīrṇakaratrāyakaḥkalitavadanaṃ dantinam antaḥ pramāṭṛbhūmau sthitaṃ svacchabuddhimakuralakṣaṇe bāhyagocare vikalpas tātālīkam ābhāsayati svecchānusāreṇeti *saṃsthānayojanāṃśe na [corr.: saṃsthānayojanāṃśena KSTS]³⁰ asyānubhavānusāritvam ity asti naisargiko 'sau.³¹*

[As an answer] to this objection, [Utpaladeva] explains, [in the passage of the *Vivṛti* beginning with] “just as...”, that the mental construction [that belongs to imagination] manifests in the external realm consisting in the immaculate mirror of the intellect, according to the will of the [subject], a white elephant that has a ten-tusked, three-trunked head, that resides “internally” – [i.e.,] inside the subject, [and that] belongs to the time of the [cognition itself] (*tātālīka*). Therefore the fact that this [mental construction] conforms to some [past] experiences does not concern the aspect of combination (*yojanā*) of this configuration; so this [mental construction] is indeed spontaneous (*naisargika*)!

Abhinavagupta's playful variations on the theme of the fantastic elephant are a perfect illustration of Utpaladeva's argument here: even if one admits that imaginary constructions are made of elements entirely borrowed from the domain of perception, and that imagination merely combines differently these elements, this very activity of combination (*yojanā*) is absolutely free. There seems to be no limit in our power to associate various elements formerly perceived and to thus create entities – be they hare's horns or ten-tusked, three-trunked elephants – that are absolutely alien to the world of perception; and this activity of combination is not determined in any way by residual traces left by previous experiences, since nobody has ever experienced the configurations of which we are capable.

30 This correction had already been proposed in TORELLA 2002, fn. 23, p. 135.

31 ĪPVV, vol. II, p. 332.

5. Utpaladeva's Second Element of Answer: Even the Combined Elements are Freely Created

At the end of his ĪPVV commentary on verse I, 6, 9, Abhinavagupta was already summing up the Pratyabhijñā's position on the extent of imagination's freedom by distinguishing the two "aspects" (*aṃśa*) of imaginary construction – namely, on the one hand, the combination (*yojanā*), and on the other hand, the elements that are combined (*yojamāna*):

*sa naisargika eveti vakṣyamāṇasūtrayoḥ svatantravikalpeṣu vikalpanīyārthānāṃ yojanāṃśe paśoḥ svāntryaṃ vakṣyate, na tu yojoyamānāṃśe, na hy ananubhūtaṃ jalaṃ jvalanaṃ ca yojayet kaścid iti.*³²

In the following two verses beginning with "[the mental construction] is perfectly spontaneous [...]",³³ [Utpaladeva] is going to state the freedom (*svāntrya*) of the alienated subject (*paśu*) in the mental constructions that are free, as regards the aspect of combination (*yojanā*) of the objects elaborated in the mental construction, but not as regards the aspect of the combined [elements] (*yojoyamāna*); for nobody can combine water and fire [through imagination if] they have not been experienced [first].

However, Utpaladeva does not content himself with stating that imagination is a free power of combining perceived elements. He goes one step further, as Abhinavagupta emphasizes while commenting on verse I, 6, 10 in the ĪPVV:

*nāstīti yojoyamāno 'pi bhāgaḥ pūrvakālāparāmarśād anubhavānupajīvy eva.*³⁴

[In the passage of the *Vivṛti* beginning with] "there is no [...]", [Utpaladeva explains that] even the aspect that is combined does *not* depend on any [previous] experience, because there is no grasp (*parāmarśa*) of the past time [when it was first perceived].

One thing is clear: according to Abhinavagupta, Utpaladeva was stating in his lost *Vivṛti* that ultimately, *the activity of combination is not the only autonomous aspect of imagination*, since even the elements combined are in fact independent of the previous experience during which the imagining subject has perceived them. Much less clear, however, is the reason invoked to demonstrate this point: "because there is no grasp of the previous time [when it was perceived]." Does Utpaladeva simply mean that the elements forming the imagined object are independent of perception because we don't remember having perceived them at

32 ĪPVV, vol. II, p. 331.

33 ĪPK I, 6, 10 and 11, quoted above.

34 ĪPVV, vol. II, p. 332.

this or that particular moment of our past? If such is his argument, it is rather weak; for if we imagine something like Abhinavagupta's fantastic elephant, the fact that we do not remember having seen a tusk in this or that particular circumstance in the past does not make us less dependent on the previous experience through which we first discovered what a tusk looks like – the fact that we have forgotten it does not make it less of a determining factor in the result of our mental construction. But if Utpaladeva does not mean this, what else can he mean? In his *Vṛtti* on the same verse, he apparently alludes to the same rather mysterious argument:

*svatantras tu vikalpaś cakṣurādyagocaram api buddhiviśayatāpādanena yathāruci pūrvānu-
bhūtatvāvimarśanena navam eva taṃ tam artham ābhāsayati saṃniveśaviśeṣaṃ ca. tatrāsāv
arthaḥ sahaja evāsti.*³⁵

However, the free mental construction manifests this or that object, which is *new* (*navam eva*) – because there is no grasp (*vimarśa*) [of it] as having been experienced in the past – and which has a particular organization [of its parts], at will, by making it the object of the intellect although it does not belong to the field of the organs of sight, etc. In this [kind of free mental construction], the object is produced *simultaneously* [with the cognition].³⁶

What exactly does Utpaladeva mean when he insists that the imagined object (including its parts, as Abhinavagupta specifies in the *ĪPVV*) is new (*navam*)? The point is somewhat subtle and requires a small digression into the Pratyabhijñā theory of perception. This little *détour* is worthwhile because it will enable us to reach the core of Utpaladeva's theory of imagination.

35 *Vṛtti*, p. 30.

36 Here my understanding of the *Vṛtti* slightly differs from that of R. Torella in his remarkable edition and annotated translation of this text. First, I believe that here, the *ca* connecting *navam eva taṃ tam artham* and *saṃniveśaviśeṣaṃ* should not be understood as a sort of disjunction (*cf.* TORELLA 2002, p. 135: “however, the independent (*svatantraḥ*) *vikalpa* renders this or that thing manifest, *whether* new *or* characterized by a different organization of its parts [...]”), because here as in the lost passage of the *Vivṛti* commented upon by Abhinavagupta, Utpaladeva is stating that the imaginary object is both made of elements previously perceived *and* new. Besides, it seems to me that in the last sentence, *sahaja* does not mean “spontaneous” (see *ibid.*), but “simultaneous” (*cf.* the equivalent term *tātkālika* that so often recurs in Abhinavagupta's commentaries: see e.g. *ĪPV*, vol. I, pp. 270–271 and *ĪPVV*, vol. II, p. 331, quoted above, or *ĪPVV*, vol. II, pp. 333–334, quoted below), because Utpaladeva does not mean here that the object is as “free” or “autonomous” (*svatantra*) as the cognition, but rather, that it is *new*, since it arises at the very moment of the cognition that constructs it (contrary to the object of memory for instance).

According to the Buddhist logicians who are Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta's main opponents (and from whom the Pratyabhijñā philosophers borrow a number of important concepts),³⁷ when perceiving, we are aware of an entity that is absolutely singular (*svalakṣaṇa*) and, consequently, impossible to formulate (for language can only denote what is common to several entities). In contrast, mental construction (*vikalpa*), which is profoundly linked with language (*abhilāpa*), has as its object a generality (*sāmānya*):³⁸ when we think "this is a pot" upon seeing something, we have already left the mere awareness of a singular presence and started constructing the object as belonging to the general category of "pots" (whereby we have already ceased to be aware of the object's absolute singularity). The Pratyabhijñā philosophers invert this scheme.³⁹ According to them, the object of perception is indeed a singular entity, but this singular entity is not the primary matter on which the mental construction then elaborates a generality; on the contrary, this singular object is in fact a synthesis of elementary phenomena (*ābhāsa*) that can be considered as generalities (*sāmānya*). Thus this particular pot seen here and now is in fact made of a series of elementary phenomena (such as "this", "pot", "red", "made of gold", etc.); contrary to the singular entities in which they are found, these elementary phenomena are not restricted to any particular time or place, and for that reason, they act as generalities.⁴⁰ Although made of these, the pot has a unity of its own and

37 On the somewhat ambiguous relation between the Pratyabhijñā and the Buddhist logic and epistemology, see TORELLA 1992.

38 See e.g. the beginning of the Buddhist's discourse as presented by Utpaladeva in ĪPK I, 2, 1: *nanu svalakṣaṇābhāsaṃ jñānam ekaṃ paraṃ punaḥ / sābhilāpaṃ vikalpākhyam bahudhā* [...] "But one [type of] cognition comprises the manifestation of a singular entity (*svalakṣaṇa*), whereas the other, called 'mental construction' (*vikalpa*), is accompanied by language (*abhilāpa*) [and] manifold". Cf. RATIÉ 2006, pp. 41–43.

39 On this inversion, see TORELLA 1992, pp. 332–333, and TORELLA 2002, fn. 3, pp. 89–90.

40 Thus, while explaining ĪPK II, 3, 2cd (*ekābhīdhānaviṣaye mitir vastuny abādhitā* // "[Valid] knowledge, which is not contradicted [by another cognition,] regards an [entity] that is the object of a single expression"), Abhinavagupta explains (ĪPV, vol. II, pp. 69–71): *vimarśabalena ca yataḥ pramāṇam vimarśaś ca śabdajīvitāḥ śabdaś cābhāsāntarair deśakālādirūpair anāmṛṣṭa ekatraivābhāsamātre pravartate ghaṭa iti lohita iti, tato deśakālābhāsayoḥ svalakṣaṇatvārpaṇapravaṇayor anāmiśraṇāt sāmānyāyamāna ābhāse pramāṇam pravartate, ayam ity api hy avabhāsa ābhāsāntarānāmiśre puro'vasthitāvabhāsamātra ity uktam śrīmadācāryapādair eva: niyate'py ayam ity evam parāmarśaḥ puraḥsthite / sarvabhāvagatedantāsāmānyenaiva jāyate // iti. "And the means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) occurs thanks to a grasp (*vimarśa*), and this grasp has as its essence the word; and the word applies to one single phenomenon (*ābhāsa*), as 'pot' or 'red', etc., that is not grasped along with other phenomena consisting in a place, a time, etc. For this reason – i.e., because of the*

transcends the mere collection of its elements, because it is apprehended as unique and unitary by the subject:⁴¹ perception is not the passive reflection of some given reality, but an active apprehension, realization or grasp (*vimarśa*) in

absence of a combination with the phenomena of place and time that may give [the object] its singularity (*svalakṣaṇatva*), the means of knowledge operates on a phenomenon that behaves as a generality (*sāmānyāyamāna*); for even ‘this’ expresses a manifestation that is not combined with other phenomena, [and] that is nothing but the manifestation standing right in front [of the subject]. This has been said by the venerable master himself: ‘even the grasp (*parāmarśa*) as *this*, which concerns a determined [object] standing right in front [of the subject,] arises thanks to the sole generality (*sāmānya*) that is objectivity (*idantā*) [and] that is found in all objects’.”

- 41 This “grasp” (*vimarśa*) of the object’s singularity is in turn made possible by the fact that when combined, the elementary phenomena have a common efficacy (*arthakriyā*), producing a single effect on the subject who perceives them. See ĪPK II, 3, 7: *prthagdīpa-prakāśānāṃ srotasāṃ sāgare yathā / aviruddhāvabhāsānām ekakāryā tathaikyadhīḥ* // “Just as the cognition of the unity of the distinct light rays of a lamp, [and just as the cognition of the unity] of rivers in the ocean, [the cognition of the unity] of phenomena (*avabhāsa*) that are not [mutually] contradicted must be produced by a unitary [entity] (*ekakāryā*).” In his commentary, Abhinavagupta explains that the rays of a lamp are apprehended as constituting together a singular entity because when they are gathered, they have an efficacy that they don’t have separately and that is not the mere *collection* of their respective individual efficacies (ĪPV, vol. II, p. 97: *prthag vartinyo yāḥ pradīpasya prabhāḥ sūkṣmatamā avalokanaśāmarthyād dhānalakṣaṇāṃ yām arthakriyāṃ na kṛtavatyas tām evaīkabhavanābhyantaram saṃmūrchitātmano vidadhate, na tatrārthakriyānām samudāyo’sti. sāgarapatitāni ca srotāṃsi bahutaratarāṅgāraṃbhārthakriyākārīṇi*. “The light rays of a lamp which, when appearing separately (*prthag*), do not have the efficacy (*arthakriyā*) consisting in enabling to see – [because then they are] very subtle –, do have this [efficacy] when they are concentrated (*saṃmūrchita*) in the same place; [and] in that case, it is not a collection (*samudāya*) of [various] efficacies[, but a unique efficacy]. And [in the same way,] the rivers flowing into the ocean have as their [common] efficacy to move countless waves”). Similarly, one apprehends a singular object (*svalakṣaṇa*) because of a combination of elementary phenomena that acquire together a unitary efficacy; cf. ĪPV, vol. II, pp. 98–99: *prthag ye dīpaprakāśās teṣāṃ sambandhi yad ekaṃ sāgare srotasāṃ ca yad ekaṃ vastu tena kāryā yathaikyadhīs tathāviruddhā ye vabhāsā ghaṭalohitakāñcanādayas teṣāṃ sambandhi yad ekaṃ svalakṣaṇam tatkāryaikyadhīḥ*. “Just as the cognition of a unity must be produced [in the case of light] by a unitary (*eka*) [entity] that possesses the distinct rays of the lamp, and in the case of the ocean, by the unitary entity that possesses the rivers – in the same way, [in the case of the perception of a particular pot,] the cognition of unity must be produced by a unitary (*eka*) singular [entity] (*svalakṣaṇa*) that possesses [various] phenomena (*avabhāsa*) that are not contradictory, such as ‘pot’, ‘red’, ‘made of gold’, etc.”

which the subject synthesizes these elements and becomes aware of them *as being part of a singular entity*.⁴²

In this regard, the Pratyabhijñā philosophers concede that the activity of imagination is not, properly speaking, a creation *ex nihilo*: however free in his activity of combination, the imagining subject has to rely on elements that are precisely the “elementary phenomena” (*ābhāsa*) of which any singular perceived entity is made, because just as any perceived object, an imaginary object is a singular entity made of generalities. Thus, much further in the treatise, Abhinavagupta insists very clearly on this dependence:

*pañcavaktraś caturdanto hastī nabhasi dhāvatīty api vimīśratayā vikalpasṛṣṭis tān ābhāsān īśvarasṛṣṭān evopajīvātīti sarvā pāśavī pratyayasṛṣṭir īśvarasṛṣṭyupajīvinīty uktam.*⁴³

Even the creation that is a mental construction (*vikalpasṛṣṭi*) in the form of a combination (*vimīśra*) [such as] “a five-trunked, four-tusked elephant is running in the sky” depends on some phenomena (*ābhāsa*) that for their part have been created by the Lord; therefore [Utpaladeva] says that any cognitive creation of the alienated subject (*paśu*) depends (*upajīvinī*) on the Lord’s creation.

The freedom of the imagining subject finds its limit in the elements that he combines: ultimately, his creation remains heteronomous insofar as it still depends on the elementary phenomena that he must borrow from past perceptions.⁴⁴ The same remark is found in Abhinavagupta’s commentary on verse I, 6, 10:

*gatasya yo’vabhāso nāsau pūrvānubhūtaḥ. tatraiva tu vikalpe yo yojyamānarūpaḥ sāmānyāṁśaḥ, sa nāpūrvo, na hi ca vikalpas tatrāṁše svatanthro’nubhavavāsanopajīvitvād iti.*⁴⁵

The manifestation of [a particular imagined] pot has never been experienced before; but within this same mental construction, the aspect of generality (*sāmānya*) that consists in the combined [elements] (*yojyamāna*) is not new, because the construction is not free (*sva-*

42 On the fact that, according to the Pratyabhijñā philosophers, perception does not passively reflect its objects but becomes aware of them in an act of apprehension or grasp (*vimarśa*, *parāmarśa*, etc.) that constitutes the very essence of consciousness, see ĪPK I, 5, 11 and its commentaries; cf. e.g. HULIN 1978, pp. 287–297, RATIÉ 2006, p. 87, fn. 138, and RATIÉ 2007, pp. 339–340, fn. 59; on the meaning of *vimarśa* and other terms deriving from the same root, see also TORELLA 2002, fn. 32, p. XXIV.

43 ĪPV, vol. II, pp. 264–265.

44 Cf. ĪPVV, vol. III, p. 381: *daśaradano dantīty api pṛthagābhāsān īśvarasṛṣṭān evopajīvati*. “Even [this creation of the alienated subject]: ‘a ten-tusked elephant’, depends on distinct phenomena that for their part are produced by the Lord.”

45 ĪPVV, vol. II, p. 335.

tantra) as regards this aspect, since it depends on the impregnations (*vāsanā*) left by [former] experiences.

And yet, in spite of this acknowledgment that the elementary phenomena at least are not new, Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta keep repeating that the imagined object made of them is new (*nava*), unprecedented (*apūrva*) or simultaneous (*sahaja*, *tātkālika*) with the imagining cognition that manifests it.⁴⁶ Besides, as we have seen, Utpaladeva states that the imagined object is new “because there is no grasp (*vimarśa*) [of it] as having been experienced in the past”, and in the somewhat puzzling passage of the ĪPVV already mentioned, Abhinavagupta goes as far as to say that “even the aspect that is combined does not depend on any [previous] experience, because there is no grasp (*parāmarśa*) of the past time [when it was first perceived].” What does it mean?

In order to reconcile these apparently contradictory statements, we should bear in mind that according to Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta, a singular object that is perceived is something over and above the mere collection (*samudāya*) of its components, because the elementary phenomena in it have together a single, unitary and unique effect on the subject that perceives this object, so that they become a single, unitary and unique entity.⁴⁷ In the same way, the imagined

46 The importance of this notion of newness as regards imagination can also be found in Abhinavagupta’s works on poetics when he describes the poet’s creative inspiration (*pratibhā*): thus, in his commentary on DhĀ I, 6, Abhinavagupta states that *pratibhā* is “an intuitive understanding capable of creating something unprecedented” (*apūrvavastu-nirmāṇakṣamā prajñā*; cf. SHULMAN 2008, p. 483). The Sanskrit notion of *pratibhā* is sometimes taken to be “the exact equivalent of Imagination” (see e.g. SREEKANTAIYA 1980, p. 11), but as D. Shulman notices, “there are [...] other well known Sanskrit candidates for this conceptual slot – *kalpanā*, *vikalpa*, *bhāvanā*, *sambhāvanā*, among others, all firmly situated within specific intellectual and theoretical contexts, each carrying its particular valence” (SHULMAN 2008, p. 482), and *pratibhā* is “often more in relation to what we might call ‘inspiration’ than to the imagination proper”, although “the visionary capacity of the poet’s mind is clearly involved” (*Ibid.*, p. 483). D. Shulman’s article thus explores several definitions of it while taking into account this fundamental ambiguity.

47 See above, fn. 41. Of course, this does not mean that this singular synthesis would be contradictory with the apprehension of this or that particular elementary phenomenon within a singular entity: Utpaladeva insists that the perceiving subject is free to distinguish this or that general feature within a singular whole. See ĪPK II, 3, 3: *yathāruci yathārthitvaṃ yathāvyutpatti bhidyate / ābhāso’py artha ekasminn anusamdhānasādhitte //* “In an object that is one (*eka*), [because it is] established through a synthesis (*anusamdhāna*), an [elementary] phenomenon (*ābhāsa*) can also be distinguished according to [the subject’s] free will (*ruci*), a [particular] desire (*arthitva*), [or] according to education (*vyutpatti*).” Cf. Abhi-

object transcends the mere collection of elementary phenomena of which it is made insofar as it is apprehended as an organic unity by the subject who becomes aware of it in a single unitary realization: because the subject becomes aware of components such as trunks, tusks, an elephant's body, etc., through a single cognitive act that fuses them together, even these various phenomena, although they have already been experienced in the past, are transfigured by the synthetic grasp (*vimarśa*) that apprehends them *as parts of this singular elephant imagined now*. Not only is the fantastic elephant new insofar as no such combination exists in the perceived world, but even the combined parts undergo a profound metamorphosis by being merged into a singular entity, and it is this singularity that makes the imaginary object genuinely *new*, in spite of the fact that it comprises elements borrowed from previous perceptions. Thus, when an objector asks: "But if, in this aspect [of combined elements, the imaginary object] is produced by the residual traces of some previous experiences, then what else [is left in it] that would be spontaneous (*naisargika*)?"⁴⁸ according to Abhinavagupta, "[Utpaladeva] answers: 'the singular [entity] (*svalakṣaṇa*)'."⁴⁹

navagupta's explanation of ĪPK II, 3, 5 in ĪPV, vol. II, pp. 91–92, according to which the subject can distinguish in a particular concrete pot various elementary phenomena such as "‘existent’, ‘pot’, ‘substance’, ‘being made of gold’, ‘brilliance’, etc." (*sadghaṭadravya-kāñcanojjvalatādayaḥ*): *tathā hi kiñcid apy atra nāstīti hṛdbhaṅgam ivāpadyamāno ghaṭam paśyann astīdam iti sattvābhāsam eva paśyaty aparān ābhāsān nāmnāpi tu nādrīyate; tathodakāharaṅgārthī ghaṭābhāsam, svatantranayanānayanayogyavastvarthī dravyābhāsam, mūlyādyarthī *kāñcanābhāsam [J, P, S2: kāñcanāvabhāsam KSTS, Bhāskari, L, S1, SOAS], hṛdyatārthy aujvalyābhāsam, ādigrahaṅād dṛḍhatarabhāvārthī dārdhyābhāsam iti draṣṭavyam; evaṃ rucivyutpattyor api yojanīyam*. "To explain: when seeing a pot, [someone] whose heart has just been broken as it were [because of the thought:] 'there is absolutely nothing here!' only sees the phenomenon 'existence', [thinking:] 'this exists!'; but he does not pay any attention whatsoever to the other phenomena. In the same way, someone who is driven by the desire to go fetch some water [only sees] the phenomenon 'pot'; someone who desires something capable of being freely carried here and there [only sees] the phenomenon 'substance'; someone who desires an object of value, etc., [only sees] the phenomenon 'made of gold'; someone who desires some kind of aesthetic pleasure (*hṛdyatā*) [only sees] the phenomenon 'brilliance'; and because of the use of the word 'etc.', [we] must consider that [Utpaladeva includes this too:] someone who desires a very hard object [only sees] the phenomenon 'hardness'. And [these examples] must also be put in relation in the same way with the [subject's] free will (*ruci*) and education (*vyutpatti*) [mentioned in verse II, 3, 3]."

48 ĪPVV, vol. II, p. 333: *nanu yady atrāṅṣe pūrvānubhavasamskārajatvam, kim anyat tarhi naisargikam?*

49 *Ibid.*: *āha svalakṣaṇa iti*. Here too, similarities can be found with *alaṅkāra* literature. See e.g. SHULMAN 2008, p. 492: "For Mahima Bhaṭṭa *pratibhā* has features of directness, of

The power of synthesis (*yojanā*) in imagination is such that it has a profound effect on the combined (*yojyamāna*) elements themselves: just as the singular entity produced by the mental construction is apprehended as new by the creating subject, its parts too appear as if they were seen for the first time – and indeed, they *are* seen for the first time insofar as they belong to this singular entity.

When answering the question “how free is imagination?”, the Pratyabhijñā philosophers therefore seem to stretch in every possible way the limits of this faculty’s freedom. Thus, towards the very end of his ĪPVV commentary on verse I, 6, 10, Abhinavagupta remarks that in the Pratyabhijñā’s perspective, the individual subject is actually the absolute consciousness that creates the universe (including all the elementary phenomena that compose each and every singular entity) – only, the individual subject is this absolute consciousness insofar as it is imagining itself as being a limited consciousness. Such a principle renders null and void the theory according to which imagination is a mere combination of formerly perceived external elements – because nothing is external to the all-encompassing universal consciousness, and because this consciousness creates everything anew at every single moment:

ābhāsasāre hi padārthavarga ābhāsanakriyaiva prādhānyena vijṛmbhate, tata eva kriyā-śaktivispḥaramātram bhagavato jagad iti kṛtamatayo manyante. ābhāsanakriyā ca yāvad apūrvā naisargikī vyavadhānavandhyā tākālīkatālingitasphuṭabhāvā vartate, tāvad ābhāso’pi sphuṭo’bhinava eva. ghaṭasyāpīhettham eva navatā, nānyatheti darśitam etat. ata eva pūrvadṛṣṭābhāsamukhena na kutracit paramārthato nirmāṇasaṅkathā sāvakāśā, prakāśarūpatayā sarvasya sadaiva svayam eva paramārthasattve kasyacin nirmāṇam ity avakāśābhāvād ābhāsanakriyāmukhena tv apūrvatvaṃ kulagiriprabhṛter api pratikṣaṇam aviśrānta iti kathitayuktyā bhavātīti tad api sṛjyata eveti sadāsṛṣṭyādiśaktiyogo’pi bhagavati na nopapadyata iti tātparyam.⁵⁰

For since all things have as their essence manifestation (*ābhāsa*), it is the action of manifesting (*ābhāsanakriyā*) which unfolds⁵¹ as the substance [of the universe]; for this very

dynamism, and above all of singularity, the foregrounding of the distinctive (*viśiṣṭa*) and intrinsic (*svabhāva*) feature of the object [...]. A notion of singularity is fundamental to much of Sanskrit poetics, especially in the Kashmiri school; we can trace a connection between such a notion and the problem of creative perception – or indeed, of imagination.” Cf. SHULMAN forthcoming, which emphasizes that the *dhvani*-theory of Ānandavardhana on which Abhinavagupta has commented is not only – as is often noticed – an aesthetics of the universal, but also, in some deeper way, an aesthetics of singularity.

50 ĪPVV, vol. II, pp. 333–334.

51 Literally, “yawns” – Abhinavagupta often has recourse to this image.

reason, the world is nothing but the throbbing shining forth (*visphāra*) of the Lord's power of action (*kriyāśakti*) – those who have made up their minds [as regards the ultimate reality] know that. And insofar as the action of manifesting occurs while being [ever] new (*apūrva*), spontaneous (*naisargikā*), immediate,⁵² and while having an object that is vivid and completely simultaneous (*tātkālika*) [with the cognition that manifests it], the [elementary] phenomenon also is vivid [and] new (*abhinava eva*). In this regard, even the pot [that is perceived] is new (*nava*) in this way only, and not otherwise – [we] have [already] shown this. For this very reason, in reality, there is no room whatsoever for this tale according to which [imagination] would be a creation through some phenomena that have already been perceived: because everything consists in the manifesting consciousness (*prakāśa*), anybody's creation is *always* (*sadaiva*) absolutely spontaneous (*svayam eva*) with respect to what is real in the ultimate sense of the term (*paramārthasattva*). Because [thus] there is no room [for the contention that imagination only combines pre-existing phenomena,] on the contrary, [we must think that] through the action of manifesting, at every single moment (*pratikṣaṇam*), [even] the chief mountain ranges, etc., are new (*apūrva*), according to the reasoning expressed [by Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇa in] “without ever resting”.⁵³ Therefore even this [aspect consisting in the various elementary phenomena] is *created* [by the constant activity of the Lord]; [and] as a consequence, even possessing the powers of constantly creating (*śṛṣṭi*) and [performing the four other cosmic acts attributed to Śiva]⁵⁴ is not impossible as regards the Lord – this was the general meaning.

- 52 Literally, “devoid of any intermediary (*vyavadhāna*)” – as opposed to what happens in cognitions such as memory, fancy or determination, which are determined by the “intermediary” (*vyavadhāna*) that is a residual trace (*saṃskāra*) left by some past experience. The presence or the absence of such an intermediary determines whether the object appears as vivid (*sphuṭa*) or not; see ĪPV, vol. I, p. 268: *etad evāspḥuṭatvam iti siddho'nubhava-smaraṇādāv ābhāsabhedo'ntarābhāsavargasya bahirābhāsanam avyavadhānena sphuṭatā, vyavadhānena tu tātkālikatvābhāvād asphuṭateti*. “And [having an intermediary] is nothing but not being vivid (*asphuṭatva*); so the difference between manifestations [occurring] in direct experience, memory, etc. is established: the manifestation in an external form of a multitude of internal manifestations without any intermediary (*vyavadhāna*) is vividness (*sphuṭatā*); whereas [the manifestation occurring] through the intermediary [of a residual trace] – due to the fact that [the manifested object] does not exist simultaneously (*tātkālika*) [with the cognition itself] – is the absence of vividness.”
- 53 See SC 112: *muhur muhur aviśrāntas trailokyam kalpanāśataiḥ / kalpayann'api ko'py eko nirvikalpo jayaty ajaḥ //* “Glory to the unique Unborn (*aja*) who is devoid of mental constructions (*nirvikalpa*) although he is constantly engaged in constructing (*kalpayan*) the Three Worlds through innumerable imaginary acts (*kalpanā*) without ever resting.” Abhinavagupta seems to be particularly fond of this verse: he also quotes it e.g. in his commentary on ĪPK I, 5, 10 (ĪPV, vol. I, p. 195) or on I, 6, 7 (ĪPV, vol. I, p. 262).
- 54 I.e., maintaining (*sthiti*) the universe, destroying (*saṃhāra, pralaya*) it, concealing (*tirodhāna*) his own nature and revealing it through grace (*anugraha*). See e.g. ĪPV, vol. I, p. 262: *tena na kevalam mahāśṛṣṭiṣu mahāsthitiṣu mahāpralayeṣu prakopatirodhāneṣu dīkṣā-jñānādyanugraheṣu bhagavataḥ kṛtyapañcakayogaḥ yāvat satatam eva vyavahāre'pi*.

Abhinavagupta is now inverting the analogy at the basis of the Pratyabhijñā's inquiry on imagination: not only is the individual subject who imagines similar to the absolutely free universal consciousness; the absolutely free universal consciousness engaged in a constant activity of cosmic creation is also similar to the imagining subject – and this mutual reflection is possible because they are profoundly identical. We are once again back to the metaphysical background on which the Pratyabhijñā's theory of imagination is built; and the passage reveals a crucial difference between the theories of imagination (and their metaphysical backgrounds) in the Pratyabhijñā, the Advaita Vedānta and the Buddhist logico-epistemological school.

Thus according to the Advaita Vedānta, the phenomenal world, with its countless differences and constant changes, is the result of an activity of mental construction (*kalpanā*) that builds it due to some kind of metaphysical ignorance or nescience (*avidyā*) in which the knowledge of the absolutely non-dual reality is somehow obliterated. From this point of view, the Pratyabhijñā does not seem to hold a very different position: according to Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta too, the world can be considered as the product of an imaginative activity. Similarly, Dharmakīrti and his followers hold that the world of mundane experience (*vyavahāra*) is made of mental constructions (*vikalpa*).

However, for the Buddhist epistemologists, if mental elaborations are “free”, they are not so in the same sense as in the Pratyabhijñā: according to Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta, they are autonomous insofar as the subject who owns them is free to produce them, whereas according to Dharmakīrti, they are autonomous insofar as they *do not belong to any subject*.⁵⁵ The Buddhist epi-

“Therefore the Lord does not perform the five [cosmic] acts (*kr̥tyapañcaka*) only in great creations (*mahāśṛṣṭi*), great maintainings (*mahāsthiti*), great destructions (*mahāpralaya*), concealments (*tirodhāna*) due to his wrath and graces (*anugraha*) [bestowed] through initiation, knowledge, etc.; rather, [he is] *constantly* [performing it], even in mundane activity (*vyavahāra*).”

55 Utpaladeva was obviously emphasizing this difference in his lost *Vivṛti*. See e.g. *ĪPVV ad I*, 6, 10, vol. II, p. 331: *nanu saugatavat kim iha vikalpa eva svatantra yena vṛttau tathoktam? iti bhrāntim nirasyati kṣetrajña ity ādinā*. “But in this regard, is it the mental construction itself (*vikalpa eva*) that is free (*svatantra*), as the Buddhists [contend] (*saugatavat*), so that [Utpaladeva] states in the *Vṛtti* that [the mental construction] is thus [free, instead of saying that the subject is free]?’ [Utpaladeva] refutes this error in [the passage] beginning with ‘the subject [...]’.” A bit further, Abhinavagupta explains that the *vikalpa* is free insofar as in it, the subject is not determined by anyone or anything else (and not, as the Buddhists contend, because it would not belong to any subject). See *Ibid.*: *prācyānubhavaviṣayīkṛtavastugata-*

stemologists hold that consciousness is in fact a series of momentary conscious events irreducibly distinct from one another and they refuse to acknowledge the existence of any permanent subject who would be the substratum of these cognitions.⁵⁶ Thus, while they do consider that our everyday world is entirely shaped by abstract representations projected onto a singular reality, they see this transcendental imagination as totally *impersonal*; and while the Pratyabhijñā philosophers present it as the expression of a conscious agent's free will, the Vijñānavādins consider it as an unconscious and uncontrolled mechanism of residual traces comparable to that of dreams (*svapna*).⁵⁷ This predilection for the dream model is significant, since contrary to the imagining subject, the dreaming subject does not experience his creative freedom: he is as it were the victim of an imagination that is not *his*, since usually (that is, if he is not a *yogin*) he is not free to decide what should happen in his dreams.

For the Vedāntins, quite similarly, the transcendental activity of imagination which produces the empirical world *does not belong to anyone*,⁵⁸ since the only reality, the *brahman*, is absolutely non-dual and alien to any kind of multiplicity and change, so that it cannot act or create. This is unacceptable to Abhinavagupta. Thus, in another part of the treatise, he questions a Vedāntin in the following way: if the only reality is completely quiescent and one, and if difference is due to nescience (*avidyā*), to whom does this nescience belong (*kasyāvidyā*)?⁵⁹ And to whom does the activity of imaginary construction belong

deśakālapramātrantarasācivyādīpāratantryaparākaraṇapraṇeṣyam uktir iti yāvāt. “This is what [Utpaladeva means]: this expression [in the *Vṛtti*, ‘the mental construction is free’, only] leads to setting aside the heteronomy (*pāratantryā*) [that could be due] for instance to the assistance of other subjects, or to the [particular] place and time of the thing that was the object of the previous experience.”

56 See RATIÉ 2006 and TORELLA 2007 on the Pratyabhijñā's reaction to this theory: Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta both exploit it (so as to criticize the static Brahmanical notions of the Self) and criticize it (since they defend the notion of a permanent subject, although they consider that this permanency is possible only provided that the subject is understood as a dynamic entity capable of undergoing countless transformations).

57 See above, fn. 21, and RATIÉ forthcoming.

58 Cf. BIARDEAU 1969, p. 33, who notices that according to Maṇḍanamiśra, *avidyā* may be compared to a play – but a play that belongs to nobody (“le jeu de personne”).

59 ĪPV, vol. II, p. 179: *cidrūpasyaikatvaṃ yadi vāstavaṃ bhedaḥ punar ayam avidyopaplavād ity ucyate kasyāyam avidyopaplava itī na saṃgacchate. brahmaṇo hi vidyāikarūpasya katham avidyārūpatā? na cānyaḥ kaścid astī vastuto jīvādir yasyāvidyā bhavet.* “If [the Vedāntin] says that the unity (*ekatva*) of what consists in consciousness is real (*vāstava*), whereas difference (*bheda*) is due to the perturbation (*upaplava*) of nescience (*avidyā*), [for

(*kasyāyaṃ vikalpanavyāpāro*)?⁶⁰ For the *brahman* is pure knowledge (*vidyā*), but the individual subject (*jīva*) understood as a limited and differentiated being is nothing but an *effect* of this cosmic activity of construction. Abhinavagupta thus attacks a particularly sensitive point in his opponents' conceptual structure: the question *kasyāvidyā?* haunts Advaita Vedānta and divides its proponents.⁶¹ Maṇḍanamīśra – with whose works Abhinavagupta seems to be familiar⁶² – answers that nescience belongs to the individuals,⁶³ and he himself mentions the objections (quite similar to those presented by Abhinavagupta) that such an answer could trigger: the *brahman*, who is pure knowledge, cannot be ignorant, but the individuals do not exist independently of the *brahman*; and if they *seem* to have such an independent existence thanks to the faculty of mental construction (*kalpanā*), this faculty in turn cannot belong to the *brahman* who is pure knowledge, but stating that it belongs to the individuals would amount to locking oneself in a logical circle (*itaretarāśraya*), since it would mean attributing to the individuals a faculty of imagination that is the very cause of these individuals'

our part we consider that this theory] is inconsistent: *to whom (kasya)* could this perturbation of nescience belong? For how could the *brahman* – which consists in nothing but knowledge (*vidyā*) – consist in nescience? And [for a Vedāntin,] in reality nobody else exists – such as an individual (*jīva*) – to whom nescience would belong.”

- 60 ĪPV, vol. II, pp. 179–180: *sadrūpam eva brahmābhinnam cakāsty avikalpena, vikalpabalāt tu bhedo 'yam iti cet, kasyāyaṃ vikalpanavyāpāro nāma?* “If [the Vedāntin were to explain:] ‘only that whose nature is real (*sat*) [and] is not distinct from the *brahman* is manifest while not being constructed (*avikalpena*), whereas difference (*bheda*) is due to mental constructions (*vikalpa*)’, [we would ask again: but] this activity of mental construction, *to whom* does it belong?”
- 61 Śāṅkara seems to evade the question and to consider it as a false problem. See e.g. the BhGBh attributed to Śāṅkara (*ad BhG XIII, 2*, pp. 371–372): *atrāha: sāvidyā kasyeti. yasya dṛśyate tasyaiva. kasya dṛśyate ity atrocyate: avidyā kasya dṛśyate iti praśno nirarthakaḥ.* “[– An objector] then asks: to whom does nescience belong (*savidyā kasya*)? [The Vedāntin answers:] to whoever perceives it. [The objector asks:] So who perceives it? [The Vedāntin] answers this [question] thus: the question ‘who perceives nescience?’ is vain (*nirarthaka*)” (*cf.* INGALLS 1953). Later Vedāntins are divided on this question, some considering that nescience belongs to the individual, and others, to the *brahman*: see e.g. POTTER (ed.) 2006, pp. 7–8.
- 62 *Cf.* SANDERSON 1985, p. 210, n. 41 (regarding Śaivism in the tenth and eleventh centuries): “when Vedānta is expounded by its opponents in Kashmirian sources of our period it is the doctrine of Maṇḍanamīśra which is generally in mind [...]. To my knowledge no source betrays familiarity with the doctrines of Śāṅkara.”
- 63 See BSi, p. 10: *yat tu kasyāvidyete jīvānām iti brūmaḥ.* “As for the question: ‘to whom does nescience belong (*kasyāvidyā*)?’, we answer: to the individuals (*jīva*).”

existence according to the Advaita Vedānta.⁶⁴ Maṇḍanamiśra only avoids these difficulties by invoking on the one hand a circular causality that supposedly escapes the status of logical defect because it is beginningless,⁶⁵ and on the other hand, the status by nature “inexplicable” of illusion:⁶⁶ according to the Vedāntin, the imaginary creation of the imaginary world has a particularly ambiguous

- 64 See BSi, p. 10: *nanu na jīvā brahmaṇo bhidyante, evaṃ hy āhānena jīvenātmanānupraviśyēti. satyaṃ paramārthataḥ, kalpanayā tu bhidyante. kasya punaḥ kalpanā bhedikā? na tāvad brahmaṇas tasya vidyātmanaḥ kalpanāśūnyatvāt, nāpi jīvanāṃ kalpanāyāḥ prak tadabhāvād itaretarāśrayaprasaṅgāt; kalpanādhīno hi jīvavibhāgaḥ, jīvāśrayā kalpaneti.* “[– An objector:] But the individuals (*jīva*) are not differentiated from the *brahman*! For it is [precisely because] thus [they are not differentiated from it] that it is said [in *Chāndogyaopaniṣad* VI, 3, 2]: ‘having pervaded by Himself [these three divinities that are brilliance, waters and food] in the form of the individual (*jīva*)...’. [– The Vedāntin:] This is true from the point of view of ultimate reality (*paramārtha*); but they are differentiated by the faculty of mental construction (*kalpanā*). [– The objector:] But to whom does this differentiating faculty of mental construction belong? Certainly not to the *brahman*: since it consists in knowledge (*vidyā*), it is devoid of this faculty of mental construction. But it does not belong to the individuals either, because those have no existence before this faculty of mental construction, so that a logical circle (*itaretarāśraya*) would follow: the distinction between the individuals would depend on the faculty of mental construction, [and] the faculty of mental construction, on the individuals!” Cf. ĪPVV, vol. III, p. 248: *na hi vidyaikarūpasya brahmaṇas tadabhāvarūpam avidyā nāma, na cānye jīvādayaḥ kecit; avidyayaiva hi ta utthāpyāḥ.* “For the *brahman*, which consists in nothing but knowledge (*vidyā*), cannot have a form that would be an absence of [knowledge], [and] nescience (*avidyā*) is precisely [such an absence]; and there is no one else – the individuals (*jīva*) for instance – [to whom nescience could belong], since these [individuals] result from nescience itself!”
- 65 See BSi, p. 10: *anye tv anādītvād ubhayor avidyājīvayor bījāṅkurasantānayor iva netaretarāśrayam aprahṛptim āvahaṭīti varṇayanti.* “But others explain that, because nescience (*avidyā*) and the individual (*jīva*) are both beginningless (*anādī*), [this] does not result in the fault [consisting in] a logical circle (*itaretarāśraya*), just as [in the case] of the series of seeds and that of the sprouts [that condition each other while it is impossible to determine a first moment of the process].”
- 66 See *Ibid.*: *atra kecid āhuḥ: vastusiddhāv eva doṣaḥ, nāsiddham vastu vastvantara-niṣpattaye’laṃ na māyāmātre. na hi māyāyāṃ kācid anupapattiḥ; anupapadyamānārthaiva hi māyā; upapadyamānārthatve yathārthabhāvān na māyā syāt.* “Some answer these [objections in the following way:] there would be a logical defect if [this] were about establishing [the existence of] something real (*vastu*) – because something that has not been established is not capable of making [us] realize something else –, but not if [this] concerns a pure and simple illusion (*māyāmātra*). For as regards illusion, there is absolutely no logical impossibility (*anupapatti*); for illusion (*māyā*) is precisely that [cognition] of which the object is impossible (*anupapadyamāna*) – if its object were possible, since it would conform to its object, it would not be an illusion!”

ontological status, since it cannot be explained either in terms of being or in terms of non-being,⁶⁷ and precisely for this reason, we cannot account for it in a rational way. Abhinavagupta mocks this so-called inexplicable status: to say that it is inexplicable does not exempt the Vedāntin from explaining *for whom* it is thus inexplicable, not to mention that the result of this activity of mental construction (i.e., the differentiated world) is manifest, and is therefore perfectly explicable in terms of being, since whatever appears exists at least as an appearance.⁶⁸ Besides, why should the constructed (*vikalpaka*) world be unreal (*asatya*), as opposed to the unconstructed reality immediately apprehended in any perception?⁶⁹ For after all, both are manifest, and therefore both are real, at

- 67 See BSi, p. 9: *nāvidyā brahmaṇaḥ svabhāvo nārthāntaram nātyantam asatī nāpi satī; evam eveyam avidyā māyā mithyāvabhāsa ity ucyate. svabhāvaś cet kasya cid anyo'nanyo vā paramārtha eveti nāvidyā; atyantāsattve khapuṣpasadyśī na vyavahārāṅgam; tasmād anirvacanīyā.* “Nescience (*avidyā*) is not the nature (*svabhāva*) of the *brahman*, nor anything else [besides this nature, since nothing else exists]; it is neither absolutely non-existent (*asatī*) nor [absolutely] existing (*satī*); precisely because it is so, this nescience is called *māyā*, [i.e.,] an erroneous manifestation (*mithyāvabhāsa*). If it were the nature of something – whether it be different [from this thing] or not –, it would necessarily have a reality in the ultimate sense (*paramārtha*) – therefore it would not be nescience; [but] if it were an absolute non-being (*atyantāsattva*), such as a flower in the sky, it could not be part of mundane experience (*vyavahāra*). It is therefore inexplicable (*anirvacanīya*) [either as a being or as a non-being].”
- 68 ĪPV, vol. II, p. 179: *anirvācyeyam avidyeti cet, kasyānirvācyeti na vidmaḥ; svarūpeṇa *bhāti ca [L, S1, S2, SOAS: ca bhāti KSTS, Bhāskarī, J; p.n.p. P] *na ca nirvācyeti [J, L, S1, S2, SOAS: na cānirvācyeti KSTS, Bhāskarī: conj. PANDEY anirvācyā ceti; p.n.p. P] kim etat? yuktyā nopapadyata iti cet saṃvedanatiraskāriṇī kā khalu yuktir nāma? anupapattīś ca bhāsamānasya kānyā bhaviṣyati?* “If [the Vedāntin answers] that this nescience is inexplicable (*anirvācyā*), [for our part,] this is what we do not know: *for whom* is it inexplicable? [And to say] both that it is manifest by nature and that it is inexplicable, what does that mean? If [the Vedāntin answers] that it is not possible from the point of view of reason (*yukti*), what on earth is this reason that obscures experience (*saṃvedana*)? And what other impossibility (*anupapatti*) could there be for what is being manifest, [apart from the impossibility not to be manifest]?”. Cf. ĪPVV, vol. III, p. 248: *anirvācyā seti cet, kasyeti na vidmaḥ. bhāti cānirvācyeti ca yakṣabhāṣā.* “If [the Vedāntin answers] that this [nescience] is inexplicable (*anirvācyā*), [for our part,] we do not know *to whom* it belongs. And [saying] both that it is manifest and that it is inexplicable is [using] the [incomprehensive] language of Yakṣas!”
- 69 ĪPV, vol. II, p. 180: *brahmaṇaś ced avidyāyogo, na cānyo'sti. avikalpakam ca satyam vikalpakam asatyam iti kuto vibhāgo? bhāsamānatvasyāviśeṣāt. bhāsamāno'pi bhedo bādhitā itī ced abhedo'py evam, bhedabhāsanena tasya bādhit. viparītasamvedanodaya eva hi bādho nānyah kaścit. bādho'pi ca bhāsamānatvād eva san nānyata itī bhedo'pi bhāsamānaḥ*

least insofar as they are appearances. The constructed universe and the difference that pervades it are manifest, and one must account for this manifestation instead of discarding it as a pure and simple illusion.⁷⁰

In contrast, the Pratyabhijñā philosophers consider that the absolute consciousness is indeed the *creator* of the phenomenal world and of its infinite

*katham avidyā? bhāsanam avadhūryāgamaikapramāṇako'yam abheda iti ced āgamo'pi bhedātmaka evāvastubhūtaḥ pramāṭṛpramāṇaprameyavibhāgaś ceti na kimcid etat. "If [the Vedāntin answers that nescience] belongs to the brahman, [then the brahman] is associated with nescience, [which is impossible according to the Vedāntin's own principles]; and there is no one else [– such as an individual – who could be associated with nescience]. And where does [the Vedāntin's] distinction according to which whatever is not constructed (*avikalpaka*) is real (*satya*), and whatever is constructed (*vikalpaka*), unreal (*asatya*), come from? For [the constructed and the unconstructed] are both manifest (*bhāsamāna*)! If [the Vedāntin answers] that difference (*bheda*), although manifest, is contradicted (*bādhita*), [we will notice in turn that] the same applies to non-difference (*abheda*), because it is contradicted by the manifestation of difference; for the contradiction [of a cognition] is only the arising of an opposed cognition, and nothing else. Moreover, [the Vedāntin himself considers that] contradiction exists (*sat*) from the very fact that it is manifest, and for no other reason; so why should difference – which is also manifest – be nescience? If [the Vedāntin], refusing to take into account manifestation (*bhāsana*), [answers] that this non-difference has as its sole means of knowledge scripture (*āgama*), [we will answer that] scripture as well, insofar as it has difference as its essence and implies a distinction between the knowing subject, the means of knowledge and the object to be known, is made unreal (*avastubhūta*) [by the Vedāntin's very reasoning]; therefore this [argument] is worthless."*

- 70 This principle according to which the unconstructed (*nirvikalpa*, *nirvikalpaka*) must be authentic or real as opposed to the constructed and therefore artificial world of (transcendental) imagination is actually found both in the Buddhist logicians' works and in the Advaita Vedānta. See for instance NB I, 4: according to Dharmakīrti, only the most immediate perception, which is "devoid of mental construction" (*kalpanāpodha*), is "not erroneous" (*abhrānta*). In the same way, Maṇḍanamīśra for instance considers that perception, which is "devoid of mental construction" (*avikalpaka*), gives us access to the "pure and simple reality" (*vastumātra*), whereas mental constructions that follow it only add to it artificial features (see e.g. BSi, p. 71: *vastumātraviśayaṃ prathamam avikalpakaṃ pratyakṣam, tatpūrvās tu vikalpabuddhayo viśeṣān avagāhanta iti sarvapratyātmavedanīyam*. "The first perception (*pratyakṣa*), which is devoid of mental construction (*avikalpaka*), has as its object the pure and simple reality (*vastumātra*), whereas the mental constructions that follow it pervade particularities (*viśeṣa*): everybody can experience this.") Of course, this similarity should not hide an important divergence: for Dharmakīrti, perception grasps a singular entity (*svlakṣaṇa*), i.e., an entity so particular that it does not share any of its features with anything else, and mental constructions produce generalities (*sāmānya*); whereas for Maṇḍanamīśra, mental constructions produce particularities (*viśeṣa*), thereby hiding a reality that is so universal that it is perfectly devoid of any particularity.

variety. Only this creation is not ultimately distinct from the creator: just as an imagined object is nothing but the imagining consciousness taking the form of the imagined object, in the same way, the world is nothing but the absolute consciousness taking on an infinity of different forms. And this is possible only if the essence of consciousness is not immutability (which appears to the Śaiva non-dualists as a lack of power to change) but a fundamental freedom (*svātantrya*) – a freedom to manifest itself as what it is not without ceasing to be oneself, exactly as an imagining consciousness playfully manifests itself as a three-trunked elephant without ceasing to be a consciousness.⁷¹ From the Pratyabhijñā's perspective, the mental activity through which the world is created is neither impersonal nor inexplicable: it springs from the absolute consciousness, because this consciousness is constantly engaged in a cosmic creative activity, recreating the world *pratikṣaṇam*, “at every moment”, as Abhinavagupta was saying at the end of his commentary on verse I, 6, 10.

6. Cosmogonic Imagination and the World's Reality

One feature of the Pratyabhijñā's position is particularly worth noting: according to Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta, the very fact that consciousness thus freely creates the world by taking its form involves the *reality* of the world. Thus, while commenting on a verse where Utpaladeva states that action requires not only a unitary consciousness but also a “will to act”,⁷² Abhinavagupta explains:

*tasmād vāstavaṃ cidekatvam abhyupagamyāpi tasya kartṛtvalakṣaṇā bhinnarūpasamāveśātmikā kriyā nopapadyate; parāmarśalakṣaṇam tu svātantryam yadi bhavati tadopapadyate sarvam. parāmarśo hi cikīrṣārūpecchā, tasyāṃ ca sarvam antarbhūtaṃ nirmātavyam abhedakalpenāsta ity uktam svāmināś cātmasaṃsthasyety atra. tena svātmārūpam eva viśvaṃ satyarūpam prakāśātmatāparamārtham atruḍitaprakāśābhedaṃ eva sat prakāśaparamārthenaiva bhedenā prakāśayati maheśvara iti tad evāsyātidurghaṭakāritvalakṣaṇam svātantryam aiśvāryam ucyate.*⁷³

71 On this peculiar feature that radically distinguishes consciousness from objects, see e.g. RATIÉ 2007, pp. 353–354, fn. 82.

72 ĪPK II, 4, 20: *vāstave 'pi cidekatve na syād ābhāsabhinnmayoḥ / cikīrṣālakṣaṇaikatvaparāmarśam vinā kriyā* // “Even though consciousness's unity (*ekatva*) is real (*vāstava*), there can be no action in two [entities] differentiated by their manifestation without a grasp (*parāmarśa*) of unity that consists in a will to act (*cikīrṣā*).”

73 ĪPV, vol. II, pp. 180–181.

Therefore, even if one admits that “consciousness’s unity is real”, its “action”, that is, its agency (*kartr̥tva*), which consists in taking on “differentiated” forms, is not possible. On the other hand, if [consciousness possesses] a freedom (*svātantrya*) characterized as a grasp (*parāmarśa*), then [consciousness’s action] is perfectly possible!⁷⁴ For a grasp (*parāmarśa*) is a will (*icchā*) consisting in a desire to act (*cikr̥ṣā*), and in this [will], whatever is the object of the creation (*nirmātavya*) exists continuously (*āste*) while being internal (*antarbhūta*) [and] while being as it were undifferentiated (*abhedakalpena*) [from consciousness] – this is what [Utpaladeva has already] said in the [verse beginning with] *svāmināś cātmasaṁsthasya* [...].⁷⁵ Therefore the Great Lord (*maheśvara*) manifests (*prakāśayati*) the universe, which consists in nothing but Himself (*svātman*), the nature of which is real (*satya*), which has as its ultimate reality its identity with the manifesting consciousness (*prakāśa*) [and] which never ceases to be identical with the manifesting consciousness. [He manifests this universe] through a differentiation (*bheda*) that itself has as its ultimate reality the manifesting consciousness. This is precisely what is called freedom (*svātantrya*) or sovereignty (*aiśvarya*) – [a sovereignty] characterized as being the agent of the most difficult deeds.

The universe is real (*satya*) precisely because it is the product of a cosmic imagination. Abhinavagupta unfolds the paradox: the universe is nothing but consciousness itself (*svātman*) appearing as what it is not, that is, as differentiated (*bhinna*) whereas in fact it is absolutely one. And yet this differentiation is not unreal, because the only reality is consciousness, and because the nature of consciousness is to manifest itself; so that none of what is manifest can be disregarded as unreal.⁷⁶ The infinitely variegated universe is one of consciousness’s

74 Or: “then everything is possible!”

75 ĪPK I, 5, 10: *svāmināś cātmasaṁsthasya bhāvajātasya bhāsanam / asty eva na vinā tasmād icchāmarśaḥ pravartate //* “And there must be (*asty eva*) a manifestation of all the objects [as being] contained in the Lord’s Self; [for] if it were not the case, the grasp that is will (*icchā*) could not take place.” In his commentaries (unfortunately too long to be quoted here), Abhinavagupta explains that according to this verse, creative will involves the manifestation of both the subject and the object, but that when thus willing to create, the subject is still aware that the object (already apprehended with all its distinguishing features) is not ultimately different from the consciousness that grasps it. In this will, as Abhinavagupta says here, the object of creation is thus manifested “while being as it were undifferentiated” from the creating subject.

76 Thus according to Abhinavagupta, the Vedāntins and the Dharmahīrtian Buddhist, who both contend that the phenomenal world is the result of some sort of mental construction, make the same mistake when considering that either the difference or the identity pervading the phenomenal world must be unreal (since according to the former, only unity is real and “unconstructed”, whereas according to the latter, only singularity is real and “unconstructed”). They are both mistaken because they do not realize that consciousness’s absolute freedom allows it to take the most contradictory forms without being shattered by this contradiction:

ways of manifesting itself to itself (rather than some illusion inexplicably floating above the absolutely single reality, as in Advaita Vedānta, or the product of some impersonal beginningless mechanism of residual traces, as the Buddhist Vijñānavādins contend) because consciousness is, in its very essence, creativity.

Thus according to the Pratyabhijñā, consciousness is not only the totality of that which exists, but also the *agent* of all being, since to exist is in fact to perform the act of existing:

*jaḍasyāpy asti bhavatiṭy asyām api sattākriyāyām bubhūṣāyogena svātantryābhāvād akartṛtvam, tena pramātaiva taṃ bhāvayati tena tena vā himācalādīnā rūpeṇa sa bhavatiṭy atra paramārthaḥ.*⁷⁷

Even in this action of being (*sattākriyā*) [expressed with verbs in the form] “[it] is (*asti*)”, “[it] exists (*bhavati*)”, the insentient is not an agent (*kartṛ*), because of its being devoid of

no phenomenon can be considered as devoid of reality, since any phenomenon is consciousness manifesting itself. See e.g. ĪPV, vol. II, pp. 117–118: *ihānuvṛttaṃ vyāvṛttaṃ ca cakāśad *vastv ekatareṇa [conj.: vastu katāreṇa KSTS, J, L, S1, S2, SOAS; p.n.p. P] vāpuṣā na satyam ucyatām ubhayatrāpi bādhakābhāvāt; satyato hi yadi bādhaka evaikatārasya syāt tat tadudaye sa eva bhāgaḥ punarunmajjanasahiṣṇutārahito vidyudvilāyaṃ viliyeta, na caivam. ata eva bhedābhedayor virodhaṃ duḥsamartham abhīmanyamānair ekair avidyā- tvenānirvācyatvam, aparaiś cābhāsālagnatayā sāmṇvṛtatvam abhidhadbhir ātmā paraś ca vañcītaḥ. saṃvedanaviśrāntaṃ tu dvayam api bhāti saṃvedanasya svātantryāt. *sarvasya hi [Bhāskarī, J: sarvasya KSTS, L, S1, S2, SOAS; p.n.p. P] tiraśco’py etat svasaṃvedanasiddhaṃ yat saṃvidantarviśrāntam ekatām āpādyamānaṃ jalajvalanaṃ apy aviruddham. “In this [world], one cannot say about an entity that is manifest both while conforming (*anuvṛtta*) [to similar entities] and while being excluded (*vyāvṛtta*) [from entities that are different from it] that it is real (*satya*) in one of these forms only; because nothing contradicts (*bādhaka*) any of these two [forms]. For if [one of them] really contradicted the other, then, when the one [supposedly contradicting the other] arises, this precise aspect [supposedly contradicted,] being deprived of the capacity to appear again, should vanish as a flash of lightning vanishes – but it is not the case. For this very reason, some, who consider that the contradiction between difference and identity is impossible to justify – [i.e.,] that it is inexplicable (*anirvācyā*) since it consists in nescience (*avidyā*) –, and others, who talk about [its] ‘relative truth’ (*sāmṇvṛtatva*) because it entirely rests on appearances (*ābhāsa*), have fooled themselves as well as the others. Rather, both of them, [identity and difference], are manifest [insofar as] they rest on consciousness, by virtue of consciousness’s freedom (*svātantrya*). For even water and fire, since they receive a unity [insofar as] they rest inside consciousness, are not contradictory: this is established by [mere] self-consciousness for all – even for an animal.”*

77 *Vṛtti ad ĪPK II, 4, 20, pp. 60–61.*

freedom (*svātantrya*), for [the action of being] implies a desire to be (*bubhūṣā*)⁷⁸; therefore here is the ultimate reality in this regard: it is the subject who makes the [insentient] be (*bhāvayati*), or [it is the subject who] exists (*bhavati*) in this or that form – the Himālaya for instance.

To be or to exist are verbs; as any verb, according to the Sanskrit grammarians, they denote an action (*kriyā*) – and as such, they imply a will to act (*cikīrṣā*), but the insentient is incapable of desire. Therefore properly speaking, things do not exist (*bhavanti*): the conscious subject makes them exist (*bhāvayati*). Some learned reader could object that the great poet Kālidāsa himself has chosen to begin one of his most famous poems with the affirmation that the mountain called Himālaya “is” (*asti*), and in this first verse of the *Kumārasaṃbhava*, the mountain seems to be the agent of the action of being.⁷⁹ However, Utpaladeva’s lost *Vivṛti* seems to have explained that this is just a poetic licence – or rather, a metaphor (*upacāra*)⁸⁰, and according to Abhinavagupta, Kālidāsa himself points out that this action of being in fact has consciousness as its agent when he specifies that Himālaya “has as its Self a divinity” (*devatātmā*).⁸¹ As Utpaladeva

78 According to Abhinavagupta, the compound *bubhūṣāyogena* can be understood in two complementary ways. Cf. ĪPVV, vol. III, p. 252: *iyatā vṛttir ubhayathā gamitā: bubhūṣāyogena yat svātantryam, tasyābhāvāt; ayogena ca yaḥ svātantryābhāvas tata iti*. “For this reason, the *Vṛtti* should be understood in both ways – as meaning, [on the one hand,] ‘[the insentient is not the agent of the action of being], because of [its] absence of freedom, for [the action of being] implies a desire to be (*bubhūṣā-yogena*)’, and [on the other hand,] ‘[the insentient is not the agent of the action of being], because of [its] absence of freedom, since [it] does not possess [a desire to be] (*bubhūṣā-a-yogena*).”

79 See ĪPVV, vol. III, p. 248, where KS I, 1ab is quoted: *nanu dṛṣṭaṃ jaḍasya kartṛtvam asty uttarasyāṃ diśi devatātmā himālayo nāma nagādhirāja iti*. “[– An objector:] But [we] see that the insentient [too] is the agent (*kartṛ*) [of the action of being, in this verse for instance:] ‘There is (*asti*), in the Northern area, a Supreme Lord of the mountains, named Himālaya, who has as its Self a divinity!’”

80 See ĪPVV, vol. III, p. 252: *nanv evaṃ himavān astīti katham? āha kartṛtopacāras tv iti*. “[– An objector:] But if it is the case, how can [Kālidāsa say] that the Himālaya ‘exists’? [Utpaladeva] answers [with the sentence beginning with:] ‘however, the metaphor (*upacāra*) of agency [...]’.” The Pratyabhijñā philosophers consider that in general, agency cannot belong to insentients, so that they are only spoken of as agents metaphorically (cf. RATIÉ 2007, p. 353); for the same reason, they can “be” – i.e., be the agents of being – only in a metaphorical way: in fact, consciousness *makes them be*.

81 See ĪPVV, vol. III, p. 248, where, answering the objection, Utpaladeva states that the agent of the action (including the action of being) must be the conscious subject (*pramātr*) and not an insentient entity (*jaḍa*); Abhinavagupta then adds: *etad abhīmatam eva sārāsvatasya*

says in his *Vṛtti*, it is the conscious subject who makes things exist (*bhāvayati*) or performs the action of existing (*bhavati*) in this or that differentiated form: Himālaya is nothing but consciousness performing the action of being the Himālaya.

The Pratyabhijñā philosophers thus oppose to the monistic ontology of Advaita Vedānta a dynamic ontology that reveals action at the core of being. Commenting on a verse of Utpaladeva according to which “the Lord possesses being (*sattā*), bliss (*ānanda*), action (*kriyā*),”⁸² Abhinavagupta develops the idea according to which to be is to act or to be the agent of the action of existing (*bhavanakartṛtā*) – an action that is nothing but the bliss of being aware of one’s own freedom.⁸³ Similarly, Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta designate consciousness as “the Great Being” (*mahāsattā*) – a notion that they borrow from Bhartṛhari –⁸⁴ because consciousness’s being is not the existence of this or that particular entity, but the freedom to be in the form of all entities – including non-being,⁸⁵ as Utpaladeva explains in his *Vṛtti*:

devatāmeti viśayataḥ. “It is precisely the opinion of the divinely inspired [poet, since he] specifies [in his verse that Himālaya] ‘has as its Self a divinity’.”

82 See the beginning of ĪPK IV, 6: *sattānandaḥ kriyā patyuh ...*

83 ĪPV, vol. II, p. 257: *tasya viśvapater yā sattā bhavanakartṛtā sphurattārūpā pūrvaṃ vyākhyātā sā sphurattā mahāsattety atra, saiva prakāśasya vimarśavyatirekāḍ vimarśātma-kacamatkārārūpā satī kriyāśaktir ucyate, paraunmukhyatyāgena svātmaviśrāntirūpatvāc ca saivānandaḥ, tad evaṃ bhagavataś cidātmatayaiveyadrūpatā*. “This Lord of the universe possesses ‘being’ (*sattā*), [i.e.] the agency as regards the action of existing (*bhavanakartṛtā*) which consists in a shining forth (*sphurattā*) already described in [verse I, 5, 14, beginning with] ‘it is the shining forth, the Great Being (*mahāsattā*) [...]’. Because [this being] is nothing more than the grasp (*vimarśa*) of the manifesting consciousness (*prakāśa*), it is what [we] call ‘the power of action’ (*kriyāśakti*), insofar as [this power] consists in a wonder that is a grasp (*vimarśa*); it is also this same [being] that is bliss (*ānanda*), because it consists in resting in oneself (*svātmaviśrānti*) insofar as it abandons any intentionality with respect to any Other (*paraunmukhya*). Thus the Lord, precisely because it consists in nothing but consciousness, is nothing but this: [being, bliss, action].”

84 See TORELLA 2002, n. 29, p. 121. On Bhartṛhari’s influence on Utpaladeva, see TORELLA 2008.

85 See ĪPK I, 5, 14 (*sā sphurattā mahāsattā deśakālāviśeṣiṇī / saiṣā sāratayā proktā hṛdayaṃ parameṣṭhinaḥ //* “[Consciousness’s grasp (*vimarśa*)] is a shining forth (*sphurattā*); it is the Great Being (*mahāsattā*) particularized neither by place nor by time; it is said to be the heart of the Supreme Lord because it is His essence”) and Abhinavagupta’s commentary on *mahāsattā* in ĪPV, vol. I, pp. 209–210: *sattā ca bhavanakartṛtā sarvakriyāsu svātantryam. sā ca khapuṣpādikam api vyāpnotīti mahatī*. “And Being (*sattā*) is the agency of the action of being (*bhavanakartṛtā*) – [i.e.,] it is freedom (*svātantrya*) in all actions. And this [Being]

*sphuradrūpatā sphuraṇakartṛtābhāvāpratiyoginy abhāvavyāpinī sattā bhavattā bhavanakartṛtā nityā deśakālāsparsāt saiva pratyavamarśātmā citikriyāśaktiḥ.*⁸⁶

[The shining forth, (*sphurattā*),⁸⁷ i.e.], the fact of having one's form shining forth (*sphuradrūpatā*), is the agency as regards the act of shining forth (*sphuraṇakartṛtā*); it is the being (*sattā*) that is not the contrary (*pratiyogin*) of non-being (*abhāva*), [because] it pervades non-being as well; it is existence (*bhavattā*), which is the agency as regards the act of existing (*bhavanakartṛtā*), [and] which is eternal because its devoid of any contact with place and time; this is the power of action of consciousness (*citikriyāśakti*) that consists in grasping (*pratyavamarśa*).

Being pervades everything – including non-being. For non-being exists insofar as it is an object for consciousness: we can talk about the flower in the sky because consciousness *makes it exist as a non-being*. The Great Being, or being in the absolute sense, is the fact – or rather, the act – of being manifest (*prakāśamānatā*); and this act transcends the conceptual contradiction between the contraries (*pratiyogin*) of being and non-being by making this very contradiction manifest,⁸⁸ just as it transcends time and space while pervading all moments and

is said to be Great (*mahatī*) because it pervades even the flower in the sky for instance.” The flower in the sky (as the son of a barren woman or the hare's horn) is a canonical example of non-existent object.

86 *Vṛtti*, p. 23.

87 On this word (identified by Utpaladeva with “the Great Being”: see above, fn. 83), cf. TORELLA 2002, fn. 31, p. XXIII: with the root *sphur-*, “the light is enriched by a ‘vibrant’, dynamic, connotation – which makes it into the intersection point with the doctrine of the Spanda.”

88 See ĪPVV, vol. II, p. 201: *nanv abhāvo bhāvasya pratiyogī. satyaṃ bahiḥsadbhāvasya, na tu prakāśamānatāyāḥ. tayā hi vinā pratiyogitaiva kasya?* “[– An objector:] But non-being (*abhāva*) is the contrary (*pratiyogin*) of being (*bhāva*)! [– Abhinavagupta:] True: [non-being is the contrary] of that being which exists externally; but not of [that being which consists in] being manifest (*prakāśamānatā*); for without that one, to whom could the very property of being a contrary belong?” On the fact that consciousness, because it is an act of manifestation and not just a manifested entity, transcends the contradiction that it makes exist by manifesting it, cf. ĪPV, vol. II, pp. 15–16: *na caitad vācyam: ekasvarūpasya katham anyad anyad rūpam iti? yato nāsau kaścid bhāvo ya evaṃ vikalpyate; saṃvid eva hi tathā bhāti, tathābhāsanam eva cāsyā aiśvaryaṃ, na hi bhāsane virodhaḥ kaścit prabhavati.* “And one cannot object this: ‘how can that which has a unitary nature (*ekasvarūpa*) possess constantly different forms (*anyad anyat*)?’, because it is not just some entity (*bhāva*) that is thus being imagined; for it is consciousness itself that is manifest thus. And to be manifest thus is nothing but the sovereignty (*aiśvarya*) of [consciousness], for no contradiction (*virodha*) can exert its power as regards manifestation (*bhāsana*) [itself, as opposed to the manifested].”

places.⁸⁹ This being in the absolute sense is not a static substance: it is neither an entity nor a state (both words that might translate the Sanskrit *bhāva*), but rather, the pure dynamism at the source of all acts – “the freedom in all acts” (*sarva-kriyāsu svātantryam*) as Abhinavagupta puts it. This freedom equated with “the agency as regards the act of existing” (*bhavanakarṭṛtā*) seems to echo the notion of *bhāvanā* (“the bringing into being”) which plays such an important role in Bhartṛhari’s philosophy of language⁹⁰ as a kind of linguistic potentiality and which – again – can be described as some kind of imaginative power.⁹¹

We are now able to understand the full extent of Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta’s statement that the experience of imagination can be a path towards Recognition: imagination enables the subject lost in *saṃsāra* to enjoy the universal consciousness’s creative freedom – and to experience this creativity as the wondrous power *to make oneself what one is not without ceasing to be oneself*. Thus, commenting on a verse by Utpaladeva according to which consciousness transforms itself into an object of knowledge while the object remains ontologically dependent of consciousness,⁹² Abhinavagupta explains that conscious-

89 Thus, commenting on the compound *deśakālāviśeṣiṇī* (“who is particularized neither by space nor time”) that qualifies *mahāsattā* in ĪPK I, 5, 14, Abhinavagupta explains (ĪPV, vol. I, pp. 210–211): *deśakālau nīlādivat saiva sṛjati tābhyāṃ viśeṣaṇīyā na bhavati. yat kila yena tulyakakṣyatayā bhāti tat tasya viśeṣaṇam kaṭaka iva caītrasya. na ca deśakālau vimarśena tulyakakṣyau bhātas tayor idantayā tasya cāhantayā prakāśe tulyakakṣyatvā-nupapatteḥ. evaṃ deśakālāsparśād vibhūtvāṃ nityatvaṃ ca, sakaladeśakālasparśo’pi tannirmāṇayogād iti tato’pi vyāpakatvanityatve.* “[Being] can be particularized neither by space nor time, because it itself creates them as [it creates objects such as] the blue, etc. [For] only that which is manifest on a similar plane (*tulyakakṣyatayā*) with [something else] particularizes this [other thing], as Caitra’s bracelet [particularizes Caitra as being a bracelet-bearer]; and space and time are not manifest on a similar plane with [consciousness’s] grasp (*vimarśa*), because the manifestation of [space and time, which occurs] objectively (*idantayā*), and [the manifestation] of this [grasp, which occurs] subjectively (*ahantayā*), could not be on a similar plane. Thus [being] possesses omnipresence and eternity because it is devoid of any contact with space and time – but all places and times are in contact [with being], because they are associated [to it] insofar as it creates them; consequently, for this reason too, it possesses omnipresence and eternity.”

90 See SHULMAN 2001, pp. 204–208.

91 See e.g. SHULMAN 2008, p. 482.

92 ĪPK I, 5, 15: *ātmānam ata evāyaṃ jñeyīkuryāt pṛthaksthiti / jñeyāṃ na tu tadaunmukhyāt khaṇḍyetāsya svatantratā //* “For this very reason, [consciousness] must make itself an object of knowledge (*ātmānam...jñeyīkuryāt*); nonetheless, the object of knowledge (*jñeya*) has no separate existence – [otherwise consciousness]’s freedom (*svatantratā*) would be ruined,

ness “makes itself an object of knowledge” (*svātmānam [...] jñeyīkaroti*) although in fact it is not an insentient object of knowledge (*jñeya*), but only a knowing subject or agent (*jñātr*), because consciousness is free to become aware of itself as this or that particular object without ceasing to be consciousness.⁹³ Bhāskaraṅṅha in turn explains that consciousness’s power of presenting itself as what it is not without ceasing to be itself is a joyful play (*krīḍā*) in which consciousness relishes its own powers;⁹⁴ and this definition could equally apply to the individual subject’s imaginative activity. For ultimately, the freedom that Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta invite us to notice in the latter is nothing but the freedom of grasping (*vimarśa*) through which consciousness becomes aware of itself *as [...]* (i.e., as itself, or as the countless objects that it creates by taking their form) – a freedom so absolute that it transcends even the boundaries of identity and non-contradiction,⁹⁵ and that it is even capable of presenting itself as alienated. The individual subjects experience suffering and alienation only inso-

because of [consciousness’s] intentionality as regards this [object].” For an examination of Abhinavagupta’s commentaries on this verse see RATIÉ forthcoming.

93 ĪPV, vol. I, pp. 214–215: *prakāśātmā parameśvaraḥ svātmānam jñātrekarūpatvād ajñeyam api jñeyīkarotīti yat sambhāvyate kāraṅāntarasyānupapatter darśitatvād dṛḍhena sambhāvanānumānena,*tad ata eva [Bhāskari, J, P: tata eva KSTS, L, S1, S2, SOAS] vimarśaśaktīlakṣaṅāt kartṛtvād dhetor bhavati; yato hy ayam ātmānam parāmṛṣati tato viśvanirbharatvāt tathā nilāditvena cakāsti.* “The Supreme Lord (*parameśvara*), whose Self is the manifesting consciousness (*prakāśa*), ‘makes himself an object of knowledge’ (*svātmānam [...] jñeyīkaroti*), although he is not an object of knowledge (*ajñeya*), because he is only a knowing subject (*jñātr*). This [thesis, first] stated as a hypothesis because [we] have shown the impossibility of any other cause [of the universe] through a firm hypothetical inference, is [now fully] established for this reason: the agency (*kartṛva*) consisting in the power of grasping (*vimarśaśakti*); for it is precisely because this [Lord] grasps himself (*ātmānam parāmṛṣati*) [as himself] that, because he is full of the universe, he manifests himself as being the blue and [any other object].”

94 *Bhāskari*, vol. I, p. 268: *jñeyīkaroti – ajñeyam sat svayam svaśaktyāsvādānarūpakrīḍārthaṅ jñeyatayā bhāsayati.* “[The Lord] ‘makes himself an object of knowledge (*jñeyīkaroti*) – [i.e.,] although he is not an object of knowledge, he manifests Himself (*svayam*) as an object of knowledge, for the sake of playing (*krīḍārthaṅ*) – [a play] that consists in relishing (*āsvādāna*) his own powers (*śakti*).”

95 ĪPV, vol. I, p. 205: *vimarśo hi sarvaṅsahaḥ param apy ātmīkaroty ātmānam ca parīkaroty ubhayam ekīkaroty ekīkṛtaṅ dvayam api nyagbhāvayaṅīty evaṅsvabhāvaḥ.* “For [consciousness’s] grasp (*vimarśa*), which is capable of bearing anything (*sarvaṅsaha*), has such a nature that it transforms into itself (*ātmīkaroti*) even that which is other (*para*), and that it transforms itself (*ātman*) into another (*parīkaroti*); that it makes them one and the same entity, and that it negates their unified couple.”

far as the absolutely free and blissful consciousness plays at manifesting itself as suffering and alienated – and plays at believing that it suffers and that it is alienated: thus Abhinavagupta compares the universe to a theatre play (*nāṭya*), and the absolute consciousness to an actor (*nāṭaka*) “who does not cease to rest in his own nature” while playing this or that role.⁹⁶

This playful aspect of imagination also constitutes its most paradoxical feature: on the one hand, in it *consciousness manages to fool itself* so to speak; for we do believe to some extent in the independent reality of the creations of our day-dreamings, or in the fictions that we encounter in poetry or theatre – otherwise we would remain perfectly indifferent to them, and we would be incapable of enjoying the stories that we tell ourselves or that the others tell us. On the other hand though, *consciousness always remains conscious that its imaginary creations are nothing but imaginary creations*: imagination involves the awareness that one is imagining, although it also involves a capacity to playfully forget this awareness. According to Abhinavagupta, this mysterious power involved in any act of imagination is, again, nothing but the absolute consciousness’s freedom. Thus, in the TĀ, after asking how consciousness, which is pure subjectivity, can present itself as a mere object of consciousness, Abhinavagupta adds:

*ucyate svātmasaṃvittiḥ svabhāvād eva nirbharā / nāsyām apāsyam nādheyam kimcid ity
uditaṃ purā // kiṃtu durghaṭakāritvāt svācchandyān nirmalād asau / svātmapracchādana-
krīḍāpaṇḍitaḥ parameśvaraḥ // anāvṛtte svarūpe’pi yad ātmācchādanaṃ vibhoḥ / saiva
māyā yato bheda etāvān viśvavṛttikaḥ //*⁹⁷

[To this objection, we] answer that self-consciousness (*svātmasaṃvitti*) remains full because of its very nature; [we] have [already] stated before that nothing can be subtracted nor added from it. However, because it is the agent of the most difficult deeds (*durghaṭakārin*), because of its pure freedom (*svācchandyā*), this Highest Lord (*parameśvara*) [which is consciousness] is skillful at the play (*krīḍā*) [consisting in] dissimulating oneself (*svātmapracchādana*). Dissimulating oneself (*ātmācchādana*) whereas one’s own nature remains unveiled (*anāvṛtta*): this is precisely the Omnipresent Lord’s *māyā* from which comes all this difference existing throughout the universe.

Just like the individual subject’s imagining consciousness, the absolute consciousness is capable of playfully ignoring its own nature while it gets engrossed in its own creation, and this wondrous power of *māyā* through which conscious-

96 See ĪPVV, vol. III, p. 244, quoted and translated in RATIÉ 2009.

97 TĀ 4, 9–11.

ness throws itself in some kind of distraction or torpor (*moha*)⁹⁸ is the source of the phenomenal universe – which is not to say that the phenomenal universe is an illusion: it is perfectly real insofar as it is a manifestation of consciousness, and it is erroneous (*bhrānta*) only when grasped as an entity independent of consciousness – i.e., only when it is not apprehended as the product of consciousness’s sovereign power of imagination.

7. Concluding Remarks

Indian philosophy as a whole tends to devalue imagination. Thus Advaita Vedānta or the Vijñānavāda see it as the very root of all alienation and suffering

98 On this (quite untranslatable) notion of *moha*, see e.g. ĪPK I, 1, 3, quoted in RATIÉ 2006, p. 98; cf. RATIÉ 2007, pp. 359–362 and 367 for other passages mentioning it. The term does not denote a mere ignorance, but rather, a knowledge that is erroneous (cf. ĪPVV, vol. III, p. 166: *mohasya mithyājñānasya...*) because it does not recognize its object as what it really is (the French “méconnaissance” is probably not a bad equivalent). However the Sanskrit term is full of connotations that no European language seems able to suggest with a single word: *moha* is a kind of paralysis of consciousness – a state of torpor or hebetude in which consciousness is incapable of grasping itself (the term also designates a fainting fit or a coma), but it is also a state of confusion, as well as anything (such as a veil or a screen) that conceals or obscures; finally, it is the bewilderment in front of something marvellous, and the magic art used so as to stupefy an enemy. Abhinavagupta claims that consciousness’s power of stupefying oneself without losing one’s self-awareness is not at all “inexplicable”, contrary to the Vedāntins’ contention, precisely because it is nothing but consciousness’s sovereign freedom. See e.g. ĪPVV, vol. III, p. 80: *paśupramātrṇām akhyātirūpo mohaḥ. kāraṇaṃ cāsyēśvaraśaktir itī svarūpataḥ kāraṇataś ca nirvācyataiva. na khalv anirvācyākāraḥ kaścid avidyātmā moho vastutvenāsyeyadvaicitryaprathanasāmarthyāsambhavāt sambhave vā pūrṇam eva vastutvaṃ nānirvācyatā.* “Distraction (*moha*) consists in an incomplete manifestation (*akhyāti*) [of the nature of the Self] for alienated subjects (*paśupramātr*). And its cause is the power of the Lord (*īśvaraśakti*); it is therefore perfectly explicable (*nirvācyā*) both as regards its nature and as regards its cause. This distraction (*moha*) is not at all some inexplicable appearance (*anirvācyākāra*) consisting in some ne-science (*avidyā*), because it could not have the power to manifest such a diversity if it were not real (*vastu*); and since it can [use this power], it is fully real, and it is not inexplicable.” On the meaning of *akhyāti* here, see ĪPV, vol. II, p. 113: *apūrṇakhyātirūpākhyā eva bhrāntitattvam.* “The essence of error is *akhyāti*, that is, [not an absence of manifestation, but] a manifestation (*khyāti*) that is incomplete (*a-* = *apūrṇa*).” Cf. *Bhāskarī*, vol. II, p. 123: *īśadarthe tra nañ na tv abhāve.* “In the [compound *akhyāti*], the negation [prefix] has the meaning of ‘partial’ (*īśat*), and not that of ‘absence’ (*abhāva*).”

insofar as it supposedly produces an artificial or “constructed” world which conceals reality. As for the Brahmanical thinkers who regard the phenomenal world as a real entity existing independently of consciousness, they seem to consider imagination as profoundly misleading insofar as it presents itself as an activity of creation *ex nihilo*, whereas in fact it is entirely determined by latent traces; it thus induces the wrong belief that consciousness can manifest a world of its own, and it illegitimately casts a metaphysical doubt on the external world’s reality. The Pratyabhijñā philosophers agree with the Vedāntins and Vijñānavādins that some kind of transcendental imagination is the root of alienation: according to Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta, individual subjects suffer and are subjected to various determinisms that they do not control *only because they imagine that they are suffering and alienated*, whereas in fact they are all nothing but the free and blissful universal consciousness.⁹⁹ However, this universal consciousness thus imagines itself to be the various individual subjects only because imagination is consciousness’ freedom (*svātantrya*) – a freedom so absolute that consciousness can choose to conceal or ignore its own freedom in some kind of mysterious distraction whereby it ceases to pay attention to its own nature, in spite of the fact that this nature is ever manifest. In ĪPK I, 6, 10–11 and their commentaries, Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta therefore endeavour to show that when imagining, the individual subject experiences the same limitless freedom that characterizes the universal consciousness: not only is his or her imagination a free combination (*yojanā*) of various elements previously perceived; it is also capable of a genuine creation (and not only of a mere rearrangement of pre-existing elements), since the imagined object is much more than the simple collection of these elements. By grasping the imagined object as a singular whole, the imagining consciousness profoundly transforms the already perceived constituents, giving rise to a new (*nava*) entity. Because its essence is *vimarśa*, the power to playfully grasps itself as what it is not without ceasing to be what it is, the individual subject’s imagination constitutes a path towards the full metaphysical liberation which consists in the Recognition (*pratyabhijñā*) that one is not a subject limited by time and space and bound to *samsāra*, but the universal consciousness that playfully grasps itself in the form of the phenomenal world – hence Abhinavagupta’s beautiful oxymoron of the “freedom of the alienated subject” (*paśoḥ svātantryam*)¹⁰⁰ when talking about the individual subject’s imagination: the alienated subject (*paśu*) can recognize himself as the Lord

99 See ĪPK IV, 1–3 (cf. RATIÉ 2009, fn. 40, p. 363).

100 ĪPVV, vol. II, p. 331, quoted above.

(*pati*) because when he imagining, he or she also experiences in the most immediate way the creativity at the source of all phenomenal variety.

Admittedly, towards the end of the treatise, Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta outline the limits of the individual subject's imagination that they seem to stretch almost infinitely in the texts examined here. Thus in the last section, they emphasize that the individual subject's creation is still limited, not only because however new, this creation requires the existence of elementary phenomena (*ābhāsa*),¹⁰¹ but also because it rests on the power of mental construction (*vikalpaśakti*) which in turn rests on an activity of exclusion (*apoha*, *apohana*) through which the individual grasps himself as being identical with one particular object *only* (such as his body) to the exclusion of everything else.¹⁰² His imaginary creations are therefore determined to a certain extent by this identification, so that they are not common (*sādhāraṇa*) to all subjects, but confined to each individual: although we can communicate to others our imaginary creations (through the mediation of language, visual arts, etc.), we cannot share them with the others as we can share the perception of this or that object: their immediate apprehension remains inaccessible to other individuals.¹⁰³

101 See e.g. ĪPV, vol. II, pp. 264–265 or ĪPVV, vol. III, p. 381, both quoted above.

102 See ĪPK IV, 8: *te tu bhinnāvabhāsārthāḥ prakalpyāḥ pratyagātmanaḥ / tattadvibhinna-sañjñābhiḥ smṛtyutprekṣādigocare //* “But for the individual self, in the realm of memory, fancy, etc., the objects, the manifestations of which are separated, are constructed (*prakalpya*) through various distinct names.” Abhinavagupta (who specifies that “the realm of memory, fancy, etc.” includes imaginary constructions: see ĪPV, vol. II, p. 263: *smaraṇa utprekṣaṇe saṃkalpane'nyatrānyatra ca vikalpayoge*, “in memory, in fancy, in imaginary construction (*saṃkalpa*), and wherever there is an association with a mental construction”) explains thus the gist of the verse (*Ibid.*): *etad uktaṃ bhavati: īśvarasya vikalpātmakatām antareṇa śuddhavimarśaviśayābhāvā arthāḥ, paśos tv anyonyāpohanahevakini vikalpe samārūdhās te'rthā bhavanti, sāṃsārikahānādānādīvyavahāropayogād iti.* “Here is what [Utpaladeva] means: for the Lord, objects must be apprehended by a grasp that is pure (*śuddhavimarśa*), without consisting in a mental construction (*vikalpa*); whereas for the alienated subject (*paśu*), these objects exist while resting on a mental construction that is engrossed by (*hevakini*) mutual exclusion (*anyonyāpohana*), because [they] are useful in the mundane activities of those who transmigrate, such as rejecting, giving, etc.”

103 See ĪPK IV, 9: *tasyāsādhāraṇī sṛṣṭir īśasṛṣṭyupajīvinī / saiṣāpy ajñātayā [corr. TORELLA 2002 ajñatayā KSTS, Bhāskarī, J, L, S1, S2, SOAS] satyaiveśaśaktyā tadātmanaḥ //* “This same creation (*sṛṣṭi*) of the [individual subject] whose Self is the [Lord] is not common (*asādhāraṇī*) [to other subjects and] depends on the creation of the Lord; it is *real* thanks to the power of the Lord, although [the individual subject] does not know [this power].” Cf. ĪPV, vol. II, p. 263: *paśukartṛkā sṛṣṭis teṣām arthānām īśvarasṛṣṭānām uparivartinī, ata eva tām īśvarasṛṣṭim upajīvanty asādhāraṇī pratipramāṭṛniyatā.* “The creation (*sṛṣṭi*) having as

However, the goal of Recognition is precisely to resorb this difference so as to attain a state where the subject's imagination is perfectly free of any kind of boundary or determination: the individual's imagination is limited only insofar as he imagines it to be limited, and the individual is not alienated because of imagination, but because he does not realize the full extent of his power of imagination. Utpaladeva therefore claims that someone who has fully realized his identity with the absolute consciousness knows and creates objects at will,¹⁰⁴ probably as these yogins whom he believes to be capable of creating at will and without any material cause objects that become perceptible to everybody:¹⁰⁵ in the Pratyabhijñā, liberation seems to amount to an infinite expansion of imagination – or rather, to the realization that one's imagination is infinite. Paradoxically though, this identification of the phenomenal world with an imaginary creation does not lead at all to some illusionistic theory. The various perceived entities could be considered as unreal only if the absolute consciousness produced them while disregarding or concealing an external reality; but according to the Pratyabhijñā philosophers, since they are created by a dynamic consciousness which constitutes the only reality and which freely chooses to appear in their form, they are an aspect of reality: the world is real precisely because it is imagined.

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its agent the alienated subject (*paśu*) occurs in connection with the objects created by the Lord; for this reason, [this creation] which depends on the Lord's creation is not 'common', [i.e.,] it is limited (*niyata*) to each [individual] subject."

- 104 See ĪPK IV, 15 (cf. RATIÉ 2007, fn. 67, p. 345) and the *Vṛtti ad loc.*, p. 79: *ittham āviṣkṛtaśaktyabhijñānam ātmānam anantajñānakriyāsaktinibhṛtam īśvaram pratyabhijñāya yatheccham sarvaṃ paśyati nirmimūte*. "Having thus recognized (*pratyabhijñāya*) his own Self – once its signs of recognition (*abhijñāna*), [i.e.,] its powers, have been made evident [by the treatise] – as the Lord full of the infinite powers of knowledge and action, one perceives [and] creates at will (*yatheccham*)."
- 105 See ĪPK I, 5, 7, examined in RATIÉ forthcoming.

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