



Jnanapravaha

JPM QUARTERLY Jan - Mar '19



The participants watching the screening of 'Looks of a Lot'

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JPM Quarterly

The first semester of Jnanapravaha Mumbai's 2018-2019 academic year concluded with an intellectual feast of coursework and public programming. Our *Indian Aesthetics* (IA) and *Critical Theory, Aesthetics, and Practice* (CTAP) students finished their first essays; the third iteration of *JPM Write: Style* brought in fresh faces; and our Academic Director, Rohit Goel, taught another new Theoretical Foundations module, this time on the concept of 'Civil War'.

JPM's public programming also continued apace, including seminar series in *Buddhist Aesthetics* (BA), *Islamic Aesthetics* (ISLA), *Criticism and Theory*, as well as *Creative* and *Curatorial Processes*. And we have a lot to look forward to in the New Year. On January 4, 2019, we begin the fifth iteration of our ISLA programme with a seminar series, 'In the Triangle of Samarkand' by Ilker Evrim Binbaş; followed by Gülru Necipoğlu's lecture series, 'From International Timurid to Ottoman'; 'Architecture and Decor in 15th Century Delhi Sultunate' by Yves Porter; and a seminar series by Simon Rettig on 'After Timur: Calligraphy and the Arts'. The programme concludes with a lecture by Rettig on post-1400 manuscripts of the Qur'an. The lectures are open to the public for a discounted fee if you register for all of them. In BA, we begin with a series on 'Buddhism in Southern Andhra' by Richard Blurton; followed by Christian Luczanits on 'Western Himalayan Art'.

In mid-January, we look forward to the launch of a new course, *JPM Write: Argument*. Designed and taught by Rohit Goel, participants will learn to write complete academic, art critical and journalistic texts that entice the reader by building on existing scholarship and viewpoints, without sacrificing originality of thought. Students will identify what puzzles or surprises them and their readers regarding topics on which they are writing, what methods to use to most clearly and enticingly solve that puzzle, and finally, how to present their arguments in written form. We also look forward to our quarter-long *Southeast Asian Art and Architecture* (SEAAA) course, beginning mid-February. In addition to SEAAA Course Director Swati Chemburkar, a number of fine scholars, including Olivier Cunin, Andrea Acri, Stephen Murphy and Peter Sharrock, will be lecturing through the course. Finally, Rohit Goel will be teaching another new module of Theoretical Foundations in March 2019, on 'The Emergence of Capitalism.'

Several of our SEAAA seminars will be open to the public, as will Vidya Dehejia's IA lectures on Chola bronzes, which will begin at the end of January. All are also welcome to register and attend Padmini

Chettur's retrospective of her contemporary dance practice, 'The Rigorous Practice of Freedom,' which will happen at the end of February, as part of CTAP. Please keep an eye out for email announcements of these courses and programmes.

JPM wishes you a very happy new year and we look forward to seeing you in 2019, rested and rejuvenated for what promises to be another year of rigorous thought at our space.

With my warmest wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rashmi Poddar', written in a cursive style.

Rashmi Poddar PhD.

Director

Aesthetics

JPM's Aesthetics offerings include (1) an academic year-long Postgraduate Diploma/Certificate course in Indian Aesthetics as well as ongoing public seminars and lectures in the field; (2) a quarterly Postgraduate Certificate course in Yoga and Tantra, as well as ongoing public seminars and lectures in the field; (3) a quarterly Postgraduate Certificate course in

Southeast Asian Art and Architecture as well as ongoing public seminars and lectures in the field; (4) a fortnight of public seminars and lectures in Islamic Aesthetics; (5) an ongoing series of public seminars in Buddhist Aesthetics; and (6) occasional academic conferences and workshops in these fields.



Detail of Scene of a Rāma Darbāra' in a Sekhavi, Haveli, Sekhavi, Northern Rajasthan, c. 1850

Indian Aesthetics

The Diwali quarter of this year's Indian Aesthetics course began with the continued exploration of Jain philosophy, iconography, art, and architecture by Dr. Viraj Shah and Kamalika Bose. Dr. Shah's overview of the Jain caves of the Western Deccan, which she used as a springboard to explore the myths, legends and iconography of the Jain Tirthankaras, drew on material evidence afforded by her field work as well as Jain texts. The scholar highlighted *Vira Rasa* or heroism as the most important facet of the Jinas, a heroism not related to emerging victorious in wars, but to gaining mastery of the senses and to the attainment of enlightenment. The pure asceticism of Jainism eventually came to include *tantric* elements and the worship of folk deities as well as popular heroes to attract the laity, which sought material boons. *Shanta Rasa* is also seen in the images of the Jinas, bringing their aims of tranquility and detachment into sharp focus.

Kamalika Bose spoke about Jain sites of worship both in Bengal and in Ahmedabad, drawing on her own research and writing. She showed how medieval and early modern architectural styles, manner of worship and locations of Jain temples from the 18th century onwards were a product of the social, political and economic milieu of the region in question, and were also the result of the limitations and exigencies of the time in which they were built.



Prof. Kamalika Bose speaks during 'Acculturation and Hybrid Typologies for Worship in Bengal - From the 18th Century to the Present'

Earlier, the scholar engaged with the hybrid typologies of worship in Bengal, which include the home shrine or *thakur dalan*, and other sites of Hindu worship. The unusual and exquisite brick and terracotta temples of the area show no affiliation to the accepted styles of temples in North (*nagara* style) or South India (*dravida* style). Rather, they mimic the thatched hut styles of homes in Bengal, with variations of several types,

showing how architecture can undergo deep acculturation. By studying architecture as a living entity that is a product of both time and place, the speaker engaged with a variety of building styles that have emerged, and the probable triggers that resulted in particular styles.

Dr. Pushkar Sohoni's sessions began with an overview of the development of temple architecture in the subcontinent. Beginning with cave architecture that shows evidence of precursors in wooden architecture that no longer survives, he traced the evolution of various temple styles and types in different areas with remarkable felicity. His second session explored Maratha temples, some of which are still in worship, describing an

instructive and detailed instance of acculturation which involves innovation and appropriation of other styles. His sessions connected back to Kamalika Bose's elucidation of temple types, and forward to the sessions in which Dr. Rashmi Poddar and Dr. Kirit Mankodi traversed the vast terrain of the origin, legends, icons and iconography, as well as the sacred spaces of deities such as Devi, Shiva and Vishnu.

Dr. Kirit Mankodi's masterful exposition of Shiva and Vishnu showed how each deity grew from relatively obscure origins to the overarching Hindu gods they are today. Vishnu, the sustainer, one of the Adityas or Vedic solar gods, was not very important in the beginning. Not as complex as



Dr. Pushkar Sohoni speaks during 'Evolution and Morphology of the Hindu Temple'

Shiva, Vishnu nevertheless became associated with kingship and victory along with the *avatara* mythology which expanded the forms in which he is represented. His theriomorphic, anthropomorphic as well as therio-anthropomorphic forms and their legends are well known and proliferate both in the visual art of temples across the subcontinent and in post-Vedic texts. Shiva's aniconic *linga* form and his iconic forms emerged from tribal as well as Vedic roots. With the advent of *bhakti*, Vishnu and Shiva, the destroyer, became personal gods. Dr. Mankodi also shared insights on Surya, connected both to Vishnu's origins and to Shiva in temples such as Modhera. According to the scholar, the site brings together Surya and Shiva. As a leading scholar of iconography, Dr. Mankodi illustrated his sessions with lesser-known images and concluded with an exploration of the *ashtadikpalas*, directional gods usually represented in the outer parts of temples.

The *Devi Mahatmya* (5th - 6th c CE) is the first text to elaborate the complex feminine cosmic principle of Devi, which is probably an amalgamation of multiple forms, an earlier aural tradition, and autochthonous, local, non-patriarchal worship. Both motherly and protective, fierce and dangerous, Devi embodies *Vatsalya Rasa* and *Raudra Rasa*. Receiver of blood sacrifice, Devi was the deity worshipped by warriors. Dr. Poddar elucidated the unitary, independent Devi, who is a symbol of ultimate reality in *Shakta* theology. *Shakti* is the kinetic principle that animates several male gods, including Shiva. The scholar also introduced the anti-ascetic, anti-speculative, heretical and radical *Tantra* as an experiential

method that offers tools to expand the practitioner's consciousness by affirming the senses and the body. The guru teaches esoteric methods such as *panchamakara* to connect the practitioner with divinity. Dr. Poddar's session helped remove present-day biases associated with the term '*tantra*', which is usually seen as forbidden and dabbling in occult practices.



Dr. Rashmi Poddar speaks during 'Devi – Cosmic Charm of Vatsalya and Raudra Origin, Legends, Icons, Sacred Spaces and Places'

The delicate sophistication and innovation seen in the art of the subcontinent's Islamic courts, and the architecture and ornamentation associated with them was ably dealt with by Smita Dalvi. She drew links between the philosophy and art forms of the Central-Asian Islamic world and that of the

Sultanate and Mughal courts. By showing examples of the syncretic art which emerged here, Ms. Dalvi established that Sufi philosophy as well as several forms of art and architecture were created, enriched and refined when Islam came to the subcontinent. Her sessions are the first building blocks that will enable some Indian Aesthetics students to engage with the Islamic Aesthetics course to be held in January 2019.

The sessions in the Diwali quarter bring together visuals of art, architecture, text and icons with philosophy and art history through current research, enriching students' understanding at multiple levels. - J.K.

Past Programmes:

Art, Empire and the Nation: India and the Raj

December 6th & 7th, 2018, 6:15 pm

Renate Dohmen (Lecturer in Art History, Open University)



"Oh, East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet" -
Rudyard Kipling, 'The Ballad of East and West'

Professor Renate Dohmen's seminar engaged with modified art forms that emerged during the British colonial period in India between the late 18th and mid-20th centuries in the media of painting, print-making, design, architecture and photography. Using a perspective informed by the writing of scholars such as Edward Said, author of the seminal *Orientalism* (1978), the speaker described the last half-century's shift in perspective and showed why art and art history were central to colonial ideology. She illustrated her analysis with visual examples, showing that material culture was intimately connected with the project of colonisation and empire.

The speaker discussed the methodological framework of such an enterprise, which rather than merely inserting colonial work (that was earlier relegated to natural history museums and the like) into the British art historical frame, would consider the fundamental ambivalence and double coding that desired such objects yet deemed them to be inferior. Such a methodological framework considers that 'history' is a representation of different world views, rather than 'fact'. European colonial ideology essentialised the colonised and their art in a manner which has had long-ranging effects. Such cultural essentialism misused the ideas on culture and community put forward by 18th-century German philosopher Herder by applying them to the nation.

A transcultural approach acknowledges Britain's global connections, which came about through trade and empire. The trajectory of British responses to India shows a shift in taste and the relationship with the colony from the 18th to the

19th century. Though Western painters in India, such as Zoffany and Hodges, began with an engagement with the native people and Indian art forms, very soon science and exploration as well as creating a record became the prime concern for the colonisers, as evidenced in the paintings of Daniells and in Fergusson's drawings and photographs of monuments. These artists catered to a lucrative market. Yet the field also opened itself to Indians, including fine artists.

Transcultural influences were not one-way; they were apparent in miniatures that were painted in the Mughal emperor Jehangir's court. In the 19th century, government art schools became sites for transcultural encounters. Before the age of photography, the East India Company hired Indian artists to create a record. The Company schools of painting, *bazaar* or popular art seen in Calcutta, and specifically Kalighat paintings, show European naturalism allied with social satire that is not tainted with essentialism. The European concept of the gentleman painter took hold and Indian artists such as Raja Ravi Varma espoused and excelled in European style oil painting, receiving national recognition. This led to the rise of modern Indian art. The colonial encounter was seminal in shaping Indian art, art history as well as archaeology, and the way in which Indian art and culture were viewed. The coloniser's 'civilising mission' depended partly on art and culture but so did the Indian struggle for independence. Both were essentialist in nature and method, and gave rise to standard histories of British and Indian art.

The interactions between coloniser and the colonised were even more complex in the fields of

craft, design and display as seen in the Great Exhibition of 1951 in London. Paradoxically, colonial ideology, British design reform, Anglo-Indian architecture and the Arts and Crafts movement in Britain, all leaned heavily on Indian ornamentation. The British interpreted Herder's ideas in a way that justified the view that though 'less developed' cultures such as India did not have the capacity to produce fine art, they excelled in ornamentation, and that this contact could benefit colonisers. The contradictory British approach taught the 'grammar' of Indian design to Indian artisans to enable the creation of traditional design (emphasising the deemed backwardness of India, a false view which legitimised British rule and was designed to prevent industrial progress in India by focusing on idyllic villages) and to British artisans to produce modern decoration (which would humanise the industrialised way of life in Britain). Such a view was appropriated by English-educated Indian elites including Gandhi, who used it to unify the national struggle. Renate Dohmen asserted that such "accommodation, appropriation and re-negotiation" show that transcultural mediations are evidenced both in culture and in ideas.

Photography in the colonial context derives its meanings through its use in particular social settings, even though the medium is often considered to be unambiguously evidential. It was successfully deployed by Indian nationalists through the creation of portraits of Indian national leaders and the recording of massacres of Indians by the British, alternative narratives which ignited patriotic sentiments in Indians. Conversely,

photographs were also used to celebrate the empire. However, it was architecture that was seminal to the Raj encounter, with the British enthusiastically adapting Indian elements for use in colonial buildings. These were highly visible and monolithic markers which conveyed British might and power in different styles such as Indo-Gothic, Indo-Saracenic or the Neo-classical style of Lutyen's Delhi, that were replete with Indian elements. Indian rulers and landed classes aligned themselves with this visual representation of power, built in similar styles, often by employing British architects, and adopted the lifestyles of the British in India. The derision of some British architects and accusations of poor taste did not dissuade them. Professor Dohmen pointed out that in some cases, this appropriation may be interpreted as a "nuanced defiance" of the coloniser.



Prof. Renate Dohmen speaks during 'Art, Empire and the Nation: India and the Raj'

In all, the role played by colonisation and the empire in British art has been sorely neglected by scholars. In the 19th century, the field of art history was still nascent. The artistic interactions and interlocations of the Raj era were not considered by academicians until the 1970s, when postcolonial theory blossomed. Before this, art history was conceived in national terms and compartmentalised accordingly. A transcultural approach has enabled art historians to see how cross-national currents such as trade and empire created a mesh of artistic and political influences that resulted in unique products. Within artistic categories too, it is impossible to compare as fruitfully as in a methodology which considers various types of artistic production at the same time through a transcultural lens. It is this approach which reveals the basically contradictory nature of British colonial ideology, which was mired in notions of colonial superiority and Indian inferiority and in assumptions about race. Such notions were seminal to the colonial encounter across different kinds of art. Indian artists freely appropriated British culture in most spheres and especially in print-making, but the British fear of 'mixing' held the colonisers back except in the selective appropriation of design and architectural elements.

Early 20th-century Indian art and its national character has deep roots in the historical fact of colonisation. The initial espousal of British mores gave way to an assertion of national identity through the adoption of strongly Indian elements and 'spirituality', as seen in the art of Jamini Roy and Abanindranath Tagore, resulting in Raja Ravi Varma's falling out of favour during the nationalist

period of the early 20th century. Critics such as Monica Juneja suggest that the contemporary art world continues to use this basic paradigm, even though essentialist understandings of culture based on race and religion have been overtly rejected. This tendency to double standards has been sharply critiqued since the end of the 20th century, but with little actual change. ‘Difference’ is still seen as desirable, even exotic, and artists continue to root their work in racial identity and nation even though more practitioners from non-Western nations are included in international exhibitions. The need for a “decolonised mindset”, according to the speaker, gives urgency to the continued study of the colonial artistic encounter between India and Britain. - J.K.

Forthcoming Programmes:

The Thief Who Stole My Heart: The Material Life of Chola Bronzes from South India, c. 855–1280

January 31st, February 1st & 2nd, 2019, 6:30 pm
Vidya Dehejia (Professor of Indian and South Asian Art, Columbia University)

In this illustrated seminar series, Vidya Dehejia discusses the graceful luminous sculptures of high copper content created by artists of Chola India, treating them as tangible objects that interact in a concrete way with human activities and socio-economic practices. She asks questions of this material that have never been asked before so that these sensuous portrayals of the divine gain their full meaning through a critical study of information captured via a variety of lenses.

Day 1

- Gods on Parade: Sacred Forms of Copper
- Shiva as “Victor of Three Forts”: Battling for Empire, 855-955

Day 2

- Portrait of a Queen: Patronage of Dancing Shiva, c. 941-1002
- An 11th-century Master: Ten Thousand Pearls Adorn a Bronze

Day 3

- Chola Obsession with Sri Lanka & the Silk Route of the Sea in the 11th and 12th centuries
- Worship in Uncertain Times: The Secret Burial of Bronzes in 1310



Queen Sembiyan Mahadevi as Uma, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC.

Islamic Aesthetics

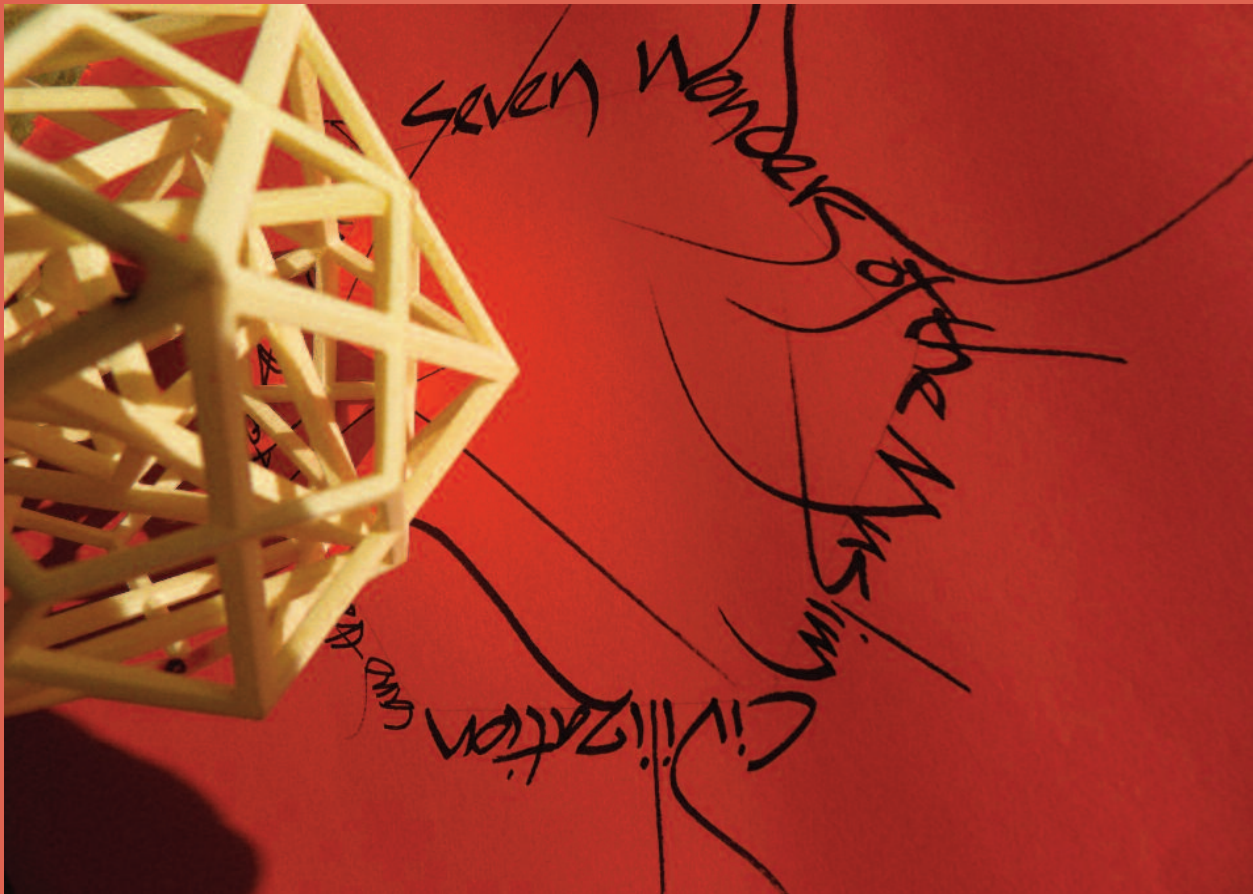
Past Programmes:

Seven Wonders of the Muslim Civilization

November 13th, 14th, 15th, 16th and 17th, 2018,
6:30 pm

*H. Masud Taj (Professor at Azrieli School of
Architecture & Urbanism, Carleton University)*

Perched high on Mount Jabal al-Nour, near Mecca, the grotto of Hira lies relatively undisturbed even today. It was here that, fourteen centuries ago, a trader came seeking solace in meditation, being dissatisfied by social unrest and moral degeneration. While deep in prayer, the angel Gabriel appeared to him and revealed the word of



God. “Read!” proclaimed the angel, “And your Lord is the Most Generous. He who has taught by the pen; taught man that which he knew not.” Terrified and perplexed, the trader, Muhammad, returned to civilization and in the ensuing years, began to spread the words of Allah, which would later be compiled into the Quran—‘the recitation’.

Using the cave, the space of contemplation, and the pen, which gave shape to the words of God, H. Masud Taj drew an analogy to the genesis of Muslim architecture and calligraphy. Jnanapravaha hosted Taj, an award-winning architect, professor and calligrapher, for the widely attended series of seminars titled ‘Seven Wonders of the Muslim Civilization’ under the segment of ‘Islamic Aesthetics’. With lectures spread over five evenings, he strung together a vast knowledge of Islamic culture into an incredible narrative spanning religion, commerce, language, the written word and the built environment.

It is perhaps its geographical position that has accorded Muslim civilization an eventful history. Although its centralised location resulted in increased conflict, it also opened up the potential for exchange with surrounding civilizations, aided by its vast trade network and consequent expansion. This history of confluence goes hand in hand with the evolution of architecture; the primitive form of its edifices went on to adapt to and assimilate with several local styles, resulting in its rich tapestry. While inherently a spatial manifestation of Islam and its doctrines, engagement with several cultures over centuries has lent Muslim architecture a peculiar and prolific body of work, its monuments clustered along

several cities across its civilization.

The series of seminars featured seven such marvels, spanning the 7th to the 16th centuries, each edifice comprising a different architectural typology. The first, the singular ‘Dome of the Rock’ in Jerusalem, perfectly exemplifies both, a rootedness in the central tenets of Islam and an accommodation of local architectural traditions. Studied next were two architectural instantiations that occur at the beginning and end of the Muslim sojourn in Spain—the seemingly infinite mosque of Cordoba and the sensuous fort complex of Alhambra in Granada. The series then veered towards a compelling mixed-use typology—the incomplete Sultan Hasan Madrasa at Cairo, which comprises four schools of law, a mosque, a tomb, a hospital, and an orphanage, apart from shops and residential areas. Similarly, the labyrinthine Bazaar of Isfahan is interspersed with public spaces, mosques and madrasas. The list of seven was rounded off with the peremptory urban mosque complex of Suleymaniye in Istanbul, and the ethereal mausoleum of Taj Mahal in Agra, illustrating an unprecedented refinement of the architectural ideal at the zenith of the civilization.

These enigmatic buildings are laden with inscriptions, given the centrality of the Quran and Islamic calligraphy’s strong ties to it. Almost an entire millennium separates the Dome of the Rock, constructed a mere 60 years after the Prophet’s death, and the Taj Mahal. While the former has the earliest record of Quranic epigraphy, the latter has been adorned with the most number of Quranic verses. Being a major form of artistic expression in Islamic cultures and an integral part of architecture,

these inscriptions help decipher and contextualise the monuments' meaning.

While an excursion through the detailed histories of each of these edifices is beyond the brevity of this article, certain strands of thought emerged through the lectures, offering insight into the Muslim worldview and its ties to architecture. Foremost among them was trade as a defining characteristic of Muslim culture; it is inherent to Islamic theology, religion and lifestyle. Early economic innovation and ethically driven commerce facilitated varied building enterprises. While the fortunes bequeathed by law to the state from deceased families made it possible to finance the Sultan Hasan Madrasa, adding shops to its program sustained its upkeep. The open market space of Isfahan was not controlled by the state, resulting in free competition and a distinct architectural identity.

One of the central underlying ideas that extend from religion to architecture is the reigning imperative of 'Tawheed'. Understood as 'the unity of one' and that of existence, it links geometry to the order of the cosmos. The complexity of interlaced ornamentation, the most recognisable feature of Muslim architecture, can be reduced to simple shapes, points of origin and underlying principles of organisation. Apart from these infinitely tileable patterns, the system of proportions and fractal self-similarity within elements extends to all built forms, especially apparent at the Taj Mahal and the Alhambra; this allows even the largest of spaces to be nuanced and filled with subtleties. The adherence to Quranic doctrines and orderly geometries is balanced with

a responsiveness to terrain and site-specific contexts, which allow for spontaneity and inventiveness within the application of a universal system.

An extension of the holistic approach to architecture and its interrelation to religion is the reverence conferred on the built tradition. The Alhambra, for example, has seen several expansions throughout the reigns of kings, with each addition respecting the previous design. The outcome is such that the building form comprises an ensemble of autonomous but cohesive forms. An intriguing corollary of this phenomenon is how the facades get incorporated and become interior elevations, like those of the mosque of Cordoba. The peerless form of the Taj Mahal is the crowning culmination of a very rich strand of tradition, drawing from a lineage of precedents such as the tombs of Timur, Babar, Humayun, Akbar, Jahangir and Itimad-ud-Daulah.

Through anecdotes of interactions with his mentor Hassan Fathy, Taj spoke of the relationships between form, the earth that it articulates into levels and the sky that it captures and frames. For example, the madrasas at Suleymaniye sit on stepped platforms over the contours of the land, their domes creating a striking silhouette against the sky. Architecture choreographs movement through these forms, unfolding as a layered sequence of spaces. At both the Alhambra and the Sultan Hasan Madrasa, the circulation meanders through several programmatic elements, courtyards and transitional spaces, almost as if to make the external world immaterial. The presiding form of

the Dome of the Rock rests as an octagonal volume, the surrounding floor extending onto its visage till it meets the horizon. Ascending to complement the blue of the sky, it is crowned by a golden dome signifying the heavens. The articulation of interior spaces accentuates its lateral form and circumambulatory movement, only to reveal a womb-like sanctum that stresses on its verticality.

The seven wonders, the paragons of Muslim architecture, resolve complex spatial concerns through a synergy between religious precepts, built traditions, structural integrity and inventiveness, all

the while creatively responding to geographical and historical contexts. Achieving both visual splendor and sensory 'affect', their exquisite forms aspire towards intangibility. This lecture series attempted to understand civilization through the lens of architecture, situating it with concurrent Muslim thought, poetry, mysticism, science and theology. Unpacking the ideas and belief systems that are both projected on and communicated by architecture, Taj emphasised on a built vocabulary that possesses the depth and diversity to receive such layered meanings. - S.B.



Prof. H. Masud Taj speaks during 'Seven Wonders of the Muslim Civilization'

Forthcoming Programmes:

In the Triangle of Samarkand, Constantinople, and the Deccan: Modalities of Sovereignty in the 15th Century

January 4th & 5th, 2019, 6:15 pm

Ilker Evrim Binbas (Institute of Oriental and Asian Studies, University of Bonn)



How did political ideas and political events coalesce and interact when there was no commonly agreed constitutional paradigm to glue a society together? This seminar series addresses

this question in the context of the Timurids, Turkmans, and Ottomans in the 15th century. Prof. Binbas's analysis will combine the rhetoric on kingship and ideas on governance in specific political contexts, and he will discuss the wide range of political and constitutional paradigms that emerged during this period.

Day 1

- Timur, after Timur: The Last of the 'Chinggisids' and the Rise and Fall of an Unlikely Ideal of Sovereignty
- Eschatology and Conquest: Arts and Politics from the Deccan to Constantinople

Day 2

- Contractualism and the Chinggisid *Yasa* in the 15th Century
- Who is Afraid of Timur? The Timurid Empire from an Interregional and Intercultural Perspective

From International Timurid to Ottoman: Aesthetics of Architectural Landscapes extending between Central Asia and Anatolia in the 15th-16th Centuries

January 7th, 8th and 9th, 2019, 6:15 pm

Gülru Necipoğlu (Aga Khan Professor and Director, Harvard University)

This seminar focusses on the architectural cultures of Timurid and Turkmen Iran-Central Asia and the Eurasian Ottoman Empire during the 15th and early 16th centuries. Iconic monuments will be contextualised in their urban, aesthetic, socio-cultural, and political settings. Transregional exchanges are explored alongside indigenous



architectural traditions, with particular attention to materiality and ornamental aesthetics. An overarching theme is the translation and transformation of the international Timurid-Turkmen architectural idiom in the Ottoman capitals of Bursa, Edirne, and Istanbul.

Day 1

- Emergence of the Timurid-Turkmen Architectural Idiom in 15th-Century Iran and Central Asia

Day 2

- Translation of the International Timurid-Turkmen Aesthetic in Ottoman Bursa and Edirne during the early 15th Century

Day 3

- The Formation of a Distinctive Cosmopolitan

Aesthetic in Ottoman Constantinople-Istanbul between the late 15th and early 16th Centuries

Architecture & Décor in 15th-century Delhi Sultanate

January 10th & 11th, 2019, 6:15 pm

Yves Porter (Teaches Islamic Art, Aix Marseille Université)

The arts of 15th-century Delhi Sultanate, corresponding to the Sayyid (1414-1451) and Lodi (1451-1526) dynasties, have long been overshadowed by their Mughal successors. Beginning with an introduction on the state of the Sultanate after Timur's invasion (1398), these series will focus first on their extant architectural legacy (buildings and décor), to be compared with monuments from other sultanates (Jaunpur, Gujarat, Malwa). The question of the almost-

unknown secular and palatial architecture of this period, again to be compared with contemporaneous remains in other sultanates, will be further analysed. Finally, glazed tiles, acknowledging a spectacular use during the Lodis, will be studied in detail. Further links between architectural decoration (tiles and stucco) and other arts (mainly manuscripts' illumination) will also be explored.



Day 1

- Delhi, after Timur (1398-1526)
- The “Seat of the Throne” in 15th c. Delhi sultanate

Day 2

- Tombs and Mosques under the Sayyid and Lodi dynasties
- Lodi Glazed Tiles, Stucco, and Manuscript Illumination

After Timur: Calligraphy and the Arts of the Book in the Persianate World between 1400 and 1550

January 12th & 14th, 2019, 6:15 pm

Simon Rettig (Assistant Curator of the Arts of the Islamic World, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution)

This seminar series addresses the production, patronage, and circulation of manuscripts in Arabic scripts in the Persian-speaking sphere from the time of Timur (or Tamerlane, d. 1405) in the late 14th century to the rise of the early modern empires in Iran, Turkey, and India around 1550. The seminars both introduce the visual characteristics and shared aesthetics in the arts of the book in the three political and cultural spheres, and offer an opportunity to investigate regional adaptations of and local responses to the so-called metropolitan styles. They will shed new light on the concepts of centres and peripheries within the pre-modern Eastern and Central Islamic worlds by focussing attention on the main components of the book: calligraphy, illumination, and illustration.

Day 1

- Books for the Prince or Books for All? Royal and Commercial Manuscripts in Timurid Iran and Beyond
- A Script to Unite Them All? The Development, Diffusion, and Reception of *Nasta‘liq* Calligraphy

Day 2

- Beyond Ornament: Forms and Functions of ‘Animated’ Illumination in Belletristic Manuscripts
- Imaging the Word: New Pictorial Developments in the Post-Mongol Persianate world



Folio from a Divan of Sultan Husayn Mirza
Attributed to Sultan-'Ali Mashhadi (d. 1520)
Afghanistan, Herat, Timurid period, ca. 1490
Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper
Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington
DC, F1929.66

The Global *Muṣḥaf*: Visual Identity, Trans-Regionalism, and Eclecticism in Manuscripts of the Qur'an after 1400

January 15th, 2019, 6:15 pm

Simon Rettig (Assistant Curator of the Arts of the Islamic World, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution)

Codicological investigations have challenged the study of Qur'anic manuscripts (*muṣḥaf*, pl. *maṣāḥif* in Arabic) as works created in specific cultural contexts. This methodological approach, however, has also opened new avenues of research and encouraged the understanding of the transcribed Holy Text as a whole, and its role and

position within a global, albeit complex, production and consumption system. Through both codicological examination and art historical *mise en perspective*, this lecture investigates the materiality of Qur'anic manuscripts in the 15th century. From the Mediterranean world to the Indian subcontinent, these volumes both emulated earlier models and developed new and original visual presentations. Innumerable copies were commissioned by members of the elite across the Islamic world. They were acquired and collected for the finest libraries and treasuries as well as exchanged as gifts and booty. Thus, they were in constant circulation, resulting in the emergence of a 'global' aesthetic language for the Qur'an.

This seminar is part of the annual Deccan Heritage Foundation Lecture Series.



Opening folio from a Qur'an
Egypt, Cairo, Mamluk period, ca. 1480–90
Ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper
Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts, Istanbul, TIEM 533, fol. 1b

Yoga and Tantra

Past Programmes:

Atru, Abhaneri, Amva: Are These Pancharatra Temples?

September 27th, 2018, 6:30 - 8:30 pm

Dr. Kirit Mankodi (Retired Professor of Archaeology, Deccan College)



The tradition of Vaishnavism considers Vishnu as the Supreme God, and incorporates within its fold various sects like the Pancharatra. While temples built according to the Pancharatra tradition in Kashmir and South India have been studied over the years, little research has been conducted on the temples of central India. In an attempt to bridge this gap, Dr. Kirit Mankodi focussed on three Vishnu temples at Abhaneri, Atru, and Amva in Rajasthan to understand if they fell within the Pancharatra tradition.

The Harshadmata temple in Abhaneri, which dates back to the second quarter of the 9th century CE, has been greatly damaged over time, with many of its sculptures now in ruins or missing. In her book *The Sculpture of Early Medieval Rajasthan*, Cynthia Atherton claims that this Abhaneri temple belongs to the Pancharatra sect. Atherton bases her claim on the presence of sculptures whose characteristics match those found in other Pancharatra temples. For instance, there is a sculpture of Vishnu, who is mounted on Garuda, found on the southern wall of the Abhaneri temple, a figure on a *makara*² featured on the western wall, and a four-armed Balarama found on the northern wall – all of which indicate the Pancharatra tradition. The eastern wall showcases an unidentifiable figure.

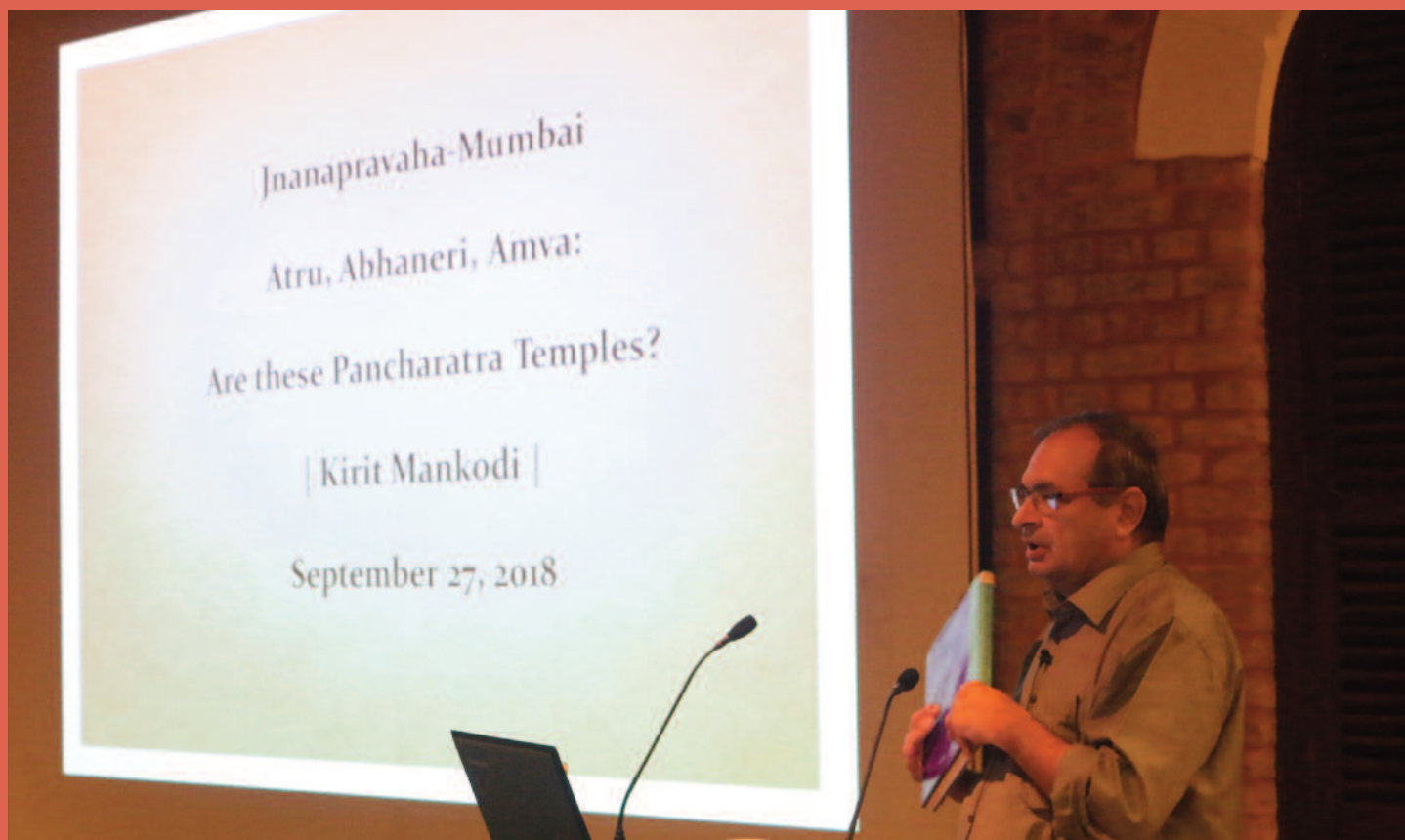
According to Pancharatra texts, Vishnu is the Supreme Lord Paravasudeva, and the central form from which four forms or *vyuhas* emanate

sequentially: Vasudeva, his brother Sankarshana (Balarama), his son Pradyumna, and his grandson, Aniruddha. It is on the basis of this that the figure on the eastern wall mentioned previously can be inferred to be that of Vasudeva.

Dr. Mankodi points out that the Harshadmata temple has another telling detail indicating its Pancharatra trait — the presence of 12 sculptures of couples framed within square niches, with each pair shown engaged in amorous activities within a courtly setting. The presence of these amorous sculptures can be attributed to one of the

Pancharatra gods, Pradyumna, who is also associated with Kamadeva, the god of love.

Eastern Rajasthan was overlooked or ignored by most early archaeologists in India. It was only between 1915 and 1920 that the archaeologist V. Bhandarkar made his first visit to the 10th-century-CE Gadgach temple in Atru. A two-page report submitted by him after this maiden visit is the only documentation that exists on this temple. In it, he notes a large mutilated sculpture of Vishnu Shesha found on the site, indicating that this was once a Vishnu temple.



Dr. Kirit Mankodi speaks during 'Atru, Abhaneri, Amva: Are these Pancharatra Temples?'

However, in 2007, when the ASI decided to clear the mound on which the ruins of the Gadgach temple lay, new findings emerged. Though not much remains of the Gadgach temple, it was discernable that it has had two phases of construction. This was inferred through the discovery of an older plinth beneath the mound. Also found were four sculptures, each consisting of a pair of figures, positioned in a manner indicating there would have been 12 such sculptures in all. In addition to these, the Gadgach temple also had another set of coupled sculptures depicting the *dikpalas*³ with their consorts.

Before the mound was cleared, the Gadgach temple was thought to be a Vishnu temple, but the unearthing of the coupled sculptures suggests a connection to the Pancharatra tradition. Strengthening this hypothesis is Bhandarkar's account of the villagers of Atru, who believe the temple was dedicated to Aniruddha, again indicating a Pancharatra connection.

Though the temples at Abhaneri and Atru are separated by a century, there are enough commonalities in their features to indicate their connection to the Pancharatra system. - S.G.

References:

¹ While the Abhaneri temple is popular, the ones at Atru and Amva are lesser known among scholars. Amva, which is in the Baran district of Rajasthan, was omitted from Dr. Mankodi's presentation due to lack of images.

² A mythical aquatic creature.

³ Guardians of the direction.

The Legends Of Nathasiddhas In Early Medieval Art And Old Marathi Literature

October 4th, 2018, 6:30 - 8:30 pm

Dr. Amol N. Bankar (Indological researcher & a visiting scholar at Wolfson College, University of Oxford)

The Shaiva yogis (ascetics) belonging to the Natha *sampradaya* (lineage), which has 12 important sects, carry forward a tradition begun by Adinatha (Shiva). Stories describe him as giving Kaula (associated with the deity Kalika and the Nathas) knowledge to Uma (Parvati) and being overheard by Matsyendra Natha in the form of a fish. Matsyendra is also mentioned in Abhinavagupta's *Tantraloka* of the 10th century CE and his images can be found in temples all over Maharashtra, portraying him seated on a fish. Natha yogis believe that Goraksha Natha drew the practice of *hathayoga* into their tradition. This, and the arousal of *kundalini* through the seven *chakras* of the body, allowed them to experience the ultimate union of Shiva and Shakti. *Panchamakara*, *mudras* such as *khechari*, and other methods helped a yogi rise through four stages of development until the attainment of *moksha* (liberation).

Natha yogis are known by several appellations, including the pejorative *kanphata* and a new term, *darshani* or *darshandhari* yogis. Apprentices are trained for two years and then initiated by giving them a secret *mantra* and splitting their ears. After initiation (*diksha*) into this esoteric tradition, they are given several articles to wear, including a Natha *janeu* or sacred thread of black wool, and earrings. The *sampradaya* initiates some

householders. Yogis may be *sthanadhari* or *mathadhari*, living in *mathas*, or *ramata* yogis who wander in troops called *jamaats*. Today, an authority popularly called the Yogi Mahasabha in Haridwar keeps a record of all Natha yogis and their sects. Common attributes of such yogis are the wearing of *jata* or dreadlocks, carrying a *danda* or staff and having a *chillum* to smoke cannabis. *Dohas* or couplets composed by these Natha yogis from the 13th century onwards have been compiled by Hazari Prasad Dwivedi, who unearthed their writings. Some Natha yogis have played important political roles in current times.

The wanderings of the Natha yogis (still practiced while carrying a vessel or *patra devata*, which represents Goraksha Natha, containing five objects originally shrouded in secrecy) have continued over several hundred years, and geographically connect the subcontinent. Important Natha sites include Trayambakeshwara (in Nashik), Kadri (considered to originally have Vajrayana affiliations) and Pushkar. Dr. Bankar has recorded graffiti-like inscriptions scattered all over present-day India and Bangladesh, in which names of yogis, such as Makaradhwaja and Changa Vateshwara, can be found. Some of these



Dr. Amol Bankar speaks during 'The Legends Of Nathasiddhas In Early Medieval Art And Old Marathi Literature'

names along with their Natha lineages, biographies and descriptions of attributes worn by them are present in various manuscripts, and royal as well as other important inscriptions at several sites. These connect the Nathas with the Shaiva (Kapalika and Ganachara), *tantric* as well as Tibetan Buddhist traditions. Some texts, such as *Amrutasiddhi*, mention Virupaksha who is believed to have come from Maharashtra and whose tradition became widespread in Tibet.

The Mahanubhava sect was started by Chakradhara in 12th-century Maharashtra. Along with the Bhagavata sect, the Mahanubhavas supported literature in Marathi. This literature includes Jnaneshwara's *Jnaneshwari*, written in the 13th century CE, in which the saint traces his guru *parampara* (lineage) to Adinatha. Changa Vateshwara's *Tattvasara*, composed in the 14th century CE, also traces his own guru *parampara* to the Natha *sampradaya*. A well-known story in Maharashtra describes a meeting between these two *siddhas*.

Bhairava, Tripurasundari and Balasundari are important deities in the Natha tradition. Their images, along with those of other important Nathas such as Matsyendra Natha and Chaurangi, are found at various locations in Maharashtra, including Ellora. The forms reflect the legends of the Natha Siddhas among which that of Chaurangi, found on the wall of the 16th-century-CE Sri Shailam temple, is illustrative. This legend describes the story of Chaurangi, who was born as prince Sharangadhara, and who resisted his young stepmother's attempt to seduce him. The stepmother retaliated by complaining to the King

that Sharangadhara had molested her. Enraged, the king ordered that his son's hands and feet be cut off, only later realising that Sharangadhara was blameless. Matsyendra found the prince, placed him in a cave with a stone, and instructed him to meditate by gazing at this stone for 12 years. Any lapse in concentration would result in the stone falling on Sharangadhara. After the successful completion of this task, Sharangadhara regained his hands and feet and received the name Chaurangi. Throughout the 12 years, an ordinary herdsman fed him while he meditated. The influence of this herdsman, named Goraksha Natha, grew by the 13th or 14th century CE, and today, images of Goraksha Natha can be found at many sites in Maharashtra, including Panhale Kaji.

- J.K.

Buddhist Aesthetics

Past Programmes:

Gandharan Art and Architecture: Between Global and Local

November 26th, 27th, 28th, 29th and 30th, 2018,
6:15 - 8:30 pm

Pia Brancaccio (Associate Professor of Art History, Drexel University)

In July 2017, Pia Brancaccio (PB) gave an immensely stimulating talk titled 'Monumentality in Buddhist Sculpture', and suggested that far from being engaged primarily in monastic activities, the Sangha seemed to be deeply involved in overseeing economic activities. The evidence for this was drawn from the types of grants they received for the building of irrigation systems, and the lofty vantage points of monasteries. Even the Chaitya-styled architecture of Karle, Bhaja and Bedsa suggests they were probably meant to be residences of powerful people rather than ascetics seeking liberation from the material world.

The series of five lectures was based on several other aspects of Gandharan art, anchored on the findings of the latest archaeological digs by Italian and French archaeological teams in the Swat Valley, Taxila, and in the 'Greater Gandhara' region (a term popularised by Richard Sleman). These finds offer a much more nuanced view of the multicultural social and religious antecedents of the region, which PB believes is a more productive

prism to view Gandharan Art through, than the 19th-century fascination with Greek and Western 'influences' associated with Alexander's conquests within the region.

Only one Alexandrian city has been excavated: Ai Khanoum, on the river Oxus (bordering modern-day Uzbekistan), about a thousand kilometres away. This city had a huge porch with Corinthian capitals, Greek pebble mosaics (as opposed to the glass mosaics of Rome), and busts in the Greek style.

However, the continuing evidence of a western cultural lineage has been found at Sirkap (near Taxila) and Barikot (ancient Bazira) in the Swat Valley. PB used a graphic analogy – if chopsticks are found in an area, it can be inferred that the Chinese were there. Similar telltale signs have been found at both sites. At Barikot, tulip-shaped bowls were found, from which Achaemenid presence could be inferred. Excavations unearthed layers revealing a Greek-styled fortification, Greek weights, and rotary querns dating to the time of Alexander and the Indo-Greeks who ruled the region.

At Sirkap, excavations uncovered the grid-like layout of the city, the schist offering serving trays, and reliefs with the deep folds of clothes and more realistic bodies, all indicative of a non-Indic culture and a pre-Kushan tradition of sculpture in grey schist. Since this region stands at an important

juncture of not only the East-to-West axis of the Silk Road, but also at entry points into the Indian subcontinent, hoards of Roman luxury goods which have been found are considered to be the result of trade rather than conquest.



Dr. Pia Brancaccio speaks during 'Gandharan Art and Architecture: Between Global and Local'

From archaeological evidence, the sequence of dynasties has been determined as follows: Achaemenids (600 – 400 BCE), Greeks (326 – 324 BCE), Mauryas (324 – 185 BCE), Scythians (2 – 1 century BCE), Parthians (1 century BCE – 1 century CE), Kushans (1 – 4 century CE), Huns (5th century CE), and Hindu Shahi (9 – 10 century CE). PB convincingly makes the point that the region is truly a 'minestrone soup' of cultures.

Things change with the Kushans, a Yuezhi tribe, driven out by the Han Chinese from South-West China. The generally agreed dates suggest they were in Gandhara and India from the 1st to 4th centuries CE (the Rabatak inscription from a funerary site), and that Kanishka ruled in 128 CE, or most likely in the 2nd century.

Although Buddhism was probably introduced much earlier, in Mauryan times, the religion seems to take off during the Kushan reign. The profusion of Buddha sculptures, small and large, have not been found in any other place. PB suggests that such riches of material finds could be indicative of a proselytising zeal of religion which had not yet developed strong roots as it already had in India. However, by the 7th century, there were so many stupas in Gandhara that Xuanzang thought that he had arrived in the land of Buddha's birth.

PB discussed the finds at the Dharmarajika Stupa (Taxila), Amluk Dara (in Swat), Gumbat and Takht-i-Bahi. Two aspects of the architecture and sculpture stand out. First, the stupas are quite different from their Indic counterparts in Sanchi and Bharhut. They are less spherical, with a long staircase leading to the front, as opposed to entrances from the four cardinal directions. There is no *vedika* or *torana*, and the stupa is built on a square platform, whereas the Indic ones rest on a spherical base. PB suggests that the frontal layout is similar to Graeco-Roman temples, and that the square platform was probably a symbolic architectural representation of the placement of sacred objects (namely the stupa with relics within them) on a throne. The stupa is usually surrounded by chapels – which have large Buddhas placed within

them – facing the main stupa, which also suggests the importance of relic worship. An excerpt from the Milindapanna reads: “When the relic is seen, the Buddha is seen.”

The second aspect that characterises these stupas are the sculptural portrayals found on them, highlighting an obsession with narratives of Buddha’s life. They are almost always in sequence, from birth to death. There are no Jataka tales, with

the exception of the Dipankara Buddha, which connects the past Buddha with the Shakyamuni to come. The narrative tradition and the writings of Asvaghosha led PB to suggest that a strong theatrical tradition existed in the region. It is interesting that the earliest image of an emaciated Buddha fasting, and the famous *mahaparinirvana* scene appear first in Gandhara.

The comparison with Indian sculpture is also



fascinating. Apart from the realistic-versus-symbolic nature of the two styles, elements like Buddha's hairstyle stand out – here, it is more like Apollo's, with a knot on top. Many reliefs have Western characters, like Heracles, or sea creatures and muscled men with oars appearing around the stupa or at the base of main stupa stairways. Keeping to the 'minestrone soup' analogy, PB convincingly suggests that rather than talking about 'influences', it is preferable to see these Western elements as 'choices' made by elites to communicate in an accepted language of power.

The common notion is that after the Kushans were overthrown by the Kidarites and Alkhan Huns, Buddhism was destroyed across the region. However, excavations at Takht-i-Bahi, Dharma-rajika and Mes Aynak show that Buddhism continued to flourish, although the profusion of grey schist sculpture seen during the Kushan times comes to an abrupt end and stucco becomes more common.

It is also notable that there are hardly any sculptures from Mathura in Gandhara, even though both were part of the Kushan territory. Also interesting was the lack of connection between the texts in the birch manuscripts (possibly the earliest manuscripts in the subcontinent) found at Jaulian, and the sculpture.

During the 19th century, there was a craze for Gandhara sculpture. Many stupas were raided by British army officers for their sculptures and relics. The Political Agent in Malakand, Harold Deane, was an exception who tried to save the sculptures and transfer them to museums. The account of the

interest that these museums had, and how they tried to complete collections by sourcing valuable pieces was fascinating.

Alexander Caddy was sent by the archaeological survey to photograph the sites in Gandhara. The piles of sculptures that he photographed, and PB's short exercises in identifying some of them in the Indian Museum, Kolkata, was not only fun but suggests some scope for research in this area. Finally, PB spoke of finds in a major town, Mes Aynak in Afghanistan, which was leased to a Chinese company for copper mining. This important site seems to have been saved by the UN and holds incredibly exciting prospects for more information about Gandhara and the Greater Gandhara region. - A.S.

Forthcoming Programmes:

Buddhism in Southern Andhra: the evidence of Amaravati

February 11th and 12th, 2019, 6:30 - 8:30 pm

Richard Blurton (Retired Curator, British Museum)

These seminars will consider the sculpture from Amaravati as a way to explore Buddhism in Andhra in the early centuries AD. This will primarily be carried out through the collection held in the British Museum in London, much of which has recently been re-presented. An attempt will be made to connect imagery with doctrinal and devotional change over a period of immense importance in the spread of Indian culture elsewhere in South Asia, and then throughout Southeast Asia.

Day 1: Amaravati in the local context

Day 2: Amaravati in the world



Drum slab from the stupa at Amaravati. British Museum. 1880,0709.79

Western Himalayan Art and Its Key Monuments

March 25th, 26th, 27th, 28th, and 29th, 2018,
3:30 - 6:00 pm

Christian Luczanits (David L. Snellgrove Senior Lecturer, London University)

This seminar discusses the Buddhist art of the Western Himalayas, that is the areas of present-

day Northern Pakistan, North-West India, including Kashmir and West Tibet, in their interrelationship. It will do this on the basis of portable artworks as well as through some of its key monuments, in particular Tabo and Alchi monasteries. Special emphasis will be placed on the most important iconographic topics depicted and on reading a monument as a conceptual whole.

Day 1: Kashmir and the Western Himalayas

Day 2: Tabo Monastery in Context

Day 3: Yoga Tantra Revisited

Day 4: Alchi Monastery in Context

Day 5: Revival in Guge Art



Deities of the Vajradhātu Mandala in the Apse of the Assembly Hall of Sumda Chung, Ladakh; ca. 1200 CE; photo C. Luczanits 2009.

Criticism & Theory

JPM's Criticism and Theory offerings include (1) an academic year-long Postgraduate Diploma/Certificate course in Critical Theory, Aesthetics, and Practice, as well as ongoing public seminars and lectures in the field; (2) an academic year-long Postgraduate/Certificate course in Theoretical Foundations; (3) an ongoing series of public seminars and lectures in Indian Intellectual Traditions; and (4) occasional academic conferences and workshop in these fields.



Installation view: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2014. Photo: David M. Heald

Critical Theory, Aesthetics, & Practice

The second quarter of CTAP was grounded in a structuralist reading of Marx's *Grundrisse* and *Das Kapital*. Opening with three sessions that moved deftly from a detailed understanding of the commodity form, the historically specific nature of abstract labour time, and forms of alienation appearing under capitalism, to the linear transformation of labour time as mapped out in EP Thompson's renowned essay *Time, Work, Discipline and Industrial Capitalism*, Academic Director Rohit Goel set the tone for robust discussions on politics and aesthetics in the section *Foundations: Critical Theory* as well as the section on *Critical Theory and Aesthetics* that will continue till late January.



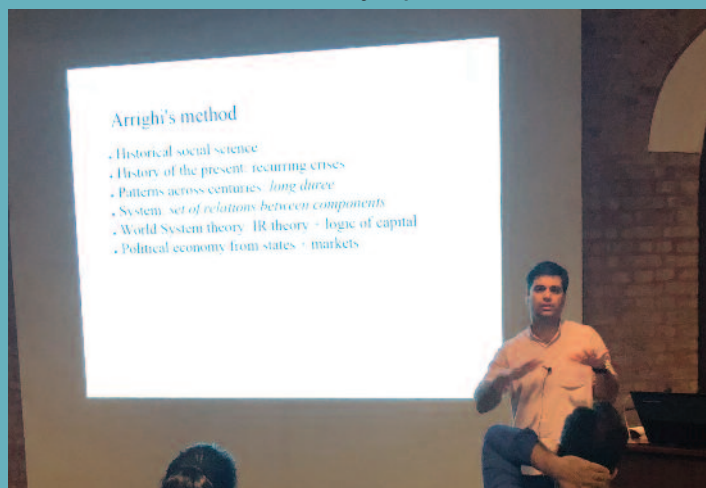
Prof. Himanshu Burte speaks during 'Space in Capitalism: Lefebvre'

Prof. Himanshu Burte's expansive lecture on the French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre especially delighted our architectural cohort who had been anticipating this lesson with a renowned architect and scholar of Bombay. By contrasting technician and humanist views, Burte ultimately showed space to be a system of spatial and social relations that can (and does) dominate us, without our even intuiting its influence in our daily lives. His many examples – from smart cities to Le Corbusier's Chandigarh – subtly brought the top-down 'modernism' of urban spaces into question. Rohit Goel continued the conversation on Lefebvre's seminal text *The Production of Space*, by asking us to consider not whether space is imposed from 'above' or formed from 'below', but rather: how do we ensure that the space we produce is not alienated from us?

Teaching two early case studies by Freud, Goel entered the complex terrain of psychoanalysis. Unpacking the universal psychological structure that Freud posits, i.e., the dialectic between the conscious and unconscious, Goel discussed how the ontologically social nature of human beings becomes the basis or starting point of psychoanalytic theory. Tying Marx, Lefebvre and Freud together through their analysis of modern subjectivity under capitalism, Goel emphasised the dangers of fetishising the objects from which we routinely find ourselves alienated, particularly

nature, as seen in the discourse on the anthropocene.

Perhaps no living intellectual has understood the problematic nature of fetishisation better than the Slovenian-Lacanian academic Slavoj Žižek. Through a careful reading of the opening chapter of *The Sublime Object of Ideology* over two classes, Goel broke down Žižek's theory of ideology, specific to the social relations of capitalism, revealing the homologous nature of value and the Freudian symptom.



Prof. Anush Kapadia speaks during 'Finance Capitalism I: Arrighi's *The Long Twentieth Century*'

Prof. Anush Kapadia of IIT (Bombay) brought Giovanni Arrighi's *The Long Twentieth Century* into CTAP for the first time, with two sessions on finance capitalism, which mapped out the grammar of finance within which we operate. If the secret of capitalism that Marx unveils is that formal 'equality' is entirely consistent with exploitation, Kapadia helped us understand how the emergence of the modern state system, and the transition that states make from trade to finance also form the

substance of modern social relations. Kapadia's lectures made us see society as an interlocking web of financial contracts, contracts that we spin collectively into the future. This financial theory of society, stemming from world-systems theory, brought a rich new vocabulary into CTAP.

The section *Critical Theory and Aesthetics* began with lectures on the art criticism and curatorial work of Richard Bartholomew and Geeta Kapur, titled 'Modernism: The Indian Context'. Nancy Adajania spoke at length on the influences of Bartholomew's poetics on her generation of art writers and curators, while Deputy Course Director Alisha Sett presented an art historical framework for understanding Kapur's most influential text *When Was Modernism*. By unravelling the feminist subtext of Kapur's writing, discussing the importance of artist-scholars like Trinh T. Minh Ha and Laura Mulvey, Sett created a dialogue between the many parallel modernisms Kapur is interested in.

Adajania returned to give a magnificent illustrated lecture on 'Art and Agency: From Chittaprosad to Navjot' that aimed to answer the question: how do artists in the Indian art world speak to issues of class, caste and gender? Ranging from Nandalal Bose's Haripura posters to Ramkinkar Baij's politics of cement, Chittaprosad's *Hungry Bengal* diary to Nilima Sheikh's *When Champa Grew Up*, Adajania wove a tale of intellectuals, workers and artists coming together to address some of the deepest divides across the subcontinent.

Rohit Goel closed the quarter with two lectures on the Frankfurt School. Addressing commonly

misunderstood readings of 'aura' in Walter Benjamin's classic essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, and the theoretical contradictions between 'listening' and 'hearing' in Theodor Adorno's *On the Fetish Character of Music and the Regression of Listening*, Goel illustrated how these two thinkers apply aesthetic and critical theory to a wide variety of artistic productions and their modes of circulation.

It was an intense and fulfilling quarter, laying the groundwork for the next section which will bring many contemporary artists and curators to the classroom to share their practices. – A.S.

Past Programmes:

I. Screening: Looks of a Lot

II. Phenomenal Listening: The Art of Jason Moran

September 21st, 2018, 6:15 - 8:30 pm

Radclani Clytus (Assistant Professor of English and American Studies, Brown University)



Photo © Jason Moran; Courtesy of the artist, RoundO Films, and Luhring Augustine, New York

I. Screening: Looks of a Lot

In this documentary, RoundO Films follows interdisciplinary jazz artist Jason Moran as he prepares for the Chicago Symphony Center premiere of *Looks of a Lot*, a collaborative multimedia project with sculptor and social practice artist Theaster Gates and musicians Tarus Mateen, Nasheet Waits, Ken Vandermark, Katie Ernst, and the Kenwood Academy High School Jazz Band. *Looks of a Lot* (henceforth *Looks*) offers a rare insider's view of two singularly innovative artists, Moran and Gates, labouring to repurpose America's complex racial history as they commemorate the victims of Chicago's epidemic gun violence. This screening marked the film's premiere in India.

Directed by Radclani Clytus, an artist-academic working at the intersections of new media, 19th-century American literature, and visual culture, *Looks*' compelling cinematic narrative moves beyond the portrait of an intense and evolving artistic process to provide a nuanced representation of the artists' psychical preoccupations. Whether Moran and Gates are riffing on the dark history of the American minstrel tradition, Franz Schubert's *Der Doppelgänger*, or ruminating on the black youth of Chicago's South Side, *Looks* captures the links between their ideas and sounds, and eventually transforms their disparate conceptual approaches into a powerful whole. Much like jazz itself, *Looks* evolves and makes tangential connections so as to cohere its sense of meaning.

The film eschews an explanatory linear account for an experimental verité documentary enacted

and sustained by several narrative sequences told in parallel order. By shadowing Moran in all facets of his intellectual and creative processes, *Looks* goes well beyond those typical documentaries that treat jazz as a type of ‘artifactual’ phenomenon and enables an aural/visual aesthetic that resonates with Moran’s own improvisational ethos. For example, if viewers pay attention to the books that are being handled by Gates and Moran (Frederick Douglass’s *My Bondage and My Freedom* and William Labov’s *Language in the Inner-City*), they can draw helpful associations between the historical contexts of black literacy and speech, and the sense of purposefulness underlying Moran’s project.



There are also moments when the meaning of this film ripples outward and away from art, and back into life. Beyond the concert hall and the music studio, a murder takes place, and Aaron Rushing, one of the young musicians who was supposed to participate in Moran’s piece, never makes it to the stage. This tragedy changes the

significance of the film and the performance, showing both the necessity and the limits of great art. What is at stake in *Looks* is nothing less than the qualification of what it means for an artist to connect empathically with a community and project that feeling as transparently as possible.

Looks chooses to layer this reality in the film so as to focus on Moran’s artistic response as a dialogical process as opposed to presenting his performance piece as a singular idea or as an event in and of itself. As we follow Moran from his Harlem studio to Gates’s Chicago atelier, and eventually to the Kenwood Academy rehearsal space, where students are practicing Moran’s music, we get a real sense of the ‘artist at work’, his thoughts, and the many worlds that he moves through. We also gain an understanding of Moran’s emotional journey, from the joy that he receives while listening to and playing jazz, to the palpable despair he experiences at the loss of one of his young performers to gun violence. The overall effect is hauntingly abrasive: anger, confusion, doubt, and perseverance all come to mind.

The film resolves itself by reintroducing more scenes from the South Side of Chicago. A cruel history looms in our thoughts as we see a sign for Emmett Till Road. The music attending this segment comes from Moran’s music box. It’s simple and plaintive, and punctuated by Gates’s singing the following line repeatedly: “There is so much blood on these streets.” The film ends and viewers now have an appropriate context for grasping *Looks*, one that reminds us of what J. A. Rogers posited nearly a century ago: “The true spirit of jazz is a joyous revolt from convention,

custom, authority, boredom, even sorrow—from everything that would confine the soul of man and hinder its riding free on the air.”¹

II. Phenomenal Listening: The Art of Jason Moran



Prof. Radiclan Clytus speaks during 'Phenomenal Listening: The Art of Jason Moran'

Radiclan Clytus's lecture focussed on the radical renewal of the practice of listening within Jason Moran's recordings and commissioned works, arguing that Moran breaks new ground by definitively expanding our notions of jazz much beyond its traditional musical boundaries. Because the audience had just experienced the cognitive dissonance generated by Moran's *Looks of a Lot*, Clytus's analysis resonated deeply, especially as he exposed them to rare footage of Moran's

collaborations with artist Kara Walker and the iconic re-staging of the *Fats Waller Dance Party*.

Moran has continually endeavored to make use of a wide range of aesthetic practices from visual and performance art, music composition, literature, dance, architecture, and digital media, in an effort to not only renew the vocabulary of jazz but also to honour black expressive culture's essential role in revivifying contemporary creative arts in America. Breaking down a series of audio samples, Clytus showed us how Moran redraws the generic borders of jazz by remixing its history, and why his sampling of black soundings ultimately lead us back to the auction block via James Baldwin:

"This music begins on the auction block. Now, whoever is unable to face this—the auction block; whoever cannot see that that the auction block is the demolition by Europe, of all human standards: a demolition, furthermore at the hour of the world's history, in the name of 'civilization'; whoever pretends that the slave mother does not weep, until this hour, for her slaughtered son, that the son does not weep for his slaughtered father; or whoever pretends that the white father did not, literally, and knowing what he was doing, hang, and burn, and castrate, his black son—whoever cannot face this can never pay the price for the 'beat' which is the key to music, and the key to life."ⁱ

'Of the Sorrow Songs: The Cross of Redemption' in James Baldwin and Randall Kenan (ed.), *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings* (New

York: Pantheon Books, 2010), 152-153.

Clytus established an alternative account of jazz praxis through the narrative arc of Moran's transition into the realm of contemporary and performance art. Clytus's argument, by focussing on the generative qualities of Moran's interdisciplinary language, and the philosophical difference between listening and 'hearing', recalibrated how we talk about jazz's multi-dimensional artistic legacy.

The evening ended with a robust question-and-answer session. Some of the key queries were: how do Moran's primarily elite and white audiences grapple with the racial histories that he is subtly addressing; and why did Clytus not choose to deal more in depth with social justice and racial violence in Chicago during the making of the film? Clytus agreed that there is a deep tension between the politics that Moran is attempting to address and the increasing seclusion of his performances in 'high art' venues. However, footage from the *Dance Party* revealed that there are still occasional moments for a black audience to commune with Moran's work.

References:

¹ J. A. Rogers, 'Jazz at Home', *The Survey*, March 1, 1925, p 665.

ⁱ James Baldwin, 'Of the Sorrow Songs: The Cross of Redemption' in James Baldwin and Randall Kenan (ed.), *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010), 152-153.

"After Evil"

December 13th, 2018, 6:30 - 8:30 pm

Robert Meister (Professor of Social and Political Thought, University of California)

Can we keep refugees out without violating human rights? Why do we disapprove of white male resentment when they view themselves as victims rather than perpetrators? Is it sufficient to register our complaint against Trump in simple terms: 'he does not care'?



Prof. Robert Meister speaks during 'After Evil'

For Robert Meister, the answers lie in the particular form of a politics of compassion that in a post-Communist world has not only replaced a political concern for historical justice with a therapeutic concern for trauma, but has transformed the very theory of justice to a theory of non-indifference to suffering. What this means is that it is not justice, but only mattering that matters, and mattering itself matters only if and when people are traumatised by their suffering. It

is then necessary and sufficient that compassion be felt for victims' ongoing trauma resulting from past evil, even as gains accumulated by beneficiaries from past evil are allowed to continue to run.

Thus, as the South African miracle is an exemplar of justice that was rendered unnecessary to reconciliation, the politics of human rights rests upon a compromise in which beneficiaries of past injustice are allowed to keep their accumulated gains in return for simply acknowledging the evils of the past, without thinking of ongoing benefits as a perpetuation of the past. Rather, the present belongs to a different time, in which they are not obliged or required to defend or justify their gains, even though such gains are accrued to them as beneficiaries from past evil. On the other hand, after evil, the only benefit accruing to victims of past evil is a moral consensus that the past is evil. However, its political price is that it is inappropriate to bring up conflicts of the past since the past is evil, and since evil is in the past, such injustice is not present anymore. Yet, given that victims of past evil continue to face ongoing trauma owing to evils of the past, it is imperative to feel sufficient compassion for traumatised victims by screening them individually on clinical symptoms of trauma. Thus, it is not injustice that matters, but mattering itself in so far as it matters to matter about oneself. Human rights activism then lies in non-indifference, in reconnecting bodies from stories, to increase people's capacity to matter to themselves, and thus to others. Human rights violation, on the other hand, is an indifference to victims' stories.

But why is one supposed to be non-indifferent?

Why does injustice matter only when people are still traumatised by it? Why is it trauma that matters, and not injustice, without contingency? Why is it that injustice does not matter while trauma does?

For Meister, the indifference to injustice, or the privileging of the mattering of trauma over the non-mattering of injustice renders human rights discourse a successor to the counter-revolutionary idea. He proposes a conception of historical justice based in financial theory as a successor to the revolutionary idea. By restating the theory of justice in terms of inter-temporal, valuable options, it becomes possible to raise the value of justice as an option by targeting the choke point of the system of finance capital i.e. liquidation of assets in political turbulence. In doing so, Meister gives the contemporary left a lot to think about it terms of political praxis. - R.S.

Historical Justice in the Age of Finance

December 14th & 15th, 2018, 6:30 - 8:30 pm

Robert Meister (Professor of Social and Political Thought, University of California)



The detailed write-up about this screening and lecture will be featured in our next Quarterly (Apr - Jun 2019).

Liberalism and its Indian Afterlife

December 19th & 20th, 2018, 6:30 - 8:30 pm

Faisal Devji (Professor of Indian History, Oxford University)

The detailed write-up about this screening and lecture will be featured in our next Quarterly (Apr - Jun 2019).

Forthcoming Programmes:

Two Sides of the Same Coin. Thoughts on Destruction and Preservation of 'Cultural Heritage' in the Middle East

February 8th, 2019, 6:30 - 8:30 pm

Mirjam Brusius (Research Fellow in Colonial and Global History, German Historical Institute London)

Archaeology and tangible heritage (artefacts, buildings and sites) have always played key roles in identity and nation-building in the Middle East. Yet scholars have yet to provide insights into what in the Middle East has historically been deemed of value, why, and for whom. Moreover, current notions of what 'cultural heritage' is and how it should be preserved are limited. The paper will treat preservation and destruction as historical phenomena, which were rarely exclusive, but rather connected and identified in crucial ways.



American Colony, Palmyra. Workmen moving massive capital. Syria Tadmur, photograph, 1920 [approximately to 1933], Photo Dept, photographer, Library of Congress,

Theoretical Foundations



Module II. Civil War

October 26th, 27th, November 1st, 2nd, 5th, 6th, 12th, 20th, 21st, and 23rd, 2018, 6:30 - 8:30 pm
Rohit Goel (Academic Director, Jnanapravaha)

Territorial conflict is a prominent news feature in our current times. A deeper understanding not only of the physical history but the pathology of civil war seems not only interesting but also significant. This course outlined an understanding of the distinction

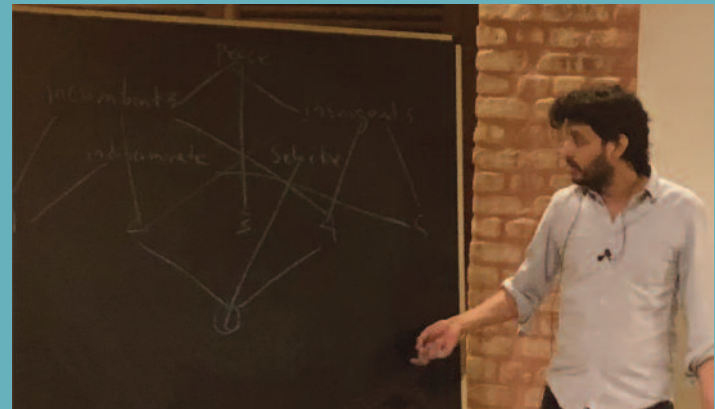
between civil war as practice and as a system of analysis. The perception of democratic peace works on an assumption that democratic countries will not fight each other, yet conflict persists as 'global civil war'.

The course started with David Armitage's *Civil Wars - A History in Ideas*. Through this text, we looked at the history and etymology of the term 'civil war'. While the text offered a history of civil

war, it did not necessarily illustrate a theory. It had started with the Romans, who linked the words civil and war, and could only do so because they had defined, or rather, conceived a definition of 'civil'. At the first signs of an internal struggle, the Romans referred back to the Greeks in an attempt to understand their own situation, which introduced us to the term 'stasis'. Through Armitage's text, the course looked at the conflict in Corcyra in 427 BCE (The Peloponnesian Wars), which was a physical manifestation of an ideological struggle between the Athenians and Spartans. Contemporary theorists refer back to this particular conflict as a primary example of civil war, just as the Romans did by retroactively looking at a particular part of stasis to explain their conflict. What was interesting is the manner in which the idea of civil war was linked to the city; cities are the place of politics, and the military belong outside of the city. The act of turning troops inwards became emblematic of civil war, so much so that civil war itself defined the history of the Roman civilization. The important idea that was constantly emphasised was the distinction between stasis and civil war, which is encompassed within the definition of citizenship, an idea that was further explored through Giorgio Agamben's *Stasis – Civil War as a Political Paradigm*.

Agamben's transcribed lectures offer an understanding of stasis as a dialectic encircling *oikos*, the family, and *polis*, the city. The discussion turned to the need to relook at the relationship between *zōē* (natural life) and *oikos*, as well as *bios* (good life) and the *polis*. Citing Nicole Loraux's essay, Agamben summarises stasis, within Greek

politics, as a performance from the *oikos*, for the *polis*, as a way to enable reconciliation. It is this reconciliation that then gives rise to the act of amnesty, which, in the Athenian context, was neither forgiveness nor repression, but rather a promise not to make bad use of memory. The importance of not forgetting is something that then becomes a deterrent for repetition. Working with the text, the discussion within the class led to the understanding of a 'threshold' that reveals stasis as either a politicised *oikos*, or a depoliticised *polis*. The text and the discussion constantly referenced back to Plato's *Republic*. It is interesting that the text is used in many ways to frame the paradigm of civil war, also serving as the founding principle for Thomas More's *Utopia*.



Rohit Goel speaks during 'Module II - Civil War'

The discussion then moved to Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* – more specifically, its original frontispiece. Analysing every element of the emblem, the discussion moved to trying to understand the constant tension between a sovereign and the city. The first thing to stand out in the image is that the village is completely empty

while the body of the sovereign seems to be an amalgamation of the many people. By declaring a sovereign, monarch or an appointed figurehead, the people become a dissolved multitude. The web that links the disunited multitude, sovereign and dissolved multitude, is connected by civil war which transforms the dissolved multitude into a disunited multitude. There are constant and strong links to Christian beliefs, particularly to that of forgiveness and absolution, ideas that are further explored in the next reading, Robert Meister's *After Evil*.

The discussion focussed on the American civil war, and more importantly, Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address*, which acted as an absolution of American guilt, transforming 'unwilling perpetrators of evil' and their victims into collective survivors. Drawing a parallel between Lincoln's redemption and the Pauline narrative, the act of rebirth legitimises the act of violence as a marker. It also implies that as collective survivors, the moment of violence, which in this discussion was the American civil war, should not be repeated, and that every American was now equal. But as current news and American late-night talk shows tell us, that is simply not the case. An increase in nationalistic narratives across the globe seems to challenge some of the existing theory on civil war, by perpetuating an 'otherness' that has already been absolved. One of the potential causes discussed during the class was the idea that contemporary humanitarian ethics has collapsed *oikos* and *polis*, where every citizen is family, allowing for a politicising of everyday acts.
- D.S.

Forthcoming Programmes:

Module III. The Emergence of Capitalism in Early Modern Europe

March 5th, 6th, 12th, 13th, 19th, 20th, April 2nd, 3rd, 8th, and 9th, 2019, 6:30 - 8:30 pm

Rohit Goel (Academic Director, Jnanapravaha)

In *Capital*, Marx offers the most systemic unpacking of the logic of capital and its contradictions, from the post-Industrial Revolution vantage of full-throttled capitalist production. However, in his sections on "primitive accumulation," Marx struggles to explain the historical "when, where, why, and how" of capitalism's emergence. This course attempts to answer these questions, considering the strongest historical scholarship on the emergence of capitalism in early modern Europe. In addition to Marx's attempt, we will consider the efforts of Max Weber (*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*), Giovanni Arrighi (*The Long Twentieth Century*), Jan de Vries (*The Industrious Revolution*), Robert Brenner (*The Brenner Debates*), Kenneth Pomeranz (*The Great Divergence*), William H. Sewell Jr. ("The Empire of Fashion"), and others.

Admissions Open

at Jnanapravaha Mumbai office.

Fees (per module)

Rs. 7,500/- (Participation required)

Rs. 10,000/- (Participation and writing required)

Community Engagement

JPM's Community Engagement offerings include (1) JPM Write, a six-week Certificate course in writing style and (2) occasional public lectures and performances in Creative Processes, Curatorial Processes, and Iconic Images as well

as book launches, concerts, film screenings, and panel discussions on topics of interest to Mumbai's and India's general public.



Past Programmes:

JPM Write: Style

September 1st, 7th, 17th, 22nd, 24th, and 29th, October 6th, 8th, 13th, and 15th, 2018.

Rohit Goel (Academic Director, Jnanapravaha)

In October, Jnanapravaha Mumbai conducted the second iteration of *JPM Write: Style*, a course oriented towards non-fiction writing – the FIRST of its kind in India. Its objective is to teach participants how to become more conscious writers by explaining the fundamental elements of writing style in professional, academic, and cultural settings. *JPM Write: Style* does not intend to dictate **how** to write, but aims to help participants become more aware of how they **choose** to write.

In 12 sessions that were conducted over the course of six weeks, *JPM Write* introduced participants to the 'Principles of Style Model' which taught them five different principles, categorised as Audience, Action, Character, Clarity and Information. The correct usage of these was stressed with several examples, class exercises and peer-reviewed assignments, with the final takeaway for students being that they could write in a manner that is in tune both with their audience as well as with the content they wish to communicate. The course was taught by Jnanapravaha's Academic Director, Rohit Goel, with Amita Kini-Singh as the Teaching Fellow.

JPM Write: Style is a writing course that is actually about *readers* and seeks to help writers see their words as their readers would, to write *non-narcissistically*. Its aim is to teach participants to always write with others in mind, whether an

internal other or an intended audience of *novices*, *intermediates*, or *experts*. Its *Principles of Style* stresses on the important tasks that must be completed so as to write clearly, directly, and elegantly. These include anticipating one's audience, writing with the intended reader in mind, and editing the text by thinking about how that reader will react.



Prof. Rohit Goel speaks during 'JPM Write: Style'

While the course is not one in grammatical-rule following, it taught participants how to ensure reader understanding by the appropriate usage of verbs, nouns, subjects and voice. The importance of using verbs to communicate actions in the world, the usage of only acceptable nominalisations, and placing strong characters as subjects, was brought home in the initial sessions. Rather than ban the

usage of the passive voice, which is often a recommendation of many style guides, *JPM Write: Style* taught the appropriate and judicious use of voice. The grammatical foundations provided by the course was hugely appreciated by the audience.



Ms. Amita Kini Singh speaks during 'JPM Write: Style'

JPM Write: Style also offered participants various strategies and syntactical forms that would promote clarity and ensure an ideal flow of information in their writing. It encouraged the use of connectors and orienters, and the maintenance of strong cores, as tools that promote reader comprehension. The audience was also encouraged to provide readers with an appropriate sequence of old and new information so as to ensure that their writing had the flow needed to keep the reader well-informed and glued to the text. Through revising their own texts, and collaborative learning, participants were taught how not to write in a dumbed down or reductive

way, and how to communicate complex ideas in a simple and elegant manner.

The programme had a mid-course and end-course review that summarised the learning, encouraged class discussions and addressed participants' queries. The faculty also shared real-world examples of great writing, which followed all five principles of style taught during the course. It ended with the handing out of *The Style Checklist*, and participants were encouraged to use it regularly while writing, until it became second nature to them. While the course also delved into depth about how writers need to work hard at cultivating a clear, direct and elegant style of writing, it was the quick tips, the dos and don'ts, the 10-second edits and final checklist that proved the most popular tools and takeaways. As the second iteration of *JPM Write: Style* came to a close, its impact, popularity and utility was clearly evident from the excellent feedback received from participants. - A.K.S.

Gieve Patel's *Collected Poems*: Poetry Reading and Discussion

September 28th, 2018, 6:30 - 8:30 pm

Gieve Patel (Writer and Painter)

Collected Poems brings together all three of Patel's previous books of verse, which have been out of print. In addition, the book includes his translations of 17th-century Gujarati mystic-poet Akho, and a section of 'New Poems'. At Jnanapravaha, Patel read selected poems from the book, while poet, curator, and cultural theorist Ranjit Hoskote engaged the poet, painter, and

actor in a discussion of his work.

Patel wrote the collection *Poems* (1966), which features *On Killing a Tree*, between the ages of 20 and 26. Hoskote spoke of this period – the intellectual climate of the late 1960s – as a time of ferment generally, with wars in Algeria, Vietnam, and a tremendous sense of upheaval in India as the Nehruvian era came to an end. The year 1967 saw a political rupture in the Naxalbari uprising. Meanwhile, Patel straddled the disciplines of theatre, painting, and poetry. His first exhibition of paintings was held in 1966. For Patel, this was a period of internal conflict. Having just finished his medical studies, he was an outsider to the art world. Established painters could not accept him, until he met Akbar Padamsee, who generously championed Gieve and his work. The world of writing was less hostile, Nissam Ezekiel became an early support and published *Poems*.

In Patel's early work, Hoskote detected a closeness to the world around: to family, to the feudal structure of master and servants, and to the gap between urban environment and countryside. "I was introducing myself to the world," explained Patel, and that his readings permeated into the work, as well as the fact that his family was partly urban and partly rural.

This discussion culminated in Patel reading the poem on his *Grandfather*, who held a large estate with tribal Varli labour – a feudal dynamic that made the young Gieve uncomfortable, and desire for "change". He would discuss these thoughts with his grandfather, and the poem is his rejoinder to Patel's theories.

Forthrightness about relations between

landowners and marginals is a continual thread across Patel's writing. The poem *Nargol* (named after the seaside village in Gujarat where his parents' seaside village in Gujarat, which he would visit annually) encapsulates all the contradictory feelings of modernity, and radical otherness from the figure of the servant, and yet the inescapable connection fraught with difficulties. In the 1970s, Patel became more politically aware and saw himself as someone with Leftist sympathies. He practiced medicine in the town of Sanjan, which is about seven miles from Nargol and the sea. So, in a way, this was a homecoming but, simultaneously, also a running away from the established and daunting theatre scene in Bombay. He needed the isolation to write *Princes*, his "idiosyncratic and difficult play". During this period, Ebrahim Alkazi emerged as his mentor across the spheres of theatre, painting, and writing.

A kind of sociological inquiry on figure of personal authority and the phenomenon of charisma is present as a topos in Patel's work. Hoskote pondered on Patel's remarkable encounters with spiritual teachers, of which Alkazi was a secular, cultural counterpart. Patel responded with two poems on authority and the reaction it engenders. The first, on when he, as an 18-year-old, caused a jovial interruption in the religious mediation of his 7-year-old cousin, *Vistasp*. The second, *The Multitude Comes to a Man*, from Patel's second book and more serious in tone, deals with authority connected to religious and spiritual aspirations. Patel followed it with what he describes a "slightly bitter, self-mocking" poem that explores the tenuous relationship between

belief and reason, *Should One Come to Me*.



Dr. Gieve Patel speaks during 'Collected Poems'

Hoskote and Nancy Adajania curated a show titled '*No Parsi is an Island*', where they used the poem, *The Ambiguous Fate of Gieve Patel*. It features a rare moment when Patel speaks on behalf of his birth community, and was written in a period of hopelessness in the 1970s, when communal riots had become commonplace. The title poem of his second book, *How Do You Withstand, Body* (1976) describes Patel's confrontation, in his 30s, with international brutality and violence — in Vietnam and Iran, and closer to home in the birth of Bangladesh — when the idea of torture as a "public event" entered his consciousness. It talks about the human body per se — not Hindu, or Muslim, or Parsi — subjected to violence repeatedly, a theme explored in the rest of the book.

Building on these themes of embattlement and alienation that suggest a universal fate of modern community, Hoskote raised the subject of translation as a means to connect with another imagination and a different literary universe. For

Patel, the possibility of translation came from Suresh Joshi, a major figure in modern Gujarati literature. Joshi copied out about 50 of Akho's verses, very generously, in his own hand, and looked them over with Patel, who made extensive notes on vocabulary problems and philosophical thinking. Patel has been working at them and translating intermittently over the last 40 years, and a few that he is completely satisfied with are included in the current volume. Akho's appeal was in his great, universal aspirations and an extraordinary contemporary presence. His feelings about his society in the 17th century resonate with what Patel feels about our society today. The poems are in different registers: some are clearly admonitory, some offer advice, others mock, and capture a variety and range of experiences. Akho was a *Jnani* and believed that the path to the infinite was through knowledge. The poem *Maya*, which Patel read, displays Akho's scepticism about religious cults that float away on a wave of emotionalism.



Dr. Ranjit Hoskote in discussion with Dr. Gieve Patel during 'Collected Poems'

Patel's reading changed around the age of 50. He was seeped in sacred literature from across the globe, particularly that of St. Teresa of Ávila and the *Upanishads*, which he describes as "some of the most glorious writings ever done". His third book, *Mirrored, Mirroring* (1991) reflect these preoccupations. After a strong engagement with the physicality of the world and the body in his previous works, Patel wanted to look in other domains. A line from St Teresa's autobiography, which for him epitomised everything she was, haunted him: "Whenever you move away from me even a little, I immediately fall to the ground". This feeling and expression of a complete, abject dependence, made something inside him rebel against it. "What about me?" he said, and forth came the poem, *A Variation on St. Teresa*.

A charming insight about Gieve emerged during the discussion with the audience. He considers being in the medical clinic a private activity, whereas writing and painting in a lonely studio are, for him, public, as one is always aware of the scrutiny and discussion the work will be amidst. Patel concluded the night with one of his new, exceptional poems, *Magenta*. It is good news indeed that Patel and his words are, once more, out there to be discovered, and for many, rediscovered. - R.N.

Forthcoming Programmes:

JPM Write: Argument

January 19th, 21st, 28th, February 4th, 9th, 16th, 18th, 23rd, 25th and March 2nd, 2019, 6:30 - 8:30

pm

Rohit Goel (Academic Director, Jnanapravaha)

In this course, students will learn to write argumentatively, whether for art catalogues, newspapers, journals, e-zines, blogs, or for academic courses and publishers. Over ten sessions, we will address the ideal structure of completed texts — Introduction, Text Body, and Conclusion — in a manner that will draw readers into the narrative flow and arguments you wish to present. Why should readers care about your text? Are you building on existing points of view and literatures or attempting to deliver new positions and findings? How do you form a thesis statement and where in the text should it appear? What strategies of narrative flow are most conducive to delivering your arguments? Have you effectively transitioned between sentences as well as between paragraphs? How do you ensure you fulfill the promises of argumentation you make to your readers, thereby meeting their expectations?

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Fee: INR 10,000/-

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At Jnanapravaha Mumbai office.

For more information visit www.jp-india.org or email us at info@jp-india.org.

Creative Processes

Past Programmes:

Zarina: Floating on the Dark Sea

December 18th, 2018, 6:30 pm

Sandhini Poddar (London-based Art Historian)

The detailed write-up about this screening and lecture will be featured in our next Quarterly (Apr - Jun 2019).



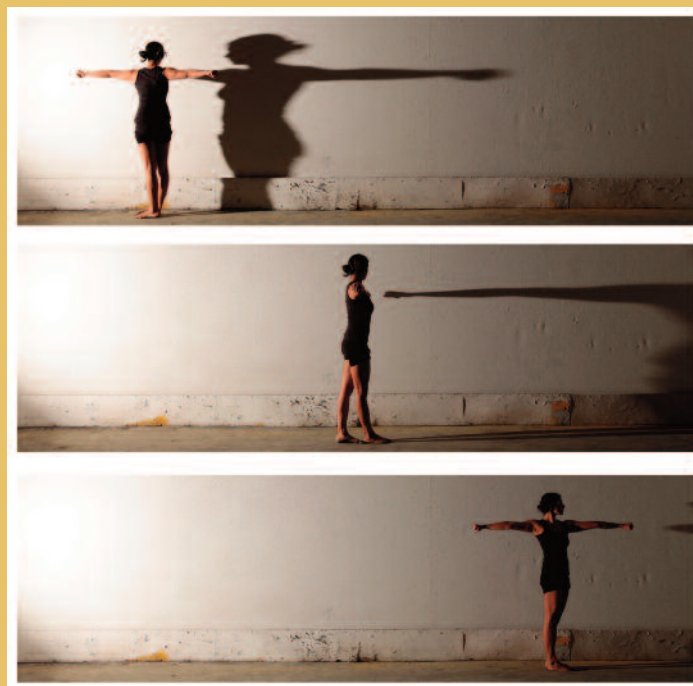
Photo Credit: David Heald, Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation

The Rigorous Practice of Freedom

February 26th & 27th, 2019, 6:30 - 8:30 pm

Padmini Chettur (Contemporary Dancer, India)

Please check our website in January for more details.



Forthcoming Programmes:

Walking on/off the line : Shilpa Gupta

February 5th, 2019, 6:30 - 8:30 pm

Shilpa Gupta (Contemporary Artist, India)

Please check our website in January for more details.

Curatorial Processes

Past Programmes:

May You Live in Interesting Times

December 10th, 2018, 6:30 - 8:30 pm

Ralph Rugoff (Curator) and Jitish Kallat (Artist)

The detailed write-up about this screening and lecture will be featured in our next Quarterly (Apr - Jun 2019).

Forthcoming Programmes:

Parapolitics: Cultural Freedom and the Cold War

January 24th, 2019, 6:30 - 8:30 pm

Nida Ghose (Curator and Writer, India)

It is a well-known fact that the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) secretly funded culture during the Cold War. Enlisted in shoring up an anti-Communist consensus in the service of American hegemony, intellectuals and artists became a strategic target and modernism became a weapon in the rapidly developing arsenal of 'peaceful' techniques. The exhibition and publication project *Parapolitics: Cultural Freedom and the Cold War* is not about revealing that scandal, despite the lack of engagement it has met from museums. Rather, it questions whether the canon of Western modernism can be 'globalized' retroactively, without confronting the ideological structures and institutional narratives that supported and exported it. Employing the history of one of the CIA's front

organizations, the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), *Parapolitics* reconsiders the political appropriation of aesthetic form — such as the instrumental use of abstraction and realism — in the 20th century. It traces how the struggle for hegemony helped shape the way modern art came to be defined and defended as 'free' — that is, fundamentally individual and beyond ideology. The inherent contradictions and moral ambiguities of advocating freedom by means that are themselves outside of democratic accountability have had consequences for how intellectual and creative autonomy are conceived of in the anxious liberal democratic consensus that pervades our present. Drawing attention to what the binary logic of the Cold War overshadowed, excluded, and rendered impossible, *Parapolitics* seeks to recover the conflict lines that have animated artistic choices and that implicitly haunt the field of contemporary art until today.



Doug Ashford, Bunker 2, 2017

Jnanapravaha Mumbai is deeply indebted to the following for their support:

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Announcements

**Certificate Course - 'Southeast Asian Art and Architecture'
(14th February - 26th April, 2019)**



From the 5th to the 14th century, a series of Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms emerged in Southeast Asia. The cultures of these kingdoms were deeply enriched by the religious movements, texts, kingship, art/architecture, philosophy, science, scripts and gods that were of Indic origin. However,

the selections made by the Southeast Asian societies transformed the source material with abundant creativity. Indic seeds were planted in local earth.

The reason for the adoption of Indic concepts and beliefs by Southeast Asian societies and the

process through which they were assimilated by the locals are extremely difficult to pin down. The earliest Vishnu images of Southeast Asia were partly Indian in style and fully Indian in their iconography, but this need not mean that the symbolism was understood only in Indic terms. The process of acculturation begins necessarily with a perception of the relevance of the original concept, but embedding in the local culture entails new layers of meaning that are hard to determine. For example, the 12th-century Khmers worshipped Vishnu in the vast palatial Angkor Wat but today the three-metre-high icon of Vishnu is venerated as the Ta Reac, head of the earth spirits.

Future research has to address questions such as when and why specific Indic cultural elements came to be adopted and adapted by Southeast Asians.

The course is designed to help students familiarise themselves with Hindu-Buddhist art, and material culture of Southeast Asia from early centuries to the advancement of Islam in the 14th century. A range of approaches based on current international scholarship will enable students to critically analyse key representative monuments, sculpture and artefacts. Students will be required to write a catalogue entry of 1,000 to 1,200 words on an object as an important means of reinforcing their foundational knowledge of this region.

This certificate course comprises about 23 sessions.

Duration: 14th February 2019 - 26th April 2019;
Classes mainly on Thursdays and Fridays from

3.30 - 6.00 pm

Eligibility: Graduation Degree

Admission Requirements:

- A copy of your last degree certificate
- A copy of your complete biodata
- One passport size photograph

Fees: INR 18,000/-

For further information, visit www.jp-india.org or
e-mail us at info@jp-india.org

JPM Student Review

Orientalism — A European Fantasy of the East

Rutwij Nakhwa (JPM Alumnus)

This essay seeks to explore what it means to think “Orientalism” as a European fantasy of the East, rather than a body of European knowledge about the East that is either simply incorrect or biased.

Introduction: Orientalism as a Symptom of the West

The Orient was almost a European *invention*, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences.¹

- Edward Said, *Orientalism*

For Said, Orientalism is a “style of thought”², based on a distinction made between “the Orient” or the East and “the Occident” or the West, which permeates writing across disciplines — literature, philosophy, economics, political theory, imperial administration — and forms: theory, epics, novels, journalism, official records, etc. Said detects a constant “interchange”³ between the more imaginative thereby fictional, and academic thereby (ostensibly) factual meanings of Orientalism. But crucially, Orientalism is not just an invention on the level of thought but “a Western

style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.”⁴ The Orientalist bias, then, is one that thinks the East — in contrast to the West — as inferior, sensual (and therefore irrational), cruel, etc. But is this all Orientalism is? A problematic bias or an erroneous style that could be corrected, resulting in a better world for all. I shall use the analogy of a dream to tackle this question.

A dream consists of its manifest content, i.e. the events that take place within the dream (its text), and latent dream-thoughts, the dream’s underlying “secret” thoughts that are re-presented through its text. One could think of the discourse of “Orientalism” (as presented by Said) to be the manifest content of Europe’s knowledge of the East. This knowledge is obviously⁵ incorrect and/or prejudiced, and embodies an “inherent” “Orientalist” bias of the West towards the East. Said, in his opus, *Orientalism*, exposes the “secret” of the canonical knowledge produced by the Western High Humanist tradition, insofar as it is not simply “pure” knowledge but always-already⁶ tinged with this Orientalist bias, which had hitherto remained hidden. This secret, hidden bias, would constitute the Orientalist discourse’s latent dream-thought.

To clarify, the dream is a *symptom* that betrays a

traumatic (repressed) kernel in the unconscious. To get trapped in an endless analysis of the latent dream-thought, or the Orientalist bias, would entail a “fundamental theoretical error”⁷, which Said arguably makes. To think of Orientalism as a European *fantasy* of the East would be to move beyond this rigorous but simplistic analysis that elucidates the hidden dimension of Western knowledge. *True* interpretation of the Orientalist dream/discourse would entail analysing the *form* of this knowledge rather than just its “secret” content. This crucial form is the ‘dream-work’, i.e. the process through which the latent dream-thought (which is obvious and known to the dreamer) manifests in the specific way it does. The analysis of the dream-work is what holds the key to that repressed kernel in the unconscious, which is the ultimate motivation of the dream, i.e. the symptom, which, in this case, is the problematic discourse of Orientalism. Moving beyond Said, Alain Grosrichard analyses⁸ the dream-work of Orientalism in his book, *The Sultan’s Court*.

Orientalism as a Western Fantasy of the East

It is perhaps in the fantasy that one has to look for the secrets of political domination and its mechanism, although it seems far removed from the more palpable social realities. And above all, fantasy is not some realm of pure ideas and representations, for it ultimately relies on enjoyment, the stuff that irretrievably sullies the supposed ideal purity; it is the mechanism of ‘production’ and canalization of enjoyment, and in this

way it may hold the key to our status as subjects — both political subjects and subjects of desire — and to our practices.⁹

Grosrichard’s primary object of study is the fantasy, the “distilled” form of a fiction that remains consistent across various Western discourses on the East — the spectre of Asiatic despotism. Briefly, this is characterised by an all-powerful master, who subjects his population to totalitarian rule. The despot is bound neither by law nor by nature¹⁰. His only concern is his own relentless enjoyment, at the expense of his population, which is that of slaves. And at the heart of this fantasy, within the Sultan’s court, is the seraglio, the site of unalloyed sex and enjoyment. It is the void into which there is a constant (one-way) flow of goods, women, and *jouissance* (enjoyment).

By its structure and its way of life, the seraglio thus appears as a complex apparatus, built from start to finish in order to suck from outside it and everywhere beyond it all that has worth as an object of *jouissance*, in order to purify it, load it to its greatest potency and stockpile it in order to prevent even the smallest particle being lost or diverted to other paths besides those that lead to the despot, whose glorious body alone can make credible this dream of an unalloyed sexual happiness.¹¹

But as Grosrichard traverses this fantasy¹² (in other words, *goes through* it), breaking it down into its various elements and actors, analysing each in meticulous detail, he exposes the internal

contradictions and contingency that permeate the fantasy.

The East as a Screen for Western Anxiety

At the first instant, the texts that Grosrichard juxtaposes reveal an uncanny resonance between the fiction of despotism and the French monarchy. Montesquieu and his *Persian Letters* (a fictional novel), one of Grosrichard's primary sources, employs this resonance to create a connective chain between the (fictitious) seraglio of Isfahan in Iran, and contemporary Parisian socio-political reality¹³. At once, despotism appears to be something far removed, foreign and unnatural to the West but also something that it is always in danger of slipping into.¹⁴ Towards the end of the 17th century, an anxiety arose in the West, as it found reflections of the despotic Orient in its own monarchies — it felt threatened by the possible perversion of its own socio-economic order.¹⁵ This anxiety was embodied by a vast amount of literature on the Oriental spy, in which his gaze would haunt the West. In which, for Grosrichard, “An entire century took *pleasure* in making itself seen through what it burned to go and see; in revealing to itself the truth about its princes, its obeisances, its way of making love — in short, all its madness — through the artifice of a gaze which, it tells itself, is foreign.”¹⁶ Indeed, the Orient was merely a “setting and a screen” for the fantasy, which actually functions in and for the West.¹⁷

A Vanishing Master

As the book delves deeper into the fantasy and its emblematic texts, two prominent driving elements

of despotic power in the Orient emerge — the letter, the despot's written command¹⁸ and his all-pervasive gaze.

[T]o be master is to see. The despot can be stupid, mad, ignorant, drunk or diseased, but what does it matter so long as he sees. Not seeing means being condemned to obey. Under the despotic regime, where obedience is always 'blind', the blind man is the emblematic figure of the subject¹⁹... Whether he [the despot] appears, at regular intervals, framed by a window, or hides; whether it is obligatory to show oneself to him when he emerges, or instead prostrate oneself out of sight — the despot tends always to be constituted as a pure 'being of the gaze', simultaneously peripheral and central, enclosing and enclosed, since he is this gaze which is imagined to look upon everyone else, and this unique gaze which, from the centre of the Palace, is cast down upon the City, the Empire and the World.²⁰

Paradoxically, the Great Mughal was tied in a reciprocal bondage²¹ with his subjects — of having himself shown (albeit from a great height) at the regular intervals — failing which they would mutiny. As it were, the Oriental king, “at first sight” the master of the gaze, ultimately, is subjected by that very gaze. The enigma of the despot (and his power), necessarily, needs to be sustained by hiding him away in the seraglio, i.e. through his absence, and carefully displayed (yet hidden) presence. Indeed, the oriental kings are “kings through display”.²²

The second device of despotic power is that of the letter. The depot's word merges with the letter, which goes beyond and supersedes his word. The letter does not merely represent the king's command, it *is* the command itself. The letter *is* the despot in all his power ("The despot's name is itself the despot"²³). Through it, the despot's power is not communicated but *transmitted*, as a whole, to its messenger, the first chance comer who must unquestioningly carry out the will, as his own²⁴. "[T]his complete transmission of power is possible only because each man is nothing in himself, and can be merged with the signifier with which the master desires to mark him and make him serve as a neutral and transitory aid."²⁵

To be sure, the category of "each man", who is nothing in himself, includes the despot as well. The twin registers of the imaginary gaze and the symbolic letter sustain the image of the all-powerful despot who is everywhere, but at the same time efface him through their very movement, exposing that he is nothing and nowhere. Despotism functions as a self-perpetuating machine, wherein even the despot himself becomes superfluous.

From the Despot to the Vizier — A Chain of Enjoyment

Through the seal of his name, the despot elevates a subject, who is nothing, to the highest office of the vizier, instantly transmitting "the whole of his power to him. The vizier becomes the despot."²⁶ But, the vizier can only be the despot, desire like him ("his will, like that of the despot, is made

manifest arbitrarily, suddenly and absolutely"²⁷) in so far as he enjoys "the good graces of the despot". Paradoxically, while the vizier stands in for his absent, hidden master and rules in his name, he is seemingly omnipotent, yet, were he to displease the despot, his power (and his life) would be instantly taken. The vizier appears, at once, to be omnipotent and impotent. As such, the position of the vizier is oriented towards death, which to Grosrichard presents a *radical choice*:

[I]n the despotic State, either one lives but counts for nothing, or one counts, but on the condition of giving one's life. In these terms, freely offering his head to the despot when he demands it is not the vizier's failure. It is his triumph. This death must be seen as the only moment when the vizier knows with absolute clarity that he is the Other's wish, and when he is fully in control of responding to this wish. He can finally desire like him, in both senses simultaneously.²⁸

The despot concedes his power to the vizier, and through him to the rest of his subjects, as the despot-vizier relationship is endlessly mirrored up to the last rung of the populace, which is "endlessly subject to tithes and taxes, with no other care but to stay alive, in anonymity and nullity" — or what Giorgio Agamben calls 'bare life'²⁹. But in return, the despot demands the gift of *jouissance*.

In a world where there are those who have nothing and are nothing, while the Other is and possesses everything, after the gift of

life the spontaneous form assumed by the gift of love is *flattery*; it is the giving of an image which offers the despot more than he has, but supposes in exchange that he will accept that he is not everything, since you cannot be flattered except by someone who matters in your eyes. A momentary abandonment of power is therefore offset by a gain in *jouissance*.³⁰

The descending transmission of power will therefore be answered by a rising flux of presents of every kind — which however, stand always as gifts of love against gifts of existence, as ‘surplus enjoyment’ against ‘surplus power’ ...³¹

Therefore, the economy that governs the functioning of the despotic regime is that of enjoyment, best summed up by the maxim: “Always more *jouissance*”³². However, as Grosrichard’s analysis explicates, the omnipotent despot is essentially always engaged in his own *jouissance* and thereby *unable* to exercise power, which is completely delegated to the figure of the vizier, his surrogate. “Instead of being an ultimate goal, the *jouissance* of the despot then becomes the primary cause of the transmission of power, which is its necessary effect”³³. In the final analysis, at the heart of the seraglio lies not the all-powerful being, but a figure of extreme lack in the despot who is shielded, ever since birth, from the world, completely unaccustomed to the battlefield or capable of commanding troops, or even satisfying women. To be sure, it is precisely the despot’s

status as nothingness that sustains the despotic machine. The despot’s existence as a void is what makes his name omnipotent and his gaze omnipresent. Despotism, as a fantasy, can retain its structure permanently at the expense of the figures of the despot and his subjects, who are mere phantasms³⁴, perpetually replaceable and alterable.³⁵

A Dialectic of Lack and Fullness

A common thread emerges, of a negativity against which every positive, necessarily, must be defined; exemplified by the figure of the Oriental despot who is simultaneously everything and nothing. To reiterate, the fantasy of the despotism has no bearings on an empirical place that is the East. The devices of the letter and the gaze — emblematic of the registers of the symbolic and the imaginary — are projections onto the East of the West’s (and our own) disavowed reality. In Western discourse, the legendary figure of Mohammed first appears as a “glorious body”³⁶ with incredible features such as perfumed waste products and an infinite sexual prowess. Is this not another projection of Western desire? A necessary counterpoint to the Christian tenets of sacrifice and renunciation for the attainment of supreme spiritual goodness. Islam, with its pursuit of supreme sexual pleasure, becomes Christianity’s phantasmic other.³⁷ Through Islam and Mohammed, and their alleged sanction of polygamy, despotism is exposed to be bound up with a relation between the sexes. “The sexual *jouissance* without limits which is allowed him [i.e. the despot] as an exclusive right is also the means of his absolute power and the

fundamental explanation of the form this power takes.” As such, the “natural” inequality between sexes in the Orient (as opposed to Europe) is reproduced in the relation of the despot (the man) to the subjects who are reduced to the position of slaves (women).

Grosrichard’s *going through* culminates at the vanishing point of the Orientalist fantasy: the seraglio at the centre of the Sultan’s court, which takes the form of a repetitive, stereotypical image that remains unchanged across accounts, whether “factual” or fictional³⁸.

By its structure and its way of life, the seraglio thus appears as a complex apparatus, built from start to finish in order to suck from outside it and everywhere beyond it all that has worth as an object of *jouissance*, in order to purify it, load it to its greatest potency and stockpile it in order to prevent even the smallest particle being lost or diverted to other paths besides those that lead to the despot, whose glorious body alone can make credible this dream of an unalloyed sexual happiness.³⁹

The crucial point is that the seraglio can be imagined as the site of pure enjoyment only due to being surrounded on all sides by prohibition. It is populated by a class of beings marked by a distinctive lack — the blind, mutes, dwarves, eunuchs, women and children — who confer on to the despot his essential attributes. They create a relief or a hollow, against which the resplendent image of the despot is projected, and who, in all his

fullness, embodies each of those qualities the seraglio’s inhabitants lack. They are the negative stand-ins for his positive, complete being. Moreover, the despot is either a descendant of a foreign conqueror, or as in Persia, the seraglio’s inhabitants are all foreigners, their non-nativeness establishing a commonality against which the despot stands out as the singular other. “They are the living analysis of his Unity, the active affirmation that he alone has eyes and speech, the cosmological proof of his omnipotence and uniqueness.”⁴⁰

The women in the seraglio, who are “without number”, are closely guarded and monitored at all times. For, “it is rumored that at the impenetrable heart of the seraglio bums a fettered and frustrated lust, and that the piercing eyes of the old women, alert to every vestige of *jouissance* kept hidden from the master, might at every moment be deceived, for all their precautions.”⁴¹ The despot enjoys, not the *other* sex, as much as the multiplicity of women; an imagined plurality that only further serves to highlight his singularity.

Furthermore, the foreign status of the children is of singular importance. They come from another world i.e. the Christian world, as tribute or trophies of war and are essentially blank slates, “orphans with no natural or cultural roots, no memory”⁴². They are made equal through a solemn circumcision ceremony which marks them as sons in the name of their symbolic father, the despot. They lack any subjective characteristics or inherent value, but, trained by the seraglio’s eunuchs, are

technically qualified for their roles in despotic order. At this point, Grosrichard offers a remarkable insight. In many eyes, both the eunuch and pedagogical saint were model educators, but, under the modern liberal paradigm, came to be criticised for serving an arbitrary, tyrannical power (that of the despot and God respectively), and, further, for having sacrificed being men, to serve their master better, leading to a “cruel zeal”. But, despite many differences, does the modern State too not claim to disregard both birth and property in its servants? Does the state also not claim children away (for a time) from their natural parents for the purposes of education, asking in return only for a tribute of love for itself? And similar to the despot’s children, the Oriental subjects are characterised by a lack of any inherent-value but that which arises from employment, of a fortune that is contingent to the whims of the despot. Ultimately, despotism’s essence of power lies in the “ineradicable absurdity of desiring what one fears and loving what kills you”⁴³, and this dialectic of fear and love finds its remarkable twin in the invisible hand of the market (fear) and the abstract quantity of money (love). In the final analysis, the utility of the fiction of exotic despotism (governed by an economy of *jouissance*) was to sustain and justify the modern Western order, of which it was the phantasmic other. An order which sought to prohibit despotic enjoyment, or rather “professed not to want *jouissance* unless it is reinvested in the service of the State”. What this means is that:

[T]here are not two economies (on the one hand the despotic and totalitarian, on the other the bourgeois and liberal) but, rather,

two interchangeable languages to describe the same deception, off which every variety of political power lives.

The East as the Eunuch of the West

The most crucial inhabitants of the Seraglio, akin to its children in their *blankness* are the eunuchs, as it were, even more blank, not being susceptible to bonds of family and friendship and neither to passions of love and ambition. The eunuchs’ only attachment is their duty, which is their *raison d’être* and, in that sense, making them far superior to other men. The eunuch is the figure of supreme lack, a negative par excellence to the fullness of the despot. His role is not restricted to an irreplaceable usefulness as the “harmless” guardian of the harem and is crucial in the economy of desire and *jouissance*. It is by gazing at his lacking figure that others imagine the invisible completeness of the despot. In principle, he can do nothing to the women, but also everything, since, it is through him that women desire the despot. In a reversal of the logic of the vizier, the eunuch in his impotence becomes omnipotent.

The eunuch’s figure sprouted a tremendous anxiety about sex, and this anxiety strangely posits the effacement of sexual difference as a necessary precondition to the thriving of despotism. The anxiety further intensified with the knowledge of women marrying and desiring eunuchs in Asian countries. “There is something here which eighteenth-century rationalism fails to understand: that in the same period, and in the same nation,

both the presence and the absence of an organ can be endowed with a similar effect, and that power accrues equally to those who have it and those who do not ...” The eunuch is the paradigmatic figure of the dialectic between castration and mastery (lack and fullness). While having been *actually* (physically) castrated, the eunuch constantly eludes being pinned down to his symbolic identity (position) — always-already being less and more than just a “eunuch”⁴⁴. The eunuch’s marriage exposes the “whole essence of marriage, and ... the sexual norm which is to hold sway within it.”⁴⁵ In the eunuch, the woman desires the appearance of a man and the man, the appearance of a woman. A “semblance of being” instead of the real thing. Grosrichard thinks of the eunuch not as neither man nor woman, nor as simultaneously man and woman.

[W]hat if ... anatomical reality [has] misled us? What if, instead of vainly seeking the eunuch in between these two sexes existing naturally for all eternity, we were to make the eunuch primary, so that each of the two sexes would then be defined in relation to him? ... What if the difference between the sexes came second, and castration came first, and one became a man or a woman only in relation to it?⁴⁶

The eunuch exposes (and guarantees) the impossibility of the sexual relationship — between man and woman — and in the same instant becomes its mediator.

It is ... not surprising that the phenomenon of despotism should appear simultaneously,

for the eighteenth century, as a primordial, archaic and 'natural' form of power, which a society made up of men and women freed from their prejudices must set themselves to outstrip by setting up new interpersonal relations — and as the inevitable outcome of a decline which finds expression in the relaxation of morals, the shipwreck of the family, and sexual disorder, which, in the eyes of many, are characteristic of contemporary society.⁴⁷

The eunuch sets up a relationship of love between the master and the subjects, to substitute an original relation of natural dependence (and dominance).⁴⁸ In the final analysis, like the eunuch, the fantasy of the East provides the cut against which relations of domination in the West are effaced through a dialectic of fear and love. The fantasy always produces a decoy (in this case, the spectre of Oriental despotism) — a lack that one must fill (love) or flee from (fear) — to cover up a *real* lack. It is no wonder that today we are haunted by a multitude of phantasms, that of Communism (fear), or of Capitalism (love), of geological disaster (fear), of terrorism and fundamentalism (fear and love), of refugees (fear and love) of authoritarian masters (imagined as both full and empty). These decoys, or fetishes, cover up a *primordial lack* — the ontological minimum distance between human beings and the world — which for psychoanalysis is coextensive with subjectivity as such. Structurally, the fantasy (at the level of form, with varied manifestations in content) encapsulates everyone. Fantasy is a necessary condition for

systems of domination, of which capitalism is the paradigmatic example. Fantasies of capital allow us to exist in an endless comfort of perpetual repetition, i.e. to exist without creating — life with an orientation towards death. To traverse the fantasy would be to confront the primordial lack instead of disavowing it.

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FOOTNOTES

¹ "Introduction" in Said. 1979, 1 (my emphasis)

² Ibid., 2

³ Ibid., 3

⁴ Ibid., 4. Said acknowledges Orientalism as a material phenomenon of the East's domination by the West, yet he struggles to allocate priority between its material and discursive dimensions. Ultimately, he attempts to expose Orientalism through an immanent critique from within his own field, i.e. the cannons of Western High Humanist literature, while maintaining the tenuous claim of it being an all-pervasive, all-encompassing material as well as discursive phenomenon.

⁵ "[I]t is obvious that this fantasy, elaborated down

to the smallest detail, does not correspond to any Asian reality. It is easy to expose the unreliability of sources, the use of highly dubious hearsay, the blatant partiality and prejudice of the authors, their meticulous reports on things which they, by their own account, could not possibly have witnessed (first and foremost, the seraglio), and so on." (Dolar, Mladen. "Introduction" in Grosrichard. 1998, xiii)

⁶ Said even traces this bias back to Greek Antiquity.

⁷ My analogy of dream interpretation is inspired by the fundamental homology that Žižek finds between the interpretive procedure of Marx and Freud, in their analysis of the commodity and dreams respectively. See "How Did Marx Invent in Symptom" in Žižek. 2008, 3 – 55

⁸ "Grosrichard's method in dealing with this fantasy, while obviously firmly rooted in Lacanian psychoanalysis, is remarkably unobtrusive ... His interventions seem to be minimal, almost imperceptible: the texts are just disposed, rearranged, articulated, punctuated, pieced together in a pattern ... it produces an 'estrangement effect' in which the texts, although apparently hardly tampered with in their original setting, are deprived of their seemingly natural and self-evident air - they unexpectedly show their contrived and contingent side. One could even venture to say that Grosrichard does not really engage in interpretation - not in the usual sense. There is a famous Lacanian dictum that 'one doesn't interpret the fantasy' (as opposed to the symptom which demands endless interpretation) — one has to 'go through' [traverser] the fantasy, and Grosrichard leads us by the hand in this going

through, this 'traversing', showing us both its profound consistency and its total contingency." (Dolar, Mladen. "Introduction" in Grosrichard, 1998, xi)

⁹ Ibid., x

¹⁰ For Montesquieu, the Asian countries are, *in nature*, different from Europe. The warm climate makes the populace highly susceptible to total slavery, and hence the figure of the despot is a natural outcome. "There are places in the world where nature gives rise to such unnatural beings as men who are slaves and able to tolerate a government of this nature..." (Grosrichard. 1998, 41)

¹¹ Ibid., 127

¹² See footnote 3 above.

¹³ John Law's bankruptcy as the last link in a historical chain leading from the *Ancien Régime* to Despotism (Grosrichard. 1998, 28). For Voltaire, this connective chain belied Montesquieu's political aim of restoring the privileges of the Old Nobility. In the same vein, for Jean Coppin, the "savagery" of the Ottoman Sultan's was the justification for a new crusade; despotism as a plan of divine Providence, a chance for Christianity to redeem itself. The fiction of despotism also legitimated European colonial interventions as *enlightened* despotism. See note 30 in Grosrichard. 1998, 200

¹⁴ "The despotic fantasy served as an ideological weapon at the time of the Enlightenment, a handy weapon to strike the opponent, a warning and a constant inner peril. The rising bourgeoisie could denounce the proponents of the old order as riddled with the despotic disease, bearers of an irrational privilege and perpetrators of slavery. The

aristocracy could present democratic demands as an extension of despotic levelling, soulless de-individualization, loss of rank and distinction. In both cases it was exhibited as a monstrous counter-nature, a spectre demonstrating what our society could become unless we used some radical means to prevent it, though the recommended antidotes were sharply opposed. It was endowed with a curious ambivalence, both confined to the exotic Asian horrors and corroding our own social structure from within, haunting our past, present and future, Asia in the midst of Europe. It could effortlessly cross the boundaries of inside/outside, far away/close, alien/familiar. Strangely enough, opposed ideologies and classes could use the same panoply as a common background, a shared store of clichés, as if the reality of fantasy were immune to class and status differences." (Dolar, Mladen. "Introduction" in Grosrichard. 1998, xiv)

¹⁵ Grosrichard. 1998, 20

¹⁶ Ibid., 25 (my emphasis)

¹⁷ Dolar, Mladen. "Introduction" in Grosrichard. 1998, xiv

¹⁸ Grosrichard. 1998, 56

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 60

²¹ Ibid., 59

²² Ibid., 60

²³ Ibid., 1998, 66

²⁴ "The king gives a written order for a certain child to be blinded and this order is given to the first chance corner, in Persia there is no official executioner Once the order is carried into the

seraglio, it is quickly understood, provoking cries and weeping; but at last the child must be released. The eunuchs take him to the cruel messenger; who throws them the order ... and then squatting down, he seizes the child, puts him across his knees with his face upturned and grips his head with his left arm. Then with one hand he opens his eyelids, and with the other takes his dag by the tip, and rips out the pupils one after the other, still whole, and undamaged, as one does with an unripe walnut. He puts them in his handkerchief and takes them off to the King." (Ibid., 55)

²⁵ Ibid., 65

²⁶ Ibid., 72

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 73

²⁹ For a brief account of Agamben's work, see Adam Kotsko. "How to Read Agamben". Los Angeles Review of Books.

<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/how-to-read-agamben/> (accessed December 10, 2018)

³⁰ Grosrichard. 1998, 73.

³¹ Ibid., 74

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 75

³⁴ "[L]ike his vizier the despot has importance only by virtue of an all-powerful name, for which he is merely the reference point or imaginary support. The despot is nothing without his vizier, who, being effaced in his name, thereby constitutes him as his master. In other words, the vizier creates the despot just as much as the despot creates the vizier." (Ibid., 81)□

³⁵ To clarify, this void at the heart of the seraglio is never perceptible to the Asiatic subjects as such.

The void, this primal lack is covered up by the imaginary figure of the despot, without which the system will collapse. And with every symbolic production of the despot's figure, his potency in the register of the imaginary will only become greater. Moreover, the despot also has the imaginary sanction of religion. Although the Islamic law is written and unchangeable, it names the despot as its primary interpreter: "The point is that by affecting to respect the Law through them [the Grand Mufti and others], the despot endows this Law with a transcendence and an omnipotence which are invested in him in exchange, endowing his speech and his name (and similarly all those who command in his name, across the chain of despotism) with their absolute symbolic power. Or — to be more precise — the despot, too, by submitting to it like everyone else, endows the Law with its universal character, while he alone receives from it the power to speak *imperatively*." (Ibid., 92)

³⁶ Ibid., 101

³⁷ Just as the Enlightenment (and this is the period that Grosrichard has chosen for his analysis) with its self-image of rationality has Oriental Despotism as its phantasmic Other. Interestingly, "[A]ccording to the principles of their faith the Mahommedans are obliged to use violence in order to destroy other Religions; none the less they have tolerated them for several centuries. The Christians were commanded only to preach and educate; none the less they have been exterminating by fire and by sword those who are not of their religion." (Bayle quoted in Ibid., 113)

³⁸ Ibid., 125

³⁹ This quotation has been repeated for emphasis

(same as footnote 11)

⁴⁰ Grosrichard. 1998, 128

⁴¹ Ibid, 142

⁴² Ibid., 132

⁴³ Ibid., 46

⁴⁴ “Someone is a 'eunuch' just as he is a senator, or a father, or whatever: just as he is a man.” (Ibid., 156)

⁴⁵ Ibid., 158

⁴⁶ Ibid., 161

⁴⁷ Ibid., 178

⁴⁸ Ibid., 163

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