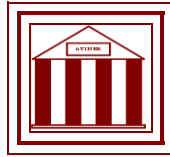


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**Field of Art in Indian Art Theory**

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University of Warsaw  
Poland**

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## Field of Art in Indian Art Theory

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### Abstract

The objective of this paper is to identify and define the main differences in the modern Western and Classical Indian approaches to the theory of art, and by extension, to the works of art itself. I examine three problems: classification of the art or the art disciplines, theory of the senses and strategies in perception of the art.

Concerning the first problem, I analyse the origins of art, its boundaries and inner division, to identify the Field of Art, the connection between disciplines (theatre, music, painting, sculpture, etc.) and their position in the Art World. The following Sanskrit treatises serve me as a basis – *Natya Śāstra* (*Nāṭya-śāstra*), *Kamasutra* (*Kāma-sūtra*) (collection of *bahya kala* (*bāhya-kalā*)) and *Vishnudharmottara Purana* (*Viṣṇu-dharmōttara-purāṇa*).

Significant distinction can be found in the theory of senses. Based on *Samyutta Nikaya* (*Samyutta Nikāya*), *Nyaya Sutra* (*nyāya*), *Vaisheshika Sutra* (*vaiśeṣika*) etc., I examine the classical collection of the senses and their roles, with the special insight to the position of the mind (*manas*) as sixth sense or inner organ linked to senses.

With that background I can analyse the theory of the taste (*rasa*), including the roles of the emotion (*bhava*) and the mind (*manas*).

**Keywords:** field of art, visual and performing art, spectator, India, Sanskrit, perception of art

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## Introduction

The concept of field as a component of social theory was introduced by Pierre Bourdieu and developed in his work *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste* (French edition: 1979, English edition: 1984). The theory describes societies by position, role etc. of its actors and relations between them in different fields, and among others the field of cultural production which contains our main interest – the field of art:

To the socially recognized hierarchy of the arts, and within each of them, of genres, schools or periods, corresponds a social hierarchy of the consumers. This predisposes tastes to function as markers of ‘class’. The manner in which culture has been acquired lives on in the manner of using it: the importance attached to manners can be understood once it is seen that it is these imponderables of practice which distinguish the different—and ranked—modes of culture acquisition, early or late, domestic or scholastic, and the classes of individuals which they characterize (such as ‘pedants’ and mondains). Culture also has its titles of nobility—awarded by the educational system—and its pedigrees, measured by seniority in admission to the nobility<sup>1</sup>.

According to Bourdieu, actors of the field of art have the power to legitimate objects as works of art, and by extension to include or exclude activities from it, considering them artistic or not.

In the case of Indian art, we should begin with Classical period. We can with certainty identify sages or authors of theoretical treatises as persons with the title of cultural nobility who have the authority to legitimate activities as artistic and their artefacts as works of art. However I will not analyse the field of art in social context as Bourdieu did. This paper focuses on reconstruction of the broad context, identifying main relations in the field of art of Classical India. For genuine understanding of Indian field of art we should not assume that artistic disciplines known to Western theoreticians were also considered artistic in India or conversely. This analysis is based on Sanskrit treatises focused on pleasurable activities ie. *śilpa-śāstra*, *alamkara-śāstra*, *kāma-śāstra*.

The aim of this paper is to postulate entirely different theoretical approach to Indian art and its history by confronting it with the approach of modern Western art history.

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<sup>1</sup>Bourdieu P., *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1984, p.2

### **Contemporary Occidental Perspective – Academic Approach**

I will not refer to or analyse an historical approach towards the theory of art, its definitions, frontiers and rules, even if we could find certain analogies or similarities (e.g. Vasari's theory of the movements of the soul), but this is not a comparative cross-cultural study. This paper's aim is to confront the background of contemporary western-based researcher with Classical India and because of that only modern approach would serve as a point of reference.

When we look at academic disciplines the picture of modern divisions in arts emerges. Let's take a closer look into Polish academic and education systems. Universities teach art history (beginning with Early Christian art), musicology, theatre studies. But there is also literary science which is not so strongly considered as artistical and is a part of philological studies. Other problematic areas are antic art (treated as a part of archaeology), folk art (cultural anthropology) or even oriental art (in academic world as a part of oriental studies and in museums' world mostly in ethnological institutions). There are also some problematic artistic activities e.g. performance art which is in the field of art history and cultural studies (modern culture *sensu largo*).

All of these disciplines are taught separately without cross-discipline, multidisciplinary approach or research and they focus only on Western artefacts and history. In consequence art historians don't have knowledge about other artistic activities, artefacts or theories of a given time and they have only instruments to research Western culture, which they try to apply in Oriental studies. There is little awareness of the differences between basic construction of the fields of art.

Contemporary Western theory of art is divided into two subcategories: visual and performing arts, which does not ascribe artefacts to a specific domain (e.g. visual for art history etc. There are some new programmes in visual studies, but they haven't reached Poland yet). But again – it was at first specific to one culture, then became more universal. Nevertheless there still are different categorisations e.g. in Poland the most commonly used categorisation is: plastic arts and theatre with music, dance, film etc. as independent categories. This two systems coincide in many points and this division covers largely the universal one, but not entirely. Even though Western approach can be considered as consistent, it has its cultural varieties. Not to mention India!

### **Classical Indian Perspective**

Theatre played an important role in Indian culture since the beginnings, thus scholars of classical era also composed many treatises concerning rules, practice and theoretical basis. This fact has its repercussions till nowadays as it is the most researched art discipline.

In one of the biggest works on this subject – *The Laws and Practice of Sanskrit Drama* – S. N. Shastri adduce the division of *kāvya* (poetical compositions) into *drśya* (what is to be watched) and *śravya* (what is to be

listened to)<sup>1</sup>. First difference to the Western system: the division of literature into visual (or audio-visual) and aural (audial) categories. Drama is in the visual art category and by extension so is theatre. From this understanding of poetical art we can draw a general categorisation of Indian art for visual (theatre, dance, painting, sculpture) and audial (music and for that theatre also, recitation, singing). First category (*drśya*) incorporates Western visual arts (e.g. painting) and some of performing (theatre) also. Western binary system is then not appropriate for describing Indian art within Indian theoretical frames.

Researchers may argue that the division into visual and performing arts can be used universally, because it categorizes artefacts. But if our research is to be profound and accurate, we cannot omit theoreticians of a given time and culture and their works as they reflect thinking about art and its nature. And because of that Western classification should be skipped for researching Indian art.

### *Nāṭya-śāstra*

One of the most important texts of Indian culture is *Nāṭya-śāstra* or *Treatise on Theatre*. Tradition ascribes it to sage Bharata, who heard it from Brahma – the Creator of the World. As it concerns our world the treatise is dated from 2 BCE to 4 CE, has many authors and consists of 36 chapters, describing every aspect of theatre – origins, construction of a play house, actors, dramatic actions and theory of art.

Originally theatre was invented to please celestial residents:

*deva-dānava-gandharva-yakṣa-rakṣo-mahoragaiḥ* | 1.10.1

*jambudvīpe samākrānte lokapāla-pratiṣṭhite* || 1.10.2

*mahendra-pramukhair devair uktaḥ kila pitāmahaḥ* | 1.11.1

*krīdanīyakam icchāmo drśyaṃ śravyaṃ ca yad bhavet* || 1.11.2<sup>2</sup>

By gods, danavas, gandharvas, yakshas, rakshasas and great serpents,  
[who lived] at Jambudvipa secured by guardians of the worlds,  
with Great Indra at the head of them, was said: “O, Father Brahman,  
we wish for an entertainment, a plaything, which would be for both –  
watching and listening.

[trans. BB]

In the above stanza important information can be found – firstly, it confirms the previous analysis that theatre belongs to both categories – visual and audial arts (*drśya* and *śravya*). Secondly, that theatre is made for pleasure (*kila* – an entertainment and *krīdanīyaka* – a plaything) and it was its first and basic purpose. But not only, what is clearly stated in the whole prologue, where the status of *Nāṭya-śāstra* as the fifth *veda* is emphasized:

<sup>1</sup>Shastri S. N., *The Laws and Practice of Sanskrit Drama*, book 1: *Laws of Sanskrit Drama*, The Chowkhamba Sanskrit studies, vol. 14, Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1961, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>*Nāṭya-śāstra with the commentary of Abhinavagupta*, ed. Kavi M. R., Oriental Institute, Baroda 1934.

*dharmyam arthyam yaśasyam ca sôpadeśyam asaṅgraham* | 1.14.3  
*bhaviṣyataś ca lokasya sarva-karmānudarśakam* || 1.14.4  
*sarva-śāstrārtha-sampannam sarva-śilpa-pravartakam* | 1.15.1  
*nāṭyākhyam pañcamam vedam sêtihāsam karomy aham* || 1.15.2<sup>1</sup>

I create the fifth *veda* called *veda* of theatre, based on histories, originating all arts, endowed with wisdom of all treatises, showing all worldly actions and containing collections [of rules] and instructions and [it will be] dharmic, purposeful and celebre.  
[trans. BB]

Plays then have also a didactic function. They should preserve tradition and enhance values. What is crucial in this stanza is the word *śilpa*, which is the umbrella term for what Occident calls fine arts and crafts. Later the corpus of treatises on plastic arts were called *śilpa-śastra*. In Indian theory plastic arts originate then from theatre, where at first they played a role of secondary activities, used to create a scene or costume. As word *citra* (colour, paint) or *citraka* (painter) at first described a person who covers actor's body with pigments, then evolved to artistic profession of a painter.

The need to legitimate knowledge about theatre also provides important information about activities that we can consider artistic, hence they constitute one of the discipline of art:

*jaagrāha pāṭhyam ṛgvedāt sāmabhyo gītām eva ca* | 1.17.1  
*yajur-vedād abhinayān rasān ātharvaṇād api* || 1.17.2<sup>2</sup>  
[He] took recitation from *Rgveda* and songs indeed from *Samaveda*, dramatic actions from *Yajurveda* and tastes (*rasa*) from *Atharvaveda*.  
[trans. BB]

Here we encounter the most important concept in Indian art – the theory of *rasa* or taste, which will be analysed later.

### *Bāhya-kalā*

In Indian tradition there is category of *bāhya-kalā* or outer artistic activities, which consists of 64 arts, listed in *Śaiva-tantra* and in *Kāma-sūtra* (*Aphorisms on Love*):

*gītām vādyam nṛtyam ālekhyam viśeṣaka-chedyam taṇḍula-kusuma-  
vali-vikārāḥ puṣpāstaranam daśana-vasanāṅga-rāgaḥ  
mañibhūmikākarma śayanaracanam udakavādyam udakāghātaḥ  
citrās ca yogāḥ mālya-grathana-vikalpāḥ śekharakāpīḍayojanam  
nepathya-prayogāḥ karṇapatrabhaṅgāḥ gandhayuktiḥ bhūṣaṇa-*

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<sup>1</sup>*Ibidem.*

<sup>2</sup>*Ibidem.*

*yojanam aindrajalāḥ kaucumārās ca yogāḥ hastalāghavaṃ vicitra-  
śāka-yūṣa-bhakṣya-vikāra-kriyā pānakarasarāgāsavayojanaṃ  
sūcīvānakarmāṇi sūtrakrīḍā vīṇā-ḍamaruka-vādyāni prahelikā  
pratimālā durvācaka-yogāḥ pustaka-vācanaṃ nāṭakākhyāyikā-  
darśanaṃ kāvya-samasyā-pūraṇaṃ paṭṭikā-vetra-vāna-vikalpāḥ  
takṣa-karmāṇi takṣaṇaṃ vāstu-vidyā rūpyaratnaparīkṣā dhātuvādaḥ  
maṇi-rāgākara-jñānaṃ vṛkṣāyurveda-yogāḥ meṣa-kukkuṭa-lāvaka-  
yuddha-vidhiḥ śukasārikāpralāpanam utsādane saṃvāhane keśa-  
mardane ca kauśalyaṃ akṣaramuṣṭikā-kathanaṃ mlecchita-vikalpāḥ  
deśabhāṣā-vijñānaṃ puṣpa-śakaṭikā nimitta-jñānaṃ yantramāṭṛkā  
dhāraṇamāṭṛkā sampāṭhyaṃ mānasī kāvya-kriyā abhidhāna-kośaḥ  
chando-jñānaṃ kriyā-kalpaḥ chalitakayogāḥ vastragopanaṇi dyūta-  
viśeṣā ākarṣakrīḍā bāla-krīḍanakāni vainayikīnāṃ vajrayikīnāṃ  
vyāyāmikīnāṃ ca vidyānāṃ jñānaṃ iti catuṣṣaṣṭir aṅgavidyāḥ  
kāmasūtrasyāvayavinyah || [1.3.14]<sup>1</sup>*

The following are the arts to be studied, together with the Kama Sutra:  
1. singing; 2. playing on musical instruments; 3. dancing; 4. union of dancing,  
singing, and playing instrumental music; 5. calligraphy and drawing; 6.  
tattooing; 7. arraying and adorning an idol with rice and flowers; 8. arranging  
beds of flowers; 9. colouring the teeth, garments, hair, nails and bodies; 10.  
fixing stained glass into a floor; 11. the art of making beds and cushions for  
reclining; 12. playing on musical glasses filled with water; 13. storing and  
accumulating water in aqueducts, cisterns, and reservoirs; 14. picture making,  
trimming, and decorating; 15. stringing of garlands and wreaths; 16. binding of  
turbans and chaplets, and making crests and top-knots of flowers; 17. scenic  
representations; 18. art of making ear ornaments; 19. art of preparing perfumes  
and odours; 20. proper disposition of jewels and decorations, and adornment in  
dress; 21. magic or sorcery; 22. manual skill; 23. culinary art; 24. making  
drinks with proper flavour and colour; 25. tailor's work and sewing; 26. making  
parrots, flowers, tufts, tassels, bunches, bosses, knobs, etc., out of yarn or  
thread; 27. solution of riddles, enigmas, covert speeches, verbal puzzles, and  
enigmatical questions; 28. a game, which consisted in repeating verses, and as  
one person finished, another person had to commence at once, repeating  
another verse, beginning with the same letter with which the last speaker's  
verse ended; 29. the art of mimicry or imitation; 30. reading, including  
chanting and intoning; 31. study of sentences difficult to pronounce; 32.  
practice with sword, single stick, quarter staff, and bow and arrow; 33.  
reasoning or inferring; 34. carpentry; 35. architecture; 36. knowledge about  
gold and silver coins, and jewels and gems; 37. chemistry and mineralogy; 38.  
colouring jewels, gems and beads; 39. knowledge of mines and quarries; 40.  
gardening; 41. art of cock fighting, quail fighting, and ram fighting; 42. art of  
teaching parrots and starlings to speak; 43. art of applying perfumed ointments

<sup>1</sup>Vātsyāyana, Kāmasūtra with commentary of Yasodhara, Nirnayasarayantralaya, 1900  
<http://kjc-fs-cluster.kjc.uni-heidelberg.de/dcs/index.php?contents=texte>



to the body, and of dressing the hair with unguents and perfumes and braiding it; 44. the art of understanding writing in cypher and the writing of words in a peculiar way; 45. the art of speaking by changing the forms of words; 46. knowledge of languages and of the vernacular dialects; 47. art of making flower carriages; 48. art of framing mystical diagrams, of addressing spells and charms, and binding armlets; 49. mental exercises, such as completing stanzas or verses on receiving a part of them etc.; 50. composing poems; 51. knowledge of dictionaries and vocabularies; 52. knowledge of ways of changing and disguising the appearance of persons; 53. knowledge of the art of changing the appearance of things; 54. various ways of gambling; 55. art of obtaining possession of the property of others by means of mantras or incantations; 56. skill in youthful sports; 57. knowledge of the rules of society, and of how to pay respects and compliments to others; 58. knowledge of the art of war.; 59. knowledge of gymnastics; 60. art of knowing the character of a man from his features; 61. knowledge of scanning or constructing verses; 62. arithmetical recreations; 63. making artificial flowers; 64. making figures and images in clay<sup>1</sup>.

Among them, there are some obvious for Western art world *viz.* music, singing or drawing, but there are also many activities called secondary or serving *viz.* colouring clothes, arranging flowers. They certainly do not form a collection typical for Western thinking of art, but are important elements of Indian art world and form not only the field of art, but also influence the role and domain of other artistic disciplines. Floral arrangements and garlands are volatile elements of temple statues of which author is aware and plans them into a figure while sculpting. Author incorporates those future elements into his/her work.

#### *Viṣṇu-dharmôttara-purāṇa*

Another crucial text for Indian art theory is the *Viṣṇu-dharmôttara-purāṇa*, an appendix to the *Viṣṇu-purāṇa*, composed about 6th CE. In the third chapter Vajra talks with sage Mārkaṇḍeya about art:

Vajra said: (Oh) sinless (one), speak to me about the making of images of deities, so that (the Deity) may remain always close by and may have an appearance in accordance with the Śāstras.

Mārkaṇḍeya said: (Oh) Lord of men, he who does not know properly the rules of *chitra* I can, by no means, be able to discern the characteristics of images.

Vajra said: (Oh) propagator of the race of Bhṛgu, be pleased to narrate the rules of painting, as he who knows the rules of painting, alone knows its characteristics in words.

Mārkaṇḍeya said: Without a knowledge of the art of dancing, the rules of painting are very difficult to be understood. Hence no work

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<sup>1</sup>Based on translation of *The Kamasutra of Vatsyayana*, trans. The Hindoo Kama Shastra Society, Benares, New York, 1925 . p. 12-15

of (this) earth, (oh) king, should be done even with the help of these two, (for something more has to be known).

Vajra said: Please speak to me about the art of dancing and the rules of painting you will tell me (afterwards) for, (oh) twice-born one, the rules of the art of dancing imply (those of) the art of painting.

Mārkaṇḍeya said: The practice of (dancing) is difficult to be understood by one who is not acquainted with music. Without music dancing cannot exist at all.

Vajra said: You are conversant with dharma, tell me (first) about music and (then) you will speak about the art of dancing (because) when (the former) is well known, (oh) best of the Bhrgus, (a man) knows dancing too.

Mārkaṇḍeya said: Without singing music cannot be understood. He who knows the rules of singing knows everything properly.

Vajra said: (Oh) best of those who support dharma, please speak to me about the art of singing, as he who knows the art of singing is the best of men and knows everything. [3.2.1-9]<sup>1</sup>

As for painting, *Viṣṇu-dharmôttara* is a treatise with one of the greatest authority as painting was not at first treated as an independent or highly esteemed art. Here also the author emphasize the previous mentioned dependences of disciplines or their origins – from singing and music (both audial), through dance or theatre (audio-visual) to painting and sculpture (visual). I would prefer not to call that ‘hierarchy’ as valuation was not expressed, but certainly it is some kind of dependence or seniority, which of course tells a lot about importance and role of every art discipline in cultural life. Disciplines are related to each other and joined by common elements or mutual secondary arts.

### *Theory of Senses*

Besides five Aristotelian senses (sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste), Indian philosophy recognises also an internal organ called *manas* (mind). Sometimes *manas* is considered as a sixth sense as in Abhidhamma philosophy, which reflections R. K. Sen notices in *Nāṭya-śāstra*. According to Abhidhamma there are six senses – sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste and ideal, and respectively six organs of senses – eye, ear, skin, nose, tongue and mind<sup>2</sup>.

In other cases (e.g. Nyāya school) it serves as a transmitter of sensual data to intellect (*buddhi*) and self (*atman*), where they are proceeded variously into knowledge, making the cognition possible. Despite the classification, role of *manas* is basically the same: mind is the abode of memories of things and emotional states, recollects data from sensual organs and mixes it with those memories, so that intellect could cognise and infer about objects. This is the

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<sup>1</sup>*The Vishnudharmottara (Part III). A Treatise on Indian Painting and Image-Making*, trans. Stella Kramrisch, Calcutta University Press 1928 p. 31-32.

<sup>2</sup>Sen R. K., *Aesthetic Enjoyment. Its background in philosophy and medicine*, University of Calcutta, 1966, p. 33-35.

reason why it plays a crucial role in experiencing art, which is primary sensual according to the theory of *rasa*.

### Strategies of Art Reception

There are three degrees of art reception: aesthetic, emotional and intellectual. In Western culture the most valued one is intellectual. Observer's aim is to understand ideas expressed in the work of art. (S)he does it by reading and decoding symbols, metaphors, motives, iconography and cultural background. In modern art e.g. Minimal Art, true reception is sometimes impossible without knowing the theory behind the artefact, created by author himself or theoretician of artistic movement. Observer encountering a work of art should read and understand it, if (s)he wants to fully appreciate it.

In India, not only classical, but also modern, reception and its kinds were profoundly described by various treatises like, already mentioned, theory of *rasa* which apply to every artistic activity.

#### *Theory of Rasa*

Dhanamjaya in his treatise on theatre (*Daśarūpa*) claims that theatre originates *rasa* and is a dedicated art for it:

*daśadhāiva rasāśrayam* | [1.10]<sup>1</sup>

[Theatre] is of ten kinds and is the abode for taste (*rasa*). [trans. BB]

Nonetheless *Viṣṇu-dharmōttara* states firmly that *rasa* applies as well to painting, sculpture etc. *Nāṭya-śāstra* provides a collection of 8 corresponding *bhavas* (emotional states or moods) and *rasas* (tastes): *rati* (love) – *śṛṅgāra* (romantic taste); *hasya* (joy) – *hāsyā* (comic taste); *śoka* (sorrow) – *kāruṇya* (tragic taste); *krodha* (anger) – *raudra* (fury); *utsaha* (energy) – *vīra* (heroic taste); *bhaya* (terror) – *bhayānaka* (horror); *jugupsa* (disgust) – *bībhatsa* (aversion); *vismaya* (astonishment) – *adbhuta* (amazement). Later other tastes have been introduced, from Abhinavagupta, commentator of *Nāṭya-śāstra*, till modern days.

Work of art should emerge specific emotions (*bhava*), that already exist in observer. From emotion the taste (*rasa*) is born. Aesthetic reception of art is then a result of emotional reception. It concerns the inner world of observer, not external form of work of art. Form is only a medium to emerge emotion. Art stimulates and rises emotions by specific instruments as gestures, mimic, colours, costume etc. as Nandikeśvara stated in *Abhinaya Darpaṇa* or *The Mirror of Gesture*:

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<sup>1</sup>*The Daśarūpa. A Treatise on Hindu Dramaturgy by Dhanamjaya*, trans. Haas G., Columbia University Press, New York 1912, p.4.

For wherever the hand moves, there the glances follow; where the glances go, the mind follows; where the mind goes, the mood follows; where the mood (bhava) goes, there is the flavour (rasa)<sup>1</sup>.

It is mind (manas), described earlier, which is the center of experiencing rasa, recollecting remembrance of passed emotions with sensual data, allowing them to evoke desired state in observer.

## Summary

Confronting those two – Western and Indian – approaches towards the art, I would like to emphasize differences.

Firstly, classification of art in Western world is author-orientated, focused on her/his actions and means of expression, which (s)he decided to use (visual and performing arts), while in Indian world it is observer-orientated and focused on her/his means of reception of art (visual and audial arts).

In Indian tradition there is a strong accent on multidisciplinary art e.g. sculpture and music, by consequence also work of art is perceived multisensory. Only modern and contemporary art and art theory in Western world made the turn towards multiplicity.

Classification of art reflects also in its perception – artefact-orientated in Occident (we evaluate the result of artistic activities – the work of art, its meaning and ideas), therefore the focus is on the outer. On the contrary, in India perception is observer-orientated (we evaluate the emergence of *rasa*) and her/his inner perception.

Definition of the field of art, classification of artistic activities and their mutual relations is essential in researching a culture, its products and cultural activities. In the case of Indian art the research area is enlarged because according to treatises painting cannot be understood without previous analysis of dance etc.

Contemporary Art History, developed on the foundations of works of Roman Ingarden, Roland Barthes and others, tries to find new strategies for perception of art, but also directs its interests to spectator as it was in Classical Indian theory of art.

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<sup>1</sup>*The Mirror of Gesture being the Abhinaya Darpaṇa of Nandikeśvara*, trans. Ananda Coomaraswamy, Gopala Kristanyya Duggirala, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1917, p. 17.

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