Framing 'Pre-Modern Indian Art': Art and History

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IN ART HISTORY AND AESTHETICS

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis titled **Framing 'Pre-Modern Indian Art': Art and History** submitted by Sarada Natarajan for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Art History and Aesthetics incorporates the results of independent investigations carried out by the candidate herself under my supervision.

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To the memory of my father and his irrepressible sense of curiosity and wonder;

And to my grandmother, who has always made the past seem like an intriguing place.

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Contents

PREFACE

As art history students in Baroda, we were trained to identify the formal and aesthetic qualities, stylistic variations and iconographical complexities of a wide range of artefacts ranging from Indus Valley terracottas to Pahadi miniatures. We absorbed an immense amount of information about the original cultural milieux within which these works were produced and received, the textual resonances of particular iconic forms, the social and political contexts within which they were deployed, patronage systems and guild formations. Understandably, the more we learnt about these artefacts, the more saturated they became with contextual significance, the more we valued them. This alone, we felt, was sufficient justification for further art historical research.

It took me a few years out of the institutional cocoon of academic art history to question the somewhat conventional nature of this kind of valuation, not to mention its obvious circularity. At the margins of my consciousness lingered the possibility of another kind of value, based on an experience of these objects far removed from that offered by mainstream art history research. Examining my motivations for studying pre-modern Indian art, I realized that what drew me to the discipline in the first place was a series of highly subjective experiences. *Encountering t*he Great Relief at Mamallapuram face-to-face, or the exquisite early Mughal miniatures at the National museum, or the colossal Buddha sculptures in the Kanheri caves – each of these encounters was a momentous event not even remotely connected with all the analyzing and interpreting we did in the classroom. The experience of encounter was a powerfully affective one, with an inescapable *corporeal* component. It became increasingly clear to me that the capacity that these remarkable productions had to stimulate this kind of affect had little to do with the historical pedigree of the artefacts, their antiquity, the meanings they communicated or the metaphysics they embodied. In stark contrast to their modest and well-ordered procession through the pages of art history texts and in slide-shows, the objects I encountered in the field exuded an uncontrollable, transgressive *presence* that even the most unimaginatively conceived museums could not repress.

This powerful sense of *disconnect* then, between the objects I studied in the classroom and the objects I encountered in the field, forms the motivational core of the present study. Initially, I was unsure of the academic relevance of the problem; it seemed to be altogether too subjective and idiosyncratic to merit scholarly investigation. However, a stint of teaching pre-modern Indian art history to practicing artists at the post-graduate level convinced me of the validity of the disconnect question.

My lectures on the history of Indian sculpture encountered a major stumbling block, arising from what I came to perceive as a failed vocabulary. I found myself unable to communicate to my students even a fraction of the impact that these works had had on me in field encounters, incapable of animating these remarkable objects in a way that highlighted their affective qualities, their visual and material 'presence' in our midst. These were precisely the qualities that I imagined would carry maximum resonance for practicing artists. My re-presentations of these art works in my lectures were unfailingly off the mark. The more I surrounded them with contextual detail in my discourse, the more I seemed to mire them in some inaccessible and somewhat (to young artists, at least) irrelevant historicity. The more I detailed their formal and stylistic nuances and highlighted their aesthetic qualities, the more irrevocably inanimate and ossified they became.

In an attempt to overcome this impasse, I went back to the canonical art history texts we had referred to as students, paying closer attention to approaches, methodologies, narrative strategies and rhetorical styles. This preliminary survey produced a rather unexpected result; I became aware of the fact that the problem exceeded what could be explained away as my personal limitations as a presenter. The inadequacy of my vocabulary was, in large part, a symptom of a more systemic issue; it was a structural feature of the discourse of pre-modern Indian art history, as we had inherited it**.** There seemed to be something embedded within the discipline's structure that precluded the possibility of the viewer/interpreter engaging directly with the *material presence* of the objects she studied, and the possibility of reflexively positioning this aspect of the work at the centre of an art historical inquiry. *To investigate why the words we use seem to fail the objects we study* (to

borrow James Elkins' phrase) – this seemed to approach a respectably academic re-formulation of a personal dissatisfaction and stumbling block.

The obvious course of action was to look closely at different kinds of writing about these artefacts; to try and comprehend which of them came closest to capturing the affective qualities of the objects they studied, and to articulating the tactile, corporeal and kinaesthetic (as opposed to purely visual) nature of the encounter. This necessitated a stepping back from contemporary discourses, a stepping away from art history proper, to explore a wider range of related discourses (travel writings and colonial archaeological reports, for example) that recorded and interpreted these encounters. Given this hugely expanded field, I chose to focus on a small selection of texts – primarily English-language texts dealing with sculptural artefacts.

Somewhat late in the analysis, I experienced a first-hand understanding of two theoretical formulations that are just beginning to influence the way we research and teach art history in India. The first formulation is the poststructuralist position on *the mutual constitution of subjects and objects*; the second is visual culture's insight into *the "culturality of vision".* What follows in the present project is, from one point of view, an elaboration of this understanding; the four major chapters apply this insight to a theoretically eclectic analysis of select texts. In the final section, I speculate on what an art history that positions the *materiality* and *presence* of its objects as a central philosophical question might look like.

As art-history itself has, until recently, avoided disciplinary reflexivity and devoted itself single-mindedly to the study of external 'objects' (particularly in some Indian institutions), I have chosen to pick many of my critical tools and concepts from a variety of fields and disciplines. While the influence of post-structuralism, post-colonial and cultural studies is inescapable for a project of this kind, I have also borrowed freely from my reading of anthropology, material culture studies, phenomenology and that new entrant in art history's neighbourhood - visual culture studies. The resultant theoretical *bricolage* is untidy but I hope, somewhat productive.

INTRODUCTION

As socially and culturally salient entities, objects change in defiance of their material stability. The category to which a thing belongs, the emotion and judgment it prompts, and the narrative it recalls, are all historically refigured.

--Nicholas Thomas, Entangled Objects

We do not explain pictures: we explain remarks about pictures – or rather, we explain pictures only in so far as we have considered them under some verbal description or specification.

--Michael Baxandall, Patterns of Intention

The Great Relief at Mamallapuram, an imposing open-air sculptural panel carved on an outcrop of granite rock, has been described and interpreted by numerous visitors over the past two centuries. When I began this project, I set myself the task of collecting as many 'scholarly' English-language accounts of this monument as I could find with the intention of comparing various representations of the artefact. I began the compilation with art history texts and expanded the search outwards and backwards to include related textual representations from earlier periods and contexts. My own frequent and enthusiastic face-to-face encounters with this artefact gave my assignment a theoretical direction; I was looking for representations that best fore-grounded what was surely the most salient, universally accessible feature of this particular work – its compelling visual/material *opulence*.

It came as a surprise to me at this early stage of my inquiry that the writers of my collection had very different priorities. Some of them were content with outlining the narrative involved, enumerating and naming the figure-forms. Others privileged measurement and 'scientific' description of the object. A third group plunged with little preamble into the interpretation controversy. A fourth group puzzled over chronology, patronage and the mystery of the unfinished sections. It appeared as if each of these groups was talking about a different object; and none of these objects resembled 'my' object. More

perplexing, a majority of the writers seemed to take the alluring visual and material qualities of the object for granted. What I found most significant about this artwork - the philosophical conundrum posed by objects, ontologically identified with their originary (and now absent) pasts, which continue to impinge on our present by their imposing visual/ material *presence* - was for these interpreters an incidental means to some other end – historical, scientific, interpretative.

A welcome transformation that my inquiry has undergone over the years has been the abandoning of what now seems to be a theoretically naïve quest for 'truest' account – that definitive textual representation which is most in tune with the visual and material 'essence' of the object it describes or interprets. However, some of the questions thrown up in the course of the preliminary study have lingered on and generated the primary arguments of this project.

The purpose of this inquiry, very broadly stated, is to examine how the sub-discipline of pre-modern Indian art history frames its objects discursively. My specific interest is to examine how art historians respond to and represent the *visual and material* qualities of pre-modern Indian sculptural art and how these representations are articulated with the discursive representations of other aspects of the objects' identity that are considered salient – their historical location, their function in past contexts, artistic intention and agency, the 'content' which they were intended to communicate (or obscure), the metaphysics they embodied. My central argument is that while recent art history (especially after the 'cultural turn') in India has achieved an unprecedented level of complexity in *contextualizing* the sculptural artefact within the historical circumstances of its making (in terms of its representational content, ideological affiliations, the social-political and cultural circumstances of production and reception, patronage, and so on), it falters when it has to respond to the work of art as *presentation* – as a site of a plenitude of visual and material qualities *encountered in the present.*[1]

In other words, Indian art history's intense and increasingly sophisticated engagement with the historicity of sculptural artefacts and their originary

[1]For a useful encapsulation of several features of this recent shift in Indian art history towards the interpretive/critical paradigm, see Shivaji K. Panikkar, Parul Dave Mukherji and Deeptha Achar eds., *Towards a New Art History: Studies In Indian Art* (D.K. Printworld Ltd., 2003), 47–65.

communicative content appears to have overshadowed art historians' responses to the powerfully affective visual and material qualities of the works. It is particularly ironic that even as the discipline of art history in India has finally begun to take reflexivity seriously, we have no *theoretical frame* within which to accommodate these embodied responses to the visual and material attributes of the works that we encounter. It is my contention that this structural failure can be explained at least partially in terms of the historical circumstances within which the discipline evolved in India. In the course of this study, I will attempt to historicize and problematize the relationship between the art historian - the viewing and interpreting subject - and the sculptural artefact/object, with the intention of unearthing the factors that influence Indian art history's construction and representation of the 'visuality' and 'materiality' of its primary objects.

Because this is a historiographical study focusing on discursive representations of pre-modern Indian sculptural artefacts, my primary sources are not the artefacts themselves but *writings about artefacts*. In the four chapters that form the body of this analysis, I identify and differentiate between five distinct forms of discourse (or discursive formations) about sculptural artefacts that are genealogically related to the current discourse of pre-modern Indian art history.[2] In Chapter I, I examine in turn, **colonial travel writings** of the late 18th and early 19th centuries which framed the 'wonders' of the Indian subcontinent using Romantic aesthetic categories and the discourse about **Indian 'antiquities'** of the same period, initiated by the establishment of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. In Chapter II, I focus on the **colonial archaeological discourse** that became dominant between the middle and the last decades of the 19th century and the late 19th and early 20th century discourse of **colonialist art history** (which I see as linked to the early initiatives to monumentalize and museumize pre-modern Indian artefacts). Chapter III discusses **nationalist art history** of the first half of the 20th century that constituted a new field of objects – the spiritualized, aestheticized domain of 'Indian Art'. Chapter IV is in the form of three case

[2]My deployment of the term "discourse" throughout this study is in general conformity with its current usage in poststructuralist theory and cultural studies. An influential text that has shaped my understanding of discourse and discursive formations is Michel Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge*; this influence is most evident in the somewhat "archaeological" trajectory of this project. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Routledge, 2002).

studies; I examine in detail three distinct and well-established approaches to sculptural artefacts in **post-independence Indian art history**, drawing out the continuities and ruptures between these and earlier discourses.

In the first part of each section dealing with a specific discourse formation – I attempt to contextualize the discourse within its historical setting, to define its boundaries, to delineate the 'field of objects' constructed by the discourse and the position of sculptural artefacts within that field. This definition and delimitation of different discourses and their objects constitutes a significant theoretical contribution of my project. It emerged out of an extensive survey of primary texts, a few of which are listed in the bibliography. In the second part of each section, I look more closely at a small selection of individual texts that exemplify each discourse under analysis, in order to understand the subject positions made available by the texts and to investigate subject-object relations implicit within the discourse.

It must be emphasized again that my objective is not to correlate the textual representations I study with their referents in the 'real' world or to evaluate the truth value of the texts with reference to some *a priori* unchanging reality of the objects they describe and interpret. I am interested in how texts actively *construct* the objects of which they speak, to what category these objects belong within a particular discourse, what their 'salient features' are purported to be, what is considered significant and what insignificant in their forms and contexts, and inferentially, what these findings say about the relationship between the documenting/interpreting subjects and their objects. Throughout this analysis, I keep one eye fixed on how the texts frame the visual and material qualities of the work and on the kind of significance ascribed to these qualities within the larger framework of the representations.

DISCOURSES AND OBJECTS: SOME THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The present inquiry is theory-heavy; it grapples with relatively abstract questions of epistemology, subject-object relations and theories of visuality and materiality. In this sense, it is an anomalous contribution to the discipline

of Indian art history, where, for over half a century, to be rigorous is to be rigorously *empirical*. The theories that form the backbone of the study are an eclectic mix, borrowed from post-structuralism, cultural studies, postcolonial theory, anthropology, material culture studies, phenomenology and visual culture. In the section that follows, I provide an overview of (and abbreviated background for) the core theoretical constructs and associated terminology that underpin this project.

Diverse Discourses

In the first two chapters, I examine written discourses about artefacts that were in circulation well before the discipline of art history was established in India. The fact that more than half of this inquiry is devoted to examining writings that fall 'outside' the ambit of art history could raise questions about relevance. My reason for venturing beyond disciplinary boundaries is twofold. Firstly, because my intention is to historcize Indian art history's representational practices, I find it useful to work backwards from the present discourse of art history to a range of non-art historical discourses from the past. The connections I attempt to draw between these earlier texts and the present discourse of art history does not take the form of a linear developmental sequence; colonial travel writing, for example, did *not* eventually 'develop' into art historical discourse in some teleological manner. The relationship between the discourses is necessarily tenuous, even discontinuous at times. My logic for juxtaposing these discrete discourses is not because I see them as referring to the same 'object' (in fact, I argue that they actually create different objects) but because I see them as involving related *practices* of 'encounter', viewing and representation and of negotiating comparable terrains of subject-object relationships. In other words, I see the earlier discourses as being *genealogically* related to present day art history discourse.[3]

[3]In an interview published as "Questions of Method," Foucault speaks of his approach in *Discipline and Punish* as targeted towards analyzing "regimes of practices" rather than "institutions", "theory" or "ideology". Regimes of practices have their own 'specific regularities, logic, strategy, self-evidence and "reason". To examine them means to analyze "programmes of conduct which have both prescriptive effects" and "codifying effects regarding what is to be known(effects of 'veridiction')". "Foucault: Questions of Method" in Kenneth Baynes, James F. Bohman, and Thomas Anthony MacCarthy (eds.), *After Philosophy: End Or Transformation* (MIT Press, 1987), 102–103.

Secondly, the discourse of Indian art history derives its sustenance and coherence from a set of mostly implicit assumptions, expectations and theoretical frameworks that have become so naturalized within the discipline's structure as to be almost undetectable, especially to an 'insider'. Take, for example, the methodological procedures of empirical description, formal analysis, stylistic analysis and aesthetic appreciation; between them, these four approaches have been the mainstay of Indian art history's framing of the visual and material qualities of its primary objects. They have become so seamlessly integrated with a specifically art historical 'way of seeing' that it is difficult to imagine how we can talk about visual and material qualities of artworks without recourse to one or the other them. Commonsensical and unproblematic though these approaches may appear to art historians, they are not indispensable to a credible framing of the visual/material qualities of the work. This becomes apparent only when we can achieve a critical distance from the theoretical framework of art history proper, a near impossible feat for me personally, because I have spent the last twenty years absorbing the theories and methods of what in India has been an essentially non-reflexive discipline.

Because there is no Archimedean point 'above' the discourse of art history which I can occupy in order to critique the discipline's epistemological underpinnings objectively, I choose the next best option. By looking at earlier discourses that involved establishing a subject-object relationship with sculptural artefacts, by temporarily occupying the subject-positions afforded by these discourses and by adopting their 'ways of seeing', I attempt to expose the contingency and historicity of Indian art history's theoretical frames and methodological protocols. In his foreword to an early Foucault text, Hubert Dreyfus makes this comment in connection with Foucault's genealogical histories: "The best way to see that things might be otherwise is to see that they once were and in some areas still are otherwise, and to see well how we developed our present narrow view."[4]

[4]Hubert L. Dreyfus in his foreword to the California edition of Michel Foucault, *Maladie Mentale Et Psychologie* (University of California Press, 1987), xxxix.

Objects, Artefacts, Things

This stepping back from art history's monopoly on textual representations of sculptural artefacts is a theoretical move that I find necessary as a kind of defamiliarizing exercise. But adopting this strategy also implies that I have to relinquish my privileging of art history's ontological category for its primary object, that is, the *'art object'* frame. The inevitability of this comes into sharp focus when we are confronted with other categories for the sculptural artefact, other ways of objectifying it in prior discourses. When travel-writer Maria Graham, for example, describes the aesthetic feelings evoked by an architectural ruin in Mamallapuram, she is not, in fact, framing the artefact itself as 'a work of art' (even though this last category features prominently in the Romantic writer's conceptual horizon). Her object, framed as a picturesque 'wonder', is the architectural ruin seamlessly integrated with its natural setting.[5] Similarly, the 19th century colonial archaeologist categorizes and frames the sculptural artefact as a 'document of history', not as a 'work of art'. Therefore, superimposing today's category of 'art object' on the objects formed by earlier discourses would be tantamount to a category error.

I have found it methodologically enriching to relativize the category of art object and to accept whatever category each discourse imposes on its objects. Hence, a sizeable section of each chapter is devoted to defining and examining the contours of the distinct kind of object that each discourse constructs. I pay special attention to the nomenclature and characterization of the objects, the scope of the 'field of objects' in each case, the conceptual ecology that each discourse surrounds its objects with, and the purported 'salient features' of the objects so described. For example, the 'wonders' of 19th century travel writing are artefacts framed contiguously with their natural settings; by contrast, the contemporaneous antiquities discourse is careful to abstract its 'man-made' objects from their natural and (incidental) human entanglements. It is clear that even when both these discourses are referring to the same 'thing', they classify it under distinct ontological categories and objectify it differently. For the purposes of my project, it makes sense to take these categories seriously.

[5]Maria Graham, *Journal of a Residence in India*, 1813.

The distinction between 'thing' and 'object' features prominently in recent theoretical writings, especially in the fields of material culture studies and critical theory.[6] One influential way of demarcating the boundary between (material) things and objects has been to assert (following Immanuel Kant and later, Martin Heidegger) that things are 'ontologically innocent'; that is, they have not yet been trapped into a conceptual scheme of the knowing subject as objects inevitably are. Things are unmediated, sometimes opaque and recalcitrant; objects are often transparent, already always mediated by human subjectivity. In his seminal article titled *Thing Theory*, Bill Brown designates the 'thing' as that which lies 'beyond the grid of intelligibility', temporalized as both 'the before and the after of the object'. On the one hand, things are 'the amorphousness out of which objects are materialized by the (ap)perceiving subject, the anterior physicality of the human world emerging…as an after-effect of the mutual constitution of the subject and the object….' On the other, things can be imagined "as what is excessive in objects, as what exceeds their mere materialization as objects or their mere utilization as objects-their force as a sensuous presence or as a metaphysical presence, the magic by which objects become values, fetishes, idols, and totems."[7]

Because my project hinges on recognizing and defining the contours of a multiplicity of objectifications in diverse discourses, I take recourse to a theoretical formulation similar to the 'thing' in Brown's theory. I use the term 'artefact' or 'sculptural artefact' as a place holder for that entity which is logically prior to its objectification (as 'antiquities', or 'wonders' or 'art object') in the different discourses I examine. I find the term 'thing' too general for the purposes of my study; 'artefact' is more appropriate in this context, especially because all of these discourses (romantic-travelogue, antiquarian, archaeological, art historical) recognize, even when they do not emphasize, the artefactual nature of the objects they frame.

[6]Recent writings that feature this distinction prominently include Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 1988); Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Autumn, 2001), 1-22; W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images* (University of Chicago Press, 2005); Amiria Henare, Martin Holbraad, and Sari Wastell (eds.), *Thinking Through Things: Theorising Artefacts in Ethnographic Perspective* (Routledge, 2006).
[7]Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Autumn, 2001), 1-22.

To elaborate a little, I use the term 'artefact' throughout this essay in a specific set of related ways. At the broadest, most conceptual level, the 'artefact' haunts my scheme as a theoretical entity that is *withdrawn* from its specific burden of 'objecthood' within a particular discourse; it participates in some of the materiality, unspecifiability and impenetrable excess of Brown's (and ultimately Heidegger's) 'thing'. At a more pragmatic level, the 'artefact' is a necessary heuristic device with minimal theoretical baggage, a least common factor of sorts, which allows me to move between different objectifications and frames. (I must stress again that I have no intention of extracting some noumenal 'artefact-in–itself' from the analysis). This flexibility is reflected when I use *term* 'artefact' frequently throughout the text, either to emphasize something prior to its 'objectification' in relation to the subject or to focus the spotlight on the act of framing itself.

Although this study examines discourses about sculptural artefacts in general, it may be observed that the focus returns in each chapter to a few specific artefacts - the Great Relief at Mamallapuram, Ellora's Cave 16 and Elephanta's relief sculptures are *leitmotifs* throughout the analysis. In following a select group of artefacts through their objectification in different discourses, I indulge in a version of what Arjun Appadurai calls 'methodological fetishism'. That is, I turn my attention to the sculptural artefacts themselves *functioning as objects*, to 'things' animated by human interactions with them.[8] Nothing highlights the changing nature of subject-object relations better than comparing two accounts of the same artefact generated by different discourses; to put it in Appadurai's terms, "it is things-in-motion that illuminate their social and human context."

Subject Positions

"Discourses structure both our sense of reality and our notion of our own identity."[9] Following Michel Foucault, constructionist theories of meaning and representation hold that not only does discourse systematically produce the *objects* of which it speaks, it also produces "*a place for the subject* (the reader or the viewer) from which its particular knowledge and meanings makes most sense… discourses, then, construct **subject-positions**, from

[8]Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things*, 5.
[9]Sara Mills, *Discourse* (Routledge, 2004), 15.

which alone they make sense [emphasis original]."[10] Throughout my analysis, I attempt to temporarily occupy the subject positions constructed by each discourse for the reader with the intention of arriving at a critical understanding of the distinctions between the various available subject-object relations across discourse formations. Two limitations of this strategy bear mentioning here. Firstly, it is theoretically impossible for me to completely abandon my own situated understanding of the discourses I examine, to embrace alternative subject-positions constructed in historical and cultural circumstances very different from my own. Moreover, the critical value of such a move is doubtful. Secondly, I base my analysis on the assumption that the subject-positions offered by the discourses I examine are more or less congruent with the subject-positions occupied by the authors of the individual texts themselves. The fact that the texts I investigate are largely what can be considered 'scholarly' representations that fall squarely within clearly demarcated discursive boundaries, (and are not primarily works of fiction or rhetoric) justifies, in my opinion, the founding assumption behind this strategy.

The critical potential of this approach, as mentioned earlier, is that it offers a way to 'disidentify' myself from the subject position I automatically occupy as a student of Indian art history in the twenty-first century, a subject position already constructed for me by the discipline in which I was trained. By giving me a ringside view of the mechanics of discourses-constructing-subjects, this approach also offers me insights into the limiting ways in which subject-object relations are worked out within the present discourse of art history, and perhaps even some prospect of altering the configuration of the discourse itself in a minor way.

Why 'sculptural artefacts'?

There are three reasons why I choose to focus on discursive objectifications of pre-modern *sculptural* artefacts, even though I occasionally refer to texts about painting and architecture. The first reason is personal; having studied and taught 'Indian sculpture' intensively for two decades, I count on my first-hand familiarity with the large corpus of extant sculptural productions both *in*

[10]Stuart Hall, (ed.,)*Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, 1st ed. (Sage Publications & Open University, 1997), 56.

situ and in museums across the country to anchor my critical understanding of the representations I analyze. There is also the question of affect. I find that my response to the visual and material qualities of sculptural artefacts is more acute than my response to painting or architecture (in isolation from sculpture, that is). Even though we are very far from theorizing 'affect' within the discipline of art history, my fascination with the affective force of pre-modern Indian sculpture has been the single most important motivation for seeing this project through.

Secondly, given the sheer volume of writings about pre-modern Indian material artefacts, some thematic limitation becomes necessary. Using 'sculptural artefacts' as a thematic division is fairly arbitrary, especially as much extant pre-modern Indian sculpture occurs contiguously with (and is aesthetically inseparable from) the architectural matrix of which it was usually a part. However, because the discipline of art history itself recognizes 'Indian sculpture' as a sub-field of inquiry, and because the ultimate target of this inquiry is Indian art history's formulations, there is a pragmatic (even if somewhat anachronistic) value in projecting the theme backwards to earlier discourses.

The final reason relates to what may be considered intrinsic qualities of sculpture itself. Sculptural artefacts are, by their very nature, sites replete with both visual and haptic/kinesthetic stimuli; there is often a fine tension between their 'visual presentation' and their 'material presence'. Most of the texts I examine cope well with the visual presentation of sculptures, framing it under some verbal description without much difficulty. However, when it comes to the material presence of the artefacts, which calls for a more intimate, haptic response from the viewer, the texts flounder or avoid dealing with that aspect of the artefact altogether.[11] The resistance offered by the compelling material presence of sculpture, its multi-sensorial appeal, a tangible yet elusive quality that defies easy subsumption into any order of discourse, makes sculptural artefacts an exciting choice for a study of subject-object relations.

[11] I deal with the theoretical implications of this in my concluding chapter.

Visuality and Materiality

A compelling reason to investigate textual approaches to sculptural artefacts in their *entirety*, instead of reading descriptions of visual and material qualities in isolation from other factors considered salient (like their historical significance and intended meaning), is that it enables a *contextualized* understanding of how artefacts are 'framed' within each discourse. Even though, as phenomena, artefacts are perceived primarily through their visual and material modalities, the relative significance of the visual and the material in relation to the other aspects varies substantially from frame to frame. Each discursive frame achieves a distinctive balance between representations of the physical attributes of its objects and questions of historicity and communicative import; this triad of aspects is so tightly interwoven as to be inseparable. Moreover, it is the frame-taken-as-a-whole that gives the reader an indication of the subject-position she/he is expected to occupy in relation to the objects of the discourse. While it is difficult to *define* this subject position or characterize it in exact terms, it is possible to arrive at an approximation of it inferentially.

One of the key findings of this inquiry is that texts within a specific discourse formation highlight particular aspects of the visual/material, while paying little or no attention to others. It is almost as if certain specific visual and material qualities of artefacts become visible within one discursive frame, only to disappear within another frame. For example, in colonial archaeological accounts, there is a tendency to treat complex sculptural arrays in an atomistic fashion – isolating human figures from animals and decorative motifs (see chapter II). Empirically describing a work within this frame often means enumerating elements from (the viewer's) left to right, from top to bottom. This discursive frame renders invisible aspects like workmanship, sculptural qualities and the *aesthetic impact* of the work. The sculptural fragment remains irrevocably a fragment; the only material qualities that seem to matter are dimensions, state of preservation and placement (if some kind of archaeological reconstruction is intended). By contrast, in the writings of Stella Kramrisch and some of the post-independence texts I examine, there is a great deal of emphasis on the plastic qualities of individual works – a close-up view that lingers on the

depth of carving, articulation of elements, finish and so on (Chapter III). Sculptural arrays are treated as organic wholes and the description tries to follow the narrative intention of the work. These writers' descriptions automatically compensate for missing limbs and weatherworn sections of sculpture and the reader is tacitly encouraged to imagine them as they were in their pristine, newly-carved state.

These curious discrepancies in 'ways of seeing' are not merely quirks of individual viewing subjects - framing objects in their own way. As will be seen in subsequent sections, the differences in ways of seeing between texts *across discourses* are exponentially greater than the differences between texts from within the same discourse formation. What I attempt to establish in the chapters that follow is that this *differential framing* of the visual and the material:

1) Is largely a function of the discourse formation within which a text is embedded. To put it somewhat crudely, the discourse we participate in determines what we see and what we choose not to see.

2) Has ideological implications, which this inquiry attempts to unpack.

Within the bounds of mainstream art historiography, this proposal to link discursive representations of visual and material qualities of artefacts to putative subject positions might be considered an overambitious or dubious project. However, parallels can be found in various forms of *discourse analysis*, a well-established branch of epistemological inquiry from the 1970's onwards.[12] As for the insight referred to above – that is, the differential framing of the visual and the material in different discursive representations – this 'insight' lends itself to being recast in terms of one of the fundamental theoretical formulations of Visual Culture Studies – the theory of *visuality*.

One of the most quoted definitions of visuality occurs in Hal Foster's preface to the 1988 anthology titled *Vision and Visuality*. In the opening paragraph, Foster differentiates between vision and visuality thus:

> Although vision suggests sight as a physical operation, and visuality sight as a social fact, the two are not opposed as nature to

[12] See, for example, Marianne W. Jørgensen and Louise J. Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (Sage, 2002).

> culture…neither are they identical: here the difference between the terms signals a difference within the visual–between the mechanisms of sight and its historical techniques, between the datum of vision and its discursive determinations—a difference, many differences, among how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see, and how we see this seeing or the unseen therein. [13]

In his contribution to the anthology titled 'The Gaze in the Expanded Field', Norman Bryson elaborates on this aspect of visuality as the 'socialization of vision':

> For human beings collectively to orchestrate their visual experience together it is required that each submit his or her retinal experience to the socially agreed description(s) of an intelligible world. Vision is socialized, and thereafter deviation from this social construction of visual reality can be measured and named, variously, as hallucination, misrecognition, or "visual disturbance." Between the subject and the world is inserted the entire sum of discourses which make up visuality, that cultural construct, and make visuality different from vision, the notion of unmediated visual experience. Between the retina and the world is inserted a *screen* of signs, a screen consisting of all the multiple discourses on vision built into the social arena.[14]

If one were to reframe the primary areas of investigation of this project in terms of in terms of 'visuality', the questions would read something like this: How do individual writers 'view' what they 'see'? How do they discursively *construct* the visuality of the objects they study? What 'historical techniques' of sight, 'discursive determinations' of vision and 'socially agreed descriptions' go in to the textual framing of the material and visual attributes of artefacts? Why do these discursive constructions of the 'visual reality' of sculptural artefacts differ so markedly from discourse to discourse? What light does this differential construction at the level of visuality throw upon subject-object relationships specific to each discursive formation? Ultimately, what does this tell us about Indian art history's construction and

[13]Hal Foster in his preface to Foster (ed.), *Vision and Visuality*, Dia Art Foundation (Bay Press, Seattle, 1988), ix.
[14]Norman Bryson, "The Gaze in the Expanded Field", ibid., 91–92.

representation of the visuality of its primary objects and the subject positions available within the recent discourse of art history?

Compared to the idea of visuality, the concept of 'materiality' has a more complex history and is a fundamental issue across a range of disciplines. For this project, an obvious and interesting field to mine for theories of materiality would be material culture studies. As the late 20th century offspring of archaeology and socio-cultural anthropology, material culture studies concentrates on the interactions between people and things. In his introduction to the definitive 2006 anthology - *Handbook of Material Culture* - Christopher Tilley locates the concept of materiality at the very heart of the inter-discipline of material culture studies:

> At present, material culture studies form a diffuse and relatively uncharted interdisciplinary field of study in which a concept of materiality provides both the starting point and the justification. This field of study centres on the idea that materiality is an integral dimension of culture, and that there are dimensions of social existence that cannot be fully understood without it.[15]

Tilley elaborates on the varied and sometimes contradictory connotations of materiality we encounter as part of common usage – from dictionary definitions to everyday language.

> …the very concept of materiality is … heterogeneous and ambiguous. Attempts at rigorous definition are entangled with deep metaphorical roots and cultural connotations. According to various dictionary definitions materiality can mean substance, something comprised of elements or constituents, of variously composed matter: the tangible, the existing or concrete, the substantial, the worldly and real as opposed to the imaginary, ideal and value-laden aspects of human existence. The concept of materiality is thus typically used to refer to the fleshy, corporeal and physical, as opposed to spiritual, ideal and value-laden aspects of human existence…Furthermore notions of materiality in everyday talk are frequently linked with commonsense ideas about data, facts or

[15]Christopher Tilley et al. (eds.),*Handbook of Material Culture*, (Sage, 2006), 1.

> objective evidence, rather than anything to do with human subjectivity and bias, the mind, ideas or values.[16]

In material culture terms, materiality is the mutually constitutive relationship between people and things. An important branch of material culture studies looks at the social biography of things – how the uses, functions and significance of things have varied through time, because people's interactions with them change.[17] The discipline also debates the 'agency' of objects, their capacity to influence human status and actions.[18]

At the broadest level, I borrow from material culture studies the concept of materiality as an aspect of artefacts that emerges from the *interactions* between subjects with their objects. Like visuality for visual culture studies, the concept of materiality is not so much about 'brute matter' as it is about the 'historical techniques' and 'discursive determinations' of the (multisensory) perception of material things (see Bryson, above). This broad-based formulation provides the conceptual background for my understanding of materiality. However, my application of the term 'materiality' throughout this inquiry has a narrower focus; it deals with three specific and interrelated areas of the subject's interaction with artefacts.

1. At the level of the artefact itself, the matter or physical material out of which the artefact is made (whether granite, or sandstone or bronze), and the matter or material that surrounds it; these play an important role in determining its material and visual attributes. Following Heidegger, I do not believe that matter is a passive entity awaiting the imposition of Form on it by the human subject. On the contrary, matter or material has its own kind of agency which can on occasion overwhelm 'form' itself (which is why I use the term 'material' instead of medium). At the level of materiality, I see most artefacts of the pre-modern period as collaborations between the agential potential of the

[16]Ibid., 3.
[17]See Appadurai (ed.), op. cit., especially Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process," 64–94.
[18] See for example, Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: Towards a New Anthropological Theory* (Oxford University Press, 1998); David Freedberg, *The Powers of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (University of Chicago Press, 1991), for different theoretical explorations of the autonomous agency of objects.

material itself and the agency of the artist.[19] Moreover, materials are already suffused with culture-specific significance, even before they are shaped into artefacts.

2. This leads logically to another realm of materiality – that of *facture*, the physical making of a work by the artist/artisan and the immediate material circumstances that surround it. Facture is arguably the single most important determinant of the (original) material attributes of artefacts. The concept is foregrounded in David Summers' "On the Histories of Artifacts": "Any work of art, taken as a whole, before it is regarded formally, aesthetically, or expressively, may also be regarded indexically, that is, in terms of its own facture, *as the result and record of its having been made* [emphasis added]."[20] For Summers, the acknowledgement and understanding of facture is not a mere evidentiary supplement, but epistemologically and philosophically *central* to our understanding of artefacts. Summers rejects the idealism that makes us react to continuous artefactual traditions by asking 'why people keep imagining things in the same way'. What we should be asking instead is 'why they keep making things in the way they evidently did (or do). The answers to these questions are very different.'[21] Keeping facture centre-stage is crucial in the context of pre-modern Indian sculptural artefacts whose makers remain, with a few exceptions, anonymous.

3. Finally, at the level of reception, materiality implies the interactions between material objects as sites of multisensory stimuli and *embodied* subjects (the category includes the makers, users and viewers of artefacts across time). Perception of the material attributes of artefacts is not limited to the visual sense. Haptic sensibilities come into play – ranging from the tactile and the kinaesthetic to the proprioceptive. The idea of embodied perception (absent until recently in art history)

[19]This insight is influenced by Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology"', in *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays* (Garland Pub., 1977), 30–35., in which he implicates four Aristotelian causes in the making of a silver chalice. Echoes of this are found in his more famous essay, "The Origin of the Work of Art", See Donald Preziosi (ed.), *The Art of Art History*, 284-295.
[20]David Summers, "On the Histories of Artifacts," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 76, No. 4 (Dec., 1994), 592.
[21]Ibid.

receives its most elaborate treatment in the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty.[22] From poststructuralist and feminist perspectives, bodies are not merely stable natural/biological entities common to the human species; bodies are also historically inscribed and culturally produced.[23] Pierre Bourdieu uses the term *habitus* to refer to a system of bodily and conceptual dispositions (culturally inherited, enduring schemes of perception, thought and action) which individuals deploy almost unconsciously to deal with objective conditions that they encounter.[24]

This relativization of the body and bodily practices complicates the notion of embodied perception considerably. What it adds up to in the context of this study is that when the subject encounters artefacts face-to-face, she is already approaching it with a set of corporeal dispositions that are historically and culturally determined. The process of discursive objectification adds yet another layer of complexity, another system of limitations and possibilities to the representation of the perceived artefact. Materiality, within this framework, becomes *the historically determined, culturally specific discursive objectification of perceived material attributes of artefact*. For the reasons listed above, materiality, like visuality, varies according to subject position and the discursive frame within which the objectification takes place.

It will be noted in the chapters that follow that most of the discourses studied tend to gloss over or to sideline the material attributes of the work in favour of the visual. The discourses themselves are ocularcentric, that is, they privilege 'seeing' over other ways of experiencing the objects they frame. Interestingly, each of the discourses is ocularcentric in a slightly different way. One of the tasks of this study is to distinguish between the different ways of privileging the visual over the material – and to unpack the ideological underpinnings in each case. What makes this undertaking somewhat tricky is that unlike visuality, 'materiality' is undertheorized in art-

[22]Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (Routledge, 2002).
[23] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy and History," in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader*, (Pantheon, 1984), 76-100; Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (Routledge, 1993).
[24]Pierre Bourdieu, "Habitus," in Jean Hiller and Emma Rooksby (eds.),*Habitus: a Sense of Place* (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2005), 43.

history/ visual culture studies and overdetermined in other contexts. However, theorizing materiality adequately for the purposes of art history and bringing it into some sort of symmetrical relation with visuality (visual culture studies tends to privilege the dematerialized image over the embodied artefact) is beyond the scope of this project. A few starting blocks are set up in the concluding chapter.

THE STUDY IN CONTEXT

The present inquiry does not attempt a comprehensive survey or developmental account of discourses about pre-modern artefacts. Instead, what it tries to capture are six distinct 'moments' in the discursive representation of sculptural artefacts; the intention is to mark both the breaks and continuities in subject-object relations and in the framing of material and visual qualities across discourses. The first 'moment' that this study examines coincides with end of 18th century and the last 'moment' covered falls exactly two centuries later, in the 1990's. While the project emphasizes the diversity of subject positions and framings, it does not presume to have covered all possible position-takings *vis a vis* the artefact.

In the context of Indian art history, studies dealing exclusively with historiography continue to be few and far between. Even scarcer are ones that approach the discipline from a theoretical standpoint, with a view to unearthing epistemological positions and ideological underpinnings; this is the gap in current scholarship that my project attempts to fill. Most historiographical studies of Indian art history are either in the form of surveys of trends (or developmental accounts), or in the form of anthologies where individual scholars contribute site-specific or period-specific historiographies. What follows is a brief overview of significant contributions to the field.

One of the early sources of inspiration for this project was Partha Mitter's *Much Maligned Monsters.* This 1977 publication, one of the first historiographical texts I read, is a detailed documentation of European reactions to Indian art starting with Marco Polo's description of South India from the 13th century and ending with the writings of nationalist art

historians. Published one year before Edward Said's *Orientalism*, this must surely be counted as a pioneering work in the area of postcolonial studies. *Much Maligned Monsters* critically distinguishes changing *trends* in reactions to Indian 'art'; this was the first text I encountered that treated texts and discourses as 'representations,' at face value, without being zealously prescriptive.[25]

Pramod Chandra's *On the Study of Indian Art* (pub. 1983), presented as a series of lectures at the Asia Society, is a brief survey of 19th and 20th century historiography of pre-modern Indian architecture, sculpture and painting.[26] A significant anthology edited by Catherine Asher and Thomas Metcalf, *Perceptions of South Asia's Visual Past* (1994) emerged out of a seminar at the American Institute of Indian Studies, Varanasi.[27] The December 1997 issue of the *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, guest edited by Tapati Guha-Thakurta, is themed *Sites of Art History: Canons and Expositions*. It features articles by Guha-Thakurta, Ajay Sinha and Arindam Dutta that are relevant to this study.[28]

Another anthology titled *Towards a New Art History: Studies in Indian Art* (pub. 2003), a product of a 2002 seminar at M.S. University in Baroda conducted in honour of Prof. Ratan Parimoo, seeks to question canonical art history in India by ushering in a 'framework oriented approach' that investigates cultural phenomena ranging from museums and galleries to a contemporary popular festival. The introductory article titled 'Towards New Art History', co-authored by Deepta Achar, Parul Dave Mukherji and Shivaji Panikkar, usefully encapsulates some generational discontents that have surfaced with respect to institutional art history in India, while pointing towards a few emerging trends. Ratan Parimoo's expansive "From Iconography through Iconology to New Art History", and articles by Ajay

[25]Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters: A History of European Reactions to Indian Art* (University of Chicago Press, 1977).
[26]Pramod Chandra, *On the Study of Indian Art* (Asia Society, New York, 1983).
[27]Catherine B. Asher and Thomas R. Metcalf (eds), *Perceptions of South Asia's Visual Past*, (American Institute of Indian Studies, New Delhi, Swadharma Swarajya Sangha, Madras, and Oxford & IBH Pub. Co, 1994).
[28] Tapati Guha-Thakurta (ed.,) "Sites of Art History: Canons and Expositions" *Journal of Arts and Ideas.*," Numbers 30-31, December 1997.

Sinha, Kavita Singh, Guha-Thakurta and Rahul Bhattacharya are of particular relevance to my study.[29]

Indian Art History: Changing Perspectives (pub 2006) is a more recent contribution to the field of historiography. This anthology is edited by Parul Pandya Dhar and features among others, Parimoo's essay on Stella Kramrisch, Gautam Sengupta on Rajendralala Mitra, Upinder Singh's article on 19th century archaeologists and architectural scholars and Dhar's own covering essay, which surveys the field of Indian art historiography under various thematic heads.[30]*Asian Art History in the Twenty-First Century* (pub 2008) edited by Vishakha Desai has an article titled "The Shape of Indian Art History" by Frederick Asher which looks at American contributions to the discipline in India.[31] This essay unearths some of the political implications of American scholars 'studying India' from the early 20th century onwards; it makes for an interesting contrast when read alongside Joanna Williams' 1981 introduction to the *Kaladarshana* anthology, a more serene sketch of scholarly developments titled "Whither the Study of Indian Art?"[32]

Despite the small numbers of books that deal exclusively with Indian art historiography, historiographical reflexivity in general has been gradually on the rise since the 1980's. An increasing number of recent scholarly texts on Indian sculpture and architecture critically analyze colonial, nationalist and post-independence contributions to their special areas in their introductory chapters.[33] Even though these studies do not approach epistemological and ideological issues from the perspective of the discipline as a whole, their localized critiques can be very insightful and clearly demonstrate the writers' reflexive self-positioning in the context of their specialist field. The writings of

[29]Shivaji K. Panikkar, Parul Dave Mukherji and Deeptha Achar (eds.), *Towards a New Art History*.
[30]Parul Pandya Dhar (ed.), *Indian Art History: Changing Perspectives*,(D.K. Printworld, 2011).
[31] See Frederick Asher, "The Shape of Indian Art History," Vishakha N. Desai, ed., *Asian Art History in the Twenty-First Century* (Clark Art Institute, 2008), 3-14.
[32]"Whither the Study of Indian Art?" in Joanna G. Williams, *Kalādarśana: American Studies in the Art of India* (Brill, 1981), v–viii.
[33]S. L. Schastok, *The Śāmalājī Sculptures and 6th Century Art in Western India* (Brill, 1985), 1–3; Susan L. Huntington, *The "Pāala-Sena" Schools of Sculpture* (Brill Archive, 1984), 3–5 ; Desai, "Beyond the Temple Walls: The Scholarly Fate of North Indian Sculpture, A.D. 700-1200," in Vishakha N. Desai, Darielle Mason, and Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, *Gods, Guardians, and Lovers: Temple Sculptures from North India, A.D. 700-1200* (Asia Society Galleries, in association with Mapin Publishing, Ahmedabad, 1993), 19-31, to name a few writings.

two art historians who influenced my thinking about epistemological structures and subject positions merit special mention in this context.

Gary Tartakov's *The Durga Temple at Aihole: A Historiographical Study* (Pub. 1997) marks a significant departure from the exclusively empirical, object-centred approach to Indian artefacts that was the distinguishing characteristic of American scholarship of his generation. The entire first half of the book is a critical reading of influential archaeological and historical approaches to the temple from the colonial period onwards. Unearthing the ideological motivations behind these narratives, Tartakov highlights the situated and contingent nature of all representations (including his own), the inescapable influence that prior interpretations have on later ones and the resultant 'shifting meanings' of the object.[34] Another historiographically astute art historian, Ajay Sinha, introduces 'Vesara' to us in terms of the scholarly contestations over this hybrid form of temple architecture that was practiced in mediaeval Karnataka.[35] 'Vesara' is revealed as an unstable entity, subject to reinterpretation.[36] Related to this study, Sinha's prolonged debate with architectural historian Adam Hardy about methodological approaches to medieval architecture in Karnataka, articulated across several journal exchanges, offers a fascinating insight into how differing ideological positions engender differences in methodological frameworks even within the current (supposedly unitary) discourse of Indian art history.

Guha-Thakurta's contribution to artefactual historiography in India has exerted a major influence on this project. In her critical interpretations of colonial, nationalist and post-independence texts, the scholar draws out connections between discursive formations and the institutional structures that sustain them in the process of negotiating the complex terrains of empire, nation, region and modernity. *Monuments, Objects, Histories,* (pub 2004) is a compilation of nine significant articles published over three decades; these and other essays originally appeared in various journals and

[34]Gary Michael Tartakov, *The Durga Temple at Aihole: a Historiographical Study*(Oxford University Press, 1997). See also Tartakov's "Changing Views of Indian Art History", in*Perceptions of South Asia's Visual Past*, 33-62.
[35]Ajay J. Sinha, *Imagining Architects: Creativity in the Religious Monuments of India* (University of Delaware Press, 2000), 19–30.
[36]These historiographical formulations are expanded in Sinha's article, "The Construction of 'Mule' in Indian Temple Architecture," *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, (December, 1997), 33-62.

anthologies.[37] The scholar's approach to discourses and institutions is anchored by rigorous empirical research but *deployed within a consistent theoretical* framework, a very rare combination in Indian art historiography. Guha-Thakurta's Foucauldian framing of institutional authority and discursive regimes in 19th and 20th century India, in particular, establishes a precedent for later scholars in the field.

My own engagement with the epistemological and ideological foundations of discourses about artefacts draws on this precedent. The discursive formations that I investigate in the chapters that follow are more or less in accordance with Guha-Thakurta's scheme, with minor modifications at the level of interpretation and chronology. However, both the investigative trajectory of my project and its thematic focus are very different from her version. To use a directional metaphor, the scholar's investigative thrust seems to me to be oriented outwards - from disciplines and discourses to institutional practices and structures that sustain them (with some reciprocity, of course). My project, on the other hand, moves inwards – from discursive formations, to a closer reading of texts within each discourse, to the subject-positions implicated therein. Similarly, the larger conceptual themes that Guha-Thakurta engages with include ideological constructs like empire, nation, region and modernity - as they are defined, modified and negotiated within discursive and institutional regimes. My thematic focus is more narrowly 'art historical' – I look at discursive constructions of visuality, materiality and related issues of historicity, meaning and agency.

[37]Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (Columbia University Press, 2004).

CHAPTER I: TRAVEL WRITINGS AND ANTIQUITIES

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine two distinct colonial discourses about historical artefacts that existed side-by-side in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The first was the 'Romantic' mode deployed by the British travel writers and artists who traversed the subcontinent during this period. These travelers framed their objects as 'wonders' and 'ruins', viewing them primarily in terms of Romantic aesthetic categories, subjectively perceived and artistically re-presented. The historicity of these artefacts was important only in so far as it lent an 'aura' of age that augmented the aesthetic effects. The second colonial mode, by contrast, framed many of the same artefacts as 'antiquities'. The antiquities frame gave epistemological priority to the *historicity* of the artefacts; their status as aesthetic objects was not recognized within this frame. However, their visual and material characteristics were far from unimportant; these functioned as traces or indices of their origins in an earlier historical context.

By the mid-19th century, the Romantic travelogue was relegated to a minor literary genre in the context of India. What is interesting is that its aesthetic frames did make periodic, subliminal reappearances at the margins of late 19th century colonialist historical discourses and institutional practices, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter. The antiquities frame, on the other hand, grew from strength to strength in the first half of the 19th century; it survived the utilitarian crackdown on philology-driven 'Orientalist' researches by shedding its some of its philosophical moorings, eventually transmuting into the colonial archaeological discourse.

Background

With the spread of Enlightenment rationality and growing secularism in 18th century Europe, the fear of the unknown, satanic, heathen East and its 'monstrous' gods abated.[1] The British, under the banner of the East India Company, travelled across the subcontinent, established trading posts and

[1]See Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters: A History of European Reactions to Indian Art* (University of Chicago Press, 1977) for detailed exposition of monster accounts.

pieced together a colony through conquest. Increasing familiarity, accessibility and pragmatic concerns diminished the cosmological significance of this strange and distant land in the European imagination. India became a knowable quantity, to be explored, documented and described "through the taxonomic structure of 18th century natural science." [2]

It is in this 'safe' context that the new generation of European travellers explored the subcontinent and recorded their observations, some of them inspired by the phenomenon of the 'grand tour' gaining popularity in England.[3] European merchants, seafarers, astronomers, doctors, natural historians, missionaries, artists, scholars; travellers of all persuasions toured the subcontinent, some documenting, others painting and yet others describing in letters and journals their encounters with Indian antiquities.

The Indian version of the 'grand tour' revolved around a few standard and mandatory sites. Due to their location near European settlements, and the air of mystery and grandeur that surrounded them, the caves of Elephanta, Jogeswari, Ellora and Kanheri, Mamallapuram and the 'black pagoda' at Konark received extensive coverage. Also described were the more monumental South Indian temples at Madurai, Thanjavur and so on.

According to Kate Teltscher, travel literature was the second most popular genre among Britain's reading public in the 18th century; it was instrumental in projecting India's monumental ruins as mysterious, exotic, while retaining at a subliminal level, the threat of the unknown, the decaying, the heathen.[4] The 'picturesque' illustrations of artists like Hodges and the Daniells, published and reasonably accessible, were calculated to fortify this image visually. By the end of the 18th century, a whole new field of knowledge had developed around the subject of Indian antiquities, based on eyewitness accounts of European travellers. A cursory analysis of 18th and early 19th century European travel writings about artefacts from India's past reveals a heterogeneity of style, substance and emphasis. Broadly speaking, this heterogeneity can be resolved into two different approaches to 'ancient

[2]Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge University Press India Pvt. Limited, 1998), 5.
[3]Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters*, 1977, 105.
[4]Kate Teltscher, *India Inscribed: European and British Writing on India, 1600-1800* (Oxford University Press, 1995), 4.

remains'. The first is the Romantic travelogue that frames these artefacts along with their natural settings as part of the 'wonders' encountered by the traveler in the subcontinent – mining these for subjective and aesthetic effect. The second approach coalesces, by the last quarter of the 18th century, into a more objective, systematic and empirical research into 'antiquities', with a view to using these as corroborative evidence for the colonial historiographical project.

SECTION I: THE ROMANTIC TRAVELOGUE

European Romanticism, particularly its English variant, fostered an enthusiasm for Indian monuments and 'ruins' among 'amateur' travelers, including, in the 19th century, several women travellers. Travelling for pleasure or personal edification, these Romantic grand tour enthusiasts were drawn to mysterious ruins set in picturesque locales, mining the encounter for subjective effect. Their narratives were recorded in journals and memoirs, with parallel manifestations in the field of painting.

Thomas and William Daniells' influential *A Picturesque Voyage to India* (pub. 1810),[5] Maria Graham's illustrated autobiographical *Journal of a Residence in India* (published in 1812),[6] artist James Forbes' *Oriental Memoirs* (1813),[7] John Seely's *Wonders of Elora* (1824),[8] Bishop Reginald Heber's *Narrative of a journey through the Upper Provinces of India from Calcutta to Bombay 1824-1825, An account of a journey to Madras and the Southern Provinces, 1826, and letters written in India* (pub. 1828)[9]are some examples of this genre. Professional artists William Hodges (travelled in India 1780-1783) and the Daniells, Thomas and William (travelling between 1786 and 1794)

[5]Thomas Daniell and William Daniell, *A Picturesque Voyage to India by the Way of China* (Archival Reprint Company, 2011).
[6]Maria Graham, *Journal of a Residence in India*, 1813.
[7]James Forbes and Eliza Rosée Montalembert (comtesse de), *Oriental Memoirs: A Narrative of Seventeen Years Residence in India* (Richard Bentley, 1834).
[8]John Benjamin Seely, *The Wonders of Elora: Or, The Narrative of a Journey to the Temples and Dwellings Excavated ... at Elora, in the East Indies ...* (G.&W.B. Whittaker, 1825).
[9]Reginald Heber, *Narrative of a Journey Through the Upper Provinces of India: From Calcutta to Bombay, 1824-1825, (with Notes Upon Ceylon); an Account of a Journey to Madras and the Southern Provinces, 1826; and Letters Written in India* (Carey, Lea and Carey, 1828).

recorded their impressions of the natural and monumental landmarks of the subcontinent in watercolour and aquatint.[10]

In this section, I discuss a small sampling of Romantic travel-writings between the second half of the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century to demonstrate their framing of monumental 'wonders' encountered within the Indian subcontinent. I argue that even within the Romantic travelogue, there is a considerable interplay between the more self-consciously literary conventions and subjective narrative that we associate with Romantic writing and the objective mode associated with a more scientific or empirical approach that characterizes the research into antiquities. Individual texts negotiate the 'presence effects' of the encountered object by frequently switching modes and this feature alerts us to the variability of the subject-object relations within a single discourse.[11]

Aesthetic categories

The Romantic travelogue frames the sights and sounds of the subcontinent within the aesthetic categories of the Sublime, the Picturesque and less frequently, the Beautiful. All these categories were theorized extensively throughout the Romantic period in the writings of Thomas Addison, Richard Payne Knight, William Gilpin, Uvedale Price, Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant and later, John Ruskin. Both the Picturesque and the Sublime associated with the Romantic response to Nature (not Art); both notions partake of a certain ruggedness, disorder, irrationality while Beauty is also applicable to an aesthetic response to art – connoting order, symmetry, smoothness (Burke) rationality and ultimately, Truth (Keats).

When the Romantic travel-writer frames the artefact-in-its setting through the aesthetic categories listed above, she is not approaching it as an *art object* per se but *as an object that evokes aesthetic feelings*. (In Kantian aesthetics, as for many Romantic poets, the aesthetic feelings evoked by of Nature are primary, paradigmatic.) The programmatic conflation of natural

[10]Mildred Archer and R. W. Lightbown, *India Observed: India as Viewed by British Artists, 1760-1860: an Exhibition Organised by the Library of the Victoria and Albert Museum as Part of the Festival of India, 26 April-5 July 1982* (Victoria and Albert Museum, 1982).
[11]Hals Ulrich Gumbrecht contrasts "presence effects" with "meaning effects" in the way cultures relate to "the things of the world", arguing that aesthetic experience can be conceived of as an oscillation between the two. Hans Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey*, 1st ed. (Stanford University Press, 2003).

and cultural phenomena in these texts demonstrates this point. A partial exception may be found in the category 'Beautiful' – as shown in the section below, the concept of the 'beautiful' is often applied to artefacts which demonstrate skill and expressiveness.

The Picturesque Ruin

The texts analysed here frequently resort to framing the countryside, its ruins and the 'natives' as 'picturesque.'

> These ruins [in Mamallapuram] cover a great space ; a few small houses inhabited by Brahmins, are scattered among them, and there is one large and handsome temple of Vishnu of later date and in pretty good repair, the priests of which chiefly live by shewing these ruins. One of them acted as our cicerone….Two boys preceded us with a pipe and a pair of small cymbals, and their appearance among these sculptures was very picturesque and appropriate.[12]

'Picturesque' descriptions suggest arrested, frozen spectacles – immobile passive objects 'captured' by a mobile, active subject, who gazes from a vantage point *outside* the frame. The effect is one of pleasing disorder, disorder within limits; the chance 'discovery' of the picturesque vista simulates the accidental, the spontaneous, the 'natural'. However, if we attend to how the objects are selected and composed in the picturesque description, the adjectives and metaphors used to highlight their visual appearance, and the invisible power exerted by the frame itself, we become aware of the essentially synthetic, artificial, even conventional nature of this construction. The picturesque traveller compensates for the inadequacies of the 'real' landscape in her field of vision by tweaking the composition and filling in atmosphere, using her skill and imagination. The constructedness of the picturesque is borne out in the visual sphere as well – in the landscape views painted by William Hodges or the Daniells.

[12]Heber, *Narrative of a Journey Through the Upper Provinces of India*, 219–220.

The architectural ruin is the picturesque object *par excellence.* Maria Graham describes a large tank in Mamallapuram "the walls of which are just enough decayed to have become picturesque."[13] She continues;

> A ruined muntapom stands in the middle, and on its banks several buildings of the same kind, some partially hid by the trees, and others boldly projecting, with their verdant crowns of peepil or euphorbia. These objects, lighted up by the setting sun, with groups of natives bathing, and cattle grazing on the edge of the tank as we went by, made an enchanting picture.[14]

'Natives', cattle, trees and ruins bathed in the light of the setting sun – all in a state of nature. The deliberate and artful conflation of the natural and the cultural is one persistent characteristic of Romantic description; in the dialectical struggle between nature and culture, nature eventually emerges triumphant. In his treatise *On Picturesque Beauty* (1791), William Gilpin distinguishes between the elegance and 'smoothness' of the beautiful architectural object and the painterly 'roughness' of the picturesque ruin.

> A piece of Palladian architecture may be elegant in the last degree. The proportion of it's parts-- the propriety of it's ornaments--and the symmetry of the whole, may be highly pleasing. But if we introduce it in a picture, it immediately becomes a formal object, and ceases to please. Should we wish to give it picturesque beauty, we must use the mallet, instead of the chisel: we must beat down one half of it, deface the other, and throw the mutilated members around in heaps. In short, from a smooth building we must turn it into a *rough* ruin. No painter, who had the choice of the two objects, would hesitate a moment.[15]

The 'picturesque ruin' unambiguously situates the viewing subject *outside* the frame. The synthetic operation involved in the *re*-presentation (visual/textual) of the picturesque prospect, even while it foregrounds the 'presence' of the objects in terms of 'discovery', immediacy, spontaneity and

[13]Graham, *Journal of a Residence in India*, 161.
[14]Ibid.
[15]William Gilpin, *Three Essays: on Picturesque Beauty, on Picturesque Travel and on Sketching Landscape: to Which Is Added a Poem, on Landscape Painting* (London: Printed for R. Blamire, 1792), 7–8.

accident, implies the mastery of the viewing subject.[16] This is most apparent in the 'ruin' paintings and aquatints of Hodges and Daniells, where they systematically distinguish a darkened foreground (a 'refuge' proximate to the viewer's position – from where the viewer sees but is not seen) from the luminous middle-ground which focuses attention on the architectural ruin in all its picturesque glory, and the background – natural features blurred by atmospheric perspective leading to a very atmospheric sky. Here, the 'presence effects' are graspable, containable within Cartesian perspectival views vouchsafed by the monocular camera obscura, amenable to manipulation and 'correction'. In an article on early nineteenth century technologies and modes of seeing, Erna Fiorentini writes,

> "…around 1800, the Camera Obscura was expected to show nature not as it could be experienced directly, but as it should look like in order to make a good picture. The Camera Obscura seems to have satisfied the needs of a literally 'picturesque' visual approach to nature: What mattered for the users was not the degree of concordance between the 'reality' outside the device and the image inside it, but rather the painterly effect which nature was able to produce on the screen."[17]

The Sublime

The evocation of the Sublime, by contrast, is designed to reverse the power equation between the subject and the object. The status of the viewing subject is diminished by the larger-than-life 'presence' of the Sublime spectacle. There is a sense of immersion, of being overwhelmed by a presence that exceeds human attempts to draw meaning out of it.

> The passion caused by the great and sublime in *nature*, when those causes operate most powerfully, is astonishment: and astonishment is that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by

[16]See Gilpin on how the artist should control the composition, variety and contrast of his Picturesque painting for maximum effect. ibid., 19–21.
[17]Erna Fiorentini, "Camera Obscura Vs. Camera Lucida – Distinguishing Early Nineteenth Century Modes of Seeing," 31, accessed April 27, 2013, http://www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/Preprints/P307.PDF.

> consequence reason on that object which employs it. Hence arises the great power of the sublime, that, far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force. Astonishment, as I have said, is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree; the inferior effects are admiration, reverence, and respect.[18]

The Romantic travelogues examined in this study deploy the aesthetic of the Sublime judiciously, less frequently than they use the picturesque frame in their descriptions of 'grand tour' sites. John Seely dwells on the Sublime in his *Wonders of Elora*:

> On a close approach to the temples, the eye and the imagination are bewildered with the variety of interesting objects that present themselves on every side. The feelings are interested to a degree of awe, wonder, and delight, that at first is painful, and it is a long time before they become sufficiently sobered and calm to contemplate with any attention the surrounding wonders.[19]

The Sublime aesthetic defies the containment afforded by a camera obscura view of the world. In one sense, the Sublime is unrepresentable, and any attempts at representation are doomed to failure. The aesthetic of the Sublime in travel narratives recreates in the literary mode what Martin Jay terms the baroque scopic regime, with "its yearning for a presence that can never be fulfilled."

> Indeed, desire, in its erotic as well as metaphysical forms, courses through the baroque scopic regime. The body returns to dethrone the disinterested gaze of the disincarnated Cartesian spectator.[20]

The Sublime spectacle is represented as engulfing and penetrating the viewing subject with an almost physical intensity – the emotional reactions it seems to provoke are pain, agitation and often enough, a post-climax melancholy. The evocation of the Sublime in the context of India, as I

[18]Hector Macneil, "XXIV. An Account of the Caves of Cannara, Ambola, and Elephanta, in the East Indies; in a Letter from Hector Macneil, Esq. Then at Bombay, to a Friend in England, Dated 1783. Communicated by the Rev. Mr. Gregory, F.A.S.," *Archaeologia* 8 (1787): 251–289.
[19]Seely, *The Wonders of Elora*, 125-126.
[20]Martin Jay "Scopic Regimes of Modernity," in Hal Foster ed., *Vision and Visuality* (Bay Press, 1988), 18.

understand it, posed a definite risk to the colonial travel-writer; it threatened both his epistemological mastery over and his ontological distance from, all things 'native'. Both engulfing and penetration are the prerogative of the conqueror, not the conquered. It is interesting how travel writers stage their recuperation from the threat of the Sublime, recovering their voice after a temporary lapse into incoherence, restoring order after chaos. A brush with the Sublime, it appears, mandates a withdrawal into the self, expressed in the form of poetical or philosophical reverie. For Bishop Heber, the ruins of Mamallapuram conspire with nature to recall, through an association of ideas, Southey's *Kehama*

> …the noise of the surf, the dark shadow of the remaining building, the narrow slip of dark smooth sand, the sky just reddening into dawn, and lending its tints to the sea, together with the remarkable desolation of the surrounding scenery, were well calculated to make one remember with interest the description in Kehama, and to fancy that one saw the beautiful form of Kailyal in her white mantle, pacing sadly above the shore, and watching till her father and lover should emerge from the breakers.[21]

Seely's imagination conjures up an extravagant heathen ritual in Ellora, overstuffed with stereotypes of the Hindu 'Other' – an imaginary 'presence' that is replete with absence.

> Where now is the whole mechanism of Elora's former splendour—the mystic dance, the beautiful priestesses, the innumerable midnight lamps, the choruses of hundreds of devoted victims, the responses of music, the shouts of fanatical fakeers, the solemn supplications of the graceful-looking Brahman of the 'olden day', clothed in long white vestments?[22]

Because the transcendence implied by the Sublime aesthetic is dangerously close to religious epiphany, the framing of the heathen ruin-in-nature as Sublime seems to indicate the need for some undoing. The Christian-moral undercurrent in Seely's reaction finds an echo in Maria Graham's meditation on the Mamallapuram Sublime.

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[21]Heber, *Narrative of a Journey Through the Upper Provinces of India*, 218.
[22]Seely, *The Wonders of Elora*, 275.

> The view of these objects, together with the loneliness of the place, the depth of the sands, and the distant roarings of the ocean, dispose the mind to meditate concerning the short duration of human pride…. The monuments they have left now adorn a desert, which Nature, as if in scorn of man, seems to pride herself in decking with gay colours, and fresh smells of every shrub and flower, whose Author can never be mistaken."[23]

Graham transforms the desolation of the ruins-in-their-setting into something of an object lesson – the hubris of Babel. Nature, the handiwork of the Divine Artificer, eventually undoes all that 'human pride' seeks to immortalize. This is a fairly standard response to the ruin in the Romantic period, Shelley's Ozymandias being an ironic, more secular version of the same idea.

Meaning is what seems to be doubly absent in the Sublime ruin. On the one hand, the Sublime object itself is all presence; its 'meaning effects' are edged out by its 'presence effects', even as meaning remains out of reach. On the other, one of the preconditions of the ruin as an ontological category is that it must have lost its original function (hence - meaning). Seely's hyperbolic reconstruction of Ellora's original function underscores this absence of meaning in the monument's present.

The Beautiful

The words 'beautiful' and 'beauty' pepper the Romantic travelogue with a regularity that is to be expected. The 'beauty' of sunrises, moonlight, prospects, ruins-in-nature, native women and so on imply a *subjective* appreciation of beauty, beauty perceived by the mind of the beholder. But in their descriptions of Ellora, Elephanta and Karle, among other 'wonders', travel writers also appear to invoke a different concept of beauty, based on 'just proportions', good design, taste and workmanship. This 'objective' notion of beauty is more in line with an 18th century classical aesthetic.

> …though my expectations were highly raised, the reality much exceeded them, and …. both the dimensions, the proportions, and the sculpture, seemed to me to be of a more noble character, and a

[23]Graham, *Journal of a Residence in India*, 163–164.

> more elegant execution than I had been led to suppose. Even the statues are executed with great spirit, and are some of them of no common beauty, considering their dilapidated condition and the coarseness of material.[24]
>
> The cave of Carli is really one of the most magnificent chambers I ever saw, both as to proportion and workmanship….the most laboured part of the work is the portico of the temple. One third of its height is filled up by a variety of figures, one of which, in a dancing posture, is remarkable for gracefulness of design….[25]
>
> We will not stop at this place to enter into the exploits, attributes, and powers of the infinite variety of Hindoo deities and heroes. At all times it is an interminable subject, and one of those that, after the deepest research and closest investigation, produces neither amusement nor information, being monstrous lies and fabled imposture from beginning to end, as I know by the experience of many a weary and ill spent day of study. Where it is necessary, however, to elucidate our .subject, reference will be made to their pantheon; at other times it would be only exhausting the reader's patience, and wasting my own time on points, " flat, stale, and unprofitable." It is not the history of the sculptured figures that we are chiefly to admire, but the labour, skill, and patience displayed by the artificers of the caves in executing their almost super-human task. It is here I wish to interest and fix attention.[26]

In *Patterns of Intention*, Michael Baxandall distinguishes 'three kinds of descriptive word' which we use to say things about pictures. **Effect words** refer to the effect of the picture on the beholder, for example – 'noble character' and 'magnificence' Then there are **comparison words**, often metaphorically used, which would include straightforward references to representations in stone as if they were real - 'giants', 'monsters', 'deities' or figures 'in a dancing posture', as well as larger frames, comparing a sunset scene to an enchanting picture. Finally, there are **cause words**, which "…describe the effect of the picture on us by telling of inferences we have

[24]Heber, *Narrative of a Journey Through the Upper Provinces of India*, 139–140.
[25]Graham, *Journal of a Residence in India*, 64–65.
[26]Seely, *The Wonders of Elora*, 132–133.

made about the action or process that might have led to the picture being as it is".[27]

In the examples cited above, phrases like 'elegant execution', 'workmanship' and 'labour, skill and patience' of the artificers are inferred from the works themselves. This acknowledgement of intentionality and agency is one feature that distinguishes the Romantic travelogue from the more 'scientific' descriptions of the archaeological genre. Both cause and effect words are gradually whittled away in later frames with the result that the objects described are stripped both of the 'intentionality' that brought them into being and of their sustained 'intentional visual interest'. Baxandall makes a fascinating distinction between two aspects of intentionality which historical objects such as paintings display. On the one hand, they imply rational human action on the part of historical actors. On the other, there is purposefulness in historical artefacts themselves, and whatever their purposes, these are achieved primarily through a visual/tactile modality, which is what distinguishes a sculpture or a painting from a work of poetry or music.[28]

Objective description as distancing device

In a letter to a friend in England dated 1783, Hector Macneil describes his visit to the caves of Kanheri, Jogeswari and Elephanta which "are now the general topic of conversation" among the "virtuosi" of Bombay.[29] This narrative is a good example of the co-existence of the Romantic and the empirical-objective modes within a single text. Even though Macneil's letter is reproduced in *Archaeologia* (probably justified by its considerable empirical content) the Romantic vision that shapes the account is unmistakable. The following extract exemplifies the induction of the Romantic aesthetic categories of the Sublime and the Picturesque into the travel writings of this period. The writer begins his narrative with a standard objective 'fixing' of the location of Kanheri caves within a modern 'universal' grid of geographical coordinates, a convention that continues in official tourist brochures supplied by the Archaeological Survey of India today:

[27]Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (Yale University Press, 1985), 6.
[28]Ibid., 41–43.
[29]Macneil, "XXIV. An Account of the Caves…" 251.

> The island of Salset lies in the same latitude with Bombay and is separated from it only by a narrow arm of the sea at the N. W. extremity of the island. It is considerably larger than Bombay, and excells [sic] it as much in beauty as it does in all kinds of animal and vegetable productions, which are found in great abundance and perfection. The principle town is Tarmah…"[30]

The writer switches to a recognizably Romantic narrative, describing the surroundings of the caves as…

> …a spot as singular for the production of art, as for the lonely romantic scenes of nature that surround it.... For near three miles round the caves, the country, from its not hitherto having been cleared, is a continued wilderness, beautifully diversified with hill and dale, rocks and murmuring rills. The variety likewise of tree and shrub is peculiarly striking, and furnishes a noble source of entertainment to the lover of nature. The mango tree, one of the richest and most graceful in India, grows here in such plenty, that you might meet with it every twenty and thirty yards.... I had the opportunity for an instant of seeing and hearing the Mangoe-bird, so remarkable for the vivid tints of its plumage....The notes of this beautiful bird, though simple, were plaintive and melodious....[31]

Transporting us beyond the mundane world of landmarks and coordinates, the writer sets the stage for the 'wonders' still to come. From the somewhat familiar 'hill and dale', 'rocks and murmuring rills', the English reader is given a taste of the exotic – the mango-tree and the Mangoe-bird. This multi-sensory defamiliarising is achieved through an evocation of the aesthetic of the Picturesque. The wandering attention of the writer mimics the randomness of the picturesque. But what lies beyond is truly uncanny.

> On my first approach to this astonishing scene, I was filled with new wonder at every step; palaces, statues, giants, monsters, and deities seemed as if starting from the bowels of the earth to open day...I found myself in a kind of street, where on the one hand, a range of lofty domes ornamented with porticos, pillars, arches, and

[30]Ibid.
[31]Ibid., 252–253.

> human figures burst upon the eye at one view, and presented a scene more like enchantment than reality.[32]

Here the aesthetic of the Sublime takes over. 'Giants', 'monsters' and 'deities', threatening presences, are imbued with an agency of their own which the writer seems unable to resist. He 'finds himself' in an 'enchanted' scene as if his own agency has been temporarily taken away from him.

In the next paragraph, the author changes to a more objective descriptive mode itemizing "an open court, of about twenty five feet square, with two pillars, on which are represented, in basso relievo, a lion and a tiger…"[33] The narrative becomes more systematic, moving from section to section, naming each significant object represented, giving measurements, noting the state of preservation, with an occasional comment on the aesthetic qualities of the sculptures.

The author concludes his description of the caves with the opinion that "...the grand cave of Canara [Kanheri] must ever be considered by the man of taste as an object of beauty and sublimity, and by the antiquary and philosopher as one of the most valuable monuments of antiquity."[34]

This curious intertwining of subjective-imaginative excursions and objective description within the Romantic narrative merits investigation. A straightforward explanation would be that the Romantic travelogue, even though it belonged to a genre distinct from the more 'scholarly' empirical texts about the subcontinent, and catered to a lay readership, was still not to be mistaken for a work of fiction or poetry. It had to retain its 'realistic' or documentary bearings for purposes of credibility, to be read as a 'report' and not merely as a work of imagination, a fabulous account. In order to do this, it had to fall back upon descriptive devices already established within the scholarly empirical genre.

However, I want to draw attention to the regularity with which the empirical mode *disrupts* the flow of poetic narrative in these texts. It appears as if the empirical mode also functions in these accounts as a rhetorical device, a distancing device that anchors the writers (and their readers) from the all too

[32]Ibid., 253.
[33]Ibid., 254.
[34]Ibid., 260.

absorptive flights of imagination that threaten to spirit them away. The writer re-establishes mastery over the scene unfolding before her/him and the reader once again treads *terra firma* – the mundane world of measurements, numbers and itemized descriptions.

> The height of these gigantic statues, as nearly as I could judge by the measurement of a long pole, was about twenty-two or twenty-three feet, and (except the shoulders which appeared to me rather too broad) the whole figure is very well proportioned. The little finger measured exactly fifteen inches; the length of the foot from the heel thirty-five inches, the extended hand from the wrist thirty-seven inches, the leg from the foot four feet three inches and a half, the thigh five feet, and from the pedestal to the upper part of the kneepan five feet nine inches. The attitude of these figures is erect….[35]

This tendency becomes a central feature of the 'antiquities' frame that I discuss next where reports are purged, in stages, of metaphorical usage and speculative content.

SECTION II: THE RESEARCH INTO ANTIQUITIES

Throughout the latter half of the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century, another mode of representing artefacts from the subcontinent existed side by side with the Romantic travelogue, catering to a different, arguably niche, readership, in Europe and in the colonies. European 'men of science' and colonial functionaries of scientific bent approached these artefacts with a view to inspecting their features and recording their observations in a systematic manner. The trend was established in the 18th century by European travelers like the French Orientalist scholar A. H. Anquetil Duperron, the Danish natural historian Carsten Niebuhr, French

[35]Ibid., 254–255.

scientist Le Gentil de la Galasiere and French natural historian Pierre Sonnerat.[36]

Around this time, the first English-language writings with a comparable approach found a forum in *Archaeologia*, the journal of the Society of Antiquaries based in London. As early as 1712, Captain Pyke included an illustrated account of Elephanta in his journal while on a British ship in Bombay harbour. This section was extracted by Alexander Dalrymple and presented at the Society of Antiquaries about 70 years later.[37] The accounts of William Hunter (surgeon), Captain Pyke (later Governor of St. Helena), Charles Boon (sometime Governor of Bombay) and Hector Macneil, describing the cave temples around Bombay, were featured in the seventh and eighth volumes of *Archaeologia*[38] while (surgeon) Adam Blackader's description of the temple at Madurai appeared in the tenth volume of *Archaeologia*, dated 1792.[39] These somewhat scattered writings were important precedents for the new discourse on '*antiquities*' institutionalized under the aegis of the Asiatic societies in India and Great Britain.

In the very first volume of *Asiatick Researches*, we find a clear-cut ontological (and therefore epistemological) distinction between what is produced by nature and what is performed by man; the deliberate blurring of boundaries between nature and culture, which served both an aesthetic and a symbolic function in the Romantic travelogue, is cast aside for the more instrumental approach to these artefacts, whose primary function henceforth will be to illuminate the obscure history of the subcontinent. Colonialist scholarship claims interpretive privilege over 'antiquities', and these are effectively locked into the colonial discourse of history.

[36]see Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters: A History of European Reactions to Indian Art* (University of Chicago Press, 1977).
[37] Captain Pyke, "XXIV. Account of a curious Pagoda near Bombay…" Journal extract by Alexander Dalrymple, *Archaeologia 7*, (1785), 323-336.
[38]William Hunter, "XXXI. An Account of Some Artificial Caverns in the Neighbourhood of Bombay: By Mr. William Hunter, Surgeon in the East Indies," *Archaeologia* 7 (1785): 286–302.
[39]Adam Blackader, "XL. Description of the Great Pagoda of Madura, the Choultry of Trimul Naik, in a Letter from Mr. Adam Blackader, to Sir Joseph Banks, Bart. P. R. S. F. A. S.," *Archaeologia* 10 (1789): 449–459.

A History for a Subject Nation

The significance of the 1780's for British knowledge–production about India cannot be overstated. British territorial expansion across the subcontinent had transformed the former trading power into a colonial one. By the last quarter of the 18th century, the colonizers were putting down roots and settling into the business of administering a country they knew very little about. It is this altered political context that separates British historical research in India, post-1770's, from its forebears. While the older tradition was in the nature of dillettantish and scholarly exertions, the new studies became increasingly goal-oriented.

Knowledge-gathering became an urgent concern, both instrumental knowledge about laws, usages and land tenure and more general inquiries into the customs and traditions of the people - in other words, matters cultural and historical. The need to understand India historically and culturally became a late 18th century imperative; it generated "a growing body of assertion and argumentation about the fundamental nature of Indian society and its civil and political institutions, in the context of the extensive debates about the colonial project of conquering and ruling India."[40]

Two areas of historical/cultural research, initiated during this period relate directly to political and material interests of colonialism. The laws, customs and conventions of the native population were studied alongside textual sources of jurisprudence, in order to enable the British to codify and systematise the legal system along 'indigenous' lines. The second area was covered by historical/geographical researches into the 'land question' - c*omprehensive surveys* of political histories extending over long periods and across regions which explored the relations between power and property, *economic surveys* which focussed on political economy and revenue distribution and *local histories* (mostly in the form of reports) relating to individual or micro-regional landholdings.[41] These large projects dealing with revenue generation, property and traditions of jurisprudence were mostly

[40] Nicholas B. Dirks, "Colonial Histories and Native Informants: Biography of an Archive" in Carol Appadurai Breckenridge and Peter Van der Veer, *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993). 45

[41] Ranajit Guha, *An Indian Historiography of India: a Nineteenth-century Agenda and Its Implications* (Published for Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, by K.P. Bagchi & Co., 1988), 9.

commissioned researches, feeding directly into the expansion and consolidation of colonial gains.

Equally significant, however, was a growing corpus of more 'liberal' inquiries, both scholarly and amateur, into the cultural peculiarities of an alien land, its religions, customs and manners, languages and literature, history and antiquities. Localized, fragmentary and less obviously instrumental to colonial governance, these privately undertaken inquiries were nevertheless considered vital contributions to the cumulative process of knowledge gathering about the culture and history of the subcontinent.

In a letter to Warren Hastings, dated 1774, Samuel Johnson wrote:

> I hope you will examine nicely the traditions and histories of the East, that you will survey the corridors of its ancient edifices, and trace the vestiges of its ruined cities, and that, on our return, we shall know the arts and opinions of a race of men from whom very little has hitherto been derived.[42]

The establishment of Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta in 1786 was a landmark event in this context. It provided a unifying forum for the hitherto diffused body of writings about Indian culture and history, soliciting contributions to the field and conferring on them institutional and *disciplinary* legitimacy. Quite predictably, 'History and Antiquities' were priority areas for the private research initiatives patronized by the Asiatic Society of Bengal. The inaugural volume of *Asiatick Researches* defines the society as ' Instituted in Bengal for Inquiring into the Antiquities and History, and the Arts, Sciences and Literature of Asia'. Here, 'history', denotes 'civil' and 'natural' history, 'civil' history concerning itself with the 'actions of men' and including 'geography'('where they acted') and peculiarly enough, 'astronomy' (as a guide to 'the time of their actions').[43]This curious classification is reflected in the *Asiatic(k) Researches* corpus.

[42]Mildred Archer, R. W. Lightbown, and National Art Library (Great Britain), *India Observed: India as Viewed by British Artists, 1760-1860: an Exhibition Organised by the Library of the Victoria and Albert Museum as Part of the Festival of India, 26 April-5 July 1982* (Victoria and Albert Museum, 1982), 16.
[43]William Jones, "Tenth Anniversary Discourse - On Asiatic History, civil and natural", *Asiatick Researches Vol 4*, (London reprint 1798), i–xx.

The belief in the civilizing power of history forms the backbone of colonial historical scholarship in India. From the eighteenth century onwards India was perceived as a country without a history. Bernard Cohn calls this a 'double lack of history.' One, India had not progressed since ancient days; while Europe was progressive, India was static. Two, there were no documents or records here which could be called historical.[44] In his Discourse on Asiatic History, Jones laments that "..no Hindu nation, but the Cashmirians have left us regular histories in their ancient language."[45]

The first lacuna could be remedied through colonial political intervention: India could be positioned on the road to progress through the corrective influence of colonial rule. The second was to be remedied in the cultural sphere--it was a colonial responsibility to write a history of an a-historical nation; the responsibility of a combined task force of colonial philologists, historians, surveyors and other functionaries in the line of duty, 'gentlemen amateurs' with historical, cultural and antiquarian interests. The second project was to contribute positively to the first-- by inducting India's a-historical past into the framework of the European meta-discourse of history, the nation could be 'civilized' and now had potential to progress.

Even as British Orientalist research, anchored by the Asiatic Society, found its feet and flourished in a short span of time, it was necessary to constantly reinforce its worth and to justify this somewhat broad-based acquisition of knowledge about India. In his article 'On the Gods of Greece Italy and India' initially written in 1794, Jones (quite appropriately) invokes humanism, paraphrasing Terence: "We are men and take an interest in all that relates to mankind." [46]

Jones' verification of the 'Family of Nations' hypothesis nuanced the humanist argument, fortifying its position. A kinship, dating back to the dispersal from Babel, was established between the colonizers and the colonized. Jones' much-publicized discovery of the Indo-European linguistic group is generally considered the crowning achievement of this period. Its immediate impact

[44]See Bernard Cohn, "Transformation of Objects into Artifacts, Antiquities and Art in Nineteenth-Century India" in *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton University Press, 1996), 76–106.
[45] Jones, *AsiatickResearches Vol 4*, (Fourth edition, London, 1807), xvii-xviii
[46] Jones, *Asiatick Researches Vol 1*, (Fifth edition, London, 1806), 224

was to stimulate research in Sanskrit and comparative linguistics; at a theoretical level, it provided documentary support to the Universal History tendencies of the time. For the first time in history, European and Indian cultures emerged on a common platform, a platform constructed on the certainty of common origins. However, the imperatives of colonial domination could not allow this dissolving of civilizational distance. On the one hand, this (in some ways uncomfortable) historical discovery made it impossible to hold on to the older, more naive cultural relativism of the 'monster' era. On the other, any degree of empathy with the colonized nation would only serve to undermine colonial power structures. To quote Gyan Prakash,

> …the discoveries of the affinities between Sanskrit and European languages provided the premise for formulating the belief in an "Aryan race" from which the Europeans and Brahmans were seen to originate. This search and discovery of European origins in the India of Sanskrit, the Brahmans, and texts essentialized and distanced India in two ways. First, because it embodied Europe's childhood, India was temporally separated from Europe's present and made incapable of achieving "progress." As an eternal child detached altogether from Time, India was construed as an external object available to the Orientalist's gaze. Second, composed of language and texts, India appeared to be unchanging and passive. These distancing procedures overlooked the European dominance of the world that provided the conditions for the production of knowledge and that had constituted this discursive dominance. The India of the Orientalist's knowledge emerged as Europe's other, an essential and distanced entity knowable by the detached and distanced observer of the European Orientalist.[47]

By the last quarter of the 18th century, the historiographical project was no longer undertaken as a relatively innocent 'compare and contrast' exercise which allowed the Europeans to interpret the alien culture of India to their own people in terms of familiar epistemological structures. Built into the project and forming its very foundation, were the unequal power relations

[47]Gyan Prakash, "Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32, no. 02 (1990): 385–386.

between the colonizers and the colonized, between the knowledge-producing subjects and the 'objects' about which this knowledge was to be produced. Consequently, the essential, static, objectively observable 'otherness' of the Indian lay at the very foundation of the Orientalist project in India. This aspect of 'writing a history for a subject nation' was openly acknowledged and presented as a benevolent act, which would benefit both parties, although in different ways.[48]

History, Antiquarian Research and Antiquities

The distinction between 'civil history' and 'antiquities' needs to be understood in the context of 18th century Europe. According to historian Arnaldo Momigliano, Francis Bacon in his *Advancement of Learning* (1685) divided Civil History under the heads 'Antiquities', 'Memorials' and 'Perfect histories' (histories of ancient Greece and Rome written by classical authors) and defined Antiquities as "history defaced or some remnants of history which have casually escaped the shipwreck of time."[49] In 17th century Europe, there were two fields for historical/antiquarian research – the classical world and the non/post-classical world. Ancient Greek and Roman historians were considered the ultimate authorities on classical history; there was no space for 'contemporary' rewritings of classical history; contemporary antiquarians, however, were allowed a space on the margins of this canon, often collecting and using non-literary sources for a study of classical history. Medieval and local histories of Britain and France, however, provided an open field for both historians and antiquarians.

By the late 17th century, the distinctions between historical and antiquarian research became blurred. Both historians and antiquarians used non-literary sources (coins, inscriptions, charters 'statues' – earlier the exclusive province of the antiquarian) to arrive at facts about the past. Both produced 'new' work on classical as well as post/non-classical history. However, whereas antiquarian research focussed on religion, institutions, art and emphasised description and classification, historical research tended to emphasise a diachronic approach to history (mainly political history) and 'events' in

[48]See for example, Warren Hastings' argument about the "accumulation of knowledge" which "attracts and conciliates distant affections" of the colonized natives, quoted in Cohn, 1996, 45.
[49]Arnaldo Momigliano, "Ancient History and the Antiquarian," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 13, no. 3/4 (1950): 292.

chronological sequence.[50]. In the 17th and 18th centuries, there was another strand in historical enquiry – 'philosophical' history privileged the quest for universal principles and general historical laws over the 'erudition' of details that characterized the work of political historians and antiquarians.

In the context of late 18th-early 19th century historical research in India, there appears to have been considerable interaction between of *philosophical, antiquarian* and *historical* approaches, all making significant contributions to the historiographical project. An analysis of the historical-antiquarian writings in the first ten volumes of the *Asiatic(k) Researches,* for example, reveals that the study of antiquities articulates with the project of uncovering India's past at three different registers, all broadly historical. 1) At the level of Universal History, antiquities research is used to verify and substantiate the theories of monogenesis, 'human nature' as constant, the 'ages of man' (poetic, mythic, prosaic), the progress of forms of government, and so on. Obvious examples of this approach would be William Jones' lengthy dissertations which use antiquarian findings, among other sources, to validate and elaborate upon his 'Family of Nations' hypothesis. 2) As "…reliques which illustrate ancient manners and customs", antiquities are frequently mined for details regarding 'traditions' and 'opinions' held by people in the past, their ways of life, the level of material and technological advancement reached by them, the progress of ideas, ultimately enabling a comparative exercise between the European 'norm' and the Indian 'deviation'. 3) Finally, antiquities are viewed as potential sources of <u>new</u> information about political and religious history – chronologies, dynasties, successions, wars, forms of government; different cults, changing practices, religious movements and so on.

The OED gives the broadest definition of the term 'antiquities' as encompassing 'matters, customs, precedents, or events of earlier times; ancient records'. Thus, Thomas Maurice's seven-volume work - *Indian Antiquities* (pub. 1794) is sub-titled

> 'dissertations relative to the ancient geography, primeval theology, grand code of civil laws, government and profound literature of Hindoostan compared throughout with the religions, laws, etc., of

[50]Ibid., 293–294.

> Persia, Greece, Egypt … The whole being introductory to the history of Hindoostan upon a comprehensive scale.' [51]

A more restricted sense of the term denotes 'remains or monuments of antiquity' (in the European context, defined as the time of the ancient Greeks, Romans and early Christian era). An analysis of the use of the word in the early volumes of the *Asiatic(k) Researches*, indicates that while both the broad and restricted meanings are employed, 'antiquities' increasingly privileges the latter usage, in line with Bacon's 'remnants of history which have casually escaped the shipwreck of time'.

William Jones outlines four general sources for information about India's past; 'Languages and Letters', 'Philosophy and Religion', the 'written memorials' of India's 'Sciences and Arts' and the actual remains of 'Sculpture and Architecture'.[52]In material terms, 'antiquities' research in this context covers Jones' 'actual remains of Sculpture and Architecture', coins, as well as written records from the past in the form of manuscripts and inscriptions.[53]

Some concrete examples will help delineate the contours, the actual 'contents', of the object field covered by the 'antiquities' frame. In volume 12 of the Asiatic Researches, published in 1818, a list of contributions solicited to build the collection of the Asiatic Society's museum includes 'Inscriptions on stone or brass', 'Ancient monuments, Mohammedan or Hindu', 'Figures of Hindu deities', 'Ancient coins' and 'Ancient Manuscripts'.[54] These artefacts are ontologically separated, by their ordering in the sequence, from such objects of 'utility' (in their original contexts, at least) that feature in the list as 'vessels employed in religious ceremonies', 'instruments of war', 'instruments of music'. Colonialist interest in this category was primarily ethnological, not historical. In this sense, their epistemological status within the museum

[51]Thomas Maurice, *Indian Antiquities:: Or, Dissertations, Relative to the Ancient Geographical Divisions, the Pure System of Primeval Theology, the Grand Code of Civil Laws, the Original Form of Government, the Widely-extended Commerce, and the Various and Profound Literature, of Hindostan: Compared, Throughout, with the Religion, Laws, Government, and Literature, of Persia, Egypt, and Greece. The Whole Intended as Introductory to, and Illustrative of, the History of Hindostan, ... Vol.VII*, 1800).
[52]Jones, *Asiatick Researches; Vol 1*, 1807, 421.
[53]See "Comments of the Committee of Papers", quoted in O. P. Kejariwal, *The Asiatic Society of Bengal and the Discovery of India's Past, 1784-1838* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 117.
[54]*Asiatic Researches Volume 12*, (London, 1818) v. In the same volume, a list of donations actually received by the museum from 1810 onwards includes a carved stone with many figures of Buddha from Rajagriha, a "Dwaraca Chacra" of Vishnu, "brass" figures of "Bhavani", "Buddha", "Parvati" and "Ganesa", etc., xv.

frame affiliates them to final category of man-made artefacts in the contributions list – 'arts and manufactures'.[55]

In Jones' writings, we find a clear-cut distinction between the useful arts, the fine arts and antiquities. The useful or mechanical arts are concerned with converting the 'productions of nature' into objects of utility for the 'convenience and ornament of life'. [56] This category includes dyeing, weaving and metallurgy.[57] Apart from being viewed as ethnological peculiarities, these 'objects' of utility' were studied in the context of the technologies involved in the manufacturing processes and of their commercial potential.

The fine arts operate in the realm of "fancy" and "fiction"; for Jones, these include music, poetry, oratory, architecture and painting. 'Art', presided over by the faculty of Imagination, includes "...the beauties of imagery, and the charms of invention, displayed in modulated language, or represented by colour, figure, or sound."[58] Fine art, which Jones defines in the context of music, caters both to the senses and the imagination, "…speaking, as it were the language of beautiful nature, to raise correspondent ideas and emotions in the mind of the hearer; it then, and then only becomes what we call a *fine art*, allied very nearly to verse, painting and rhetorick…" [59]

Antiquities, on the other hand, speak the language of history; their aesthetic appeal (or lack thereof) is of little consequence to their primarily historical function. "The remains of *Architecture* and *Sculpture* in *India,* which I mention here as mere monuments of antiquity, not as specimens of ancient art, seem to prove an early connection between this country and *Africa.*" [60] Here, Jones' preoccupation with 'monuments of antiquity' is limited to their potential function as sources of information about India's past, about India's ancient connections with Egypt and Abyssinia.[61]

Writing in the first decade of the 19th century, Colebrooke assigns a special role to 'monuments'; literature, and historical evidence gleaned from

[55]Ibid., v.
[56] Jones, *Asiatic ResearchesVol 4*, xi-xix.

[57]Jones, "Third Anniversary Discourse" *Asiatick Researches Vol 3*, 428.
[58]Jones, *Asiatick Researches Vol 1*, xiii.
[59] Jones "On the Musical Modes of the Hindus", *Asiatick Researches Vol 3,* 312-313.
[60] Jones, "Third Anniversary Discourse" *Asiatick Researches Vol 3,* 427.
[61] Jones, *Asiatick Researches Vol 1*, 421

'genuine' monuments (particularly inscriptions) perform a mutually corroborative role in the reconstruction of Indian history.

> In the scarcity of authentic materials for the ancient and even for the modern, history of the *Hindu* race, importance is justly attached to all genuine monuments, and especially inscriptions on stone and metal, which are occasionally discovered through various accidents. If these be carefully preserved and diligently examined; and the facts, ascertained from them, be judiciously employed towards elucidating scattered information, which can be yet collected from the remains of Indian literature, a satisfactory progress may be finally made in investigating the history of the *Hindus.*[62]

Colebrooke's use of 'monuments' is curious; in this context, it is worth considering the etymology of the word 'monument'. In a recent article on restoration policies applied to South Indian temples, G.R.H. Wright explores the concept of a 'monument' and of 'monumentality' relating it to memory of the one hand and the aesthetic on the other. According to the etymology of the word, a monument 'calls to mind,' 'reminds the understanding'. It commemorates something memorable in a memorable way. That is, it calls to mind history, it does so by art….Thus it can be seen that any monument possesses what may be termed an aesthetic character or instance to its nature and a historic instance to its nature."[63]

When Jones refers to the remains of Architecture and Sculpture as 'mere monuments of antiquity', he expressly excludes aesthetic considerations from his purview (even though he recognizes the possibility of another 'frame'). Colebrooke's use of the word 'monuments' encompasses not only 'monumental' works of architecture and sculpture but also inscriptions in metal and stone, which he certainly does not view as 'works of art', but as potential sources of historical information. In other words, it appears that both Jones' and Colebrooke's 'monuments' function, in fact, as 'documents' of history (as we understand the word today). The OED clarifies that in 18th

[62]H.T. Colebrooke, "On Ancient Monuments, containing Sanscrit Inscriptions," *Asiatick Researches*, (London, 1809), 398.
[63]G.R.H. Wright, "Restoration of Hindu Temples in South India and its Conceptual Background" *East and West* (Instituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 2001), 179–181.

century usage (particularly legal usage) 'documents' and 'monuments' shared a range of connotations.[64]

In his famous introductory essay to *Meaning in the Visual Arts,* Irwin Panofsky distinguishes between 'monuments' and 'documents' in the context of related humanistic disciplines, history and art-history. He introduces a hypothetical Rhineland altarpiece and a contract, purportedly related to the work, dated 1471. For an art historian, the altarpiece functions as 'primary material', as 'monument'; its authenticity corroborated by the contract, the secondary 'document'. For a paleographer, or a historian of law, the objects exchange significance; the contract is 'primary' while the altarpiece lends documentary support. For a historian exclusively interested in the reconstruction of 'events' however, all available historical materials become 'secondary sources' or 'documents'. [65]

As antiquities are epistemologically contained within the master discourse of civil history in the late 18th and early 19th century, antiquities function as 'secondary sources' for colonialist historiography throughout this period. In an era when Orientalist research was dominated by philological method and research protocols, the representation of 'non-literary' antiquities such as architectural and sculptural artefacts generated considerable confusion and ambivalence in colonial writing.

Non-literary Antiquities and their troubling visuality

A survey of all writings making references to antiquities in the first ten volumes of *Asiatic(k) Researches* reveals a tripartite division of content. Writings dealing with 'textual' or 'literary' antiquities are most numerous. Epigraphical studies lead by specialists like H. T. Colebrooke and Charles Wilkins are devoted to describing, deciphering and commenting on inscriptions, coins and manuscripts. The second category deals with descriptive reports of "actual remains of Sculpture and architecture" - Mamallapuram, Elephanta, Qutb Minar, etc., in the form of empirical 'field' observations of antiquities by colonial functionaries, surgeons, engineers,

[64]According to the OED, ' Monument' , in 18th century usage, includes: " A written document, record; a legal instrument". Both 'monuments' and 'documents' can be deployed either to 'prove something' or to provide new information. In this sense, all historical documents are monuments.
[65]Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Penguin Books, 1970), 33.

astronomers whose professional specializations have trained them in the skills of observation, 'scientific' description and measurement. The third category covers expansive, multidisciplinary, essentially *speculative dissertations* by 'Orientalist' scholars like Jones, Francis Wilford and John Shore, that synthesize information gathered about visual and textual antiquities, among other sources, to 'verify' and elaborate upon various theoretical constructs and hypothesis peculiar to 18th century Universal History.

The considerable philological resources of the Asiatic Society at this point enabled scholars to deal swiftly and confidently with textual/literary antiquities. Equipped with a sophisticated critical method for dealing with texts and considerable understanding about the function and conditions of production of an inscription or coin, derived from European precedents, the language specialists of the Society were able to transform data to information to usable knowledge. They were less certain of how to deal with the recalcitrantly material 'remains of architecture and sculpture'. Momigliano describes a similar dilemma faced by antiquaries in early 18th century Europe:

> When we survey the achievements of the antiquaries in formulating the rules for the proper interpretation of non-literary evidence, we must make a sharp distinction. The success in establishing safe rules for the use of charters, inscriptions and coins as regards both authenticity and interpretation was complete….Vases, statues, reliefs and gems spoke a much more difficult language. The imposing literature of Emblemata which had accumulated since Aciato was not likely to improve the clarity of this language. Given a monument with images on it, how can we understand what the artist meant? How can we distinguish between what is only ornamental and what is meant to express a religious or philosophical belief?" [66]

According to Momigliano, the dominant 18th century response to the inherent ambiguity of non-textual European antiquities was to approach them from the angle of meaning and intent. Even Johann Joachim Winckelmann, who

[66]Momigliano, "Ancient History and the Antiquarian," 303–304.

pioneered the use of stylistic (formal) criteria for the dating of Greek sculptures, was drawn to the study of iconography, viewing Greek statues not just as vehicles of style and aesthetics but also as repositories of meaning. By contrast, colonial field reports deal with the Indian equivalent of 'vases, statues' and 'reliefs' in a crudely empirical fashion - describing, measuring, illustrating – in other words, treating them primarily as evidentiary objects supporting the colonial historiographical project, and only secondarily or tangentially, as vehicles of intended meaning. This epistemological hierarchy becomes apparent when we compare excerpts from two 'reports' of Mamallapuram antiquities, both produced for the colonial establishment within a few years of each other:

The first excerpt, a description of the Gangavatarana/ Arjuna's Penance relief in English, is authored by J. Goldingham, a British astronomer stationed at Fort St. George, and published in the fifth volume of the *Asiatic Researches*:

> ...the surface of the rock, about ninety feet in extent, and thirty in height is covered with figures in bas-relief. A gigantic figure of Krishna is most conspicuous with Arjuna his favourite, in the Hindu attitude of prayer; but so void of flesh as to present more the appearance of a skeleton than the representation of a living person. Below is a venerable figure, said to be the father of Arjuna [in a footnote-Goldingham mentions a local Brahmin's identification of this figure as Drona] both figures proving the sculptor possessed no inconsiderable skill. Here are the representations of several animals, and one of which the Brahmins name simha or lion; but by no means a likeness of that animal, wanting the peculiar characteristic, the mane. Something intended to represent this is, indeed, visible, which has more the effect of spots. It appears evident, the sculptor was by no means so well acquainted with the figure of the lion as with that of the elephant and monkey, both being well represented in this group. This scene, I understand, is taken from the Mahabharata, and exhibits the principal characters whose actions are celebrated in that work. [67]

[67] J. Goldingham , " Some account of the Sculptures at Mahabalipuram: usually called the Seven Pagodas". *Asiatic Researches Vol 5*, 1798, 69-70.

The second is a translation from Telugu, of the report of Kavali Lakshmayya, an interpreter and assistant of Lt. Colin Mackenzie, trained in the colonial method of observation and data collection during his years of service.

> On the East side of the hill, the rock has been fashioned into figures representing Arjuna's Penance as Kirata and Arjuna. Here is Arjuna his two arms extended over his head, performing penance; and here is four-armed Isvara as he appeared, holding the Pasupatastra, Damaruka, Trisula etc. Between Isvara and Arjuna stands Viswakarma, with an adze on his right shoulder, the handle of which he holds in the right hand. Above Isvara's head are Surya, Chandra etc. Below Arjuna, is Krishnaswami in a fane, four-armed and holding the Sankha, Chakra, Gada etc. To his right, is Dronacharya, seated in the lotus-posture with emaciated body, performing penance. On Krishna's left, the rock is fissured, so Naga maids appear issuing from Patalaloka, and with the 5 virgins come a naga maid for Arjuna. On the North side of these appears Indra, accompanied by his wife, mounted on the elephant called Airavata, coming to visit Siva. Behind Airavata is another elephant. Below Airavata there are three elephant cubs. And there is a cat, with her kittens, facing to the East, with upstretched paws.
>
> Round the god Indra, in the form of a ring, are figures of Garudas, Gandharvas, Kinnaras, Kimpurushas, Siddhas, Vidyadharas, etc., some with wives, some without wives, coming, as ascetics, to visit Siva. There are here 36 figures. Among these demi-gods are three deer. Behind them, to the North in the middle (of the rock) are seven lions and one sheep. To Isvara's right, and above are Dharmaraja and Bhima sitting, performing penance. On their right are a hog and a tiger. On Isvara's right are 24 figures of troops of Pramathas and Rishis coming to visit Siva...They are thus represented accompanied by their wives. Altogether there are 80 male and female figures.[68]

[68]Kavali Lakshmayya, "Description of the Pagodas," appendix in M.W.Carr, ed., *Descriptive and Historical Papers Relating to the Seven Pagodas on the Coromandel Coast, by W. Chambers [and Others]*,1869, 203-204.

Both accounts are descriptions from direct observation – of an outdoor sculptural relief at Mamallapuram. Language differences apart, the two reports are barely recognizable as descriptions of the same object.

Goldingham's tone is exaggeratedly objective and 'disinterested', bordering on the iconophobic, constantly referring to the subject's gaze in the act of scanning the panel, witness the repeated use of viewing words like 'conspicuous', 'representation', 'appearance.' The author treats the relief panel as a 'representation', in bas relief, of a scene from the Mahabharata. He selects for description, certain 'objects' that are represented on the relief panel in a somewhat arbitrary manner and judges these representations in terms of the adequacy of their verisimilitude to their referents in the real world. Goldingham painstakingly separates his own empirical observation (first order knowledge) from hearsay or native interpretation (second order knowledge).There is an implied gap between the signifiers (as Goldingham describes them) and what (according to the natives), they signify. The object is static and passive, the gaze active and appropriating. Lacking narrative focus, the gaze is quickly fatigued. The repeated use of non-diegetic comments and qualifiers ruptures the narrative and functions as a distancing device.

Where Goldingham 'observes', Lakshmayya 'reads'; here cognition/observation coincides with recognition. Lakshmayya's description is not about disjointed objects in relief on a surface 'representing' real objects in nature; it is about story-as-performance. Arjuna, Isvara and the other beings of the heavens, the earth and the netherworld 'appear', actually *manifesting* for the viewer, *embodied* in stone. Whereas Goldingham 'scopes' the panel with an alien, intransigent, instrumental gaze, Lakshmayya suspends disbelief to participate in a theatrical 'unfolding' of the narrative before him. The active gaze allows itself to be led by the performing tableau, and description follows the gaze, unifying disparate objects in an imaginative narrative, converting the static relief into 'enactment'. Even as the diegesis is seamless, Lakshmayya co-operates with the semantic intentions of the visual narrative and perhaps as a consequence, packs considerably more visual information into his paragraph than does Goldingham, who appears caught up in a complicated negotiation between proximity and distance.

What the comparison seeks to highlight is the possibility of at least two kinds of 'observation' of the same object, within the same time-space and circumstances of knowledge production. The intention here is not to claim for Lakshmayya a 'native' authenticity which renders his description superior to Goldingham's account. What I want to highlight is that colonial empiricist protocols in the late 18th and 19th centuries appear to privilege a 'morphological' over 'semantic' understanding of the visual artefact, 'distancing' over 'participatory' procedures. Within the antiquities frame, both the semantic aspects and the 'intentional visual interest' (or the 'presence effects') of these objects figure as problematic *excesses*, which it is unable to account for. Bereft of aesthetic categories such as the Beautiful and the Sublime, unable to nuance the protocols of objectivity and distance required by the colonial epistemological structures of the time, the antiquities discourse limited itself to a documenting and archiving of visual antiquities in the form of peculiarly attenuated descriptions and awkward illustrations. It is significant, in this context, that Lakshmayya's account is relegated to an *appendix* of M. W. Carr's 1869 compilation titled *Descriptive and Historical Papers Relating to the Seven Pagodas on the Coromandel Coast*.[69]

CODA: 'CURIOSITY' AND 'WONDER'

The Romantic travelogues of the late 18th and early 19th centuries share a number of characteristics with the accounts of antiquities found in the journals of the Asiatic societies. Enabled by the expansion and consolidation of colonial rule in the subcontinent and the access to different locations it facilitated, both these genres draw their authority from the fact that the descriptions are based on direct observation 'in the field.' Further, many of the passages of objective description that feature in the Romantic travel writings mentioned above are virtually indistinguishable in style and language

[69]Lakshmayya's application to the Madras Division of the Asiatic society to complete Mackenzie's archiving project after the surveyor's death was rejected by James Prinsep on the grounds that no native was qualified to undertake a project that called for critical and evaluatory acumen. See Dirks, "Colonial Histories and Native Informant", in Breckenridge and Veer, *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, 310.

from the descriptions of visual antiquities in the *Asiatic Researches.* This strengthens the argument that both discourses were premised on some common empirical foundation, and that the divergences were intentional, partly at least dictated by the differences of genre and audience, rather than indicating a radically different 'way of seeing'.

Both Maria Graham and William Chambers[70] describe the 'ruins' in Mamallapuram in their respective accounts. The vast differences in the way these writers represent their objects cannot be reduced to some 'subjective' versus 'objective' dichotomy, nor are they merely a function of language. Each writer frames his/her objects within a different ecology, each responds to different aspects of the object's visuality, its material presence, its intended meaning, the agencies responsible for its existence, its relation to the past. As a consequence, they project different values on to their objects of representation.

The Romantic traveler casts her objects in a frame that includes her impressions of surrounding topographical features and an atmosphere which has as much to do with the with external weather and light conditions as with her subjective response to the experience of encounter. The primary matrix within which these objects are embedded

is *space*, space as related to geography, as well as space as it is perceived optically and experienced haptically. The significance of these objects, for the Romantic writer, is their exotic Otherness, which she tries to highlight rather than subdue through literary means. The deployment of familiar aesthetic categories seeks to establish a common ground only for subjective responses, leaving untouched the aura of wonder and aesthetic strangeness around the objects themselves. Ultimately, this Otherness can be aligned with the Self only at a philosophical level.

By contrast, the antiquities researcher extracts his objects from their physical and environmental setting, their local associations and functions, and views them in terms of their specific morphological characteristics. He filters out those aspects of the objects' present/presence which he considered

[70]William Chambers, "An Account of the Sculptures and Ruins of Mavalipuram, A Place a few Miles North of Sadras, and known to Seamen by the Name of the Seven Pagodas," *Asiatick ResearchesVolume 1*, 145–170.

superfluous to their significance as antiquities, as documents of history. Geography and topography are included in descriptions only to the extent that they help fix the coordinates of the objects' location. Local interpretations are recorded as a standby, because they may provide hints about the historical significance of the objects. Even material state of preservation, which is recorded with noticeable frequency and clinical precision in these reports, is included less as an acknowledgement of the fragile materiality of these artefacts than as an objective index of their historicity.

When Europeans encounter and describe the ruins of Mamallapuram in this period, their gaze is already an irrevocably historicizing one. For William Chambers (surgeon, empiricist) as for Maria Graham (Romantic travel writer), the monuments of Mamallapuram appear refracted through the prism of history. The difference lies in how 'history' affects the consciousness, what value it acquires within each of these accounts.

For the Romantic imagination, the sights and sounds of nature, the beauty of man-made creations and the mysterious, unknown world of antiquity merge into one inseparable continuum; together they provide a point of departure for aesthetic appreciation and philosophical reflection. It is not important, for the purposes of the 'Romantic' narrative, to zero in on the historical facts - dates, attribution, cultic orientation, etc., - that may be gleaned from the antiquities themselves and accessory documents. If anything, such detailing would mar the air of mysterious 'antiquity' that shrouds the location and stimulates the subjective response. History itself is fetishised and 'ancient-ness' is transformed into an aesthetic entity, a version of the Sublime. The Romantic writer views the 'antiquity' of her objects as a kind of totality; the past is both lost in the mists of time and materially inscribed in the forms of the ruins encountered across the subcontinent.

For Chambers, on the other hand, the submergence of Mamallapuram antiquities in history motivates further enquiry. The past is recoverable, and it is necessary to recover it; he even suggests a method by which the history of the 'Hindoos' may be unraveled; "...by comparing names and grand events, recorded by them [the poet-historians of the 'Hindoos'], with those recorded in the histories of other nations, and by calling in the assistance of

ancient monuments, coins, and inscriptions,... some probable conjectures, at least, if not important discoveries, may, it is hoped, be made on these interesting subjects." [71]

The fault lines that separate the Romantic appropriation of these artefacts and their objectification within the antiquities frame become evident when we compare the phenomenology of wonder with that of curiosity. 'Wonder' and 'curiosity' are concepts that recur in many 18th century discourses, referring both to subjective attitudes as well as to objects onto which these attitudes are projected. Thus Graham writes of 'the wonders of the cavern of Elephanta' and Seely titles his travelogue *The Wonders of Elora* while for Goldingham, the artefacts of Mamallapuram are 'curious remains of antiquity'.[72] Even though they are generated within the same colonial contexts, these two positions are incompatible.

In an article titled "Curating Curiosity: Wonder's Colonial Phenomenology", Khadija Z Carroll views wonder and curiosity as different responses to the unknown, the unaccountable.

> Curiosity, unlike wonder, does not illicit helplessness. There is no remainder once you have accounted for curiosity, while wonder entails an unaccountable remainder. The term I use for this unaccountability, this inability to measure, compare or even comprehend, is incommensurability. Like antinomy, incommensurability signals a contradiction or incompatibility in thought arising from the attempt to apply to the ideas of the reason relations which are appropriate only to the concepts of experience. In the colonial discourse from Captain Cook onward, curiosity and wonder shape the terms of response to incommensurability.[73]

Carroll goes on to examine Wittgenstein's formulation of aesthetic experience as wonder and contrasts this with Bernard Smith's suggestion that " 'to say

[71] Ibid., 157-158.

[72] Goldingham , op. cit., 69

[73] Khadija Z. Carroll, "Curating Curiosity: Wonder's Colonial Phenomenology," in Tim Mehigan, ed., *Frameworks, Artworks, Place: The Space of Perception in the Modern World.* (Rodopi, 2008), 207.

that an object was "curious" was to express an interest in it without passing an aesthetic judgment."[74]

Within the Romantic frame, the Sublime, the Picturesque and the Beautiful, as subjective responses to artefacts-in-their-setting, coexist with another, more objective response to the beauty of the artefacts themselves – intentionally created by their makers. This recognition of intentional visual interest, while it must have played a subliminal role in spurring antiquities research, is suppressed in favour of the larger scientific project. "The experience of wonder, with all its attendant threats at disarming the individual of their expectations, seems at odds with this scientific purpose."[75] For the antiquities researcher, both literary and non-literary antiquities are equivalent at an epistemological level; they are both documents of history. At a pragmatic level, however, (given the focus on philology during this phase) literary antiquities – inscriptions, coins and manuscripts – prove more useful and secure as historical documents.

Another characteristic of wonder, according to Carroll, is that it does not see its objects possessively whereas 'curiosity knowledge' is a kind of possession; it reveals an urge to control its objects. It does this by slotting them in a pre-existing schema; "….one could say that curiosity can be satisfied, that satisfaction is accounted for by a means of taxonomy and classification and that an existing schema accommodates those classificatory means. Thus the incommensurable colonial artifact becomes a variation on an existing European model."[76]

When we view 'antiquities' as a functional rather than an ontological category, the instrumental nature of this appropriation becomes evident. By *abstracting* artefacts from their ecological, social and cultural settings, their participation in other life-worlds, the antiquities frame is actually creating a new domain of objects.[77] Antiquities are harnessed irrevocably to the

[74]Ibid., 208.
[75]Ibid., 211.
[76]Ibid., 215.
[77]The antiquities frame is a pre-fabricated one, designed for objectifying and representing artefacts/things of a certain kind in 18th century Western Europe. Admittedly, the frame undergoes changes in the course of its career in the subcontinent and is eventually replaced by other, more nuanced frames.

historical project and the colonial establishment is becomes the authorized interpreter of their value. Their link with history is their primary significance; their other attributes and affiliations are factored in only insofar as they are deemed relevant to the historical project.

Non-literary antiquities like the artefacts at Mamallapuram and elsewhere are caught in a peculiar position within this frame. Their overwhelming materiality, their compelling visuality and their semantic density – these are aspects that the antiquities discourse has no interpretive tools to deal with. Unlike inscriptions, coins and manuscripts – the other members of their domain, they resist easy assimilation into the larger discourse of civil history. In her book *Destination Culture* Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett traces the trajectory of the ethnographic object that is transformed from curio to specimen to art. "As curiosities, objects are anomalous. By definition they defy classification."[78] According to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "(f)or a curiosity to become classifiable, it had to qualify as a representative of a distinguishable class of objects."[79] Pending a taxonomy, a classification and a definite chronology, non-literary antiquities occupy an uneasy space within the antiquities discourse, suspended between 'curiosities' and the scientific objects - archaeological specimens - that they will become in the mid-19th century.

[78]Barbara Kirshenblatt Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (University of California Press, 1998), 25.
[79]Ibid., 26.

CHAPTER II: COLONIAL ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE MUSEUM

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the transition of sculptural artefacts from their secondary position within the antiquities frame (which privileged literary antiquities) to their quasi-autonomous status as 'documents of history' within the frame of *colonial archaeology*. The analysis theorizes the reifying gaze of the colonial archaeologist, which reduces and fragments artefacts and their contexts into manageable scientific 'specimens' for the colonial archive. Towards the last quarter of the 19th century, these artefacts undergo yet another transition within the colonialist museum frame – museumized and monumentalized, a selection of these artefacts become singularized (even *aestheticized*) within the Imperial museums and *in situ* monument sites, in keeping with the new rhetoric of display championed by the British Raj. Colonialist art history, which is responsible for recontextualizing these objects within an official version of history, provides the script for this Imperial 'performance'. I unearth the ideological underpinnings of the renewed visuality and materiality of the artefact within this context.

Background

By the 1820's, the scholarly Orientalism pioneered by Jones and his Asiatic Society contemporaries was losing its authority as the official vehicle of knowledge about India. Replacing it was a new kind of knowledge–production, backed by 'field' observations of trained functionaries and professionals who were trained to observe, measure, enumerate and record rather than to speculate or theorize. With the consolidation of colonial territories across the subcontinent, an era of systematic surveys was initiated, mapping the country in terms of longitude and latitude, recording its topographical features, surveying land use, listing its resources and classifying its peoples. The consolidation of empirical protocols, intended to generate "hard" objective data about India, had the additional advantage of rendering colonial knowledge production self-sufficient, giving its researchers relative autonomy from 'native' intermediaries. "Surveyors took great pains

to distinguish data *gleaned* from the accounts of natives from data *produced* by direct observation..." [1]

There was a growing confidence in the effectiveness of colonial historical scholarship-- evident from the incremental expansion of historical knowledge by the first half of the 19th century. India's past was no longer an undifferentiated, mysterious matrix that it used to be when Jones began his researches. A framework of chronological certainties, alongside a palatably 'European' picture of dynasties, successions, wars and conquests across regions in the subcontinent was beginning to emerge.

The first half of the 19th century witnessed an exponential rise in colonialist scholarship in historical research. Several new societies were set up along the lines of the Asiatic Society of Bengal both in India and in Britain; prominent among them were the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland headquartered at London, and the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, at the Presidency capital. The London Society was set up in 1823 by H.T.Colebrooke on his return to England. It was "instituted for the investigations of the sciences and arts of Asia, with the hope of facilitating ameliorations there and of advancing knowledge and improving the arts at home" and the scope of its researches was to cover "both ancient and modern times, and include history, civil polity, institutions, manners, customs, languages, literature and science".[2] The Bombay Literary Society, which was transformed into the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society in 1841, was dedicated to the extension of knowledge "on subjects of Oriental subjects, more particularly connected with the Antiquities, Philology, Geography and History of Western India."[3]

This period was also the most productive in terms of the number of landmark archaeological discoveries made. Surveyor Colin Mackenzie stumbled upon Amaravati in 1797, documented it in 1816 and throughout the 1830's and 40's, the site and its portable artefacts were the source of much debate and

[1]David Ludden "Orientalist Empricism: Transformations of Colonial Knowledge" in Carol Appadurai Breckenridge and Peter Van der Veer eds., *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 262.
[2]Frederick Eden Pargiter, *Centenary Volume Of The Royal Asiatic Society* (The Society, 1923), viii.
[3]*Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (The Society., 1844), i.

concern for its colonial caretakers.[4] In 1819, officers of the British army discovered the Ajanta caves and in 1830, James Alexander described the site in the detail in the second issue of the *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society*.[5] Architectural and sculptural remains from the Gandhara region, brought to the notice of British scholars in the early 1830's, inspired a revival of interest in the history of Indian antiquities.[6] Between 1835 and 1842, James Fergusson toured the subcontinent documenting architectural remains and classifying them. Epigraphy, a respectable and rigorous science by the 1830's, underwent a revolution with James Prinsep's deciphering of Asokan Brahmi and Kharoshti.

In his *History of Indian Archaeology*, Dilip Chakrabarti summarizes the developments during this period, remarking that "from about 1830 onwards the number of specifically archaeological writings was on the increase."

> The lines of archaeological enquiry between 1830 and 1861 were basically in the following directions: the opening of "topes" or Buddhist stupas in the northwest and the consequent increase in interest in the antiquities of the region, principally Indo-Greek coins and sculpture; a gradual increase in the number of notices of ancient sites throughout the country; occasional excavations in north India; a significant amount of "barrow-hunting" in the south; and finally, a greater realization of the need for a systematic survey.[7]

By the mid-19th century, the map of India was flagged with a significant number of pre-modern antiquities and archaeological sites. Portable fragments were shifted to museums in Calcutta and London and documentation was similarly centralized. Bit by bit, a comprehensive **archive** of Indian antiquities was being constructed, the next step on the road to 'induction' as anticipated by Jones and his contemporaries. Reports, analyses

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[4]See Bernard Cohn, "The Transformation of Objects into Artifacts, Antiquities, and Art in Nineteenth-Century India," in *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge,The British in India,* (Princeton University Press, 1996),for an account of the Amaravati artefacts and their displacements.

[5]Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters: A History of European Reactions to Indian Art* (University of Chicago Press, 1977), 165.

[6]Ibid., 258.

[7]Dilip K. Chakrabarti, *A History of Indian Archaeology: From the Beginning to 1947* (Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Private, Limited, 1988), 37.

and monographs about individual sites, architectural edifices and sculptural fragments proliferate in the journals and transactions of orientalist and literary societies both in India and in London. By the late 1850's, the artefactual archive, along with the incipient discipline of archaeology that generated it, had become so vast and specialized that it outgrew its earlier position as a sub-discourse of civil history. The need was felt for a new kind of institutional support system to bind these new units of knowledge into an autonomous scientific discourse, a need that was filled by the establishment of the Archaeological Survey of India.

The Revolt of 1857 exposed the precariousness of the British position in India, damaging the heady optimism and reformist zeal that characterized colonial administration in the previous decades.[8] Ironically, the decades following the Revolt were a fertile period for the consolidation and systematization of archaeological data and research, the institutionalization of colonial archaeology and the subsequent establishment of the first public Museum in India. In 1862, an Archaeological Department, headed by General Alexander Cunningham was instituted to survey and document the monuments and antiquities of Northern India. In 1870, the issue of centralization was pursued and the Archaeological Survey of India was established. Cunningham took over as its first Director General in 1871. In 1874, regional surveys for Bombay and Madras presidencies followed. Between 1889 and 1902, the ASI was dissolved, fragmented, retrenched and finally resurrected by the then Viceroy, Lord Curzon.[9] The objectives and methods of the institution were systematized during this troubled formative period. Archaeological exploration, documentation and conservation of ancient monuments and sculpture were the focus areas, with support from the fields of epigraphy and numismatics. Photography and casting were introduced to extend traditional documentation methods. Archaeological excavation techniques and stratigraphy were progressively refined.

[8]See Thomas R. Metcalf, *The Aftermath of Revolt: India, 1857-1870* (Princeton University Press, 1964).
[9]Archaeological Survey of India and Sir John Hubert Marshall, *Indian Archaeological Policy, 1915: Being a Resolution Issued by the Governor General in Council on the 22nd October, 1915* (Superintendent Government Printing, India, 1916), 3–4.

The decades following the Revolt witnessed the setting up of the first imperial public museum in India – the Indian Museum in Calcutta. Though the Asiatic Society museum had functioned as an important storehouse for amateur collecting of geological and natural history specimens, ethnographic objects, art manufactures and some portable antiquarian remains from its inception in 1814, it was accessible only to a small group of members and their associates. Similar museums were set up in the other presidency capitals in the 1850's. In 1866, the museum in Calcutta was delinked from the Asiatic Society and thrown open to the public.[10] By the 1880's it had a full-fledged archaeological gallery, with sculptures from Bharhut and the Gandhara region occupying pride of place.[11]

The issue of preservation and conservation *in situ* of antiquarian remains was addressed seriously between the 1870's and 1880's. The archaeological surveys conducted in the presidencies provided the foundation for this imperial enterprise. In 1873, an official order charged local governments with the preservation of monuments under their jurisdiction. Between 1881 and 1884, H. H. Cole was appointed Curator of Ancient Monuments, (a post independent of the ASI) and charged with the duty of classifying ancient monuments across the country and aiding local governments in the task of conservation. The Indian Treasure Trove Act of 1878 empowered the Imperial government and its regional representatives to acquire all objects of archaeological interest found across the subcontinent; these were to be evaluated according to very clearly defined criteria mentioned in the Act itself. This was followed, during the period of Lord Curzon, by the establishment of site museums across the country.

The first colonial art histories, which tried to recast some antiquarian remains within the 'art' frame (with many reservations and provisos), served to (con)-textualize the museumization and monumentalization of artefacts in an academic sphere. James Fergusson's encyclopedic *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture,* first published in 1876, derived its theoretical formulations from Victorian theories of biological evolution and race and from

[10]Tapati Guha-Thakurta, "The Museum in the Colony," in Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (Columbia University Press, 2004), 53.
[11]Ibid., 73.

trends in stylistic analysis and connoisseurship that marked European art history during this period, in equal measure. Fergusson's work was paradigmatic; it was quoted, imitated and modified repeatedly into the first decades of the twentieth century and continues, in my opinion, to influence surveys of pre-modern Indian art to this day.[12]

A parallel development, significant from the point of view of Indian art history today, was the apotheosis of Indian 'art manufactures' and 'industrial arts' in a series of international exhibitions beginning with the 1851 Crystal Palace Exhibition in London. Catalogues like G.C.M. Birdwood's *The Industrial Arts of India* (pub 1880) and journals like *The Journal of Indian Art and Industry* provided textual support for this enterprise. The traditional 'Indian craftsman', skillfully and unquestioningly producing sumptuous and refined commodities with a hereditary instinct for good design became a trope for another important mid 19th century colonial construction – the enduring, unchanging, passive, self-sufficient and orthodox 'village India'.

It was with a view to 'improving design and taste' among native craft communities and readying a cadre of technically proficient draughtsmen and artisans that the first government art schools were set up in the presidency capitals and in Lahore between the 1850's and 1870's. Museums displaying a selected array of Indian art manufactures and of Western 'fine art', mostly in reproduction, were added as pedagogical resources to these schools.

SECTION I: THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL FRAME

Consider the nuances that differentiate H. T. Colebrooke's characterization of the importance of inscriptional evidence within the antiquities frame (1813) and James Fergusson's dismissal (1866) of 'written annals' of Indian history as untrustworthy in the reconstruction of the history of India.

Colebrooke writes:

> In the scarcity of authentic materials for the ancient and even for the modern, history of the *Hindu* race, importance is justly attached

[12]James Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*,(J. Murray, 1876).

> to all genuine monuments, and especially inscriptions on stone and metal, which are occasionally discovered through various accidents. If these be carefully preserved and diligently examined; and the facts, ascertained from them, be judiciously employed towards elucidating scattered information, which can be yet collected from the remains of Indian literature, a satisfactory progress may be finally made in investigating the history of the *Hindus.*[13]

Twenty years later, James Prinsep makes a statement that appears remarkably similar in form and content:

> Aware indeed that the only accurate data we possessed for adjusting the chronology of Indian princes were those derived from ancient monuments of stone; inscriptions on rocks and caves…discovered accidentally in various parts of the country; -- I could not see the highly curious column at Allahabad, falling to rapid decay, without wishing to preserve a complete copy of its several inscriptions….It is greatly to be regretted that the task was not accomplished twenty or thirty years ago….[14]

In 1848, Alexander Cunningham, Prinsep's protégé, dismisses the value of 'Hindu" literary sources for historical reconstruction, claiming that "the discovery and publication of all the existing remains of architecture and sculpture, with coins and inscriptions, would throw more light on the ancient history of India...than the printing of all the rubbish contained in the 18 Puranas."[15] Two decades later, James Fergusson, in a lecture to the Society of Arts in London, underlines the value of lithic architecture, along with inscriptions and coins, in the reconstruction of Indian history:

> It seems almost impossible to overestimate the value of these stone landmarks in a country where so few books exist, and so little history, and where what does exist is so very untrustworthy….in India there are no written annals that can be trusted. It is only when it [history] can be authenticated by inscriptions and coins that

[13]H.T.Colebrooke, "On Ancient Monuments, containing Sanscrit Inscriptions," Asiatick Researches, (London, 1809), 398.
[14] James Prinsep quoted in O. P. Kejariwal, *The Asiatic Society of Bengal and the Discovery of India's Past, 1784-1838* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 169.
[15]Alexander Cunningham quoted in Chakrabarti, *A History of Indian Archaeology*, 52.

> we feel sure of the existence of any King, and it is only when we can find his buildings that we can measure his greatness or ascertain what his tendencies were, or what the degree of civilization to which either he or his people attained."[16]

Between Colebrooke's statement and Prinsep's a decade later, it is possible to discern a subtle shift in the aims, priorities and methodology of research into Indian Antiquities. Colebrooke is arguably the last important representative of the Jones generation, which views textual sources as primary documents for the reconstruction of Indian history. Within the antiquities frame, inscriptions and coins along with non-literary artefacts are secondary documents, providing supporting, supplementary evidence. Inscriptions 'elucidate' information from literature; literature, however scarce and inauthentic, is still viewed as the principal source of history. Colebrooke's argument continues along these lines: given the state of knowledge during his time, inscriptions might be of limited use for a reconstruction of political history and chronology. However, they offer invaluable insights into 'customs' and 'manners', ideas and beliefs of peoples past and this is their primary significance. Colebrooke's philological and antiquarian commitments are in keeping with the more anthropological orientation of Enlightenment philosophical history.

Prinsep's preoccupation with inscriptions and coins are less antiquarian than historical; his primary interest is political history whose foundation is a sound chronology and this in turn depends on the accuracy of data. In another context, Prinsep remarks: "What the learned world demands of us in India is to be quite certain of our data, to place the monumental record before them exactly as it now exists, and to interpret it faithfully and literally."[17] Prinsep statement is an affirmation of 'monuments' as the *only* source of accurate data for a chronology of 'Indian princes'.

By the second half of the 19th century, the denigration of 'inauthentic' literary sources and a parallel valourization of 'authentic' remains of architecture and

[16]James Fergusson, *On the Study of Indian Architecture: Read at a Meeting of the Society of Arts on Wednesday, 19th December 1886* (Indological Book House, 1977), 12–13.
[17]Prinsep, "On the Edicts of Piyadasi, or Asoke, the Buddhist Monarch of India, preserved on the Girnar rock in the Gujerat peninsula, and on the Dhauli rock in Cuttack; with the discovery of Ptolemy's name therein," in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (Bishop's College Press, 1838), 227.

sculpture, along with coins and inscriptions, become entrenched within colonialist discourses as a justification, even, for the importance of archaeological investigations. The dismantling of the broadly humanist antiquities frame, with its heavy reliance on native intermediaries and literary sources and the simultaneous spurt in status for the material artefact within the new 'archaeological frame' is a curious phenomenon, which I will term the 'archaeological turn'.

The 1830's marked the end of the era of expansive 'liberal' enquiries envisaged by the Orientalists of the Jones generation, an encyclopedic survey of 'all that was produced by nature and all that was perfomed by man. Replacing it was a more instrumental approach to India as a *tabula rasa* for political, administrative and socio-cultural reform. The reconstruction of Indian history was still considered vital to this project. In his enormously influential *History of British India* (pub. 1819), James Mill dismissed the scholarly Orientalist enterprise in India, with its overvaluing of India's past, its dependence on textual sources and on maulvis and pandits, as a product of 'susceptible imagination.'[18] For Mill, Indian culture exhibited immaturity and stagnation, there was no high civilization in the past, no subsequent decline.[19]

The attitudes of liberals like Mill and Thomas Babington Macaulay had lasting consequences for the study of Indian culture and history. Debates about the validity of Oriental learning and its *utility* for the perpetuation of colonial rule surfaced during the second decade of the 19th century. The Orientalist camp, lead by scholars like H.H. Wilson, argued for government patronage of Oriental knowledge whereas the Anglicist position recommended the withdrawal of state support to institutions promoting the study and dissemination of 'Hindu or Mahomedan learning'. Prinsep himself vehemently opposed the Anglican-Utilitarian position on Oriental studies and likened the withdrawal of state support to the publication of oriental works to the destruction of the Alexandrine library.[20]

[18]Javed Majeed, *Ungoverned Imaginings: James Mill's The History of British India and Orientalism* (Clarendon Press, 1992), 163.
[19]Ibid., 144–145.
[20]Charles Allen, *Buddha & the Sahibs* (Hodder Pb, 2003), 165–166.

It is reasonable to expect that the Anglicist-Utilitarian denigration of 'traditional' knowledge, accompanied by withdrawal of state support for institutions and publications that propagated oriental learning in 1835 would have signalled the end of the Orientalist project in India. Antiquities research, like research into all matters cultural and not strictly instrumental, ought to have perished alongside ambitious literary ventures like the Asiatic Society's *Bibliotheca Asiatica* translation project. However, the crackdown seems to have had the opposite effect on the study of antiquities; by any standard, the period between 1830 and 1860 was something of a golden age for artefact documentation, classification and historical research in general. This anomaly can be accounted for by the re-articulation of 'antiquities' (the term antiquities is still in use throughout this period) within the new colonial discourse of archaeology. In the section that follows, I posit the emergence of a new object, the archaeological specimen, as a unit of analysis within the archaeological frame.

The Artefact as Scientific Fact

In the Jones generation, the empirical study of material artefacts suffered a double disadvantage. The first was one status: in the context of a philology-driven historiography, the study of material remains was secondary to the study of literary sources. The second was the larger epistemological frame; the study of antiquities was always subordinate to larger 'Universal history' concerns of Enlightenment humanism. If 'philology' established the paradigm for 18th century researches into Indian history, the 19th century colonial approach can be justifiably described as 'archaeological'. The Jones-Colebrooke-Prinsep transition was definitely a shift in paradigm. It was marked by the erosion of the totalising conception of History, of 'all that is performed by Man', with its speculative-philosophical underpinnings in Enlightenment humanism. Replacing it was a new and radically 'scientific' approach to history; history as an accumulation of empirically ascertainable facts – principally, chronology and political history.

As an area that dealt exclusively with 'material evidence' from the past, the new discourse of colonial archaeology (as the study of antiquities minus literary sources) experienced a sudden spurt in stature. Between 1830 and 1850, it cast off its poor relative status *vis a vis* history, evolved an

autonomous sphere of operation and reformed itself along scientific lines. In this first phase, we see a proliferation of field reports in journals, acquiring critical mass, gaining in rigour, establishing methodological protocols through an accumulation of precedents. The second phase, between the 1860's and 1880's, marks the consolidation and systematization of the new discourse into a full-fledged discipline, with the establishment of the ASI, the professionalization of archaeology and the differentiation of supporting specializations – epigraphy and numismatics.

The field report was the primary methodological unit of archaeological investigations in the 19th century. Unlike their 18th century counterparts, 19th century field reports of archaeological sites avoid speculation and hypothesis, giving primacy to observation and measurements. The typical field report incorporates all or most of these elements 1) Geographical location of the site (lat-long), its geology, geology, aspect 2) The name of the site and its variants, sometimes incorporating local knowledge 3) Morphological description of prominent edifices, remains along with measurements 3) Architectural plans, elevations and other illustrations 5) Morphological description of sculpture, fragments, sometimes accompanied by illustrations 6) Copies/ estampages of inscriptions 7) A record of coins, if found 8) Local accounts of the site, its origins and significance.[21]

The 19th century field report balances a crudely formalist 'documentation' of visual antiquities with an hierarchical ordering of information which cuts out large chunks of content and context as if they were so much 'noise' in the field of pure empirical signals. Descriptive documentation is a verbal paraphrase of the archaeological site. Photographic documentation is the visual counterpart of description. Plans and measurements serve to clarify and 'ground' descriptions and photographs in terms of geometry and arithmetic. A complex artefact is 'comprehended' in its documentation.

Thus identified, characterized and comprehended, the individual artefact is ready to become the basic unit of archaeological analysis, rather like a natural history specimen captured and suspended in a jar of formalin. A problem with this ideal scenario is that artefacts rarely occur as 'pure'

[21]See, for example, Cunningham's short description of his method in his Memorandum, Archaeological Survey of India, *Report* (OfFice of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1871), viii.

individual entities. What defines a unit in archaeological terms? A monument site? A sculptural fragment? Colonial archaeologists encountered a bewildering array of remains, architectural features, narrative reliefs, icons, decorative panels, fragments, reliquaries, inscriptions, coins, and most troublingly, lacunae – missing elements. In order to bring some order into this chaos, they started off with two (pre-chronological) classifications for the more complex manifestations: 1) Communal categories 'Buddhist, Hindu, Jain, 'Mahomedan' [sic] which corresponded with the official colonial 'map' of religions in India.[22] 2) A heterogenous, conventional taxonomy of types (cave-temples, monoliths, 'topes' [stupas], temples, mosques, etc)

Partially contained within a manageable nomenclature of overlapping types, all complex manifestations could be then be broken up into 'constituent' elements -architecture, sculpture, inscriptions, coins – clearly imported from a European definition of 'antiquities' but used within the archaeological frame as analytic categories. Architecture could be further divided into plan, elevation, façade, pillar orders; sculpture into figurative, ornamental and so on. The fragmentation of complex archaeological sites into these basic elements allowed for a comparison between say, pillar orders of one cave temple with pillar orders of another, to trace the development of pillars in cave temples.

Consider this excerpt, a list of 'desiderata' for further information on cave temples and monasteries, in survey of western Indian sites, published in the 1850 volume of Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society.[23]It sums up the authorized 'scientific' approach to Indian antiquities during this period, with a noticeably *hierarchized* ordering of knowledge, beginning with the most empirical (and most reliable), moving through the less significant aspects of the monuments in question and ending with 'native knowledge' (the least reliable).

[22]As early as 1813, William Erskine suggested studying Ancient Indian art under "Brahmanical, Boudhist and Jaina" heads. William Erskine, "XV. Account of the the Cave-Temple of Elephanta" Asiatic Society of Bombay, *Transactions of the Literary Society of Bombay* (Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1819), 198–270.
[23]John Wilson "Information respecting the Cave-Temples and Monasteries of India",Asiatic Society of Bombay, *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (The Society., 1851), 84.

1. The position, size and number [of cave temples and monasteries].
2. Their form, dimensions and religious character [i.e., Buddhist, Brahmanical or Jaina].
3. The peculiarities of their architecture as illustrative of their age, and the progress and history of art.
4. Their inscriptions, original and apocryphal, of which both copies and facsimilies are needed.
5. Their mythological figures in their forms and attitudes and their general mythological and moral import.
6. Their ornamental figures.
7. Their contiguity with other groups.
8. The light in which they are viewed by the natives, who inhabit the localities in which they are situated.

By substituting just ten keywords of this list, what we have is a questionnaire perfectly suitable for botanical or paleontological research. The analogy is not as fanciful as it appears. For Cunningham, archaeological research generates 'fossil fragments of the great skeleton of lost Indian history'.[24] To elaborate on the botanical analogy, we have here a taxonomic classification (religious character), morphology (size, form, dimensions), biogeography (position, contiguity with other groups), phylogeny (architectural peculiarities related to age), anatomy (inscriptions, figures) and ethnobotany ('native' information).

It is significant how this list requires that the contents of the architectural complexes studied be separated and laid out as if on a dissection tray (points 4, 5 and 6) - architecture, inscriptions, mythological figures, ornamental figures. One consequence of this infinitely ramifying fragmentation was that it becomes possible to juxtapose spatially and temporally discontinuous forms to derive a developmental sequence and thence a relative chronology.

Finally, a series of operations were designed to place the artefact on a temporal axis – to chronologize was after all the final destination of the archaeological frame. The clearest articulation of the methodology used for

[24]Cunningham quoted in F.R. Allchin," "Ideas of History in Indian Archaeological Writing: A Preliminary Study," in Cyril Henry Philips, *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon* (Oxford University Press, 1961), 247.

dating and classifying architectural antiquities may be found in *Dravidian Architecture,* by French historian Gustave Jouveau-Dubreuil; he used this system to chronologize Dravidian monuments in the Chingleput, South and North Arcot districts of Tamilnadu.[25]

1. The first operation is to survey and document a comprehensive list of monuments from a limited geographical region.

2. Then those monuments from this comprehensive group which can be dated accurately using 'external' aids like epigraphical and palaeographical evidence, are selected and arranged datewise on a chronological table.

3. The third step is a comparative exercise; the selected monuments of known periods are compared and contrasted with each other to isolate formal features that they have in common from those that are different. This comparison is made with the intention of arriving at generalizations about what architectural features, motifs and arrangements are shared by coeval monuments and in what ways these are modified, discarded or otherwise transformed in monuments of subsequent periods. These generalizations are in the form of specific, quantifiable units of knowledge which function like clinical tests for making a diagnosis and have to be systematically employed.

4. Finally, these generalizations are applied to other undated monuments in the group, which can be diagnosed as belonging to this or that period or as marking a transition between two documented styles.

The success of colonial archaeology in extracting chronological information from the most recalcitrant of objects appears, in retrospect, almost miraculous. The emphasis on system, the myopic focus on diagnostic form to the exclusion of all other criteria was, without doubt, a contributory factor. However, the deeply ideological underpinnings of the exercise cannot be left out of the account. Colonial archaeology's **reification** of cultural productions from India's past still has consequences for art history today.

The Reifying Gaze of Colonial Archaeology

Colonial archaeology identifies and abstracts its objects from their geographical/ environmental location, their social milieu, the local usages and traditions that surround and penetrate them. It subjects them to a forensic

[25]G. Jouveau Dubreuil, *Dravidian Architecture* (Asian Educational Services, 1987).

regime of documenting and analytic procedures that 'translates' them into archive-friendly form – plans, elevations, measurements, descriptive documentation, photographic documentation of the whole and its parts. Rationalised and reduced to quantitative and empirical factors, these objects become knowable quantities, fixed permanently in a visual and textual record of the relation of their parts to each other and on an absolute scale of numerical values.

The 'abstraction' of the artefacts from their geographical and socio-cultural entanglements was a necessary preliminary towards aligning their physical attributes, visually and quantitatively perceived, with their 'real' significance for colonial epistemology (always associated with their historical moment of origin). Johannes Fabian makes a similar point about 'ethnographic objects' in the colonial context though in this case, the 'life-world' of the object often includes spheres of active production and consumption.

> To have been ethnographically collected, that is, removed from its context of production and consumption, is of the essence of the ethnographic object. As a scientific object it has its function, not as a keepsake or souvenir, nor as a token of experience or memory, or as a curio arousing curiosity or causing amusement, but as an item to be placed in systems of classification and taxonomic description. Strictly speaking, the absence of context…is not a problem with ethnographic objects; it is, as it were, their condition of possibility. If the demands for context were met, things that figure as ethnographic objects would be "scientifically" useless.[26]

The documentation protocol of the archaeological project, which included measurement, delineation, photography, casting and description, each verifiable against the other, served to convert what was essentially a qualitative experience into a quantitative one. The experiential nature of the encounter was rationalized in 'scientific terms'. The subjective, embodied response of the viewer was carefully filtered out by reducing the objects' material and visual manifestations (I use the plural deliberately here because there are spatio-temporal and relational factors in the act of viewing) into 'objective' descriptive and quantitative terms. The perceiving subject was

[26]Johannes Fabian, "On Recognizing Things," *L'Homme* n° 170, no. 2 (April 1, 2004): 51–52.

posted strictly outside the field of vision. The colonial functionary/field archaeologist was positioned in this discourse as a disinterested and impartial observer, a disembodied 'eye', a replaceable component in the colonial machinery, working within the methodological parameters sanctioned by the colonial enterprise.

The subject position which corresponds to this kind of objectification is *objectivism*. W.J.T. Mitchell, in his book *What do Pictures Want?,* draws a pertinent distinction between *objectivity*, "the somewhat detached, skeptical attitude associated with scientific research" and *objectivism,* "the conviction that we do possess, or will in due course, an exhaustive, eternally comprehensive description of the "given"."

> Objectivity is an essential component of that open, curious, and unresolved frame of mind that makes the encounter with novel, alien realities possible and desirable….Objectivism is the ideological parody of objectivity, and tends towards self-assurance and certainty about the sovereign subject's grip on the real –objectivism is the ideological fantasy of what Rousseau called the "sovereign subject," a picture of the beholder as imperial, imperious consciousness, capable of surveying and ordering the entire object world.[27]

I want to suggest here that the difference between the 'objectivity' of empirical reports on antiquities in the Jones era and the 'objectivism' of mid-19th century archaeological researches signposts the transition from the antiquities frame to the archaeological frame. The objectivist stance of the archaeological frame, I believe, continues to have a major influence on the mainstream historiography of pre-modern Indian art even today.

Fergusson writes nostalgically of his delight "in visiting the various cities of Hindostan, so picturesque in their decay, or so beautiful in their modern garb....among the wildly picturesque scenery of Rajputana...over which the writings of [James] Tod have shed such a halo of romance."[28] But here the enchantment ends; for Fergusson, a man of action and science, the spell is

[27]W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images* (University Of Chicago Press, 2006), 157.
[28]James Fergusson, *Archaeology in India: With Especial Reference to the Works of Babu Rajendralala Mitra* (Laurier Books Limited, 1999), 1–2.

broken by the need to solve the more realistic 'problem' of chronology and stylistic variations of Indian architecture. Fergusson continues:

Nowhere are the styles of architecture so various as in India, and nowhere are the changes so rapid, or follow laws of so fixed a nature. It is consequently easy to separate the various styles into well-defined groups, with easily recognized peculiarities, and to trace the sequences of development in themselves quite certain, which, when a date can be affixed to one of the series, render the entire chronology certain and intelligible."[29]

Thus from being 'wonders', semi-autonomous fields for aesthetic and philosophical contemplation in the romantic travelogue, architectural antiquities become 'scientific' objects, their autonomy relinquished for the higher purposes of science and history (in the late 19th century history is a science). In this process of objectification, the objects are 'comprehended' in an oversimplified version of what are really qualitative experiences thrown up in the process of encounter. Thus reduced and *neutralized*, these experiential qualities are then projected onto the object, and become ossified as essential attributes of the object.

The following excerpts give some indication of how the qualitative, aesthetic experience of architecture, as expressed in the romantic travelogue of the early 19th century are neutralized at the level of affect and transformed into *empirical attributes of the object* in colonial archaeology. John Seely (see previous chapter), in his description of Ellora, begins with an account of the picturesqueness of its rural setting. This is contrasted, in subsequent pages by the 'variety, monumentality and sublimity' of the excavations themselves, which evoke feelings of "awe, wonder, and delight, that at first is painful..."[30] "Everything here invites the mind to contemplation, and every surrounding object reminds it of a remote period, and a mighty people..."[31] The remote and obscure history of the artefact-in-its-setting is matched, in Seely's imagination, by the sublime nature of 'the labour, skill and patience displayed by the artificers of the caves in executing their almost superhuman task'.

[29]Ibid., 2.
[30]John Benjamin Seely, *The Wonders of Elora; Or, The Narrative of a Journey to the Temples and Dwellings Excavated ... at Elora, in the East Indies. By John B. Seely*, 1824, 106.
[31]Ibid., 107.

Compare this narrative with the following excerpts from Fergusson's description of the 'Kylas' at Ellora: "...at Ellora, a pit was dug around the temple in the sloping side of the hill, about hundred ft. deep at its inmost side, and half the height at the entrance or gopura, the floor of this pit being 150 ft. wide and 270 ft in length."[32] In Fergusson's 'approach' to Kailasa, the aesthetic experience of monumentality in Seely's account has an exact mathematical correlate.[33] The 'remote period' of Seely has a chronological correlate and turns out to be not so remote after all. "If ...it were necessary to fix on a date which should correctly represent our current knowledge of the age of the Kylas, I would put down A.D. 800, with considerable confidence...."[34] Fergusson's statement clears the history of Ellora of its mysterious remoteness and quite matter-of-factly exorcises the ghosts of the 'mighty people' who are supposed to have excavated it.

Finally, Fergusson attempts to clear the 'considerable misconception' about 'the apparently prodigious amount of labour bestowed' on the excavation:

> In reality...it is considerably easier and less expensive to excavate a temple than to build one. Take, for instance, the Kylas....To excavate the area on which it stands would require the removal of about 100,000 cubic yards of rock...the question simply is ...whether it is easier to chip away 50,000 yards of rock, and shoot it to a spoil...down a hillside, or to quarry 50,000 cubic yards of stone, remove it...a mile at least to the place where the temple is to be built, and then to raise and set it. The excavating process would probably cost about one-tenth of the other.[35]

The labour, skill and patience that Seely deems 'superhuman' are also convertible into a numerical cost-benefit analysis, which renders the task very human and ordinary indeed. By thus minimizing and rationalizing the contribution of human agency in the process of excavation, Fergusson

[32]Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, 355.
[33]Colonial archaeological site-reports traditionally locate a site in terms of latitude-longitude, geographical landmarks, distance in miles from nearest town, etc; a parodic numerical-factual version of their "picturesque" counterparts in romantic travelogues. This trend persists in today's official site-guide books issued by the ASI..
[34]James Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, 338.
[35]Ibid.

dismantles and 'shoots to a spoil' the last bastion of sublimity and wonder that the temple is capable of exciting in its viewers.

In a fascinating reassessment of the concept of reification from a recognition-theoretical view, Axel Honneth extrapolates from his interpretation of Georg Lukacs' theory of reification in capitalist societies.[36] He reads Lukacs' concept of 'engaged praxis' alongside Martin Heidegger's notion of "care" or *sorge,* with interesting results. According to Honneth, *reification* "correspondingly signifies a habit of thought, a habitually ossified perspective, which, when taken up by the subject, leads not only to the loss of its capacity for empathetic engagement but also to the world's loss of its qualitatively disclosed character."[37]

In order to demonstrate that the recognitional stance has a categorical priority over a neutral cognition of reality, Honneth brings a third insight – John Dewey's critique of the 'spectator model of knowledge' - into the equation.

> Just like Lukács and Heidegger, Dewey is also skeptical of the traditional view according to which our primary relationship to the world is constituted by a neutral confrontation with an object to be understood. Although he neither uses the concept of "reification" to characterize this doctrine nor shares the pathos of Heidegger's worldview, as far as the phenomenon that he is describing is concerned, Dewey agrees with these two thinkers that the predominance of the subject-object model cannot help but leave its impression on society's conception of itself. He asserts with Heidegger and Lukács that the longer we hold on to the traditional opposition of subject and object, the more our life practices will be damaged, since cognition and feelings, theory and practice, science and art will thereby be more and more torn apart.[38]

Dewey, according to Honneth, deploys uses the concept of 'practical involvement' "to demonstrate that we can succeed in rationally breaking down and analyzing an experienced situation only by detaching ourselves

[36] Axel Honneth "Reification: A Recognition Theoretical View," *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values,* University of California, Berkely, 2005.
[37] Ibid., 119
[38] Ibid., 110.

from the qualitative unity of this situation, by distancing ourselves from this experience."

> The analytic components that we require in order to deal intellectually with a problem of action result from the reflexive attempt to separate retroactively the components that we have experienced in their unity as part of a single qualitative experience. Only at this point, when we secondarily "process" a situation by dissecting it into emotional and cognitive elements, can we distill an object of cognition, which the acting individual can then encounter as an affectively neutral subject. This subject can now employ the whole of its attention, which had previously been fully "lost" in the act of immediate experience, as cognitive energy toward the intellectual handling of a problem that, as the object of the subject's attention, banishes all other situational elements to the background. However, Dewey never fails to emphasize that the primordial, qualitative content of experience cannot be allowed simply to vanish in this cognitive process of abstraction; otherwise, the harmful fiction of a merely existing object—of a mere "given"—may emerge.[39]

Unlike the antiquities frame of the Jones era that clearly separated 'all that is produced by nature' from 'all that is performed by man' and aligned antiquities (along with civil history) with the latter, the 19th century archaeological frame treats its objects to a spurious methodology imported from natural history. Johannes Fabian points out the epistemologically crucial distinction between two dominant categories of objects in colonial anthropology – 'ethnic artefacts' and 'ethnographic objects'.

> One could decide to treat artefact and object as synonyms, but the two terms may actually signal quite different discourses. As I understand it, artefact, etymologically and in its practical connotations, is essentially a narrative and often an aesthetic concept; narrative, in that an artefact is a thing that tells the history of its production and aesthetic, in that it was made by, or

[39]Ibid., 111-112.

> with, art. Artefacts are things that belong to culture rather than nature; they are, to use another deep rooted distinction, the business of *Geisteswissenschaften* rather than *Naturwissenschaften*. Now, and this is the point were matters get complicated and interesting, there can be no doubt that things called ethnographic objects – artefacts by their nature – were, within the paradigms of emerging anthropology (evolutionism and diffusionism, the warring twins), treated as objects of the kind science needs in order to operate its methods. They were studied by a discipline, ethnology, that may have thought of itself as a Kulturwissenschaft, but adopted methodologies that had their origins in positivist "natural history". Spatial distribution and taxonomic classification dominated the agendas of research and theorizing about culture.[40]

To treat artefacts (definitionally, objects made or modified by human beings) as if they were facts of nature is to deny their origins and persistence in purposive activity, in material and symbolic practices that surrounded them at their point of origin and at subsequent times. Colonial archaeology, however, is concerned with physical objects and their connections with similar objects; in this object saturated world there are no spaces for troubling 'native' subjectivities – both in their originary contexts and in subsequent ones. As physical bumps in the landscape, mutely bearing traces of India's past, archaeology's objects are exempted from carrying 'culture', or having 'truth value' in more than an evidentiary sense.

In its objectification, the archaeological specimen begins to bear an uncanny resemblance to the 'commodity' as characterized by Georg Lukacs, in his seminal 1923 essay titled "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat".[41] Abstracted from its ecological and socio-cultural contexts, its artefactual origins denied, it floats free of the social networks that produced and sustained it, an undifferentiated member of a species of similar specimens. Neutralized and rationalized through archaeological documentation, it acquires a 'phantom objectivity' which renders it commensurable with other specimens on the prefabricated

[40]Fabian, "On Recognizing Things," 49.
[41]"Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," in Gyorgy Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (MIT Press, 1971), 83-149.

taxonomic/chronological table. Its various values and functions throughout its multiple lives (ritual, communicative, pragmatic, symbolic, artistic and aesthetic, for example) are overwhelmed by a single 'exchange value' – that of colonialist history. Perhaps another characteristic of the Marxist definition of the commodity within capitalist systems, the fact that the commodity is owned by the employer who is not the producer, is also relevant here. The ideal archaeological specimen was owned by the colonial state – initially at on an epistemological plane. Eventually, however, the ownership was extended, by means of a series of legislations, government orders and acquisitions, to the physical/legal level.

SECTION II: THE TRANSITION FROM DOCUMENTS TO MONUMENTS

In this section I will deal with the re-contextualization of the de-contextualized archaeological objects within the official colonialist version of history and its re-aestheticization in the late 19th century. The institutional spaces of the colonial museum and the monument site and the discourse of colonialist art history are the sites where this re-contextualization and re-aestheticization take place.

Artefacts in Limbo

While coins and inscriptions were considered valuable 'documents of history' and collected, facsimiled and copied systematically, colonial archaeology in its pre-imperial avatar was, I propose, somewhat ambivalent about the ontological status of non-literary antiquities. Archaeological field reports reflect a kind of urgency in the need to 'fix' these objects through *documentation* before they deteriorate. Prinsep's inability to see the Allahabad column for its inscriptions is a case in point: it deserves to be quoted again in this context:

> Aware indeed that the only accurate data we possessed for adjusting the chronology of Indian princes were those derived from ancient monuments of stone; inscriptions' on rocks and caves; or grants of land engraven on copper-plates, discovered accidentally in various parts of the country;—I could not see the highly curious

> column lying at Allahabad, falling to rapid decay, without wishing to preserve a complete copy of its several inscriptions…. It is indeed greatly to be regretted that the task was not accomplished twenty or thirty years ago; for the ravages of time, or rather climate, have probably in that short period committed greater injuries on its surface, than during an equal number of centuries antecedent….[42]

Prinsep goes on to analyse the effect of the rain, sun and salt that leads to the flaking of sandstone buildings in Benares and "indeed all over the country". He continues, referring to the Allahabad column, "We have however before us what remains at this time of its interesting contents, and must hasten to make them known for the satisfaction of the antiquarian and the Sanscrit scholar."[43]

W.J.T. Mitchell uses the term 'bad objects' as a metaphor for three kinds of objects produced by colonial discourses – totems, fetishes and idols – which are activated/ animated in the course of the colonial encounter. Mitchell's borrows the concept from the object relations theory of Kleinian psychoanalysis. 'Bad objects', in Mitchell's interpretation, are not straightforwardly 'bad' in the moral sense, "but bad in the sense of producing a disturbance, uncertainty, and ambivalence in a subject."[44]They demand to "be neutralized, merely tolerated or destroyed." Non-literary antiquities function as 'bad objects' throughout the colonial period, sometimes mutilated (by the 'Portuguese' according to British reports), stolen by 'barrow-hunting' collectors, neutralized into scientific specimens by the archaeological frame before they are appropriated physically by the Imperial government and judged and evaluated in colonialist art history in terms of 'art' and 'non-art'. Interestingly, this ambivalence is most noticeable between the 1820's and the 1860's.[45] Even as colonial archaeology established epistemological authority over these recalcitrant 'documents of history', there are indications

[42]Prinsep "Note on Inscription No. 1of the Allahabad Column,"*Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (Bishop's College Press, 1834), 114.
[43]Ibid

[44]Mitchell, "Empire and Objecthood," *What Do Pictures Want?*, 147.
[45]It is instructive to contrast Lord Mayo's Taj Committee 1808 with Wm. Bentick's (1828-35) offer to auction the Taj Mahal for the value of its marble. See B. K. Thapar, "India," in Henry Cleere (ed.), *Approaches to the Archaeological Heritage: A Comparative Study of World Cultural Resource Management Systems* (Cambridge University Press, 1984), 63.

that these artefacts exist in a kind of ontological limbo before they were systematically appropriated for display in the newly established museums and monument sites of the Imperial government.

In 1797, Mackenzie was conducting a topographic survey of Guntur district when some unusual antiquities at the village of Amaresvaram were brought to his notice.[46] When the surveyor examined the site, he found a large circular trench 10ft. in diameter, revealing masonry, slabs and some bas reliefs. Mackenzie entered a brief description of the site and some sculptural fragments in his journal and this was supplemented by sketches of available sculptures made by his delineator.

Returning to document the site in 1816, Mackenzie found it greatly damaged, its stone having been mined for lime and building material. Spending over four months at Amaravati, Mackenzie and his delineators made maps, plans and eighty meticulously finished drawings of the sculptures. Copies of these were sent to Madras, Calcutta and London along with some pieces of sculpture. In 1830, the Collector of Musalapatnam installed some fragments in the new marketplace of his town. In 1835, the Governor of Madras chanced upon them and ordered that they be shipped to the Literary Society in Madras. In 1840, another large consignment of Amaravati sculptures was sent to Madras by the Commissioner of Guntur, there to gather dust in a store till 1854. In 1857 -58, the Madras sculptures (renamed Elliot Marbles) were shipped to London, where they spent winter, exposed to the elements in a dockyard. Finally, in 1866, James Fergusson tracked them down to a London coach house and excavated them from under piles of metropolitan detritus, reconstructing what he could of the *stupa* for display at the Paris Exposition of 1867.

The tale of Mackenzie's 'discovery', the subsequent native vandalism and colonial neglect of the Amaravati fragments in the first half of the 19th and their final resurrection by Fergusson is narrated in several writings in the latter half of the century – most notably in Fergusson's own 1860's article in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society.[47] Even within the colonial recounting,

[46]45. Major C. Mackenzie "Account of the Jains: Extracts of a Journal,"*Asiatick Researches*, Vol 9, 272–298.

[47] Fergusson, "Description of the Amravati Tope in Guntur," Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Volume 3 (London, 1868), 132-166.

it served as a moral allegory with several lessons – the dedication of Mackenzie, native ignorance and rapacity, the short-sightedness of colonial rule between the 1830's and 50's, the selfless heroism and unimpeachable scholarship of Fergusson. I retain the allegorical function of the story here, but more narrowly, as illustrative of the colonial ambivalence towards visual antiquities before the Imperial era. However, the Amaravati example is not an isolated instance of this ambivalence.

Further support for this ambivalence emerges when we consider the contrast between the pre-1860's colonial attitude towards Amaravati and Cunningham's excavation of the Bharhut *stupa* between 1874 and 1876. The meticulous attention paid to the excavation process, the thorough descriptive documentation of each fragment assembled in archaeological reconstruction and the immediate transfer of the bulk of the finds to the Indian Museum at Calcutta are detailed in Cunningham's 1879 monograph - *The Stupa at Bharhut.*[48]By this time, a clear-cut archaeological policy towards 'monuments' was in place, ensuring that the Amaravati debacle was never repeated, especially where ancient Buddhist monuments were involved.

Responding to charges that the translocation of the Bharhut fragments carried with it 'a certain aroma of vandalism [fancy carting away Stonehenge!]', Cunningham insisted that this prompt action was what *saved* the artefacts from being vandalized. The debate in this case was not whether the artefacts should be conserved or left alone to fall gracefully into decay; but whether museumization was better than *in situ* conservation. Clearly, in the forty-odd years between Prinsep's inability to see the Allahabad *lat* for its inscriptions (see above) and this sophisticated conservation debate of the 1870's, a shift in paradigm had occurred in the colonial perception of artefactual remains in India. The invoking of Stonehenge, the *ur* monument of British nationhood, reiterates this change in attitude. A brief review of changing colonial attitudes towards endangered and decaying artefacts serves to foreground this shift in paradigm.

[48]Tapati-Guha Thakurta, "Tales of the Bharhut Stupa: Archaeology in the colonial and nationalist imaginations," in Giles H. R. Tillotson (ed.),*Paradigms of Indian Architecture: Space and Time in Representation and Design* (Routledge, 1998), 35–40.

Documentation as a proxy for conservation.

In the 'romantic' travel writings of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, ruin and desolation were treated as value-additions to the sublime-picturesque qualities of ancient remains. Ruin and desolation frequently inspired moral reflection. The more humanist-philosophical of these writers inclined towards an Ozymandias-like meditation on the ephemeral nature of human effort, human vanity. Shades of Babel and Christian triumph over heathen folly flavoured other accounts (see Chapter I).

Inevitably, these sentiments spilled over into the more rigorous antiquities researches of the late 18th century where the 'ravages of tropical climate', the 'bigotry of the Moslem' and the 'apathy and ignorance of the Hindoo' were hypostasized into the destructive triumvirate responsible for the decay of ancient remains in India. From William Chambers (on Mamallapuram) in the late 18th century to Lord Curzon in the early 20th, colonial writers repeat this argument with great regularity, occasionally adding Portuguese xenophobia (Goldingham- on Elephanta) and British callousness/ overzealouness (Fergusson – on rock-cut temples) to the list.

In the reports of William Chambers and his contemporaries, a recurring component is a faithful but detached record of the 'state of preservation' of antiquities examined; conspicuously absent is the note of urgency which later writings strike, on the need to document thoroughly before all is lost. If fact, 'state of preservation' observations served a heuristic function in 'antiquities' writings, providing the authors with a rough index of the age of the remains. However, while Chambers is content to speculate on the causes of destruction, colonial archaeologists of the 19th century approached the problem as if it were a call to action.

In the early part of the 19th century, Colebrooke was critical of the colonial practice of carting away inscriptions, 'to Europe, before they had been sufficiently examined, or before they were accurately copied and translated', to be placed 'beyond the reach of reference …to be there buried in some publick museum or private collection.' Colebrooke's protest did not spring from any 'ecological' argument about leaving Indian antiquities where they belonged; rather, it was the inconvenience that this move posed 'to persons engaged in researches into Indian literature and antiquities' that he

regretted. The 'careful preservation' and 'diligent examination' of old inscriptions was most definitely a means to an end, the end being 'the illustration of the civil or literary history of the country'. For this task, originals were desirable but a good facsimile was considered a passable substitute.[49]

The necessity of *recording* ephemeral phenomena for scientific purposes before they vanished from view was the guiding principle for archaeological research throughout the second quarter of the 19th century. A few sporadic governmental interventions apart, the documentation of artefacts was mostly conducted by amateurs, on their own initiative and without consolidation. It is significant that the 1862 Minute on the Antiquities of Upper India, issued by Lord Canning (the communication leading directly to the formation of the Archaeological Survey of India) continues to prioritize documentation, documentation as a reasonable proxy for conservation and restoration, given budgetary limitations. Remarking on colonial neglect of architectural remains, Lord Canning clarifies:

> By 'neglect' I do not mean only the omission to repair them, or even arrest their decay; for this would be a task which…would require an expenditure of labour and money far greater than any Government of India could reasonably bestow upon it.
>
> But so far as the Government is concerned, there has been neglect of a much cheaper duty, -that of investigating and placing on record, for the instruction of future generations, many particulars that may still be rescued from oblivion, and throw light on the history of Britain's great dependency.[50]

By 'future generations' Lord Canning means of course, not Indians, but 'the intelligent and enquiring classes in European countries'. The message is clear; the conservation-as-documentation exercise was to be systematized and made available, *as an archive,* to researchers and scholars working in metropolitan centres in Europe. The archive would function as a necessary

[49]Colebrooke, "On Ancient Monuments, containing Sanscrit Inscriptions," Asiatick Researches, (London, 1809), 398-399.

[50]Lord Canning's Minute reproduced in Appendix I of Chakrabarti, *A History of Indian Archaeology*, 220.

and sufficient substitute for the objects themselves, the majority of which were inaccessible to these scholars and beyond conserving physically.

The Conservation debate before 1860

Early pleas for actual material conservation of artefacts came from scholars in London and prominent 'free-lancers', not attached to the colonial bureaucracy, like James Fergusson. In a paper titled 'On the Rock-Cut Temples of India', read at the Royal Asiatic Society in 1843, Fergusson concludes with a recommendation for the cleaning and preservation of several important rock-cut edifices including Karle, Udayagiri-Khandagiri, Ellora, Kanheri, Elephanta, Karle and Ajanta, underlining the fact that it was Ajanta that most required urgent attention.[51] Fergusson's recommendations seem to be targeted at the prevention of further damage to these sites, evacuating 'squatters' wherever possible and rendering them accessible to Europeans in India – from 'picnic-parties' to researchers. In 1845, the Government of India made arrangements for the clearing and preservation of both Ajanta and Ellora (then within the Nizam's dominions) along with the delineation of twenty-four of the 'most interesting and celebrated' caves and antiquities in the area.[52]

Between the 1830's and 1860's, museums in India functioned as repositories for portable fragments recovered from different sites. The original museological function of accumulation of objects for scientific purposes (rendering these artefacts accessible to European researchers) was supplemented by a new imperative– that of 'safe-keeping.'[53] However, the British had no qualms about carting away a selection of fragments to London. In 1847, an official despatch from the Directors recommended that a judicious collection of moveable fragments be made from different presidencies, with a view to shipping them to the Company's museum at London.[54] What needs to be emphasized here is that till the 1860's, both the documentation and early conservation arguments were made with European

[51]Fergusson, "On the Rock-Cut Temples of India," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No XV part 1, Volume viii, (London, 1846) 30-92.
[52]Pushpa Sundar, *Patrons and Philistines: Arts and the State in British India, 1773-1947* (Oxford University Press, 1995), 74–75.
[53]Guha-Thakurta mentions the "safe-keeping" mandate in "The Museumized Relic: Archaeology and the First Museum of Colonial India," *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 34, no. 1 (March 1, 1997): 21–51.
[54]Sundar, *Patrons and Philistines*, 76.

interests in mind; 'conservation' in whatever form was pursued to aid the work of scholars and historians in the metropole. The role of colonial functionaries in India was perceived largely in terms of facilitating the collection and transmission of 'data' to be 'processed' in London and other European centres.

SECTION III: MONUMENTS AND MUSEUMIZATION : A NEW PARADIGM

This insight brings into focus the paradigmatic nature of the opening of the first museum in Calcutta to the public, the 'monumentalization' of antiquities *in situ* in the last quarter of the 19th century, and various policies to prevent the physical transportation of material artefacts that followed. What were the factors that precipitated this new concern for the durability of historical artefacts, given the enormous logistics and expenditure that preservation and conservation entailed? What sort of expansion or transformation did the archaeological frame undergo in order to accommodate this new acknowledgement of the material presence of historical artefacts and the novel mandate for their display? What imperatives propelled the new acknowledgement of their material presence, their novel access to 'presentability' to a largely native viewership? Most intriguingly, why were these policies and institutional support systems rapidly put in place shortly after the Revolt? Consequently, what shift in ontological status, in value, did the objects themselves suffer in their transfiguration from scientific specimens – 'documents of history' – to autonomous monuments and musealia?

The answer to these questions lies, I suggest, in the overhauling of ideological state apparatuses that the revolt necessitated, and the new politics of incorporation that was to become a hallmark of the Imperial government. Both monumentalization and museumization are aspects of the new policy of visibility championed by the British Raj, contiguous with other spectacular displays of power – Victorian *durbars* that mimicked the overthrown Mughal court, the invention of Indo-Saracenic architecture and

the grandiloquent expositions of Indian arts and manufactures in European cities.[55]

The British Raj and the Rhetoric of Power

The official discourses surrounding the new Imperial policy for the preservation of monuments and the public display of antiquities are unhelpful when it comes to unearthing the ideological motivations behind this move. Almost without exception, they are couched in terms of 'enlightened custodianship' and the didactic function of museum display.[56] I see it as significant that the landmark Indian Treasure Trove Act of 1878 and its follow-up directives coincided with the establishment of the first public museum in Calcutta, and the official recognition of *in situ* conservation as a policy for select monuments. When these are viewed as contiguous performative acts within the same discursive arena, it is plausible that physical/legal *ownership* of antiquities was a pre-condition for their exposure to the public gaze. What the Treasure Trove act achieved was, at least in principle, a *neutralization* of the commodity-value of artefacts by withdrawing them from circulation in the market. Through this exclusionary move, the Imperial government cornered legal access to antiquities, and set the stage for transforming the authority exercised by colonial archaeology over antiquities, so far restricted to the epistemological level, into something like *objectified cultural capital.*[57] This was entirely in consonance with the rearticulation of power within the early British Raj – power exercised in the form of cultural hegemony, seeking alternative legitimacies through its elaborate rituals and structures of inclusion, incorporation, exclusion and

[55]From the 1980's onwards, scholars like Thomas Metcalf, Carol Breckenridge, Paul Greenhalgh and Arindam Dutta have engaged extensively with various aspects of the rhetoric of the spectacle during the British Raj. Tapati Guha-Thakurta and Kavitha Singh have made important contributions to our understanding of the politics of museumization and monumentalization of historical artefacts during the colonial period and its aftermath.

[56]Lord Lytton's Minute of January 1878 is one example of this Imperial rhetoric: "the preservation of the national antiquities ought not to be left to the charge of the local Governments, which may not always be alive to the importance of such a duty….I cannot conceive of any claims upon the administrative and financial resources of the Supreme Government more essentially *Imperial* than this [emphasis added.]." Lord Lytton's Minute quoted in Sundar, op. cit., 82. A similar argument is made by Lord Curzon in his speech (1900) "On Ancient Monuments in India", reproduced in Appendix II of Chakrabarti, op. cit., 227-236.

[57]Pierre Bourdieu formulates the concept of objectified cultural capital in "The Forms of Capital" (transl. Richard Nice), J.E.Richardson(ed.) Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education, 1986, 241-58.

civilizational 'difference'. "In conceptual terms, the British, who started their rule as 'outsiders', became 'insiders' by vesting in their monarch the sovereignty of India through the Government of India act of 8 November 1858."[58]

The epistemological appropriation of historical artefacts, represented by the archaeological archive, was an inadequate signifier for the symbolic appropriation of India's past, not least because access to the archive was limited to a small enclave of scholars in India and in Europe. It was only with the systematic *material* appropriation of these objects by the Imperial government that the symbolic appropriation could be elaborately staged for the benefit of native subjects.[59] Like the legendary *Zam-Zammah* in Kipling's *Kim*, ownership of the historical artefacts of India's past was ownership of India's past – a space from which the British were historically excluded.

It is in this context that the 'altruism' that apparently inspired *in situ* conservation policies and the opening of the Calcutta museum to the native public – loses its liberal innocence. By insisting that Indian antiquities be retained on Indian soil, as *heritage* to be restored and displayed for the edification of Indian subjects, the Imperial government was actually commandeering the tangible, visually compelling material presence of these objects to cement the permanence of British rule. Had these artefacts been carted away to England, their rhetorical potential as instruments of power would have been frittered away. They would have regressed to the status of 'mere objects' in museums or private collections, curiosities for the scientifically inclined, aesthetic objects for the artistically inclined or loot, plain and simple. On Indian soil, 'restituted' to the native populace, restored to a semblance of their former glory, these artefacts were powerfully polysemic. While ostensibly pointing to India's glorious past, they were even more potent as symbols of its Imperial present. They symbolized simultaneously the impartiality of Imperial rule, its concern for the improvement and education of subjects, its impeccable standards of aesthetic

[58]Cohn, "Representing Authority in in Victorian India," in Eric Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger,(eds.),*The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 165.
[59]Cohn's "Representing Authority..." stresses the material dimension of the Victorian symbolization of authority. He details the rituals of the Victorian durbars which involved elaborate, hierarchically ordered prescriptions for physical presentation, retinue, arms, regalia, gifts, presentations of insignia, *nazar* and so on, a mimicry of Mughal durbars. Ibid., 195–209.

judgment and its unimpeachable mastery over Indian history. They were, in other words, object lessons in the virtuousness and necessity of Imperial rule.

The instrumental motivation behind this material/symbolic appropriation of India's past will be illuminated further when we analyze how it was *staged*. I will examine two major axes along which this staging was performed – the aesthetic and the historical. After a conspicuous absence in both the antiquities and archaeological frames, the issue of aesthetics makes a significant entry in conservation discourses in the 1970's. When he was appointed Director-General of Archaeology, Alexander Cunningham's brief was to undertake "a complete search over the whole country, and a systematic record and description of all architectural and other remains that are either remarkable for their antiquity, or their *beauty* or their historical interest [emphasis added]."[60] The invocation of 'beauty' as a criterion or justification for conservation, which makes a frequent appearance in conservation discourses of the late 19th and early 20th century, was perhaps legitimized by a precedent from another area of colonial interest – the widespread aesthetic appreciation of Indian decorative arts in Europe from 1851. At one level, it was the intrinsic artisanal excellence of some of these artefacts that made them worthy of preservation. Fergusson's distinction between 'the technic' art of architecture and the 'higher phonetic arts' of sculpture and painting clearly aligns the intrinsic aesthetic value of historical artefacts with the decorative arts.[61] At another, more significant level, the aesthetic discourse was an acknowledgement of the 'presentability' of these artefacts for public viewing, of their potential 'visuality', as mediated and choreographed by the Imperial regime.[62]

[60]Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge University Press India Pvt. Limited, 1998), 151.
[61]James Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture Forming the Third Volume of the ...*, 1876, 35.
[62]This resonates with Norman Bryson's definition of visuality, cited in my introduction: "Between subject and the world is inserted the entire sum of discourses which make up visuality, that cultural construct, and make visuality different from vision, the notion of unmediated visual experience." Norman Bryson, "The Gaze in An Expanded Field," in Hal Foster (ed.), *Vision and Visuality* (Bay Press, 1988), 91–92.

In *Imagined Communities,* Benedict Anderson writes:

> Monumental archaeology, increasingly linked to tourism, allowed the state to appear as the guardian of generalized, but also local, Tradition. The old sacred sites were to be incorporated into the map of the colony, and their ancient prestige (which, if this had disappeared, as it often had, the state would attempt to revive) draped around the mappers. This paradoxical situation is nicely illustrated by the fact that the reconstructed monuments often had smartly laid-out lawns around them, and always explanatory tablets, complete with datings, planted here and there. Moreover, they were to be kept empty of people, except for perambulatory tourists (no religious ceremonies or pilgrimages, so far as possible). Museumized this way, they were repositioned as regalia for a *secular* colonial state.[63]

It is interesting that in their staging of the *in situ* monument, the conservation experts revive (a slightly parodic version of) the aesthetics of the Picturesque. The monument is 'unjungled'- cleared of extraneous vegetation that would obstruct carefully anticipated views or create structural instability. 'Squatters', however picturesque, are evicted because their use of the monument is considered defiling and inappropriate to its higher aims. Manicured lawns and disciplined shrubs contribute to an orderly version of the Picturesque. Finally, the monument itself is preserved in a state of arrested decay – modern architectural restorations are prescribed only if the structural integrity of the monument is at stake and these are to be conspicuously modern.

In a classic essay titled "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and its Origin", Alois Riegl distinguishes between different kinds of value attached to what he terms 'unintentional monuments', monuments reclaimed by the modern cult of monuments.[64] Two dominant modern values attached to these monuments are age value and historical value; these are often in conflict with each other when conservation policies are to be decided. Age value,

[63]Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 1991), 185–186.
[64]Alois Riegl, "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin," *Oppositions* no. 25 (1982): 20–51.

which Riegl insists is the more recent phenomenon, is an offshoot of modern historical consciousness and puts a premium on the object's capacity to reflect the passage of time. Proponents of age-value would therefore insist on the monument being left alone to decay through natural processes as they consider this an organic part of its identity, a value-addition to its visual properties. In other words even though they would, in principle, oppose deliberate, violent destruction of monuments by human agency, they also oppose conservation as we understand it. Proponents of historical-value, on the other hand, see the monument as a document of a particular moment or event in history, and are concerned with arresting its decay, primarily through preventive conservation. "Age value appreciates the past for itself while historical value singles out one moment in the developmental continuum of the past and places it before our eyes as if it belonged to the present."[65]

Imperial conservation policies reflect a complicated negotiation between age-value and historical value in their attempt to freeze the object in a state of *arrested decay,* retaining its value as a document, even as they invoke the Picturesque aesthetic by framing the monument in a landscaped setting. The proliferation of casts, photographs and conjectural restorations, popular as scientific substitutes for the original in museums and colonialist texts during this period, attests to their importance as historical documents, reflecting their point of origin at a particular historical moment. Both 'use value' and 'newness value', which might have had greater appeal for the native population, are definitively cancelled out by conservation policies.[66]

Ultimately, historical value emerged triumphant. The conservation and display of monuments and musealia, both *ex-* and *in situ,* were entirely mediated by the official colonialist version of history – through signposts and labels detailing the historical moment of origin of each of these objects, their provenance, through the chronological arrangement of museum displays, through elaborate pedagogical and scholarly supplements like catalogues, displayed photographs, casts and art history texts. The wondering gaze of the native subject, it was hoped, would eventually be chastened and

[65]Ibid., 38.
[66]Ibid., 39, 42.

disciplined to perceive the displayed objects through the more appropriate frame of history. Stephen Greenblatt characterizes wonder as 'the power of the displayed object to stop the viewer in his or her tracks, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness, to evoke exalted attention.' What the policies of display hoped to achieve was a carefully orchestrated historical resonance, resonance being 'the power of the displayed object to reach out beyond its formal boundaries to a larger world, to evoke in the viewer the complex, dynamic cultural forces from which it has emerged and for which it might be taken by the viewer to stand.' [67] The framing of exhibits *via* colonialist history dovetailed with the larger Imperial ambition of producing disciplined and appreciative subjects who, it was hoped, could be persuaded to give up their fanciful and inappropriate 'appropriations' of visual displays. This attempt at interpellation was doomed to failure; the conflict between the museum as a purveyor of properly scientific knowledge conducive to colonial rule and the museum as a 'wonder house' for the undisciplined native gaze was never resolved throughout the colonial period.[68]

The timing of the large scale monumentalization and museumization of historical artefacts across the subcontinent takes on a new significance when it is seen in the light of the disciplining, regulatory ambitions of colonialist history. In their contribution to *The Handbook of Material Culture,* Michael Rowlands and Christopher Tilley summarize the various recent theories that have linked the monumentalizing of the past with history, memory and the politics of identity.

> Monuments and memorials exist as a means of fixing history. They provide stability and a degree of permanence through the collective remembering of an event, person or sacrifice around which public rites can be organized. This is a fairly straightforward understanding of why tangible heritages of objects, archives, museums, monuments and memorials exist in order to make us believe in the permanence of identity. Moreover, following Nora's now classic work on lieux de memoires, these sites of memory are

[67]Stephen Greenblatt, "Resonance and Wonder," in Steven D. Lavine (ed.), *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, (Smithsonian Books, 1991), 42.
[68]Gyan Prakash makes this argument in "Museum Matters", Bettina Carbonell (ed.), *Museum Studies*:*An Anthology of Contexts*, 2nd edition, (Blackwell, 2012), 317-323; Also see Guha-Thakurta, "The Museum in the Colony,"*Monuments, Objects, Histories*, 81–82.

> consciously held ideas of the past, constructed usually in the midst of upheaval (Nora 1989). The rise of national memory emerged in Europe in the midst of a crisis of authority. The foundation of the Louvre museum in 1793 belongs to a revolutionary era in France, whose agents, in the midst of upheaval, needed to fashion a stable image of the past. As Lowenthal suggests, the projection of an image of permanence on to a landscape serves to deny the realities of change (Lowenthal 1985). As history destroys the capacity for 'real memories', Nora argued that it constructs instead sites of memory as a social and encompassing symbiosis maintained through objects and performances (cf. Nora 1989; Connerton 1989). He draws attention to the alienated status of memory in modern times: an estrangement concretized in monuments, museums and sites of memory (Maleuvre 1999: 59).[69]

I propose that the staging of *in situ* monuments and museum displays in the immediate aftermath of the revolt for the native public was one among many ways by which the colonial government sought to stabilize and objectify Indian identity in relation to its past. The census and ethnographic surveys were other late nineteenth century institutions which sought to achieve a similar objectification in the sociological sphere. However, the display of artefacts was not meant to merely resurrect and reanimate what Pierre Nora terms 'milieux de memoire', 'real environments of memory' that would reconnect the native subjects with their past in some unmediated fashion. Thoroughly decontextualized by the archaeological frame, monuments and museum displays were defined by the heavy textual overlay that slotted them by region and time period, a supposedly 'objective' history that 'belongs to everyone and to no one'. In Nora's words, history "is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it."[70] Authoritatively framed by colonialist history, the displayed artefacts were immunized against the potentially anarchic myths, memories and identity constructs of individual communities and social groups that might accumulate

[69]Michael Rowlands and Christopher Tilley "Monuments and Memorials" in Tilley et al., (eds.), *Handbook of Material Culture* (SAGE Publications Ltd, 2006), 500.
[70]Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* no. 26 (April 1989): 9.

around them. It was fortuitous for the State that many of the collected artefacts were old and abandoned, their original meanings forgotten or 'misinterpreted' by the local populace. As empty shells, they could be injected with a new significance, and be resurrected to proclaim the ordered rationality of hegemonic colonialist history.

Stripped of their local associations and usages, framed by an alien and alienating history, distanced from the present by that same history, incarcerated in vitrines, behind guardrails and the ubiquitous 'protected monument' boards, these objects were surely stamped with an inviolable 'otherness' for native viewers. Even the *in situ* monument, declaring its autonomy through a powerful material presence, relinquished this autonomy at the level of signification. Colonialist recontextualization intervened to insert a metonymic/synechdochic relationship between the objects and their 'proper' context – that is, the past as reconstructed in colonialist historiography.

The aesthetics of the *arrested decay,* both in the monument site and in museums, had an allegorical function quite apart from the scientific interest in preserving 'documents of history' without unnecessary intervention. The objects' fractured material presence, the signs of disintegration, the fragmentary forms of museum exhibits, their abdication from 'use value' - these combined to perform a powerful symbolic/concrete demonstration of the dominant meta-narrative of colonialist historiography – the subject nation's inexorable fall from a glorious past to an abject present. Their overwhelming material presence was an ironic signifier for a resounding absence.

Recontextualization and the first colonialist art histories

James Fergusson's authoritative *History of Architecture in India and the East* combines the teleology of decline with a typology of race as the context against which the corpus of historical artefacts can be periodized and interpreted.[71] Fergusson's survey must be viewed against the background of a generalized anxiety among the intelligentsia in Victorian Britain about the decline of local craft traditions in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. By

[71]James Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, J. Murray, 1876).

contrast, the crafts and manufactures of India had been elevated to exemplary status after the widespread appreciation they received during the Crystal Palace exhibition in London, in 1851. This was followed by a sense of urgency to protect and promote Indian industry, which was itself beginning to show signs of decline. Fergusson's text is interesting in that it is formulated at the crossroads of three distinct discourses; the post-1851 *aesthetic* reception of Indian design and skill, the sterner mid-nineteenth century discourse of colonial archaeology with its myopic focus on morphology, taxonomy and chronology, and finally, the late 19th century discourse of race and racial difference as essential and biologically determined.

Fergusson's cavil against the European architecture of his time, particularly the revivalisms that convulsed Britain, was that it was influenced by a 'false system'; the result was an 'anomalous and abnormal' practice. In India, on the other hand, architecture was 'a living art'; here one could encounter the 'real principles of art in action'.[72] Fergusson's predilection for ornamental architecture is evident throughout the text and he sometimes flounders trying to reconcile his personal aesthetic with the 19th century art historical mandate that read ornament as a sign of decline. Fergusson represents Indian architectural aesthetics as definitively 'Other', its "forms utterly dissimilar from those we have hitherto been conversant with".[73] Fergusson justifies his scopophilic enchantment with this 'Other' with an essentialist, racially determined version of the humanist argument. "By rising to this wider range we shall perceive that architecture is as many-sided as human nature itself…" He recommends the study of Indian architecture both as a corrective measure that would broaden the critical horizons of contemporary architecture in Europe. A very similar argument was made in the context of Indian crafts during this period.

This reveals the ontological status that Indian architectural art occupies within Fergusson's text. The concept of Art with a capital 'A' lay at the very centre of discourses about civilization and racial difference in the late nineteenth century. Every culture which claimed a position high on the ladder of civilization had to demonstrate that it cultivated Fine Arts, as a sign of its

[72]Ibid., 5.
[73] Ibid., 404.

moral and intellectual advancement. Consequently, it was important for colonial powers to deny that the arts of the colonized people could aspire to Fine Art status. Fergusson complies with this mandate by ranking Indian architecture with the lesser arts – crafts, manufactures, industrial or mechanical arts.[74]

The characteristics of Indian architectural art in this text are: 1) The art of architecture is passed on traditionally, 'its principles practiced almost mechanically' by even uneducated, native subjects. An identical argument is advanced by George Birdwood, the champion of industrial arts, for whom the native artist, with his 'great genius for imitation', however 'seldom rises above the traditions of his art."[75] 2) Unlike the 'higher arts' of sculpture and painting, which immediately reflect political decline, architecture may 'linger on amidst much political decay'.[76] Here Fergusson clears a space for his detailed analysis of Indian architecture through centuries of decadent polity even as he buttresses the teleology of decline as a justification for colonial rule. 3) The notion of creative agency, which had disappeared in the archaeological discourse, stages a comeback in colonialist art history. Fergusson borrows the reified figure of the 'native craftsman' from the arts-and-manufactures discourse and invokes it from time to time as the efficient cause of Indian architecture. The native artist/craftsman is reduced to a timeless entity, a passive body through which tradition channels and replicates itself in material form. Even though 'uneducated', with no access to individuation or individual excellence, the Indian craftsman embodies 'patient industry'. As Deepali Dewan demonstrates, the 'native artist/craftsman' is a colonial construct standing both for the anonymous collectivity he represents and for the work he produces.[77]

[74]This mandate is tediously upheld by all Imperial commentators from Birdwood, a contemporary of Fergusson and impresario of the Industrial Arts of India, to Vincent Smith, an early twentieth century historian of India who used the 'fine art' 'not fine art' distinction as a weapon of offence against the claims of nationalist art historians. See G. C. M. Birdwood, *The Arts of India* (Rupa, 1988); Vincent A. Smith, *A History of Fine Art in Indian & Ceylon* (Oxford University Press, 1930).
[75]Birdwood, *The Arts of India*, 131–134.
[76]James Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, 1876, 35.
[77]The imperialist construction of the "native craftsman" as a source both of the salvation of Indian arts and its corruption is analysed in some detail by Deepali Dewan. Dewan "The Body at Work" in James H. Mills and Satadru Sen (eds.), *Confronting the Body: The Politics of Physicality in Colonial and Post-colonial India* (Anthem Press, 2004), 118–134; and Dewan,

In Fergusson's reading, the craftsman, left to himself, is capable of ceaselessly reproducing traditional good design, as intellect does not intervene in the process. However, because of his lack of true agency and judgment, both intellectual and moral, his work is prone to display the corruption of his times. 4) Finally Indian art as a whole suffers from this moral and intellectual degeneration. Fergusson compares the Hullabid (Halebidu) temple with the Parthenon, and surprisingly, the comparison is not unfavourable. The Parthenon is as sternly intellectual as the Hoysala example is its antithesis, exhibiting 'a joyous exuberance of fancy'.[78] However, the author is forced to conclude, Hullabid being a late instance of Hoysala temples, its sculpture is degenerate. Here Fergusson emulates the archaeological frame in his tendency to dissect the object into 'architecture', 'ornamental sculpture' 'figurative sculpture'; to segregate architectural form from meaning and function. "Sculpture in India…[has] that curious Indian peculiarity of being written in decay".[79] Sculpture and painting, according to him "can only be successfully cultivated where a higher moral and intellectual standard prevails than…is at present to be found in India".[80] Moral and intellectual degeneracy is a genetic flaw among Indians, according to Fergusson, brought about by millennia of miscegenation and misrule, to be ameliorated only by firm colonial control. He uses this argument repeatedly in his extended diatribes against Babu Rajendralal Mitra.[81]

The contrast between the sweeping normative and moralistic statements with which Fergusson punctuates his text and his distinctly archaeological approach to description and stylistic analysis is a source of interesting contradictions. Brief passages of description mimic the objective archaeological narrative, detailing material, measurements, plan, structural elements and decorative features. Aesthetic judgments are profuse at the level of stylistic comparisons; they are deeply normative and prescriptive, but disguise themselves as 'objective' and commonsensical. Fergusson's periodization combines available information on political history with region-

"Scripting South Asia's Visual Past," in Julie F. Codell (ed),*Imperial Co-histories: National Identities and the British and Colonial Press* (Fairleigh Dickinson Univ Press, 2003).
[78]Fergusson on Hullabid, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, 397–404.
[79]Ibid., 34.
[80]Ibid., 35.
[81] Fergusson, *Archaeology in India*.

based cluster analysis. What ultimately stitches the narrative together in a diachronic continuum is the theory of decline. Fergusson sees decline everywhere, microcosmically in regional clusters and overall, on a global chronological scale. Ultimately, aesthetics in Fergusson's text emerges as a function of that categorical Imperial meta-narrative, the teleology of decline.[82]

Another fascinating contradiction appears at the margins of Fergusson's text, in the illustrations.[83] While the plans, diagrams and some illustrations detailing pillar orders conform to the archaeological modality, the woodcuts showing elevations partake of the conventions of Picturesque painting. The buildings are represented in oblique view, their forms illuminated by unidirectional light. Details of ruin are carefully delineated and no attempt is made to 'restore' the lacunae conjecturally. Vegetation rendered in a naturalistic mode, sets off the monuments, echoing their intricate patterns of light and shade, even springing irrepressibly from amongst the fallen stones. Here and there, a 'native' figure appears in the middle ground, ostensibly to establish a sense of scale. Most of these woodcuts were made from photographs and studies show that the practice of photography during this period was powerfully influenced by 'painterly' conventions. However, what I want to highlight is the effect that these illustrations have within the text, the semiotic function they perform. Juxtaposed with the archaeological plans and diagrams, they resonate with the display strategies that structured *in situ* conservation of monuments in India. The play between monument as scientific object, an array of architectural elements, and monument as picturesque ruin is replicated in Fergusson's text. Left out of the representation are other possible interpretations of architectural artefacts, in terms its intended function and meaning, for example.[84] One important point

[82]It is instructive to contrast this with Jouveau-Dubreuil's non-normative approach in *Dravidian Architecture*.

[83]For an interesting analysis of Fergusson's earlier "Picturesque" inclinations, see Guha-Thakurta, "The Empire and its Antiquities," in *Monuments, Objects, Histories*, 5–14.

[84]In an article comparing English and Indian understandings of architecture, Tillotson compares painted representations of Indian monuments by Hodges and the Daniells with those of 18th and 19th century Indian artists. He concludes that the Indian representations are less aesthetic that functionalist in their approach, and closer to the "intended meaning" of the structures they represent. "Painting and Understanding Mughal Architecture," Giles H. R.

of difference is that unlike the *in situ* monument, Fergusson's survey is not targeted primarily at a native Indian audience. Its implied reader is presumably a European or an Anglicized Indian. This makes the 'picturesque' intervention more intriguing. It mitigates the abstraction and coldness of the archaeological mode by presenting the objects as visually attractive and definitively 'Other'. It purports to expose the reader to an *aesthetics* of these objects that is, however, specifically English, specifically colonial. The presence of the native in the frame adds definition to this 'Otherness' – the native becomes an ethnographic marker.[85]

If archaeological description and illustrations foreground the objects in sharp focus and history is the diorama against which stylistic changes appear, the biological theory of race is the proscenium which frames the entire action. The concept of race, central to the Victorian ordering of the non-European world, hardened into a discourse about essential difference after the Revolt. The decisive decoupling of language and race took place in the late 1850's, just as Darwin's evolutionary theory became available for appropriation into the new biological 'science of race'.[86] The consummation of the new relationship between biology and race resulted in what Thomas Trautmann terms the 'racial theory of Indian civilization'. In keeping with this theory, Fergusson sees India as occupied by five successive waves of biologically distinct races. The Dasyus, a tree and serpent worshipping people 'of a very inferior intellectual capacity' and the Dravidians or Turanians, intellectually situated between the Dasyus and the Aryans, were the pre-historic occupants of the subcontinent. From Central Asia, the virile, fair-skinned Sanscrit-speaking Aryans (strikingly similar in this text to Victorian Britons), invaded India from the Upper Indus region; of the highest intellectual rank in their 'pure' state, they lost their status due to miscegenation with the other races. The Aryan conquest was followed, in more recent times, the 'Mohammedans' and finally the British.[87] Each of these races left traces of their distinct intellectual capacities and moral aspirations in the form of different art and

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Tillotson, *Paradigms of Indian Architecture: Space and Time in Representation and Design* (Routledge, 1998), 59–79.

[85]A. Chadha, "Visions of Discipline: Sir Mortimer Wheeler and the Archaeological Method in India (1944-1948)," *Journal of Social Archaeology* 2, no. 3 (October 1, 2002): 378–401.

[86]Thomas R. Trautman, *Aryans And British India* (Yoda Press, 2004), 191.

[87]Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, 1876, 9–14.

architectural forms found in India. Fergusson constructs a series of architectural styles - the Northern, the Dravidian, the Chalukyan, and the 'Indian Saracenic', which corresponds more or less, with these historical immigrations. The cause-effect connections between Fergusson's stylistic categories and racial groups are left undefined. External signs and gross pathology are sufficient for diagnosis.

Fergusson's reified racial categories provide an ideal foil for the reified objects of the archaeological frame – at a synchronic level, the archaeological typology of objects bears an indexial relationship with racial types. At a diachronic level, history and chronology set the stage for the theme of decline. Taken together, history and race are compelling justifications for the perpetuation of racial difference and colonial rule. Fergusson constructs a powerful image of the Indian subcontinent as a kind of quagmire that engulfs and emasculates all those who settle on the land, a quagmire that is characterized by a one-way flow. Each wave of immigration or invasion brings in a influx of fresh ideas and capacities, flowing typically from West to East, only to be caught up in the downward descent that is the inexorable rhythm of the subcontinent.

CODA: OBJECTIVISM AND ALLOCHRONISM

It is my contention that the colonial archaeological frame, the museum paradigm, and the first colonialist art histories, along with the neighbouring discourse of Industrial arts have left behind several structural residues that continue to influence the practice of pre-modern art history today. Of these residues, I pick out three significant tendencies which have persisted despite changed contexts of reception and interpretation. The first is art history's objectivist paradigm – a legacy of the archaeological frame that derives from the epistemology of natural history in the 19th century. Objectivism comprises a realist ontology – reality as a realm of objects that have an existence independent of the knower, and an epistemological position – the knowing subject can, from a position of externality, increasingly approach the real nature of the object. Colonial objectivism haunts the historiography of pre-

modern Indian art in many recognizable forms, in the inherited typological and generic categories that frequently go unexamined, in the separation of complex material manifestations into architecture, sculpture and painting, in formal descriptions, in stylistic comparisons, in iconographic analysis which treats meaning as inherent in the object, and overall, in the lack of epistemological reflexivity that characterizes the mainstream text. With the introduction of iconology, semiotics, narratology and other recent historicist and contextualist approaches, the interpretation of meaning has become increasingly sophisticated and takes seriously the inter-subjective context within which meaning is produced. However, formal analysis remains the most troubling locus of objectivism because formal descriptions rarely factor in the embodied viewer. Form is treated either as a property of the object, or as a vehicle of meaning.

Another legacy of colonialist paradigms manifests in the way mainstream texts lock their objects in the past and align them overwhelmingly with their original contexts of production and reception. The object and its originary context are made authenticate each other so completely that subsequent and contemporary contexts of the objects being, its presence and reception seem like inauthentic add-ons, contaminating the pristine historicity of the object. Here too, the split between form and interpretation comes into play. Slotting the object within a developmental account of style disposes of its historicity at the level of form. Interpretation is more complex and typically involves a combination of hermeneutics and social, political and cultural contextualization – all focused on the originary context. As a result, the discipline of art history tacitly acknowledges only one temporality for the objects' being. Their presence in the present is beholden, not only causally, but *ontologically*, to their relationship with the past.

The colonial imperative to deny anything but a colonial present for these objects, to treat them as 'documents of history', has already been examined in the previous sections. Johannes Fabian invents the term 'allochronism' to refer to a conceptual strategy of evolutionary anthropology in the 19th century to deny coevalness to the colonized peoples. Allochronism is a denial of a dialectical relationship between the subject and objects of knowledge that operates on the temporal axis. The object is deprived of its agency to

occupy and act in the same temporal space as the observing subject.[88] Fabian is dealing primarily with racial distancing in *Time and the Other* and his conceptualization of 'chronopolitics' relates to relations between colonizers and the colonized peoples. It might seem somewhat farfetched to apply the concept of temporal distancing to inanimate objects which originated in the past and are therefore essentially historical. However, the moment we frame objects as art, we are acknowledging their contemporaneity, both their being in and their aesthetic value for, the present, this apart from their relationship to their originary contexts. In my opinion, the fact that mainstream art history persists in treating pre-modern Indian art objects as tokens of a type, as events in a stylistic or historical continuum, as embodiments or vehicles of some ancient meaning, as products of historical patronage or as 'heritage', but rarely as aesthetic objects in their own right, highlights the fact that the residues of colonialist allochronism continue to linger on unexamined. Allochronism comes more sharply into focus when we consider the discursive institutional, and economic divides that separate modern and contemporary Indian art from 'traditional' arts like Madhubani painting and dhokra sculpture.

[88]Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (Columbia Univers. Press, 2002), 32.

CHAPTER III: INDIAN ART AND NATIONALISM IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY

Introduction:

This chapter is dedicated to the analysis of sculptural artefacts framed as *Indian Art*, a frame that was annexed for the objects of study in the polemical writings of nationalist art historians like E. B. Havell, Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, Sister Nivedita, Abanindranath Tagore and other prominent cultural figures of the early twentieth century. The discourses surrounding the emergence of pre-modern Indian Art as a national, spiritualized entity – encompassing the 'Fine Arts' triumvirate of Architecture, Sculpture and Painting – was a paradigmatic moment in the historiography of Indian art and the impact of this shift continues to influence the discipline today. Despite the recent post-colonial critiques of colonialist and nationalist art history, the different subject-positions that historians of pre-modern Indian art can occupy in relation to their objects of study continue to be somewhat influenced by the two epistemological legacies – the objectivist legacy of colonialist epistemology and the idealist formulations of the nationalist writers.

The major portion of this chapter focuses on the Idealist construction of Indian Art at the confluence of Nation and Spirit – a construct which was developed in the writings of Havell and Coomaraswamy in the first quarter of the 20th century. The latter scholar's wide-ranging hermeneutic 'recoveries' seek to create meaning on sites where 'higher' or 'deeper meaning' was hitherto absent. I attempt to visualize Coomaraswamy's framing of Indian Art and the values it accumulates through his writing. I also examine the relationship of Coomaraswamy's objects to history and how this differs from to colonial version. Finally, I speculate on the inflexions that the visuality and the material presence of art objects undergo within Coomaraswamy's Idealist frame.

In the second section, I briefly examine the writings of Stella Kramrisch who, though she was deeply influenced by Coomaraswamy's idealist-metaphysical approach to Indian art, brought a slightly different set of insights to our

understanding of Indian art, particularly Indian sculpture. Kramrisch's remarkable sensitivity to the formal/material qualities of the art object and the centrality of *history* to her formal-stylistic analysis are aspects that set her contributions apart from those of other nationalist art historians. I undertake a close reading of a few texts in Kramrisch's *oeuvre* to examine how the scholar interweaves history and stylistic change and how she frames the visual and material qualities of the objects of study.

SECTION I: THE IDEALIST-METAPHYSICAL ART HISTORY OF HAVELL AND COOMARASWAMY

Background:

While chairing the Indian Section of the annual meeting of the Royal Society of Arts in 1910, Sir George Birdwood, the champion of Indian Industrial arts, triggered a controversy that was to consolidate a completely new frame for understanding Indian art. Declaring that there was no "fine art" in India, he dismissed the 'higher' artistic value of a particular Javanese bronze Buddha sculpture that was introduced into the discussion. "The senseless similitude, by its immemorial fixed pose, is nothing more than an uninspired brazen image, vacuously squinting down its nose to its thumbs, knees and toes. A boiled suet pudding would serve equally well as a symbol of passionate purity and serenity of the soul."[1] In response to this intemperate statement, a group of prominent English artists and intellectuals including Laurence Housman, Walter Crane, William Rothenstein, wrote a letter to *The Times* of February 28, 1910, stating:

> We the undersigned artists, critics and students of art…find in the best art of India a lofty and adequate expression of the religious emotion of the people and of their deepest thoughts on the subject of the divine. We recognize in the Buddha type of sacred figure one of the greatest artistic inspirations of the world….We trust that…it will jealously preserve its individual character which is an outgrowth of the history and physical conditions of the country, as well as of

[1]Quoted in Vincent A. Smith, *A History of Fine Art in Indian & Ceylon* (Oxford University Press, 1911), 4.

those ancient and profound religious conceptions which are the glory of India and of all the Eastern world.[2]

The significance of this widely publicized exchange lies in the fact that it was the first internationally recognized challenge to the official colonialist interpretation of Indian Art. It demarcated and fortified the platform on which the new idealist interpretation of Indian Art would stage its appearance, soon to become part of India's struggle for self determination and nationhood. This alternative frame, which linked the key concepts of 'spirituality', 'tradition' and 'nationhood' with Indian art, took shape in the writings and practices of nationalist intellectuals and cultural revivalists like E.B.Havell, Abanindranath and Rabindranath Tagore, Aurobindo Ghosh, Sister Nivedita and Ananda Coomaraswamy. By the 1930's, the idealist interpretation of Indian Art had gained considerable ground, successfully de-centering colonial Eurocentric aesthetics and the archaeological approach to pre-modern Indian Art, which had so far enjoyed hegemonic status.[3]

Indian art in the Idealist frame:

The basic tenets of the idealist interpretation of Indian Art may be summarized as follows. The idealist-nationalist art historical project launched a two-pronged attack against colonialist discourses and institutional practices with respect to Indian art. On the one hand, it criticized the near-sightedness and commercialism of British policies for engendering the decline of arts and crafts in the country. On the other, it rejected the 'archaeological' approach of the official colonialist discourse in its interpretation of ancient Indian Art. Havell and Coomaraswamy offered their alternative idealist-aesthetic interpretation of Indian Art as a way of looking at Indian art from 'an Indian point of view'.

Indian Art in its new definition encompassed the Western triad of Fine Arts – architecture, sculpture and painting. Havell, Coomaraswamy, Kramrisch and other scholars made significant contributions towards the study and

[2]Quoted in Smith, *A History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon, from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911).

[3]The second edition of Smith's *A History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon*, published in 1930, displays several symptoms of the retreat of the colonialist version of Indian art history. The book was revised extensively by K de B Codrington – who strategically omits sections of the 'aesthetic' commentary through which Smith sought to establish the non-fine art status of much of pre-modern Indian Art.

theorizing of Indian painting, which, with the exception of Ajanta, had been left out of the colonial account. One vital thrust of redefining and expanding the canon of Indian Art was to establish the Fine Art status of a large selection of 'masterpieces' from the past. The new Indian Art was uniquely and organically linked to the soil of the subcontinent in its origins and development. Colonialist ideology dictated that 'foreign origins' and 'foreign influence' be used to account for all artistic innovation and aesthetic excellence in Indian art. Not content with disputing these claims of foreign influence on the basis of historical evidence and ideological-aesthetic claims, the nationalist art historians invented the concept of a 'Greater India', locating post-Gupta India as the epicentre of a cultural revolution that reverberated across several regions of Asia. Further, they rendered the whole discussion around foreign influences invalid by asserting the unified *Idealist* 'essence' of Indian Art. According to Havell, "Indian art is essentially idealistic, mystic, symbolic, and transcendental."[4]

All material manifestations of Indian art through the ages, according to this construct, were embodiments of a single set of primordial Ideas, or Ideals. For Havell, Vedic and Upanishadic thought provided the philosophical basis and the creative force that powered Indian artistic expression throughout its history. Coomaraswamy identified *Philosophia Perrenis,* which he equated with *sanatana dharma,* as the source of the doctrines and ideals of Indian, Oriental and even Mediaeval Christian Art. According to Coomaraswamy, "…just as through all Indian schools of thought there runs like a golden thread the fundamental idealism of the Upanishads, the Vedanta, so in all Indian art there is a unity that underlies all its bewildering variety. This unifying principle is here also Idealism, and this must of necessity have been so, for the synthesis of Indian thought is one, not many."[5] The organic connections between the Indian Nation with its Art and its History were drawn, for the first time, along these lines: India was united by these Ideals, which also underpinned its Art. These Ideals originated in the nation's hoary past, in almost mythical time and were valid for all time.

[4]E. B. Havell, *Indian Sculpture and Painting, Illustrated by Typical Masterpieces, with an Explanation of Their Motives and Ideals* (London, J. Murray, 1908), 10.
[5] Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, *Essays in National Idealism* (Munshiram Manoharlal., 1981), 17.

The idealist frame served several important ideological functions that were central to the nationalist struggle. It served to imagine a 'nation' into being, the nation as a unified entity, defined by its common ideals, rather than by its all-too real social, economic, religious, cultural differences, hierarchies and incompatibilities. It defined 'spiritual' and 'traditional' India as different from the 'materialistic' and 'modern' West – which is why, according to Havell, Indian art appeared anomalous and inscrutable to Western eyes. "The spirituality of Indian art permeates the whole of it, but it shines brightest at the point where we cease to see and understand it."[6] Most importantly, the stress on the unity of ideals made it possible to theorize a continuity of great art in India, a 'tradition' originating in its ancient past, surviving in an abstract realm even through the troubled present, to emerge materially again in the renaissance of the future. To theorize a continuing national 'tradition' of great art was an ideological imperative for nationalist art historians, developed in response to the official colonialist argument that 'fine arts' in India was either unknown or dead by the beginning of the Gupta period. According to Coomaraswamy, "[t]he people to whom the great conceptions came are still the Indian people, and, when life is strong in them again, strong also will be their art."[7]

Idealist Art History – A critique

Both Havell and Coomaraswamy began their art history careers as champions of native craftsmanship, criticizing imperial policies and neglect for the deteriorating state of craft traditions in India and Ceylon.[8] By the second decade of the 20th century however, the focus of their critique shifted away from the ground realities of living craft practices towards the more conceptual 'fine arts' debate, with its civilizational implications for India. In a strategically significant move, the nationalist scholars commandeered the distinctively modern-Western category of 'fine art' as a frame within which to recast and unify a large corpus of artefactual production found within the subcontinent which had previously been fragmented under several colonialist

[6]Havell, *Essays on Indian Art, Industry & Education* (Madras: Natesan, 1907), 2–3.
[7]Coomaraswamy, *Essays in National Idealism*, 50.
[8]The influence of the art and crafts movement in England and Morrisian socialism on Coomaraswamy's early writings has been well documented. See for example ,Larry. D. Lutchmansingh, "Ananda Coomaraswamy and William Morris," *Journal of the William Morris Society* 9.1 (Autumn 1990): 35–42.

categories – historical monuments, archaeological and ethnological artefacts, ornamental or decorative arts. In appropriating the fine arts frame and adopting its generic triad of architecture-sculpture-painting as the basic analytic categories in their writing, the nationalist scholars engendered a disciplinary paradox that continues to haunt the practice of art history in India. Even while they strenuously refuted the validity of the 'fine art' vs. 'lesser art/craft' divide in the context of India, Havell and Coomaraswamy ended up valorizing what we now recognize as the 'high tradition' of Indian art at the expense of various folk and popular art and craft manifestations with somewhat ambiguous social and historical pedigree, even though some of these were living art practices.

The nationalist redefinition of Indian or 'traditional' art both participated in and differed from, the modern Western construction in other important ways

1) The notion of art-making as a more or less autotelic activity and the artwork as an autonomous entity were an important motive force behind modernist experiments. Havell and Coomaraswamy rejected the notion of 'art for art's sake', insisting that 'traditional art' was always a means to an end, never an end in itself, the ends being both physical and spiritual in varying degrees.[9]

2) The modernist cult of the artist, the artist as a free-thinker and creative genius, expressing his emotions, individuality and originality through his art work was similarly rejected in favour of a conception of the artist as a functional member of society, a skilled worker catering to specific needs of his community, embodying in material form the collective vision of his people. "The artist did not think of his art as a "self-expression," nor was the patron interested in his personality or biography."[10]

3) At the level of reception, even while it challenged accepted definitions of the aesthetic, modernist art was inextricably bound up with notions of aesthetics, aesthetic experience and aesthetic judgment. Exploiting the unstable state of 'Universal aesthetics' in the early twentieth century, the nationalists erected an alternative aesthetic frame for Indian art. It was

[9]"The Christian and Oriental, or True, Philosophy of Art," in Coomaraswamy, *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art* (New York,: Dover Publications, 1956), 24–31.
[10]"The Nature of Mediaeval Art," ibid., 112.

something of an irony that Coomaraswamy, despite his unrivalled success in aestheticizing the Indian art object on the international arena, rejected the aesthetic approach to Indian art as being too subjective and 'sentimental'. 'Traditional' works of art, according to the scholar, "were not produced for the delectation of the senses" but were geared to higher rational and spiritual ends.[11]

By constructing a spiritual and idealist 'essence' for Indian art, the nationalist scholars signaled a parting of ways with the official Western definition of fine art. Faced with the imperative of authenticating this construct, which also implied affirming its ancient origins and transhistorical validity, nationalist scholars selected figurative sculpture in stone and bronze as their exemplary object lesson. Both Havell and Coomaraswamy dedicate several texts to the apotheosizing of Indian sculpture, a category replete with 'masterpieces' exemplifying the 'ideals of Indian art'.[12]

Indian figurative sculpture was eminently suited to demonstrating the primordial (Buddhist/Brahminical) ideal and spiritual 'essence' of Indian art in a way that craft traditions such as textiles and ceramics, for example, were not. It provided an aestheticized alternative to the colonialist focus on architecture, which was archaeological and objectivist in its approach. The nationalist scholars could claim for this category of art an unbroken 'tradition' that spanned over two millennia. This time frame would be extended backwards to the Vedic period, when the 'ideals' that motivated Indian sculpture were supposedly formulated, thus diminishing the significance of the foreign-influenced refinements of the Mauryan sculpture. Indian figurative sculpture could then be read as a progressive realization, in gross materials, of Vedic ideals (read the nation's spirit), which reached its culmination in the redefined 'Golden Age' of Indian art. De-centering the colonialist version of the Golden Age of Indian art, predictably located in the Gandhara time-space, the idealist art historians of the early 20th century invented a new Golden Age, a 'Classic period' of Indian art from the 6th to 8th centuries. It was not coincidental that this period corresponded with the so-

[11]"Why Exhibit Works of Art/" ibid., 16–17.

[12] Sculpture in bronze and stone is the focus of Havell, *Ideals of Indian Art* (New York, Dutton, 1912) and *Indian Sculpture and Painting, Illustrated by Typical Masterpieces, with an Explanation of Their Motives and Ideals*; Coomaraswamy, *Visvakarma; Examples of Indian Architecture, Sculpture, Painting, Handicraft* (London: Messrs. Luzac; 1914).

called 'Hindu Renaissance' in large parts of India.[13] The figurative sculpture of this period became the touchstone for all Indian Art, the point at which the archetypal Ideal reached its culmination in material form. The politics and normative implications of this new 'golden age' have been critiqued by recent scholars; it however continues to determine the focus of museum displays and long surveys of Indian Art.[14]

Idealism and the Dematerialization of Art

Because they tended to view Indian art entirely in terms of the transcendental ideas it embodied and the archetypal, abstract Ideal Forms that determined its diverse manifestations, nationalist writers tended to gloss over the physical, non-representational attributes of the works of art. In the writings of Coomaraswamy and Havell, traditional works of art are consistently viewed as means to higher 'spiritual' ends. One implication of this redefinition of art was that the metaphysical and symbolic signified was given epistemological priority over material/visual qualities of the signifier. Even as it challenged the realist epistemology of the colonial archaeological frame, the idealist discourse perpetuated the divide between form and meaning; here, however, the values were reversed with metaphysical essence subordinating phenomenal appearance.

As a consequence of this emphasis on the metaphysical qualities of Indian art over its varied physical manifestations, art works were de-materialized within idealist epistemology. When art works are interpreted and understood entirely in terms of a single set of universal ideas and values that they are supposed to embody and manifest, they become enclosed within a rarified, circular, symbolic sphere, reduced to the level of illustrations in the service of some transcendental *logos*. At work here is idealism at two levels. At the first level, the idealist interpretation of meaning supports the theory that meaning is an *a priori* that both chronologically and causally precedes the embodiment of meaning in form. The meaning of an art work is framed as transcendental

[13]Coomaraswamy, *The Arts & Crafts of India & Ceylon* (Cornell University Library, 2009), 59–69; Havell, *Indian Sculpture and Painting*, 49.

[14] Kavitha Singh, "Museums and the Making of the Indian Art Historical Canon," in Panikkar, et al. eds.,*Towards a New Art History: Studies In Indian Art* (D.K. Printworld Ltd., 2003), 311–357; Tapati Guha-Thakurta, "The Demands of Independence," *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (Permanent Black, 2007), 175–204; examine the ideological implications of this focus.

'given', pre-existing its representation in material form, originating ultimately in primordial Revelation outside historical time. Meaning is 'discovered' or 'realized' by the artist, his patron and the viewer, never constructed or negotiated within the social realm. Compounding this transcendentalist approach to meaning, the idealist interpretation of *form* inserts a complete mental image, an Ideal Form or Archetype, between meaning/Idea and its embodiment in material form.[15] According to the idealist reading therefore, the material specificities of the work have only a tertiary status on the scale of epistemological value.

The epistemological priority given to meaning and content is everywhere evident in Coomaraswamy's writing. In one of his Boston catalogues, the scholar is careful to distinguish between the 'ultimate content' of a work of art, its metaphysical import, to be understood intuitively, and its formal 'subject', relating to its iconography. In this text, Coomaraswamy purports to consider the work of art 'mainly from the standpoint of the *bhakta* or worshipper', the standpoint of 'their original usage'. However, he also takes on the task of "referring incidentally to matters of related historical interest, such as details of costume, stance, and so forth, and to the technical methods of the craft." This division of art writing into 'ultimate content' (metaphysical significance), formal 'subject' (meaning related to iconography and representation), 'incidental details of historical interest' (formal/stylistic description and analysis) and 'technical methods' (facture) is maintained in most of Coomaraswamy's writing on Indian art.[16]

Significantly, there is a distinct hierarchy implied in this approach. Coomaraswamy's writings are replete with sophisticated interpretations of art works in terms of transcendental Idea, symbolism and iconography. By contrast, his analysis of the formal/stylistic aspects of specific works, their material qualities and the technical processes involved, are brusque and rudimentary, and (if we read past the Sanskrit terminology) bear a striking stylistic resemblance to objectivist descriptions in colonial archaeological texts. If we were to map Coomaraswamy's reception of art works in terms of

[15]In his article "Is Art a Superstition, or a Way of Life?", Coomaraswamy writes "Art can…be defined as the embodiment in material of a pre-conceived form." *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, 1956, 69.
[16]Coomaraswamy, *Catalogue of the Indian Collections in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston* (Museum of Fine Arts, 1923).

proximity and distance, it becomes clear that even as he signals his proximity to the metaphysical ideas and representational aspects of his objects, he distances himself from their physical, non-representational, materially significant and expressive qualities, their 'presence effects'. One has only to compare Coomaraswamy's texts with some of the writings of his younger contemporary, Stella Kramrisch, to perceive the disembodied and clinically detached nature of Coomaraswamy's response to the non-representational, visual and haptic qualities of the works he describes. Whether this distancing from the presence effects of the works was a conscious, ideologically determined choice or whether it was a psychological idiosyncracy, it is difficult to say. The former is a definite possibility. Coomaraswamy repeatedly dismisses the aesthetic/sentimental approach to art, arguing that through its 'intelligibility and functional efficacy', true/traditional art appeals ultimately to reason and not to the senses.[17] "The recognition of beauty depends on judgement, not on sensation; the beauty of the aesthetic surfaces depending on their information, and not upon themselves."[18]

Coomaraswamy is in his element when he can 'read' paintings and sculptures as if they were written texts.[19] In his numerous descriptions of artworks, especially in his catalogues and journal articles as a Museum curator and keeper, we sense an inexplicable urgency that drives the translation of the visible into the legible. Left decisively out of the account is an entire material-visual dimension of the work, non-representational, yet powerfully affective; what Georges Didi-Huberman distinguishes as its *visual* aspect.

In his book *Confronting Images,* Georges Didi-Huberman makes an interesting distinction between *the visible* and *the visual* in a work of art.[20] Visible elements, according to the scholar, are decipherable aspects of the work, elements of representation and signification which provide a key to 'translating' the artwork – rendering it legible, like a written text. Visual elements, on the other hand, are neither visible in the sense of 'representing'

[17]Coomaraswamy "Is Art a Superstition?" in Coomaraswamy, *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, 1956, 76–79.
[18]Ibid., 75.
[19]This section is adapted from my paper, "The Visual and the Material in Coomaraswamy's Art History",presented at the seminar on the aesthetic philosophy of Ananda Coomaraswamy, University of Hyderabad, February 2011.
[20]Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images*, translated by John Goodman, (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005.

something definite and meaningful, nor are they invisible, that is to say the abstract, literally 'meta-physical', the out-of-the-frame dimension of the work. The visual, as this scholar formulates it, is the powerful 'appearance' or 'presence' of an art work, an efficacious quality that exceeds the representational, the legible dimension. 'Massive and deployed', the visual reaches out and implicates "the gaze of a subject, its history, its fantasies, its internal divisions." According to Didi-Huberman, encountering the visual dimension in a work requires,

> …a gaze that would not draw close only to discern and recognize, to name what it grasps at any cost—but would, first, distance itself a bit and abstain from clarifying everything immediately. Something like a suspended attention, a prolonged suspension of the moment of reaching conclusions….
>
> There would also be, in this alternative, a dialectical moment—surely unthinkable in positivist terms—consisting of not-grasping the image, of letting oneself be grasped by it instead: thus of letting go of one's knowledge about it."[21]

If one can hazard an inference from his writings, such an approach would have been equally unthinkable for anti-positivist Coomaraswamy, for a number of reasons quite consistent with his approach to art and aesthetics.

Art-Making within the Idealist frame

The idealist frame's epistemological dematerialization of the art work goes beyond its reduction of the act of reception to a disembodied, intellectual operation, a passive absorption of the representational import of the artwork. It extends to its problematic characterization of *art-making*, sometimes diminishing the process of making an artwork to the level of a skilled operation, sometimes elevating it to the status of an intellectual exercise. On the one hand, the individual contribution of the artist/craftsman to the material emergence of the art work is reduced to a skilled operation, because within the idealist frame, the final, material forms of the art works are themselves pre-determined by Tradition, in the realm of Idea and archetypal Form. According to Coomaraswamy, "…the nature of ideas to be expressed in

[21] Ibid., 16.

art is pre-determined by a traditional doctrine, ultimately of superhuman origin, and through the authority of which the necessity of a clear and repeated expression of such and such ideas has come to be accepted without question"[22]. The craftsman, therefore, "is not an individual expressing individual whims, but a part of the universe, giving expression to ideals of eternal beauty and unchanging laws…"[23]

Coomaraswamy simultaneously frames artmaking as an intellectual exercise, a form of knowledge. Art in traditional societies, according to Coomaraswamy, is in the first place "the property of the artist, a kind of knowledge and skill by which he knows, not what ought to be made, but how to imagine the form of a thing that is to be made, and how to embody this form in suitable material, so that the resulting artifact can be used."[24] The emphasis here is on knowledge; art-making is first of all a cognitive, intellectual operation, and only secondarily and less importantly, material practice. How can these two frames – art-making as skill deployed in the service of pre-existing doctrinal ideas, and art-making as an intellectual operation, be reconciled within the same larger argument?

Coomaraswamy cleverly resolves this paradox by simply subverting or inverting the Western distinction between 'fine arts' and 'crafts'. Coomaraswamy divides the traditional artist's operation into two phases, with obvious hierarchical connotations. The "free" theoretical or imaginative act of conceiving the mental vision (a divinely ordained, textually prescribed, collectively shared, Ideal Form) of the thing to be made is followed by the "servile" manual act of transcribing this into material form.[25] Missing from the account is an array of considerations – the resistance offered by material, the deployment of technology, the process, the conception of art-making as learnt and *embodied* knowledge as well as *practice*, and most importantly art-making as the locus of a generative *performance*.

Even function, which Coomaraswamy stresses as central to our understanding of art, is relegated to a purely cognitive realm. On the one

[22]Coomaraswamy, "Is Art a Superstition?"*Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, 69.
[23]Coomaraswamy, *The Indian Craftsman* (London: Probsthain, 1909), 75.
[24]"Is Art a Superstition?" in Coomaraswamy, *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, 69.
[25]"Why Exhibit Works of Art?" 33;"Is Art a Superstition" 72; in Coomaraswamy *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art.*

hand, "functional and symbolic values coincide"[26] and function and meaning are inseparable;[27] on the other, function is ultimately subservient to a 'higher' symbolic meaning. "Whatever work of traditional art we consider… [had] a meaning over and above what may be called the immediate value of the object to us as a source of pleasure or necessity of life."[28] Coomaraswamy articulates the connection between the meaning and function of a work of art in these terms: "…whatever, and however humble, the functional purpose of a work of art may have been, it always has a spiritual meaning, but one that the function itself expresses adequately *by analogy* [emphasis added]."[29]

The De-historicizing of Artworks

The logocentric straightjacket of 'unity' at the level of Idea also resulted in the *de-historicizing* of art works. Within the idealist frame, the irreconcilable diversity of artistic production across the subcontinent, varying most obviously according to time-period, region and cultural context, is merely epiphenomenal. The vital links between art works and the specific historical, cultural and material circumstances of their production and reception are less important than the links between art works and the trans-historical Idea. For Coomaraswamy, 'style and stylistic sequences' are the accident, not the essence of art, a product of 'human idiosyncracy[sic].'[30] "We conceive… that the most significant element in any given work of art is precisely that aspect of it which may, and often does, persist unchanged throughout millennia and in widely separated areas; and the least significant, those accidental variations of style by which we are enabled to date a given work or even in some cases to attribute it to an individual artist."[31]

The quotation above suggests the scholar's focus of interest was not individual art works at all but generic or ideal types – like the Nataraja type and the Buddha type. Given this approach, it is not surprising that Coomaraswamy was impatient with the formal attributes that marked individual art works as both unique and part of a larger sequence. What is

[26] "Is Art A Superstition?", 79.
[27] "Why Exhibit Works of Art?", 40.
[28] "Is Art a Superstition?" 78.
[29] "Why Exhibit Works of Art?" 40.
[30] Coomaraswamy, "Why Exhibit Works of Art?" 39.
[31] Coomaraswamy, "The Interpretation of Symbols," in *What Is Civilization?: And Other Essays* (Lindisfarne Pr, 1989), 128.

surprising, however, is that this lack of interest in historical specifics extended to the scholar's approach to the content and meaning of art works as well. In a recent article on the shifting meanings of the Nataraja icon, Padma Kaimal challenges Coomaraswamy's authoritative interpretation of the familiar Chola bronze Nataraja image on multiple counts. Most relevant here is her charge that Coomaraswamy's hermeneutic 'recovery' was based on the assumption that the icon had one original, static meaning that remained fixed throughout its thousand-year-long history.[32] Drawing on inscriptional and visual evidence, Kaimal argues convincingly that the image, always polysemic in nature, experienced a radical shift in meaning at a crucial point in its history. She demonstrates how the originally destructive connotations of early Nataraja images in the Tamil region were transformed, through the 10th -11th century appropriation of Nataraja as a Chola royal emblem, into the 'Ananda tandava' associations made famous in Coomaraswamy's writings.[33]

Although the scholar frequently refers to Indian and Oriental Art as 'traditional', the trope of tradition is used in his writing in a monolithic, trans-historical manner, as the polar opposite of another monolithic concept – the Modern/Western.[34] In this, it differs from a more anthropological understanding of traditions in the plural, grounded in specific historical contexts, material cultures and practices. At the heart of the notion of 'traditional art' lies the nationalist construction of the traditional artist/craftsman. In his early writings, particularly in his 1909 book *The Indian Craftsman*, Coomaraswamy quotes from a wide selection of literary sources from the *Jatakas* to George Birdwood's *Industrial Arts of India,* to theorize the social position, function and training of the 'hereditary craftsman' in India and Ceylon.[35] Despite the classification of craftsmen according to their ethos, and the time span covered by the historical documents cited, Coomaraswamy's 'Indian Craftsman' remains an a-historical, reified entity,

[32]Padma Kaimal, "Shiva Nataraja: Shifting Meanings of an Icon", *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 81, No. 3, (Sep., 1999), 390-419.
[33]This paragraph is excerpted from my paper "The Visual and the Material in Coomaraswamy's Art History".
[34]This construct finds an echo in Havell's writing. "The transcendentalism of Vedic thought…is the opposite pole to the barbaric materialism of the present day, which is a negation of all art…."Havell, *Ideals of Indian Art*, 9.
[35]Coomaraswamy, *The Indian Craftsman*.

sharing many of the features attributed to Indian craftsman in the colonial account. It is only in the following decades that the Indian Craftsman emerges as an Ideal entity in nationalist writing, an earthly counterpart of Visvakarma.

The Indian Craftsman and Traditional Society

The Indian Craftsman in his idealist avatar is a singular, trans-historical entity far removed from the contingencies and realities of the workshop and of earning a livelihood. The artist/craftsman is viewed as secure in his social position, unmindful of personal advancement except in the spiritual realm and embodying the collective Vision of his society in material form in an almost effortless application of unalienated labour. In Coomaraswamy's 'unanimous' societies, "societies whose form is pre-determined by traditional conceptions of order and meaning, there can hardly arise an opposition of interest as between patron and artist."[36] Not surprisingly, Coomaraswamy bases his interpretation of the status of the traditional craftsman on inevitably hegemonic *written* texts like the Manusmriti, the Mahavamsa, the Ain-i-Akbari and Birdwood's document, each with a vested interest in preserving *status quo.*[37] The scholar's refusal to approach these texts critically, to read between the lines, is consistent with his theory of traditional societies as existing in seamless harmony. His celebration of the 'anonymity' of the traditional Indian artist, a construct which has come under fire in recent decades, is ideologically connected to his support of the caste system.[38] "The anonymity of the artist belongs to a type of culture dominated by the longing to be liberated from oneself."[39]

Neither Havell nor Coomaraswamy display the ambivalence towards the caste system that affected many sections of colonial intelligentsia and Indian social reform movements at the turn of the 20th century. Defining caste divisions as "a legal recognition of the natural division of society into functional groups", Coomaraswamy introduces caste as a system of '*noblesse oblige*' that has a salubrious influence on social order, the maintenance of quality of artistic

[36]"Is Art a Superstition?" Coomaraswamy, *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, 67.
[37]Coomaraswamy, *The Indian Craftsman*.
[38]See, for example,Joanna Gottfried Williams, *The Two-headed Deer: Illustrations of the Rāmāyaṇa in Orissa* (University of California Press, 1996), 139.
[39]Coomaraswamy, "Why Exhibit Works of Art,"*Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, 41.

production, and the 'spiritual progress' of the artist.[40] Havell's support for the caste system is similarly unequivocal. "Caste has been the salvation for India art and industry during the critical period of transition through which India is now passing, and the caste traditions are still the most valuable industrial asset India possesses."[41]

There can be no doubt that the early 20th century idealist frame depended heavily on both the modern, secular conception of art and the modern conception of nationhood.[42] Together, these concepts provided the very conditions of possibility for the nationalist discourse.[43] Given this understanding, it is no small irony that Coomaraswamy and Havell staged their anti-modernist critique within discursive spaces cleared by *modern* critiques of colonialism and the *modernist* destabilization of the post-Renaissance definition of art, and all this from the security of their locations within irrefutably *modern* institutions – the art school and the museum. The moment we perceive the invented nature of the nationalist construct of 'traditional art', we realize that the whole edifice of art and nationhood in the nationalist-idealist discourse draws its sustenance from an ideological foundation that is fundamentally feudal, patriarchal and Brahmanical.[44] This is the basic contradiction within the new discourse. Even as it takes advantage of modern notions of 'art' and 'nation', the idealist construct of 'traditional art' is inextricably bound up with its ideologically specific construct of 'traditional society', the latter invention being offered as a ready-made and complete panacea for the ills the evils of modernity. The whole frame collapses if this ideological foundation is shaken.

This problematic ideological substratum is also the source of the powerfully normative and prescriptive character of the discourse. In defining all of Indian art essentially as 'spiritual' and 'idealistic', Coomaraswamy and Havell construct a *standard of evaluation* that might arguably be insightful in the

[40]Coomaraswamy, *The Indian Craftsman*, 66–68; "Is Art a Superstition?" *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, 1956, 67–68; 84–85.
[41]Havell, *The Basis for Artistic and Industrial Revival in India* (University of California Libraries, 1912), 148.
[42]Coomaraswamy defines nationality as both a geographical unity and a shared culture.

[43]Coomaraswamy, *Essays in National Idealism*, 7–13..
[44]Eric Hobsbawm "Introduction: Inventing Traditions" in Eric Hobsbawm and T. O. (Terence O.) Ranger (eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1–14.

context of Gupta sculpture and Rajput painting. However, what of Mughal Painting, which clearly falls short of this ideal even in Coomaraswamy's writing, or the Kalighat pat, both of which we find fascinating for reasons other than the prescribed ones? The idealist straightjacket is also irrelevant to our interpretation of modern and contemporary art, though its pernicious prescriptions did affect art practice for a few decades in the early 20th century. The traditionalist vein in the idealist discourse offers no spaces for a negotiation between the past and the present, spaces from within which the people of a modern nation can accommodate the artefactual production of the past within the horizons of their contemporary artistic, intellectual and ideological interests and commitments. An abyss separates the modern world from the 'traditional' one; the differences which seal the past off from the present are not merely historical but transcendental and insurmountably axiological. In a parodic (in)version of colonialist allochronism, it is the contemporary viewing subject who is rendered unfit to interpret the art works of the more ideal, perfect past. (see previous chapter for an explication of allochronism.) Despite Coomaraswamy's protests to the contrary, the only way that people in modern societies can embrace the idealist construction of Indian art in its entirety is by consenting to 'return to a more or less feudal order', or at the very least, by accepting, with that scholar, the 'higher' status of prevalent values in the mediaeval social order.[45]

Subject Positions in Idealist Art History

It is interesting to speculate on the subject positions taken by Havell and Coomaraswamy *vis a vis* their objects, and the possible positions the reader can occupy within this discourse. Both the writers adopt a more or less oracular tone in their writings, speaking forcefully *on behalf* of the nation, its past, its peoples, Indian art works and the traditional craftsman. The authoritarian resonance of their writing was necessitated, in their early writings at least, by their polemical and marginal position with respect to the official colonialist discourse. Havell addresses himself both to British officialdom and to an Indian audience. One prime target is the 'educated,

[45]In a postscript to his article "Is Art a Superstition or a Way of Life?"Coomaraswamy denies the charge made by his reviewer, Richard Florsheim, that he advocates "a return to a more or less feudal order", offering as an alternative strategy a getting back "to first principles"; *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, 1956, 86–88.

Westernized Indian', whom Havell sees as needing a re-education tantamount to conversion. In his descriptive writings, Havell vacillates between identifying himself with the artist, the reformist-*guru* and the (informed) viewer/interpreter of artworks. However, as Osman Jamal points out, Havell's ultimate political position within the nationalist discourse was as the voice of the Empire.[46] His project was to wean Indians away from their unseemly agitation for political sovereignty and modernization, to "dismantle the Macaulayist project and return India to a pre-modern never-never land."[47]

Coomaraswamy's position is more complex and interesting. In an article titled "Reactions to Art in India", the scholar constructs something like a 'traditional' theory of spectatorship, likening the work of visual art to a *kama-dhenu,* "yielding to the spectator just what he seeks from it or is capable of understanding." Accordingly, he divides the types of spectator into the *pandita*, who are 'concerned about the correctness of iconography', the *bhakta,* who are 'interested in the representation of holy themes as such', the *rasika* who are 'moved by the expression of *bhava* and *rasa*,' expressing 'appreciation in the technical terminology of rhetoric', the *acarya*, the fellow artists 'who regard chiefly the drawing, and technical skill in general', and finally the *alpa-buddhi-jana*, 'the ordinary laymen' who 'like the bright colors, or marvel at the artists dexterity.'[48] Though Coomaraswamy claims that we ought to appreciate Indian art from all of these points of view, we find him aligning increasingly with the *pandita* and less emphatically, with the *rasika*, in his later writings. When he turned to religion and metaphysics for answers to the anomalous state of affairs in the modern world, Coomaraswamy abdicated his earlier, more politically engaged position as a champion of the marginalized Indian craftsmen and crafts. In his later works, Coomaraswamy's politically quiescent role expands logically from connoisseur – discriminating expert on art, to Keeper/Curator – custodian of endangered artefacts, to Docent - educationist -presenter of lost contexts, to hermeneut-exegete – recoverer and interpreter of lost meanings, to philosopher-

[46]Osman Jamal, "E B Havell: The Art and Politics of Indianness," *Third Text* 11 (1997): 3–19.
[47]Ibid., 18.
[48]Coomaraswamy, "Reactions to Art in India" in *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, First Edition (Munshiram Manoharlal, 1994), 108–109.

metaphysician - apologist for Traditionalism and *Philosophia Perennis*, to visionary-seer – the Voice of 'Traditional' wisdom, which served, in certain contexts, as the conscience of the West.

SECTION II: STELLA KRAMRISCH AS COUNTERPOINT

Stella Kramrisch was probably the first professionally trained art–historian to undertake an extensive study of pre-modern Indian Art. As a student of the University of Vienna in the second decade of the 20th century, she had a thorough grounding in the techniques of formalist analysis pioneered by scholars like Heinrich Wolfflin and Alois Riegl. Her doctoral study of Indian art was supervised by Josef Strzygowski, a historian of Early Christian, Northern European, Central and West Asian art. Strzygowski used a combination of formalist analysis and comparison to establish continuities between Northern European and Central Asian Art. Race played a central role in Strzygowski's formulations; in her earlier writings, Kramrisch draws similarly facile connections between formal qualities of art works and 'ethnical' factors, bypassing the social and material spheres of art.[49]

Her other mentor, Max Dvorak, was well known for his pioneering efforts at reconciling the history of art (*Kunstgeschichte*) with the history of ideas (*Geistesgeschichte*).[50] This approach resonated broadly with the idealist art history championed by Coomaraswamy and Havell; Kramrisch's writings, taken as a whole, stress likewise the connections between Indian metaphysical and religious concepts and Indian art. Among Kramrisch's mature works, *The Hindu Temple* exemplifies this frame for Indian art.[51] According to Barbara Stoler-Miller, the notions of the manifest and unmanifest, which Kramrisch explores in her seminal works on Siva and Elephanta, show the influence of Dvorak's conceptual schemes as well. From Alois Riegl, Dvorak's predecessor at the University of Vienna, Kramrisch derived and modified a version of *Kunstwollen* (will to art), very much in

[49]Stella Kramrisch, *Indian Sculpture* (Motilal Banarsidass, 1933).
[50]See Barbara Stoler-Miller's biographical essay on Kramrisch in Stoler-Miller (ed.), *Exploring India's Sacred Art: Selected Writings of Stella Kramrisch* (Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1983), 7–8.
[51]Stella Kramrisch, *The Hindu Temple (2 Volumes)*, 2nd ed. (Motilal Banarsidass, 2007).

evidence in her diachronic formalist studies of Indian art in writings such as *Indian Sculpture* and "Figural Sculpture of the Gupta Period".[52] Both Riegl and Strzygowski immersed themselves in the 'minor arts': this refusal to acknowledge official cultural hierarchies is a legacy Kramrisch embraces in her sensitive writings on folk forms in India.

The sections that follow are by no means a comprehensive study of Kramrisch's writings on Indian art. My intention here is to tease out those elements of Kramrisch's framing of the art object that mark her work as a radical departure from the writings of the idealist-metaphysical school. For this reason, I avoid the scholar's *magnum opus*, *The Hindu Temple* and similar works where she deals with the metaphysics and iconography of Indian art. Though these works are significant contributions, I read them as extensions of the interpretive trend set by Coomaraswamy.

Basing my analysis on a small selection of texts, I highlight two specific spheres of influence where Kramrisch establishes a precedent. The first is the scholar's remarkable and peculiar reintegration of history into the very core of her narrative about art works through time, which bears a striking resemblance to Riegl's *Kunstwollen*. The second distinctive feature of Kramrisch's work is her extraordinarily sensitive immersion in the *physical* (visual and material) qualities of the art she describes. This distinguishes her writings – especially those involving formal analyses – from the texts of Coomaraswamy and Havell who always privilege content and metaphysics over form. Kramrisch's *Indian Sculpture* and "Figural Sculpture of the Gupta period", for example, establish a completely new approach to the form and physicality of Indian sculpture, which was to influence generations of scholars from Niharranjan Ray to Carmel Berkson and Joanna Williams.[53]

Kramrisch's approach to the history and materiality of Indian sculpture

In the 1930's and 40's, both Coomaraswamy and Kramrisch were writing within a context where the 'Indianness' of Indian art had to be defined,

[52]Kramrisch, *Indian Sculpture* and "Figural Sculpture of the Gupta Period," in *Exploring India's Sacred Art*.

[53]Though Niharranjan Ray rejected Kramrisch's involuted approach to style in favour of a more "social" explanation, he publicly acknowledged his indebtedness to her approach. Stoler-Miller's biography of Kramrisch in *Exploring India's Sacred Art*, 12.

reiterated and underlined from as many perspectives as possible. As elaborated above, Havell and Coomaraswamy emphasized 'Ideals' (as revealed in the Vedas or as part of Perennial Philosophy) as the unifying factor behind all Indian thought and by extension, all Indian art. Kramrisch also broaches the theme of the recognizable "Indianness" of art in her preface to *Indian Sculpture,* linking the 'plastic idiom' of Indian art with 'Indian thought' through 'subject-matter'.

> The structure and consistency of the plastic idiom are conditioned by the same bent of mind that gave their directions to the systems of Indian thought. A mode of seeing, a peculiar development of the sense of touch, help to render in visual terms a cognate outlook. The experience common to both is the subject-matter of Indian sculpture. It cannot be dissociated from form, for it is integrally one with it.[54]

Both Coomaraswamy and Kramrisch theorize certain unchanging 'essences' in Indian art. A casual reading of their texts may result in the conclusion that they are talking of the same sort of trans-historical essences – in the realm of common transcendental Ideas or Ideals. However, close attention to the theoretical underpinnings of Kramrisch's *Indian Sculpture* reveals that what the Austrian scholar means when she repeatedly emphasizes the 'permanent', 'indelible', 'essential' qualities of Indian art is, in many ways, the polar opposite of what, for Coomaraswamy and Havell, comprise the essential and unifying features of Indian art.

For Coomaraswamy, the true significance of Indian Art lies not in the exuberant diversity of material manifestations across region and time but in the Unity, the persistence of perennial metaphysical Ideas or Ideals that lie *behind* (and echoing the literal meaning of 'meta-physical') 'beyond/above' material, phenomenal forms. To repeat a Coomaraswamy formulation mentioned earlier:

> …the most significant element in any given work of art is precisely that aspect of it which may, and often does, persist unchanged throughout millennia and in widely separated areas; and the least

[54]Kramrisch, *Indian Sculpture*, x.

> significant, those accidental variations of style by which we are enabled to date a given work or even in some cases to attribute it to an individual artist.[55]

Again, in his essay 'Is Art a Superstition…' Coomaraswamy reiterates the contrast between the reliable constancy of Idea and 'accidents' of style.

> Where an idea to be expressed remains the same throughout long sequences of stylistic variation, it is evident that this idea remains the motif or motivating power behind the work…It will readily be seen, then, that in concentrating our attention on stylistic peculiarities of works of art, we are confining it to a consideration of accidents, and really only amusing ourselves with a psychological analysis of personalities; not by any means penetrating to what is constant and essential to art itself.[56]

Kramrisch on the other hand, deliberately tunes her remarkably sensitive formalist antennae to sense precisely those 'stylistic peculiarities' which Coomaraswamy is so dismissive about. In formal-stylistic analyses like "Figural Sculpture of the Gupta Period" and "Pala and Sena Sculpture", the scholar revels in a series of freeze-frame vignettes, creatively linking almost imperceptible changes in the physiognomy, pose, drapery and composition of individual examples of sculpture with changes in visualization, ideas and concepts and the influence of what she calls 'ethnical factors.'[57] The following example, a typical descriptive paragraph (in this case about fifth century Sarnath sculpture) excerpted from "Figural Sculpture of the Gupta Period", will serve to illustrate this point.

> In the mid-fifth century each sculptural profile consisted of generous, flowing curves. The profile of the trunk, from the breastbone to the abdomen, showed a gradual rising, like an elastically stretched curve. In the seventies this profile was retained; yet, as a result of the narrower and more elongated shape of the figure, it now lacked the space that would allow a gradual

[55]Coomaraswamy, "The Interpretation of Symbols," in *What Is Civilization?*128.
[56]Coomaraswamy, "Is Art A Superstition...?" in *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, 71–72.
[57]"Figural Sculpture of the Gupta Period" and "Pala and Sena Sculpture" in *Exploring India's Sacred Art*.

> lateral transition to the flanks. In the seventies this profile was more pronounced, and its curve recalls the female figures of Gothic art.[58]

What role do these stylistic changes, chronicled at an unprecedented level of detail, have to play in Kramrisch's formalist analyses? The kinds of changes she describes above seem to convulse Gupta figural sculpture every few decades, but rarely in a 'predictable' fashion or along a definable trajectory; they are truly 'accidents' in Coomaraswamy's sense of the term. How does she reconcile these apparently chance, micro-level changes, which appear to be, at the most, 'trends' in artistic taste and practice, with the larger unities which are central to the nationalist-metaphysical school – the 'Indianness' of Indian art and its teleological unfolding?

The narrative in *Indian Sculpture*, for example, has a clearly defined plot. Kramrisch hypothesizes an aboriginal Paleolithic origin for Indian plastic art. Indus Valley sculpture, with its 'deliberately subtle or snugly powerful form' is actually the creative climax of the 'paleolithic heritage'.[59] Mauryan art, though of the 'same stock' as Indus valley sculpture, is a weakened version of the latter, displaying passing Persian and Greek influence.[60] The narrative proceeds to characterize the *foundations* of 'classicism' by means of common features found at the 'early classical' sculpture of Madhyadesa, Orissa, South India and Dekkhan.[61] The *early maturity* of sculptural art in Mathura, the Western Indian caves, Central India and Orissa, Gandhara and Vengi is characterized by varying responses to 'the experience of life', culminates in the 'long-prepared miracle of transubstantiation'.[62] Kramrisch views mediaeval sculpture as both a continuation and a breaking away from, the formal values of 'classical' Gupta and its regional variants. Then, as if to hastily unify these clearly defined formal changes, and acknowledge the nationalist agenda of underscoring of the essential 'Indianness' of all these historical variations, she writes: "Ancient, classical and mediaeval, when

[58]"Figural Sculpture of the Gupta Period" in ibid., 193–194.
[59]Kramrisch, *Indian Sculpture*, 3.
[60]Ibid., 11–12.
[61]Ibid., 13–37.
[62]Ibid., 38–55.

taken in the direction of the arrow of time, denote the reactions of India, the motherland, with its creative soil, to the people it nourishes."[63]

However, as Stoler-Miller points out in her biographical essay, for Kramrisch, 'the meaningful art object is not merely a metaphysical symbol; it is also vital in its manifest form.'[64] Unlike for Coomaraswamy and Havell, the 'Indianness' of Indian art, for Kramrisch, is not a rarified unity vaguely defined as a shared idealism. In *Indian Sculpture*, the Austrian scholar undertakes the formidable project of defining this Indianness in formalist terms:

> How this Indianness is expressed in terms of relation between line, surface, volume and other elements of visualization, will be dealt with here. That there are permanent qualities throughout the fabric of Indian sculpture, and what these qualities are will have to be shown. These essential qualities, all inter-related and inseparable, contain within their compass the life of Indian plastic art.[65]

An interesting tension emerges when we compare a work like *The Hindu Temple,* with its static, idealized conceptual scheme, with a text like *Indian Sculpture* which virtually journals the minutae of stylistic change in Indian sculpture as though they were *symptoms* experienced by a single body persisting through time. Whenever Kramrisch synthesizes these two approaches within a single text, her acute awareness of the physical peculiarities of individual art works tends to overwhelm her 'reading' of the art work in iconographic and metaphysical terms.[66] Caught up in the tide of visual and material impressions of the particular, she jeopardizes the logocentrism of idealist-transcendental scheme in which meaning always has causal/epistemic precedence over form and individual physical manifestations merely serve as illustrations of the unchanging metaphysical Ideal. The individual work springs into sharp focus as Kramrisch plunges the reader into a vortex of intimate, proximate and distant views, a vortex powered by her keen observation and eccentric prose.

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[63]Ibid., 103.
[64]Stoler-Miller in *Exploring India's Sacred Art*, 27.
[65]Kramrisch, *Indian Sculpture*, ix.
[66]For example, Kramrisch "The Image of Mahadeva in the Cave-Temple of Elephanta Island" in *Exploring India's Sacred Art*, 141–148.

CHAPTER IV: POST-INDEPENDENCE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF SCULPTURE

THREE CASE STUDIES

Introduction

Indian art history in the post-Independence era has been a complex negotiation between the colonial and nationalist epistemological legacies on the one hand, and new approaches that were developed within the discipline in India and periodic influences from Western art history on the other hand. A survey of post-Independence discourses about Indian sculpture is well beyond the scope of the present inquiry. As my intention is not to render a developmental account of the discipline but to focus on 'moments' in the discursive objectification of sculptural artefacts, I choose three significant contributions to the study of Indian sculpture published in the 1980's and 1990's as my case studies. Each of these texts is an original contribution to the field, and each approaches its primary objects from a different methodological angle.

One of the objectives of this chapter is to tease out the epistemological residues of the colonial-nationalist frames that persist within these recent objectifications of the sculptural artefact. Further, through a close reading of these three texts, I attempt to demonstrate that even within the recent mainstream discourse of Indian art history, there exists the possibility of different subject-object relations and of distinct ways of framing the materiality and visuality of pre-modern sculpture. These differences are not merely a function of disparate methodological approaches to the object. I suggest that they cut deeper, operating at a structural level, and even result in the creation of different kinds of object under the apparently unitary, self-evident umbrella term – (pre-modern) 'Indian art'.

SECTION I: STYLISTIC ANALYSIS AND *THE ART OF GUPTA INDIA*

Joanna Williams' *The Art of Gupta India: Empire and Province* (published in 1983) is a sophisticated example of stylistic analysis applied to pre-modern Indian sculpture in the post-Independence era. The text focuses on establishing a sequence for the historical development of Gupta sculpture on the basis of style; however, Gupta iconography, patronage and the larger social, religious and cultural contexts form an important part of its narrative. In her introduction, Williams justifies this approach: "…the discussion weaves between style and iconography, in tribute to the belief that the most distinctive accomplishment of a work of art is the way in which its form and content are most clearly inseparable."[1]

Gupta Sculpture as 'Art'

From the outset, Williams explicitly frames her objects as 'work of art'. She reveals that her selection of specific works is guided primarily by their 'aesthetic character'.[2] Since definitions of 'art' and artistic quality are relative to the period and culture in which they originate, what yardstick does Williams use for selecting her art objects? Here we encounter an interesting ambiguity. On the one hand, the scholar generates a seminal hypothesis; according to her, Gupta carvings seem to be "…designed primarily as works of art, composed deliberately (if with varying success) as aesthetic objects. For both earlier and later periods of sculpture, this is not a rule."[3] On the other hand, Williams indicates a few of her own criteria, which seem to conform broadly to a modern western, even modernist, characterization of a work of art. She emphasizes the 'strongly intellectual flavour' of Gupta art, the unity of form and content, and the balance between 'a certain representational credibility' and 'abstracting tendencies.'[4] In a subsequent chapter, Williams speculates that the relatively 'less restrictive character of caste' during the Gupta period might explain the 'free and intellectual'

[1]Joanna Gottfried Williams, *The Art of Gupta India* (New Delhi: Heritage, 1983), 7.
[2]Ibid.
[3]Ibid., 3.
[4]Ibid., 3–4.

character of Gupta art.[5] Disappointingly, the author stops short of what might have been a complete picture of her theoretical position on the artistic value of these objects and her criteria for their selection.

> These shreds of definition are, of course, too vague to indicate why a given work has been included. For that, a catalogue of specifics would be necessary, which would at this point be both tedious and inconclusive….Only in the discussion of the actual works can their inclusion be justified.[6]

Lacking a complete definition, Williams' justification for the selection of her objects seems to me to be caught up in a circular logic. Are we to assume that the 'aesthetic character' of the objects is self-evident or is Williams' argument based on some implicit notion of a universal aesthetics common to both the Gupta period and the 20th century? In a 1988 article titled "Criticizing and Evaluating the Visual Arts in India: A Preliminary Example", Williams makes this issue her central concern, examining the alternative criteria of practicing Orissa *citrakaras* for evaluating the artistic quality of *pata citras.*[7] However, in *The Art of Gupta India*, this problem appears to be unresolved.

Stylistic Analysis and Formal Analysis: Some Preliminary Definitions

Whitney Davis' definition of stylistic analysis is succinct. "Stylistic analysis aims to attribute an artifact to its historical origins on the basis of its sensuous configuration, and in particular to assign it to the set or sequence of artifacts in which it was made…."[8] Both formal analysis and stylistic analysis take the 'sensuous configuration' – the perceptible visual and material qualities - of the object as their starting point. There are considerable overlaps between formal analysis and stylistic analysis, especially in the context of Indian art historiography; for this reason, we often club them together as formal-stylistic analysis. However the orientation

[5]Ibid., 28. This remark compels comparisons with the formulations of colonialists like Birdwood and Fergusson on the one hand, and Coomaraswamy's distinction between "free and servile" arts on the other.
[6]Ibid., 4.
[7]Joanna Williams, "Criticizing and Evaluating the Visual Arts in India: A Preliminary Example," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 47, no. 1 (February 1988): 3.
[8]Whitney Davis, *"A" General Theory of Visual Culture* (Princeton University Press, 2011).

and function of stylistic analysis differ from those of formal analysis in many significant ways, some of which are worth distinguishing here.

Formal analysis usually characterizes the artwork *as we see it today*. The building blocks of the standard modernist variant of formal analysis include the abstract 'elements and principles of art'– line, colour, texture, shape, space, rhythm, balance, ratio and proportion, unity, etc. Indian art historiography, particularly the historiography of pre-modern sculpture and architecture generated a unique manifestation of formalist analysis which I will term 'the metaphysics of form' (see section II, below). By contrast, stylistic analysis is a historicizing operation at a fundamental level. Even if it characterizes its objects in terms of 'formalist' criteria, it does so with the intention of locating the object within its historical context, as part of a sequence or series of similar looking objects. As a consequence, stylistic analysis is premised entirely on *comparisons* of more or less similar objects whereas the object of formal analysis can stand alone.[9]

A core aspect of stylistic analysis' primarily historicizing trajectory is the question of causes. Both formal and stylistic analyses are premised on the theoretical assumption that the visual and material qualities of an artwork derive in large part from the action of 'making' the work. For stylistic analysis the cause or reason why an art work looks the way it does, is paramount, whereas for formal analysis, it need not be. In other words, the founding assumption, the very *raison d'etre,* of stylistic analysis is that art works share certain stylistic qualities because of their origin in the same historical context. "By and large, objects made by groups look more or less alike because, in order to articulate certain purposes, some persons are taught or trained in similar techniques to make similar objects…."[10] By implication, stylistic analysis, if it is to move beyond mere classification and taxonomy (a logical 'nominative' operation that formal analysis can handle), has to contextualize

[9]The theoretical minimum number of objects required for stylistic analysis is three – two similar objects and a third dissimilar object, like a 'control' in a scientific experiment, in relation or contrast to which a notion of 'style' can be developed.

[10]David Summers, "Style," in Donald Preziosi ed.,*The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology: A Critical Anthology* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 145.

its developmental account of style in a historical context, peopled with historical *agents*.[11]

Stylistic change in the Gupta Context

In *The Art of Gupta India,* Williams' 'overall program is to delimit a style in its own terms and to consider the relation between this style and a putative empire'.[12] Like many of the most competent stylistic studies of the post-independence phase, Williams' analysis seeks to *contextualize* Gupta art within the political, intellectual and religious circumstances of its originary time-space, to relate art works 'to factors outside the realm of art that may explain or correlate with their particular nature.' The scholar plots Gupta sculptural style on a three-dimensional grid of 'time, place and social level'. Using a striking 'fabric' or carpet analogy – she likens *chronology* to the warp of art history, *place* to its woof and *social level* to the pile.[13] The 'patterns' that emerge as a result of weaving these together, 'the proper concern of the art historian', seem to stand for Williams' notion of style.[14]

Reconstructing Williams' process schematically from her text, we see that the scholar *abstracts* a selection of 'aesthetic objects' from a large corpus of available artefactual production from the Gupta period. Paying close attention to provenance and plausible or confirmed dates, she creates developmental sequences for each sub-region based primarily on formal similarities and variations, and secondarily on iconographic details. Using narrative, she reintegrates individual works and clusters with what is known about Gupta history – the political, socio-cultural, religious and intellectual tendencies and changes during this period. We detect something of a two-way flow; the 'realm of art' both illuminates, and is illuminated by, the larger Gupta ethos.[15]

[11]See Berel Lang, "Style as Instrument, Style as Person," *Critical Inquiry* 4, no. 4 (July 1, 1978): 715–739.
[12]Williams, *The Art of Gupta India*, 4.
[13] Ibid., 5-6. Significantly, Stella Kramrisch is the first Indian art historian to theorize 'social level' in terms of 'timed and timeless' variations in her "Indian Terracottas", Barbara Stoler Miller ed., *Exploring India's Sacred Art: Selected Writings of Stella Kramrisch,* (ICNCA and Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi, 1983). Occasionally Kramrisch intergrates this theory with her stylistic analysis of Indian sculpture, for example, in "Pala and Sena Sculpture," ibid., 207 and in "Figural Sculpture of the Gupta Period," ibid., 184.
[14]Williams, *The Art of Gupta India*, 6.
[15]Ibid., 7.

Morphology vs. Style

This process appears superficially similar to colonialist art history. James Fergusson, in his *History of Architecture in India and the East*, writes of major 'styles' in the history of Indian architecture – for example – the 'Dravidian' and 'Indo-Saracenic' style. Both Fergusson and Williams formulate their notions of style by comparing a selection of configured characteristics they identify in the objects they examine. An attentive reading of the former's texts, however, suggests that 'stylistic analysis' is actually an exercise in morphology and gross anatomy, a listing of formal similarities and differences guiding a correct taxonomy.[16] For Fergusson, as for colonialist archaeology in general, the epistemological paradigm applied to artefacts is more natural history than art history; he writes of 'three styles into which Hindu architecture *naturally* divides itself [emphasis added].'[17] This approach, viewed in the context of his statements elsewhere about Indian architectural forms being handed down traditionally, and its principles being 'practiced mechanically', leads us to presume that the concept of Indian architectural 'styles' in Fergusson's text had little to do with artistic intention, expressiveness and *choice* on the part of its creators.[18] As has been mentioned in the earlier chapter, *agency* is what is crucially missing from colonialist accounts of Indian art. What we are left with is a reified sense of 'style' as morphology, inferred from artefactual specimens. Stylistic analysis in the colonialist context has a primarily 'nominative' function, to use Berel Lang's formulation; naming, taxonomy and classification.[19]

Stylistic analysis serves an additional role in Fergusson's architectural history; an overtly ideological one. Whereas the 'style' of colonialist archaeological writings (in its crude avatar as gross anatomy/morphology) equipped artefacts with little more than a label and a place within a chronological-classificatory system, in Fergusson's *architectural history*, style is summoned up as confirmatory evidence for the Victorian theory of race, and the imperialist teleology of decline. Style, posing as hindsight 'discovery'

[16]Interestingly, Berel Lang uses this term "gross anatomy" in Lang, "Looking for the Styleme," *Critical Inquiry* 9, no. 2 (December 1, 1982): 407–408.
[17]James Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* (J. Murray, 1876), 386.
[18]Ibid., 35.
[19]Lang, "Style as Instrument, Style as Person," 715–739.

of objective attributes in artefacts, is shot through with a kind of teleological determinism.

By contrast, Williams' analysis of Gupta style is much subtler and more open-ended. First of all, even though *The Art of Gupta India* presents a developmental account of Gupta art within a fixed time frame, its narrative is far from unilinear. The sources of Gupta style are shown to be multiple and its dissolution, neither abrupt nor final. The author breaks up the monolith of 'Gupta style' and traces its trajectory through its numerous substyles. The 'substyles' Williams formulates are clearly based on provenance; however, they are characterized throughout her text not as pre-determined stylistic formulae, but as creative solutions to certain formal and representational challenges.[20]

Style as an Expressive element

Secondly, Williams occasionally jeopardizes the generic imperatives of brevity and narrative flow by pausing before specific works to remark on their *expressive* qualities.[21] As a consequence, the sculptures are represented not only as members of a stylistic cluster but also as individual art works in their own right. In many passages, the narration seems to oscillate between the temptation to linger over the expressive features of individual works and the compulsion to subsume individual objects within the larger development of style - as a way of moving the narrative forward. An excerpt, which is a description of a standing Buddha image from Mathura, will serve to clarify this distinction:

> …The feet are spaced far apart…which would suggest a date around the middle of the fifth century. The proportions are consistently elongated, and by comparison the previous example seems squat. The robe falls in more complex and graceful curves on the left shoulder. On the well-preserved halo…rays are replaced by a large lotus, a band of wildly ebullient foliage gives rise to fantastic birds, and vegetative forms have taken over all but the outer margin.

[20]The centralityof provenance to stylistic analysis is emphasized by Williams throughout *The Art of Gupta India* and also by her contemporary, Susan Huntington. See Susan L. Huntington, *The "Påala-Sena" Schools of Sculpture* (Brill Archive, 1984), 5.

[21] For style as an *expressive* characteristic of art works, see James S. Ackerman, "A Theory of Style," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 20, no. 3 (1962): 227; E.H. Gombrich "Style," in Preziosi, *The Art of Art History*, 129-140 and Summers, "Style", ibid., 144-148.

> Apparently the earlier significance of the halo suggesting light has given way to chthonic and biological forces. In formal terms, this rich array of bands–originally heightened by paint, of which touches survive—like the sinuous lines of drapery sets off the austerity of the face.[22]

Partly because of these moments of arrested attention to elaborate on the expressive qualities of individual works, and partly because of Williams' nuanced consideration of sub-styles within the Gupta corpus, the 'plot' of her narrative *meanders* across artistic choices and solutions. Overall, these features mitigate the teleological, deterministic aura that permeates many colonialist accounts.

Style vs. 'accidents' of history

Williams' stylistic analysis also eschews a parallel problem which is a feature of nationalist accounts of style, a problem with a radically different ideological origin and manifestation. By dismissing stylistic variations as 'accidents' of art, as products of 'human idiosyncracy' [sic], and by concentrating his attention on ideal 'types', Coomaraswamy valorizes the inertia of tradition over the complexity and diversity of artistic solutions that are an unmistakable characteristic of any period of pre-modern Indian art.[23] Even Kramrisch, with her unsurpassed sensitivity to the formal nuances of Indian sculpture, rationalizes this diversity away by invoking such concepts as 'permanent qualities' or 'ethnical factors'.[24] According to the Idealist theory of Indian art, style (to borrow Lang's phrase) 'plays the outside to content's inside'.[25] In this formulation, iconographic content and metaphysical significance together form the 'essence' of the work, while style remains somewhat redundant, an 'accidental predicate'.[26]

An important aspect of a number of formal/stylistic studies produced in the 1980's and 1990's is their avoidance of the nationalist valorizing of content/symbolic significance over the form/style of the artwork. The 'unity of form and content' is the new thematic that runs through both stylistic and

[22]Williams, *The Art of Gupta India*, 64, describing the image on plate 64.
[23]Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art* (Courier Dover Publications, 1943), 39.
[24]Stella Kramrisch, *Indian Sculpture* (Motilal Banarsidass, 1933).
[25]Lang, "Style as Instrument, Style as Person," 721.
[26]Ibid.

iconographical studies produced during this period. Some authors like Williams are explicitly state this; others (like Sara Schastok and Frederick Asher) demonstrate it by combining both approaches within a single text.[27] What this implies at a theoretical level is that there is a subtle change in the status of the artwork - an entente between the artwork's status as a historical object (the colonialist contribution) and its status as a vehicle of meaning (the nationalist legacy) is finally achieved. In methodological terms, this has consequences for both stylistic analysis (see below) and for iconographical interpretation (Section III).

Motifs as the Unit of Style

A comparison between Kramrisch's article "Figural Sculpture of the Gupta Period" and Williams' *The Art of Gupta India* yields interesting insights into how the relationship between subject and 'art' object transforms in the writings of two art historians separated by span of about fifty years.[28] Kramrisch is wildly eclectic in her choice of formal-stylistic 'markers' that distinguish one period or sculptural group from the next. She derives stylistic characteristics from sources ranging from traditional formalist criteria like line and composition, to motifs; from metaphysical concepts like 'yoga breath', to inferences about processes and techniques; from gestures, postures and facial expressions to very subjective characterizations of sculptural expressiveness. Reading her sometimes difficult prose, one gets the impression that her opulent descriptions of the 'formal' characteristics of Gupta art far exceed the basic requirement of establishing a stylistic sequence for the objects in question.

An excerpt from her description of the Sarnath Buddha images of the 5th century is given below:

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[27]Frederick M. Asher, *The Art of Eastern India: 300 - 800* (University of Minneapolis Press, 1980); R. N. Misra, *Sculptures of Dāhala and Dakshina Kosala and Their Background* (Agam Kala Prakashan, 1987); S. L. Schastok, *The Śāmalājī Sculptures and 6th Century Art in Western India* (Brill, 1985).

[28]Kramrisch, "Figural Sculpture of the Gupta Period,"in Miller ed., *Exploring India's Sacred Art*, 181–203. In her article on Gupta sculpture, Kramrisch, like Williams, combines her keen observation of motifs, formal qualities and expressive elements of Gupta sculpture with available historical information to arrive at a developmental account of the Gupta style "at various centres of art". Mathura, Sarnath, Gadhwa and Gupta sculpture from central Indian and the Eastern and Western "schools" are Kramrisch's equivalents of Williams' "workshops".

> The sculptural treatment of the Buddha figure in fifth-century Sarnath, which then influenced Mathura, not only places the image within its own space, but concentrates its divine presence by the close layering of the anterior plane, which is formed by the hands, and the posterior plane, formed by the back of the stele. Enclosed within a space created by its own surface, the Buddha image of the Gupta age represents a departure from the compact mass of its Kusana prototype. Layered in planes, the Buddhist icon of the Gupta period is given its classical proportions in the relation between planes and modeled corporeality.[29]

Like Williams, Kramrisch dwells on the expressive aspects of select works. But unlike Williams, the Austrian art historian is not circumspect about incorporating into her analysis, a plethora of intangible attributes like 'rhythmic flux of form' and startling conclusions such as locating the Gadhwa style within a 'world of emotionally mature humanism'.[30]

Certain aspects of Kramrisch's approach to Gupta sculpture find echoes in Williams' writing. In her introduction, Williams indicates that, in 'dealing with sculpture, it is essential to consider characteristics that are not easily quantified, for instance the way the human body moves'.[31] As demonstrated in the earlier chapter, such an approach was the hallmark of Kramrisch's formal analysis of figurative sculpture. Describing a transitional seated Buddha from Mathura, Williams concludes with the very Kramrisch-like statement that "…despite this catalogue of new motifs and elements, the image is still fundamentally akin to the earliest Kushan works in its direct, emotionally affecting warmth."[32]

Interestingly, these subjective interventions, so commonplace in Kramrisch's writings, occupy a less prominent position in Williams' text. *The Art of Gupta India* engages in less purely 'formalist' analysis, indulges in fewer sweeping generalizations and has a less flamboyant prose style than "Figural Sculpture

[29]Kramrisch, "Figural Sculpture of the Gupta Period," in ibid., 192.
[30]Ibid., 189, 198.
[31]Williams, *The Art of Gupta India*, 6.
[32]Ibid., 12.

of the Gupta Period".[33] Williams relinquishes Kramrisch's broad-based formalist framing for a more modest close-up analysis of *motifs*, a methodology she acknowledges that she adopts from French scholars of South and South East Asian art like Odette Viennot. Though most stylistic analyses published in the 1980's and 1990's make liberal use of motif analysis, only a few use the development of motifs as primary 'evidence' for stylistic variation.

Absolutely central to *The Art of Gupta India,* the motif functions as an objective correlate (and micro-unit?) of that elusive concept – 'style'. To quote Williams, '…elements are isolated and placed in a convincing sequence of development in their own terms on the supposition that it is more objective to deal systematically with the parts than with the complex whole.'[34] This *atomistic* approach to style and stylistic change in Gupta sculpture, via motif analysis, is reminiscent of old style connoisseurship and of the methodology of colonialist archaeology (see Chapter II), which drew its strength from a similar reduction, subjecting the dissected 'components' of Indian architecture-sculpture to its myopic, measuring gaze. Why does Williams, who repeatedly highlights the unity of form and content of Gupta sculpture, premise her entire stylistic sequencing not on 'artistic wholes' as it were, but on a more manageable unit, the motif?

It is undeniable that *analyse de motif* is successful as a method; it is a reliable tool for establishing a temporal sequence for complex undated art objects, a relative chronology.[35] This is particularly poignant in the case of pre-modern Indian art, where researchers are forced to do 'art history without names'. However, when the motif takes on the role of primary stylistic marker in an analysis, it brings into question the status of the 'art object' being analyzed and its relationship with the art historian/subject. If style inheres within the motif, and the comparison of motif-level changes is all that is needed to trace the development of a style, then what happens to

[33]Williams' text is the product of a period when formalist approaches to art had declined in popularity and contextualist approaches to language, cultures and art were ascendant in frontline academic institutions of Western Europe and North America.
[34]Williams, *The Art of Gupta India*, 6.
[35]Williams' motif here corresponds to that "mythical beast", Berel Lang's "styleme", the "single and generic atom of style" which, he surmises, may be considered the "least or common denominator" of style. Lang, "Looking for the Styleme," 408.

the concept of the 'art work' as an aesthetic and expressive whole? Consider the following excerpt, in which Williams compares an early Gupta Buddha with a contemporaneous Dipamkara image:

> A second seated Buddha, now in the Cleveland Museum, might be considered earlier because the raised left hand allows a full swag of drapery to descend with zig-zag hem in the Kushan manner… Moreover, the body is more slender, notably in the legs, than the previous Dipamkara. The drapery, although remaining symmetrical in its disposition, falls in more gracefully tapered parabolas than on any work seen so far, and points toward the next period.[36]

Here, clearly, the state of development of motifs has evidentiary value; but how do these details modify the expressiveness of the 'whole' art work or our aesthetic response to it? This crucial link between style and aesthetics is poorly forged for the most part in *Art of Gupta India*; the promise of the introduction (that the discussion of artworks will reveal their aesthetic value) is not fulfilled. In the busywork of establishing a chronology via motifs, what gets sidelined is a sense of style as an expressive/affective aspect of the art works, individually and as groups.

In the context of much pre-modern Indian art, a field which offers art historians no direct access to prevailing artistic practices, intentions or aesthetics, researchers are forced to arrive at characterizations of style inferentially, depending entirely on their visual perception of the objects and on memory. It follows from this that 'style' cannot be unproblematically construed as an array of *objective attributes* that inheres within the artwork, as part of its sensuous configuration from the very beginning (as texts like *The Art of Gupta India* would lead us to believe). Even if it is successful as a method, there is something disturbingly positivist about using a 'diagnostic' unit like the motif to guide stylistic sequencing. One way of avoiding the positivist trap while continuing to be rigorously empirical, is to route stylistic analysis through 'facture', a concept that David Summers develops in many of his theoretical writings.[37] When we frame artifacts as products of 'facture',

[36]Williams, *The Art of Gupta India*, 32.
[37]David Summers, "'Form,' Nineteenth-Century Metaphysics, and the Problem of Art Historical Description," *Critical Inquiry* 15, no. 2 (January 1, 1989): 372–406; "On the

we view them 'as indexes of all the purposeful processes of their making.'[38] Grounding style in facture is analogous to locating an artwork within its originary context; it becomes possible to attend to the details while keeping the 'artistic whole' firmly within sight. Both stylistic continuities and stylistic changes become fully animated with intentionality and it becomes more difficult for the researcher to reify style into units like the motif.

However, this does not necessarily imply that the art historian will miraculously gain access to the workings of the mind of the sculptor, rendering the logic of stylistic change transparent. What will become obvious is the somewhat anachronistic 'constructedness' of our stylistic patterns and categories - style as an articulation of patterns that emerge at the locus of encounter between the art historian subject and the art object and stylistic analysis as a discursive framing of these patterns. To appropriate and distort a phrase from Svetlana Alpers, style will reveal itself to be what we make it.

Style and Agency

The notion of 'agency', as related to the concept of style, is absent from both colonialist and nationalist narratives, though for different ideological reasons. Colonialist archaeology/art history, with its predilection for the natural history paradigm, had a political stake in mitigating or denying the 'agency' of Indian craftsmen in various ways. On the other side of the fence, Coomaraswamy made a spiritual virtue of the anonymity of the 'Indian Craftsman' - an Ideal entity blissfully liberated from the fetters of individualism; for several decades after, no Indian art historian questioned this position.

By contrast, Williams clearly recognizes the operation of artistic choices and the agency of Gupta sculptors in her description of stylistic change. ('Agency', as I understand it, is a superset which includes the special subset - 'facture') She allows for "the possibility of deviations from general tendencies, not only by virtue of regional developments…, but also by virtue of the will of the artist and the peculiar demands of the particular work of art—its physical properties, its content, and its integrity in terms of design. Thus the development of motifs does not follow immutable rules, but rather represents

Histories of Artifacts," *The Art Bulletin* 76, no. 4 (December 1, 1994): 590; *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism* (Phaidon, 2003), 61–116.

[38]Summers, "'Form,' Nineteenth-Century Metaphysics, and the Problem of Art Historical Description," 397.

possibilities, realized in specific cases by human choice."[39] She ascribes the inception of the characteristically Gupta style of sculpture under Chandragupta II to an 'underlying impulse' – a 'new emphasis upon the visual unity of the object'. Speculating that this 'quest for plastic harmony' "was perhaps understood by the artist himself less in aesthetic terms than in religious ones", she attributes the change (at a formal level) to a collaboration between art activity and patronage of that time.[40] The Govindnagar Buddha image (A.D. 434/5), one of the few works of this period that identifies its maker, Dinna, by name – occupies pride of place on the frontispiece of her book.

Dinna's Buddha is clearly an exception. The anonymity of the artist being the rule during this period of Indian art, and the creation of these works being largely collective undertakings, Williams makes no attempt to single out the 'hands' of individual artists of this period. She rarely uses 'artist' in the singular as do Coomaraswamy and Kramrisch, to denote an idealist subject, a putative placeholder standing in for a period, a region, a nation or an entire world-view. Instead, Williams locates artistic agency very squarely at the level of the 'workshop' which she treats throughout the text as a *historical*, not a theoretical or ideal, entity. In *The Art of Gupta India*, Mathura plays a pivotal role as the fountainhead, both of religious/cultural developments and of artistic styles and experiments that spread to, and are modified by, workshops in other locations. The sculptural style emanating from workshops of Mathura form an important reference point (though not a norm) for Gupta substyles analysed throughout the text. Interestingly, the 'workshop' or 'guild' becomes a widely accepted locus of 'style' (more often 'substyle' and 'idiom'), mediating between larger regional tendencies and individual artists, in several of the stylistic analyses published in the 1980's and 1990's.[41]

In the Western context, the idea of 'style' has, for centuries, been associated with the idea of the *individual*; a concept inextricably bound up with 'deep

[39]Williams, *The Art of Gupta India*, 6–7.
[40]Ibid., 61.
[41] For example, in Asher, *The Art of Eastern India*; Schastok, *The Śāmalājī Sculptures and 6th Century Art in Western India*; Huntington, *The "Påala-Sena" Schools of Sculpture*; Sinha, *Imagining Architects*.

values of selfhood and authenticity.'[42] An entire professional field developed around the linking of style to the individual artist – connoisseurship. In texts like *The Art of Gupta India* that deal with pre-modern Indian art, we encounter a modified version of the concept of style, style *manqué,* that is forced to function without the 'individual artist' as its theoretical anchor and ultimate objective. Given the fact that the very definition of an 'artwork as indivisible whole' is founded on the theory of 'artist as individual', what is the status of an artefact that is (irrevocably) the product of multiple anonymous agents? Could this mismatch (between the Western notion of style and the circumstances surrounding Indian artworks) explain why so many superbly wrought pre-modern art-works never make it to autonomous 'art' status and are known only under a collective identity – as tokens of a type or members of a series?

Style, Materiality and the Present

In an essay on style included in the 2003 edition of *Critical Terms for Art History*, Jas Elsner makes as interesting point that, despite its empirical method, style art history is fundamentally idealistic.

> The key assumption is that what matters about a work of art and what stylistic analysis may reveal is its origin and its moment of creation. Style rarely has any truck with the afterlife of objects, their messy history in the real world as they are bashed about, adapted, reused, and altered. The stylistic ethos affirms an almost romantic idealism about the pristine and creative beginnings of the work of art….When the morphology of objects has revealed a grouping, this does not take us to reception, for instance, but to an initial creation, whether cast in the guise of the artist or the originating location or the date of making.[43]

[42]David Summers "Style," in Donald Preziosi, *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 145. Summers traces the word style back to "stilus", meaning pen in Latin. The notion of style originally related to personal style in rhetoric, bearing the fundamentally material imprint of its author. According to Summers, this root-concept of a personal style is expanded metaphorically to give us "Baroque style", and so on.
[43]Jas Elsner, "Style," in Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, eds., *Critical Terms for Art History*, (University Of Chicago Press, 2003), 106.

Stylistic analyses like *The Art of Gupta India* are directed to towards forging a strong, primary link between artworks and their political and socio-cultural contexts of origin. However, the strength of this link is also its weakness in another sphere; style art history is so centered around the historical contextualization of artworks that it effectively *seals its objects away in their originary time-space*, locating them out of our reach in the present. The fascinating but problematic persistence of the material artefact in our midst today, and the art historian's/reader's relationship with the object, is 'out of the frame' within this discourse. In an essay titled "The Shape of Indian Art History" Frederick Asher makes the following observation about his generation of American researchers who studied Indian art between the 1960's and 1980's, a group which included Williams:

> When art historians were studying the material manifestations of the past as if they had no present day lives, our scholarship was safe. It, like our material, lived in a world long gone, a world that we fabricated by allowing these objects to represent the past, and only the past….The methods were safe, for scholars largely sought to develop an even more robust taxonomy for Indian art."[44]

The admirably close attention that stylistic analysis pays towards the material and visual qualities of the work - the focus on formal attributes, expressive elements and aesthetic properties – all this is oriented towards fixing the object firmly within its originary context. As a consequence, the artefacts revert to their 19th century status of being historical objects first and last, even though we now call them 'artworks' and fully acknowledge agency, intention, context and function. Stylistic analysis has no investment in the 'afterlife' of its objects, how they were subsequently viewed, used or misused and appropriated. It also refuses to confront them as *our contemporaries*, fully present material objects that populate our world, fascinating loci of strangeness and otherness that refuse easy appropriation or domestication.

Style art history's dread of anachronism entails a reluctance to let the present contaminate the past; for those of us caught up in today's post-structuralist ethos, this indicates a lack of reflexivity. Paradoxically, it might

[44]Frederick Asher, "The Shape of Indian Art History," in Vishakha N. Desai, ed., *Asian Art History in the Twenty-First Century* (Clark Art Institute, 2008), 8.

just be this deficiency that accounts for its success in reconstructing obscured contexts, armed primarily with empirical rigour and epistemological optimism.

SECTION II: BONER, BERKSON AND THE METAPHYSICS OF FORM

Through the 1970's into the 1990's, a range of formalist approaches to pre-modern Indian art (sculpture and architecture) flourished alongside, and separately from, the contextualist stylistic analyses that were discussed in the previous section. The practitioners of this mode came from different disciplinary and geographical locations and followed widely different research protocols and methodologies. A few of these formalists, a culturally influential group, drew inspiration from metaphysically-oriented writings of Ananda Coomaraswamy and Stella Kramrisch to create a uniquely Indian historiographical tradition that I will refer to as *Metaphysical formalism*.[45] Metaphysical Formalism differs in several significant ways from the various formalist approaches to art common in the modern West – crucially, it draws on transcendental conceptions of form and meaning found in early Indian philosophical texts to explain and interpret artistic phenomena.

Alice Boner's *Principles of Composition in Hindu Sculpture: Cave Temple Period*, published in 1962 but conceived many years earlier, is a pioneering instance of the deployment of structural or compositional principles (parallel to the architectural ones used by Kramrisch in *Hindu Temple*) in the analysis of pre-modern Indian *sculpture.* Repeating the case study format, I begin this section with a preliminary analysis of Boner's text as an early example of a purely formalist analysis of Indian sculpture. My second case study is Carmel Berkson's *The Life of Form in Indian Sculpture*, published in 2000. Berkson's book draws heavily on the works of Coomaraswamy and Kramrisch and on Boner's approach.[46]

[45] Alice Boner, Kapila Vatsyayan and Carmel Berkson are all Padma awardees. It is not coincidental that all three have links to the IGNCA.

[46] Interestingly, both Boner and Berkson were sculptors trained in the Western modernist ethos before they turned to the research and analysis of Indian sculpture.

A disclaimer is called for at this point. Unlike stylistic analysis, post-independence formalist analyses in Indian art historiography are based on different epistemologies and follow different methodologies. It is a tricky task to extrapolate from particular texts to the larger paradigm because we find neither a uniformity of method nor a single well-defined theoretical position that would automatically imply common ground. Without straining to 'unify' them, I attempt to tease out certain regularities in the formalist texts that I analyze which, as I hope to demonstrate, mark the contours of a distinctive frame for pre-modern Indian art.

Formalist Art History and its Indian adaptations

The concept of 'form' has an interesting and chequered history in Western philosophical traditions, extending from Plato and Aristotle, through Kant to modernist aesthetic theories. The twin meanings of the noun 'form' – its quotidian usage to denote contour, shape or shaped volume and its more philosophical connotations that link it to Idea (Ideal Form) are interwoven and creatively conflated in several instances throughout its two millennium history. However, it was during the late 19th century and early 20th century that specialized *formalist art history* and *formalist criticism* developed as legitimate, autonomous theoretical approaches to artworks. David Summers traces the roots of modern-day formalist art history to the idealist metaphysics of 19th century scholars, mainly from Germany and Austria.[47] Formalism, associated in the 19th century with a range of functions and concepts from connoisseurship to *Kunstwollen*, became the reigning theoretical paradigm in the first half of the 20th century, closely linked with modernism in the visual arts. Whitney Davis makes a critical distinction between what he calls 'historical formalism' of the 19th century, a paradigm that we associate with Heinrich Wolfflin and Alois Reigl, and the 'High Formalism' of the 20th century, as propagated by Clive Bell, Roger Fry and Clement Greenberg.[48] With the waning of High Modernism in the painting and sculpture of the West in the 1960's, the dominance of high formalist

[47]Summers, "'Form,' Nineteenth-Century Metaphysics, and the Problem of Art Historical Description."
[48]Whitney Davis, "Subjectivity and Objectivity in High and Historical Formalism," *Representations* 104, no. 1 (November 1, 2008): 8–22.

approaches to art ended; formalism lingers on in the margins, however, as an art historical method or technique but not as a critical paradigm.[49]

Stella Kramrisch and Ludwig Bachhofer were probably the first art historians to apply European historical formalism (in Davis' sense) to the study of pre-modern Indian art. It was Ananda Coomaraswamy, however, who gave the concept of 'Form' the expansive metaphysical scope that it was to assume in the formalist texts of the late 20th century.[50] Coomaraswamy's 'traditional philosophy' version of form was actually a synthesis of the Platonic notion of Form and Indian metaphysical constructs drawn from the Vedas, Upanishads and Buddhist texts. '"Form" in the traditional philosophy", according to the scholar, "does not mean tangible shape, but is synonymous with idea and even with soul; the soul, for example, is called the form of the body."[51] Though Coomaraswamy repeatedly denounced formalist abstraction in his trenchant critiques of modernist art of his period, I think his metaphysical conception of Form would not have had ready acceptance if not for the anti-mimetic trajectory of modernism that was already gaining ground in the West.

In retrospect, there can be little doubt that this expanded metaphysical notion of form was a valuable asset for Idealist art history. 'Form' (or 'higher' 'intelligible form') effectively supplants mimesis as the true objective of art. Measured by the formalist yardstick, pre-modern Indian art fares as well as, if not better than, 500 years of the Western representational tradition and the artistic criteria of realism, naturalism and verisimilitude are rendered inconsequential. The formalist approach also makes it possible to transcend the art-craft divide in the Indian context and to accommodate the diversity of artistic production found across the sub-continent. Finally, the metaphysical interpretation of form, while being 'authentically' Indian, in that it can be

[49]Summers, "'Form,' Nineteenth-Century Metaphysics, and the Problem of Art Historical Description," 372–373.
[50]See for example, Coomaraswamy's essays on the "Kandarya Mahadeo" temple and the "Symbolism of the Dome" in Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Door in the Sky: Coomaraswamy on Myth and Meaning* (Princeton University Press, 1997).
[51]Coomaraswamy, "Why Exhibit Works of Art?" in *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, 17.

shown to originate in Indian philosophical traditions, is also amenable to conflation, whenever necessary, with modernist formalism.[52]

The Metaphysics of Form in Alice Boner's *Principles*

Alice Boner's *Principles of Form* is the first analysis of Indian *sculpture* based entirely on the metaphysics of form. Inspired by Kramrisch's *Hindu Temple* and Coomaraswamy's writings on the architectural symbolism of the dome and the 'Kandarya Mahadeo' temple, Boner applies abstract metaphysical principles to the study of Brahmanical Cave temple sculpture created between the 6th and 9th centuries Western and Southern India. Examining a selection of sculptural reliefs from Badami, Mamallapuram and Ellora individually, Boner deploys what she calls 'visual intuition' to unearth the compositional principles that underlie these complex manifestations. "The distinctive character of the Indian form-language, which most authors have taken for granted as a basis, the substratum, the very point of departure for their analytical studies, is here the main object of investigation."[53]

Boner's hypothesis is that 'beneath' the opulent profusion of detail in Indian sculptural forms, a geometrical and abstract compositional grid can be discovered, that controls and organizes the disposition of elements. The basic geometrical forms controlling the composition are the circle with its central 'bindu', multiple diameters, and chords connecting the points where these diameters intersect with the circumference. Each relief panel under analysis is characterized by its specific combination of diameters and chords. The second part of Boner's text is profusely illustrated with photographs of prominent relief panels, organized by subject matter; each regular black and white photograph is followed by two 'diagrams' featuring geometrical grids superimposed on the images.

Ironically, 'superimposition' would be a misnomer for Boner's grids if one were to accept her explanation about their relation with the sculptural reliefs. Boner denies that the grids are projections of a 20th century formalist sensibility; she claims, instead, to have stumbled upon the logic of composition that dictated the form of the reliefs *at the point of their creation*.

[52]The pioneers of Indian modernism in the early 20th century – Jamini Roy, Nandanlal Bose, and others, exploited this space for conflation creatively.
[53]Alice Boner, *Principles of Composition in Hindu Sculpture: Cave Temple Period* (Motilal Banarsidass Publ., 1990), 3.

In other words, she claims what Davis calls an 'objective' status for her grids. According to Davis, we can "say that formalism becomes objective…when it identifies the formality that was subjectively constituted and recognized as the sensuous aspect of configuration by the people who constructed the artifact."[54] Why do we not have more actual evidence of these compositional grids, in the form of written documents or vestiges of preliminary drawings?[55] Boner invokes the 'veil of secrecy' argument, supposedly engineered by artists for protecting 'the ultimate and most treasured principles of their art from profanation'.[56]

Assuming it were true that Boner's reconstruction of compositional grids approximates what was used by sculptors of Ellora and Mamallapuram as a *technical guide* to composition, what we have is an interesting ringside view of how the sculptures were originally conceived, standardized and harmonized with each other.[57] Differences in how the grid was configured across tokens of a type (for example, various *Yuddha-Narasimha* reliefs) would give us a key to stylistic differences, differential aesthetics even. However, these are not directions that Boner finds worth pursuing.

Not content with giving them the status of technical devices, the scholar reads an elaborate, multi-layered 'metaphysical' reference into the compositional grids that govern the compositions of relief sculptures.[58] Supporting her explanation with a strange synthesis of the Platonic theory of Form, and various non-specifiable Indian metaphysical and philosophical formulations, couched in the disconcerting language of early 20th century Vitalism, Boner writes:

> In its metaphysical essence, form constitutes a definite mode of cosmic operation. It arises from certain movements of the Life-force that animates all matter, and by a process of expansion and

[54]Davis, "Subjectivity and Objectivity in High and Historical Formalism," 13–14.
[55] A partial exception seems to be *Silpa-Prakasa*, a controversial text from Orissa, which Alice Boner helped translate and publish. Boner also refers to the *Vastu-Sutra Upanishad;* Boner, *Principles of Composition in Hindu Sculpture*, 4.

[56]Boner, *Principles of Composition in Hindu Sculpture*, 4.
[57]Somewhat irrelevantly to this discussion, Boner's grids appear to me to be arbitrary. The placement of the diagonal diameters and chords in particular, emerges as markedly random.
[58]Boner, *Principles of Composition in Hindu Sculpture*, 10. Why the grids are not simply technical devices is not properly justified here; the reader is forced to take that leap of faith along with the author.

> growth, or of condensation and contraction, causes it to crystallize into certain shapes. …Different movements, obeying different urges and impulses of the cosmic Life-force create different forms. Thus lines, forms and colours are not accidental, but are direct manifestations of these inner forces, and therefore present a perfect analogy to spiritual reality, their ultimate Cause…Form, as the precipitation of the universal creative impulse and its visible image, is man's most essential and vital experience, because it brings him into direct, intimate contact with these creative forces and nourishes his subconscious as well as his conscious mind with images and impressions of the surrounding world."[59]

"As a human mode of expression," Boner continues in a Platonic vein, "form is a reflection of the cosmic world of forms…." [60] In a subsequent passage, she points to the "elementary and obvious truth that the particular form-language of any art is conditioned by the cosmic psychological and metaphysical conceptions that lie at its base." Boner's formulations on the metaphysical implications of the circle and its centre, space-divisions, time-divisions and their integration within the sculptures are too elaborate to explain in any detail. However, a few observations on the theoretical implications of her brand of formalism are relevant to this study.

The Autonomy of Form

Boner echoes Coomaraswamy's views on Indian art and symbolism on a number of counts. She shares the idealist conviction about the timeless continuity of Indian traditions, the spiritual essence of Indian art and the inability of contemporary viewers to understand 'traditional art'.[61] She reiterates Coomaraswamy's justification for the anonymity of the Indian artist, replicates the idealist construct of the Indian Artist responding to his 'inner vision' and avoids all reference to sculpture as 'facture', learnt and taught at the workshop, to sculpture as a historically specific material

[59]Ibid., 12.
[60]Ibid.
[61]Ibid., 11.

practice responsive to medium, technique and technology.[62] There is no attempt made to contextualize style historically.

What marks Boner's text as a departure from the earlier writings is the primacy given to form, even if her attenuated definition of form is confined to the so-called principles of composition. The principles are likened to the abstract 'subtle body' of figuration, to the 'skeleton' that 'determines the structure and relationship of all forms.'[63] The metaphor she consistently uses is one of depth vs. surface; 'inner' compositional principles lie 'below' the "picturesque surface" of the sculptures, giving the viewer access to 'a deeper and more real understanding' of Indian sculpture.[64] Unlike Coomaraswamy and Kramrisch, Boner treats form as a more or less *autonomous* aspect of the art work, giving it priority over imagery and symbolism. "Forms and lines have function, character and expression in themselves, quite independently from what they actually represent in the image." Forms act directly on "our subconscious form-sensitivity"; their 'objective connotations" are secondary.[65]

The first section of each of Boner's case studies of relief panels is a synoptic account of the mythological reference and iconographical details. The second part analyses individual elements of the depiction (a knee, a sword, a pedestal etc) in terms of their placement on the gridlines ('space' and 'time' divisions). In the final section of each case study titled 'Integration and Interpretation', Boner integrates the expressive aspects of form with iconography to arrive at a kind of exegesis; here form (framed narrowly as principles of composition) is viewed as the primary vehicle of *expressiveness* in sculpture; form-language *animates* figuration and imagery.

Principles of Composition: A Critique

Reading Boner's *Principles of Composition* in the 21st century is a peculiar experience; the work comes across as being a-historical, simultaneously over-ambitious and constricted in scope, essentialist, dogmatic and quaint. However, it is undeniable that the text blunders into hitherto unexplored areas in the context of pre-modern Indian sculpture. For example, Boner's

[62]Ibid., 35–37 and 17.
[63]Ibid., 7 and 3–4.
[64]Ibid., 5.
[65]Ibid., 13.

approach may be the first systematic attempt in India to account for the affective impact of sculptures in terms of *expressiveness of forms*, even if the author defines form narrowly and two-dimensionally in terms of her formulaic principles of composition. By uncoupling the *form* of the work from its representational aspect, its 'legible' import, Boner allows the reader to confront the 'sensuous configuration' of the artwork attentively, without guilt. This approach entails a fairly close viewing of sculptures as *individual* entities (not as 'tokens of an iconographic type' or 'members of a stylistic series'), and a direct and sustained experience of their material and visual qualities. An interesting implication of this uncoupling is that the 'artist', at least in theory, acquires a domain of independent and creative operation. Iconography and meaning may be pre-determined by sacerdotal prescriptions but form is the sculptor's personal domain of expertise. Boner does not develop this line of reasoning for obvious reasons; if anything, her *Principles of Composition* imposes a largely pre-fabricated formula on an a-historical Ideal artist-figure. There are other problems associated with Boner's approach, a few of which are relevant to this study.

Principles of Composition: Metaphysics or Facture?

The validity of Boner's claim to have 'discovered' the original compositional grids that controlled depictions in relief sculpture has been questioned in the earlier part of this analysis. On this somewhat unstable foundation, she erects a multi-layered edifice of motley metaphysical associations to buttress her compositional grids – the Tantric Bindu, the three Gunas, the five Elements, the eight Chakras, the Vedic fire-altar and Vedic sacrifices, the Buddhist stupa, the Hindu temple, the Nadis, yantras, mandalas, and so on.[66] Instead of adding credibility to her hypothesis of compositional principles, this overload of explanatory factors renders it precarious. As repositories of metaphysical significance, Boner's principles of composition are irredeemably overdetermined.

In an article titled "Representation in India's Sacred Images: Objective vs. Metaphysical Reference", V.K. Chari critiques Boner's conflation of yantras and pratimas (figurative images). According to Chari, "…the *yantra* as an icon and object of meditation is quite separate from the image figuration, and the

[66]See Alice, *Principles of Composition in Hindu Sculpture*, especially 18-34.

content of the meditation on it is also different. Therefore to say either that the image is a *yantra* or that the *yantra* is conceptually prior to the plastic rendering of the deity would be patently false, judging from textual evidence, for this would be to ignore the concrete, mythological content of the image and to miss the whole point of image-making."[67] Boner's enthusiastic promotion of the equivalence of yantras, mandalas and her compositional grids amounts to a serious category error, and this costs her theory some credibility.

Chari also questions Boner's suggestion that the compositional grid generates figuration; his reading of the fifth chapter of the *Vastu-Sutra Upanishad* (which is also a major textual source for Boner's theory) clearly indicates that the geometrical grid *follows* the artist's mental conception of the form and feeling of the deity to be depicted.[68] Chari concludes that "the expressiveness of the images, which Boner attributes to abstract figures, is derived from their underlying themes and from their gestures, from their 'form-content' rather than from their 'form-disposition'."[69] The scope of the compositional grid – assuming it did guide figuration – is limited to it being a technical device; and as a technical device, it points us to *facture* rather than to metaphysics.

The Life of Form in Indian Sculpture

Carmel Berkson's 2000 publication, *The Life of Form in Indian Sculpture* brings together a number of ideas developed in her earlier studies of pre-modern Indian sculpture.[70] While the book bears the unmistakable stamp of the idealist paradigm - Coomaraswamy, Kramrisch and Boner being the major influences – Berkson's contribution to the analysis of form is distinctive and original. As a trained sculptor and photographer who spent decades fine-tuning her responses to pre-modern Indian sculpture via the camera lens, the

[67]V.K. Chari, "Representation in India's Sacred Images: Objective vs. Metaphysical Reference,"Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, Vol. 65, No. 1 (2002), 68-69.

[68]For example, in *Principles of Composition in Hindu Sculpture*, 59., Boner claims that "the effectiveness of a representation depends much more on the basic composition than on gestures and facial expressions of single figures."

[69]Chari, "Representation..." 67–68.

[70] Carmel Berkson, "An Approach Towards Examining Style in Cave Temples, " in Bettina Baumer ed., *Rupa Pratirupa: Alice Boner Commemoration Volume*, (Biblia Impex, 1982); Berkson, *Ellora: Concept and Style* (Abhinav Publications, 1992); Berkson and Wendy Doniger, *Elephanta: The Cave of Shiva* (Motilal Banarsidass Publ., 1999).

author's original insights merit serious analysis. In the section that follows, I focus on two aspects of Berkson's writing that go beyond idealist constructs and advance a new way of framing and writing about the art work. The first is her uniquely tactile, kinesthetic response to sculptured environments. The second is her practical understanding of facture and process. These sensitivities combine to give Berkson's analysis of sculptural form an almost phenomenological slant that is unprecedented in Indian art historiography.

In her introductory chapters, Berkson rehearses many of the familiar formulations of the idealist paradigm – the 'disintegrations' of contemporary life, the need for the revival of 'cosmocentric' concern, the involvement of ancient artists with the 'universal will' and so on.[71] Her characterization of the 'Indian sculptor' is similarly idealized. Living 'in close and confident harmony' with nature, yet shunning mimesis, the archetypal artist's "primary purpose was to seek escape from phenomenal existence".[72] However, Berkson introduces an interesting complication into what would otherwise be a repetition of the idealist position. She drives an *epistemological* wedge between the subject matter or content of the artwork and its form. Through the length of the book, she sustains this distinction and focuses on form. Whenever she draws connections between the formal qualities of a sculpture and its representational aspects, the explanation usually involves the *expressive* register and viewer psychology. Unlike Boner, Berkson avoids reducing complex manifestations to a single geometric formula and then reading metaphysical meanings into this apparently generative 'inner principle'.

Form in Berkson's Text.

Berkson's book, as its title suggests, is influenced by Henri Focillon's 1934 classic *The Life of Forms in Art*.[73] The most obvious aspects of this influence are found in her vitalist animating (even fetishising) of lines, textures, space, volume, masses which she treats as independent entities with an organic life of their own. For example, in a passage describing the qualities of space and

[71]See Introduction of Carmel Berkson, *The Life Of Form In Indian Sculpture* (Abhinav Publications, 2000).
[72]Ibid., 23.
[73]Henri Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art* (Zone Books, 1989).

masses within the lithic temple, Berkson writes, in a strikingly Focillonian manner:

> Lesser or greater densities of space and mass create varying effects. Space provides escape routes for pent up energies of mass when compression is exclusively from within, as masses are agitated and forcefully extended outward. Solids will penetrate and dispossess surrounding space, giving it shape. Then space may be invaded or even shattered, as masses are turbulently launched into space."[74]

Berkson's objects are markedly more three-dimensional than Boner's sculptural panels; the latter's text seemed to demand that the reader acquire x-ray vision that would penetrate through the 'overlay' of volumes, masses and figuration to reach the two-dimensional skeletal 'essence' of sculptural reliefs. Although, following Boner, she does introduce the *panjara* in the initial chapters, for Berkson "the authentic work of sculpture can never be reduced to a mere reliance on a grid….Indian sculptural art achieved supreme heights even when all traces of the geometric linear grid had been entirely eliminated."[75]

The Life of Form in Indian Sculpture combines two approaches to the art object which seem to me to contradict each other. On the one hand, Berkson evolves a set of overlapping and somewhat confusing typologies for formal variations found in sculpture. Starting with an analysis of basic geometric/volumetric shapes like the plank, the block and the cylinder that frame or virtually 'contain' the sculptures, the author examines relief and free-standing sculptures from various angles – in terms of 'fields of force', in terms of how dual or multiple figures relate to each other, in terms of how they 'rupture' the surface *panjara*, and so on. These categories seem to me to be highly idiosyncratic and lacking clarity; they obscure the works themselves have a stultifying effect on the text. On the other hand, some of Berkson's descriptions of individual works, when positioned outside the *panjara* of her typologies, bring the formal dynamics of the artworks to vibrant life.

[74]Berkson, *The Life Of Form In Indian Sculpture*, 110.
[75]Ibid., 35.

In *Life of Form*, in fact, a few sculptures transcend the third dimension to become quasi-'events' that happen in the reader/viewer's space-time. Berkson's description of Elephanta's dancing Siva is illustrative:

> In terms of economy of expression and contained, yet explosive force, this is one of India's great contributions to the history of sculpture… The interactivity of volumes in dominantly lateral oppositions with simultaneous contrasting movement back to rock matrix, stabilized by axis, coordinates into a profound and unique complex structure.
>
> There are new alignments of cylindrical shapes for the first time ruptured from reliance on the planar vertical/horizontal grid. True three-dimensionality, joined with the mother rock, has been introduced. But there is more, much more, to this great work. The dense anatomical parts are now disposed along counterpositioned diagonals with vectors in extreme opposition so that tension is intense. One behind the other, the stout shapes are recessed into a deeply excavated background. At the same time, the vertical axis indraws, contains, and fixes the burst of explosive force. The furious dance is, in fact, quiescent. Since concentrated energy is ultimately retained in the primary mass, efferent forces do not dominate…[76]

Berkson's prose is somewhat turgid; it also seems, at first reading, to be indecipherably abstract. However, when we juxtapose the text with her superlative photographs (which I consider a very vital part of her *theoretical* contribution), the abstraction immediately resolves into recognizable forms and force fields. The inevitable linearity of verbal description is no longer oppressive; it provides the reader with a road-map for scanning the object and hints at how the visual and material configuration 'works'.[77] Berkson's description epitomizes what Michael Baxandall refers to as the 'ostensive' nature of art critical language where 'concepts and object reciprocally

[76]Ibid., 248.
[77]This back-and-forth between text and image is even more clearly demonstrated in Berkson's pictorial and textual contributions to Berkson and Doniger, *Elephanta*.

sharpen each other'.[78] Ostensive description, according to Baxandall, depends both on the speaker [or the writer in this case] and the hearers [or reader] "supplying precision to it by reciprocal reference between the word and the object."[79]

Baxandall characterizes these descriptions as 'alarmingly mobile and fragile', yet 'excitingly flexible and alive'. This mobility and aliveness is palpable in some of Berkson's descriptions, even if we don't subscribe to her vitalist interpretations of the 'life of forms'. This *vitality* seems to be the function of the fact that the encounter with sculptural environments, for Berkson, is not just a visual 'reading' but an embodied, relational, kinesthetic experience. In her own words "… [t]he statue will be animated only when the spectator is in direct contact with it. As s/he enters into the act of seeing and making mental observations, a process is set in motion, and then only are force events revealed to be inherent in the perceived field…."[80] "Only is a kinesthetic identification with the statue itself will the spectator recognize that what s/he sees is the counterpart of her or his own personal feelings." [81]

Subject Positions:

In her introductory chapter, Berkson gestures towards a few familiar subject positions *vis a vis* the sculptures. She refers to 'scholars' (presumably within the realist paradigm) who study style, chronology, iconography, etc; the tourist or student; interpreters interested in the metaphysical dimension of the sculptures, the devotee 'who must get in touch with the icon for life-survival purposes' and the artist/sculptor (always male) who communicates through forms with the devotee. Berkson herself clearly identifies with the 'metaphysically'- oriented interpreters and at times with the sculptor and the devotee.

The devotee, Berkson's 'ideal' viewer, is linked to the sculptural configuration through a bond of 'spiritual and temporal' necessity; the author interprets this bond as being primarily emotional and psychic. She frames her interpretation in terms of a peculiarly hybrid formulation, Jungian psychology

[78]Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (Yale University Press, 1985), 8–11, 34.
[79]Ibid., 10.
[80]Berkson, *The Life Of Form In Indian Sculpture*, 265.
[81]Ibid., 24.

combined with Indian metaphysics. Therefore, for the devotee, "what is primarily operative is the fundamental human impulse for structuring and constellating the unconscious which, if left unattended, is perpetually causing havoc and turbulence. S/he seeks a palpable imagery to control these psychic predispositions, to connect with what is constant and fixed…."[82] The artist, similarly moved by his own 'unconscious urgings', directs 'the will towards structure' and 'manipulates' forms to create meaning.[83] Meanings, for Berkson, "are intrinsic in and are to be intuited in the *life of forms*, for which only the artist can be responsible [italics mine]." The devotee intuits meanings from these forms, meanings which exist 'quite apart from content'.[84] Both the artist and the devotee "are in the identical frame of mind, which is grounded in the collective unconscious, both are in search of the external recognizable counterpart for the internally generated ordering stimuli."[85] The art object, as Berkson frames it, appears to be an emanation or concretization of the Jungian archetype. Though she bemoans the fact that contemporary Indian artists have turned away from their roots, for Berkson the modernist artist and photographer, art retains an inalienable universality rooted in psychic wholeness.

Agency, Facture and Inferential Criticism.

Despite her idealist tendency to essentialize the so-called unified 'frame of mind' of the artist, patron, devotee and priest, Berkson makes a very significant break with that paradigm in acknowledging the autonomy of the artist. She goes so far as to conceptualize an interesting tension between the artist and the codifier/canonical expert.[86] This is partly a function of Berkson's epistemology; the author consistently separates formal qualities from representational attributes throughout the text and concentrates on the *expressive* nature of form, instead of trying to affect a dubious compromise between form and representational content via metaphysics as Boner does. Ultimately, "…meanings are intrinsic in and are to be intuited in the life of

[82]Ibid., 17.
[83]Ibid., 25–26.
[84]Ibid., 30.
[85]Ibid., 31.
[86]Ibid., 26–27.

forms, for which only the artist can be responsible; the key to what is inherent in form cannot be sought for in associated texts."[87]

Another aspect contributing to the autonomy of Berkson's artist is her *romantic* framing of artistic activity which is fundamental to all her writing, to her very approach to pre-modern Indian art. She writes of the artist's 'creative delirium', and the 'compulsions of the artists towards experimentation and change'.[88] While acknowledging the 'genius' behind what she considers great works of art, Berkson writes, "…we postulate an ideal person; genius/architect/sculptor as archetypal maker, whose mind and unconscious ordering process and whose hands and tools are in direct contact with the intangibles – the meaningful, the beautiful and the universal."[89]

A distinctive characteristic of *Life of Forms* is Berkson's unusually strong identification with the *makers* of the art works she studies. Her location as a practicing sculptor and her romantic, universalist framing of art practice makes this subject-position tenable. For example, *Life of Forms* is dedicated 'to the ancient architects, sculptors and the unskilled labourers – women and men.' In her 1992 publication *Ellora, Concept and Style,* Berkson appends a photo-documentation of 'contemporary techniques of rock excavation', at Halebidu.[90] This attempt to include a practice-oriented, sculptor's eye view of Indian sculpture is unprecedented, as far as I know, in the historiography of Indian art.[91] For example, the following description of the carving process adds a completely new dimension to our perception of pre-modern sculpture:

> To begin the journey into the three-dimensional, at first the carving proceeds with slow and rhythmic strokes for the removal of excess stone from the front and two sides, to eliminate the two front corners. At every minute step along the way, analysis and measure will determine which of the hundreds of points on the surface

[87]Ibid., 17.
[88]Ibid., 63.
[89]Ibid., 23.
[90]Berkson, *Ellora*, 355–356. Berkson concludes that an excavation of the magnitude of Ellora would have involved the effort of thousands of skilled and unskilled workers, working in a highly coordinated manner to execute a carefully conceived design. This makes an interesting comparison with Fergusson's dismissal of the effort as minor compared to structural construction. (See Chapter II).
[91] Even J. Mosteller's article titled "Texts and Craftsmen at Work," in Michael W. Meister, *Making Things in South Asia: The Role of Artist and Craftsman* (Dept. of South Asia Regional Studies, 1988) is really an outside observer's view.

> should remain uncarved, where to open spaces, which oblique planes to break into, and how to carve the body parts in the round. They are first carved in gross geometrical shapes and then into more naturalistic abstractions.[92]

This close-up consideration and understanding of process is conspicuously absent in most texts dealing with Indian art. A combination of factors, I think, have accumulated to perpetuate this absence; the natural history paradigm of colonialist archaeology, overlaid with the imperialist refusal to allow natives agency and finally, the nationalist dematerialization of the artwork and idealization of art processes. It is in this context that David Summers' concept of 'facture' (see previous section on style) and Michael Baxandall's description of 'inferential criticism' in his *Patterns of Intention* become significant for Indian art historiography.

In his chapter on intentional visual interest, Baxandall attempts to draw out theoretical connections between accounts of intention and the reconstruction of the art-making process. Of the three kinds of words used to describe or point to art works (effect words, comparative words and cause words), it is words inferential about *cause,* according to Baxandall, that are the most robust and satisfying kind of demonstration of the art work's unique qualities and the artist's intention. He calls this inferential criticism. His own discursive framing of Pablo Picasso's *Portrait of Kahnweiler*, for example, examines the artist's performance as the development of a *solution* to a specific problem (the general *charge* plus the specific *brief.*)

> The sense of a dimension of process, of re-formulation and discovery and response to contingency going on as the painter is actually disposing his pigments, is often important to our enjoyment of the picture and also to our understanding of how styles historically evolve and change.[93]

Berkson's description of the Hoysala *Sivagajasamhara* at Halebid is an outstanding example of inferential criticism applied to Indian sculpture; it demonstrates that close attention to formal problems and their solutions can pay dividends even if one has very little information about the artists and the

[92]Berkson, *The Life Of Form In Indian Sculpture*, 262.
[93]Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention*, 62–63.

circumstances of their art practice. For this reason, I include here an almost complete quotation:

> At Hoysalesvara Temple, Halebid, cacophonic pandemonium might well have been the effect of such an abundant conglomeration of entirely disparate accessory forms, forced into crowded and crammed ambiguous association within a barely adequate space. Not one of the multiple forms is alike. In fact they are as dissimilar as possible; they differ from one another in size, with no obvious grid pattern and plane level placement.
>
> How is it then that there is a complex order rather than disordered confusion in this consummate creation? Although this dependence is hardly obvious, primary reliance is once again on the median axis. Weights are evenly distributed on both of its sides, so that a fine balance subliminally dominates the obfuscations. At first it may appear that the interacting forms would be permitted no escape because the perimeter of the elephant's skin is an absolute surround, pressing the elements inwards. But it soon becomes evident that there is just enough space on its inner side – a mini concavity – to free the forms from choked enfoldment…
>
> Siva's gaze, his lowest arms, his right leg and Nandi's slant are all directed towards open space. Even while every twist and turn creates opposing centrifugal/centripetal expansions and implosions and this amount of compression and concentrated power has rarely been equaled, the final effect is of *lasya*, because the median line, the dominance of Siva's *tribhanga* position and the protective oval of the skin of the elephant are the underlying infrastructure supporting and converging with small accessory volumes. Perpetual mobility results from this rhythmic interplay.[94]

The Metaphysics of Form: An Assessment

In a seminal article titled ""Form," Nineteenth-Century Metaphysics, and the Problem of Art Historical Description", David Summers speculates about the consequences (for art history) of doing away with formal analysis altogether.

[94]Berkson, *The Life Of Form In Indian Sculpture*, 349–350. See also Berkson's photograph of the sculpture – (plate facing pg 349).

Formal analysis, the author cautions us, "remains the way in which "the work of art itself" is talked about, and if it is simply abandoned, then the history of art is placed in the paradoxical position of being unable to speak in significant ways about the objects of its peculiar concern, which is not even to mention the problems of fashioning histories of these objects."[95] Summers' subsequent book, his magnum opus, *Real Spaces*, can be considered and extended resolution of this dilemma; a 'post-formalist' approach to art history.[96]

Whitney Davis makes an interesting critical point about formalism as an art historical method. Formalism, like stylistic analysis and iconography, starts 'from the visible evidence of apparent configuration.' But unlike the other two, formalism tends to 'end with its starting point - to generate a closed and circular confirmation of the formalist's own observations, relating how the artifact appears to him or her to be shaped and colored, rather than an account of the formality produced by makers and perhaps recognized by observers in the past.' For this reason, formalism lacks what Davis insightfully terms the *traction* of attribution (which is the premise of stylistic analysis) and *traction* offered by the translation of figuration (iconography's domain). Ultimately, formalism 'attends to itself *in* sensation,' rather than grappling with the complexities of the objective correlates of sensation.[97]

In the case of Indian formalist analysis, the 'traction' is often afforded by a single overarching principle or master narrative which usually takes the shape of a metaphysical formulation such as 'the temple is a monument of manifestation' or 'the unity of compositional principles underlies the diversity of manifestations'. This kind of formulation, which can claim for itself an ancient Indian philosophical pedigree, takes the form of a totalizing theory that explains (or explains away) a tremendous diversity of artefactual productions, their contexts and correlations. Also, because of its authentically 'Indian' genealogy, the formulation sometimes makes confident claims to being 'objective' (in Davis' sense), of being a reasonably accurate representation of what was actually going on in the Mind of the 'Indian Artist'

[95]Summers, "'Form,' Nineteenth-Century Metaphysics, and the Problem of Art Historical Description," 372–373.
[96]Summers, *Real Spaces*.
[97]Davis, "Subjectivity and Objectivity in High and Historical Formalism," 10–11.

who conceived and executed the art work.[98] In the section that follows, I isolate three important reasons why I find a metaphysically-inflected formalism problematic; it is a-historical, it refuses to fully acknowledge the human dimension of artefactual production and finally, it can become prescriptive instead of being analytic.

In *Life of Form in Indian Sculpture*, for example, Berkson is dismissive of stylistic evolution following a chronological sequence, asserting (in a rather essentialist fashion) that chronology 'has never been an Indian concern.'[99] Like many formalists, Focillon included, she maintains that 'artistic evolution develops independently of conceptual thought….'[100] For Berkson, artists 'do not live in the identical time period', 'in how they think about their work.'[101] The idealist underpinnings of Berkson's text show through in her framing of Indian sculpture as evolving, in some essential way, independently of the sculptors' material circumstances and their social and ideological contexts.

This problem (of being a-historical) is compounded by the dominance of the totalizing theory – a theory which has a tremendous capacity to level out variations and ignore anomalies. (Fergusson's teleology of decline was a crude 'colonialist' version of precisely such a theory.) Consider Boner's compositional principles, for example. The compulsion to resolve sculptural reliefs into their compositional principles can become obsessive; ruining our interest in other compellingly visual or material aspects – the response of the surfaces to changing light, for example, or serendipitous chisel marks that have not been smoothed over in an undercut section. The latter, especially, offers to lead us tantalizingly closer to the 'hand' of the unknown sculptor whereas the hypothetical compositional grid can only point us to some missing *silpa* text, or to Boner's own book. By accounting for all formal variations in *logical* rather than historical or contextual terms, formalist master narratives are irrevocably deterministic; they cancel out the unpredictability of stylistic trajectories, are oblivious to the significance of

[98]Berkson, *The Life Of Form In Indian Sculpture*, 23–26; Also, see the introductory chapter in Adam Hardy, *Indian Temple Architecture: Form and Transformation: the Karnāta Drāvida Tradition, 7th to 13th Centuries* (Abhinav Publications, 1995) Hardy's approach is critiqued by Ajay Sinha in his article titled "The 'Subjectivist Turn' in Indian Temple Architecture" in Panikkar et al. eds., *Towards a New Art History – Studies in Indian Art.*
[99]Berkson, *The Life Of Form In Indian Sculpture*, 19, 111, 226.
[100]Ibid., 63.
[101]Ibid., 19.

anomalies and ultimately, they minimize the role of human agency in artefactual production. Historical agents are reduced to being instruments of some inexorable 'higher' principle.

In an article titled "On Formalism and Pictorial Organization", Richard Wollheim distinguishes between what he terms 'Normative Formalism' and 'Analytic Formalism'.

> Normative (or regulative) Formalism is a theory about how paintings should be. It holds that they ought to be organized in a certain way if they are to be of value, and that this organization is what we need to take account of, and is all that we need to take account of, in coming to assess or evaluate them. Analytic (or constitutive) Formalism is a theory about how paintings essentially are. It holds that necessarily they are organized in a certain way, and that this organization is what we need to take account of, and all that we need to take account of, in coming to understand them. Sometimes … Analytic Formalism has temporal limits set to it. So we are told, and asked to make sense of it, that what it says holds true, and holds true necessarily, of, and solely of, paintings made in certain periods, or between certain dates, or by certain painters.[102]

Going by Wollheim's definitions, both Boner's and Berkson's texts are Analytic Formalist writings because they analyze historically specific phenomena and (apparently) inductively arrive at the major organizational principles. However, it is easy to see where Boner's text crosses the boundary and becomes a Normative Formalist text. The reader is saddled with the supposed universality of the grid, and with the enormous metaphysical baggage it carries. To view the Mamallapuram Mahishamardini, for example, without acknowledging its underlying 'Principles of Composition', would be tantamount to sacrilege. There are similarly coercive elements in Berkson's text as well (her value judgments about subject positions, for example) but they are less conspicuous. To use a spatial analogy, the crux of the problem with metaphysical formalism (the Indian version) seems to be that it generates a closed, holistic system that one can *only* enter unconditionally.

[102] Richard Wollheim, "On Formalism and Pictorial Organization," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 59, No. 2 (Spring, 2001), 127.

To question either the 'higher' principles or their universal applicability automatically disqualifies one from participating in the system.

SECTION III: ICONOLOGY IN DESAI'S *THE RELIGIOUS IMAGERY OF KHAJURAHO*

Both stylistic and formalist studies prioritize the visual and material qualities of the work of art. A close and sustained scrutiny of the surfaces and structures that constitute the material form of the artwork forms a vital part of every formal or stylistic analysis, no matter how elaborately the study contextualizes the work or derives logical patterns/metaphysical significance from it. In contrast to this kind of detailed looking, studies that focus on the 'content' of art works use the sensuous configuration of the artwork only as a point of departure. Till recently at least, interpretations of content in the Indian art context largely excluded considerations of formal or expressive aspects of art works; they fell in line with Erwin Panofsky's definition of iconographical analysis: "Iconography is that branch of the history of art which concerns itself with the subject matter or meaning of works of art, *as opposed to their form* [italics added]."[103]

The relationship between the art object and the interpreting subject appears to change in a subtle way when the art historian frames the object as a repository or vehicle of meaning, rather than as a trace of ancient workmanship or as a unique array of formal or expressive qualities. The 'meaningful' artefact is located within an entirely different ecology; its connections with history, with the agents responsible for its creation, with its original and subsequent viewers, all these are so distinctive that we seem to be dealing with an altogether different object from that of formal/stylistic analysis. In an attempt to map these modified connections, and to understand what is at stake when art historians frame artworks primarily as vehicles of meaning, I take up a final case study - Devangana Desai's *The Religious Imagery of Khajuraho* – as an example of a site-specific iconological

[103]Erwin Panofsky, "Iconology and Iconography: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art," in Preziosied., *The Art of Art History*, 1998, 220.

analysis.[104] Desai's text, published in 1994, is interesting for many reasons; it stands at the crossroads of old fashioned iconography and iconology, combines formulations of the idealist-metaphysical school with a broadly cultural history perspective, and contains the seeds of a reception-oriented approach to pre-modern art works, though it does not fulfill this promise.

Background

In the earlier chapters, I have suggested that the 'meaning' or significance *attributed* to an artefact within different epistemological frames does not have to coincide with its originally 'intended' meaning, that is, its original function or the message it was meant to communicate. Within the antiquities and colonialist archaeological frames, for example, the intricacies of the 'intended' communicative content of an unmistakably *narrative* work like the Great Relief at Mamallapuram are less important than its significance as a vital material trace of a lost historical period. The primary anxiety is to give it a date and a dynastic label; to the extent that an understanding of the original 'content' would help date it and attribute it to a certain dynasty, a particular ruler, the 'correct' interpretation of the story is important.

The situation changed dramatically in the first decades of the 20th century, when a selection of these artefacts attained the exalted status of Art. As I understand it, the point at which we elevate an artefact to the status of an art work is the point at which we are obliged to take seriously its intended meanings, the content it embodies. The unity-of-form-and–content argument, fundamental to the modern definition of art, precludes the possibility of simply bypassing the subject matter and content of the artwork. This aspect of an art work's significance was well understood by nationalist art historians; the newly apotheosized pre-modern Indian Art was defined, above all other considerations, as a vehicle of the most philosophically profound content. The new custodians of Indian art, who eventually usurped the colonialist prerogative to speak on its behalf, were also the major interpreters of this content; the 'meaning', 'symbolism' and 'Idea' of Indian art were on the ascendant in this new regime.

[104]Devangana Desai, *The Religious Imagery Of Khajuraho* (Franco-Indian Research, 1996).

During the pre-independence period, the new interpretive field was monopolized by historians, archaeologists and Sanskritists of Indian origin, with a small but important foreign representation. This is not surprising, given that the interpretation of content during this era usually implied finding textual correspondences for iconic forms, images and narratives. Some of the most definitive iconographical studies were undertaken by Indian scholars writing *outside the nationalist-idealist frame*. T.A. Gopinatha Rao's four part *Elements of Hindu Iconography* (pub 1914), Benoytosh Bhattacharyya's *The Indian Buddhist Iconography* (pub 1924) and J.N. Banerjea's *The Development of Hindu Iconography* (pub 1941) – all thoroughly researched works, copiously illustrated, comprehensive in scope, meticulously referenced – continue to function as 'field guides' for the Indian art history student to this day. These studies represent the empirical strand of iconographical studies, with its focus on documentation and textual correspondences. However, at a theoretical level, the interpretation of 'symbolism' initiated by the idealist–metaphysical school of Coomaraswamy, Kramrisch and others continues to influence the way we think about the connections between art works as material objects, and their intended content.

In his article "The Interpretation of Symbols", Coomaraswamy asserts that traditional art is inherently symbolic; symbolic meanings are the 'final cause', the very *raison d'etre*, of forms. "When meanings, which are also raisons d'être, have been forgotten, it is indispensible that those who can remember them, and can demonstrate by reference to chapter and verse the validity of their "memory," should re-read meanings into forms from which the meaning has been ignorantly "read out," whether recently or long ago."[105] Coomaraswamy rejects the 'modern' approach to art works, which is a response to aesthetic surfaces; to approach traditional works, the art historian has to perform the difficult task of shedding the modern mindset and entering wholeheartedly into the 'mentality' of the makers of the traditional work.

> The graduate, whose eyes have been closed and heart hardened by a course of university instruction in the Fine Arts or Literature is

[105]Coomaraswamy, "The Interpretation of Symbols," in *What Is Civilization?: And Other Essays* (Lindisfarne Pr, 1989), 133.

> actually debarred from the complete understanding of a work of art. If a given form has for him a merely decorative and aesthetic value, it is far easier and far more comfortable for him to assume that it never had any other than a sensational value, than it would be for him to undertake the self-denying task of entering into and consenting to the mentality in which the form was first conceived.[106]

In his famous essay titled "The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline", Erwin Panofsky makes an uncannily resonant statement. However, for the German scholar, the 'entering' into the alternative mentality is followed by a renewed appreciation of the 'aesthetic' attributes of the works. Unlike Coomaraswamy, Panofsky includes the formal and aesthetic qualities of a work as part of its *intention*, even though he gives content priority in his own analysis. I paraphrase the entire passage here not only because it resembles and differs from Coomaraswamy's formulation in several noteworthy respects but also because it encompasses all the stages of Panofsky's programme for the interpretation of an art work, from the pre-iconographical recognition of formal and expressive aspects to iconological synthesis.

The art historian, according to Panofsky, realizes that his 'cultural equipment' is not 'in harmony' with that of a people in another land and of a different period. He learns to make 'adjustments by learning as he possibly can of the circumstances under which the objects of his studies were created.' This gradual recreation of the originary context includes analysis of the work itself, its form, medium and condition, attribution and authorship, comparing it with other works of its class, trying to 'objectively' appraise it by the aesthetic standards of its period, identification of subject matter and influences, correlating the art work with literary texts of its times, and locating it within a history of iconographic 'types'. The art historian, Panofsky continues, "will do his best to familiarize himself with the social, religious and philosophical attitudes of other periods and countries, in order to correct his own subjective feeling for content. But when he does all this, his aesthetic

[106]Ibid., 130.

perception as such will change accordingly, and will more and more adapt itself to the original 'intention' of the works." [107]

Iconography and Iconology

Writing in the 1930's, Panofsky proposed his three levels of meaning interpretation which he termed pre-iconographical description (which deals with primary or natural subject matter and responds to both factual and expressional clues), iconography (which is the discovery of secondary or conventional subject matter) and finally iconology (which involves the unearthing of intrinsic meaning or content).[108] Half a century later, Devangana Desai defines *The Religious Imagery of Khajuraho* as an *iconological* study 'concerned with the meaning and context of images".[109] How does Desai's definition of 'iconology' relate to Panofsky's? And what marks it as different from earlier interpretive works about pre-modern Indian sculpture?

An overwhelming number of interpretations of pre-modern Indian images are *iconographical*; that is, they are primarily involved in interpreting the artefact in terms of its conventional or traditional meanings, correlating the material configuration with stories, allegories and symbols used in written texts or other sources. (I use the term 'images' interchangeably with 'art works' in this section, to include all categories of representational sculpture and to connote iconology's tendency to treat its object more as a representation of an 'idea' and to ignore the *non-representational* components of its visual and material qualities.) Gopinatha Rao's *Elements of Indian Iconography* is a classic example of an iconographic text, tracing the textual sources of conventional iconic 'types'. Kramrisch's famous work on Elephanta is more difficult to place; its major trajectory is, after all, the uncovering of the 'basic principles' or 'intrinsic meanings' that unite Saiva philosophy with its material manifestation in the cave.[110] However, it is my contention that Coomaraswamy's and Kramrisch's interpretive writings on specific Indian

[107]Erwin Panofsky, "The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline," in E. C. Fernie ed., *Art History and Its Methods: a Critical Anthology* (Phaidon Press Ltd., 1995), 193.
[108]Panofsky, "Iconology and Iconography: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art," in Preziosi ed.,*The Art of Art History*, 1998, 220–235.
[109]Desai, *The Religious Imagery Of Khajuraho*, 14.
[110]"The Great Cave Temple of Siva on the Island of Elephanta" in Stella Kramrisch, *The Presence of Śiva*, (Princeton University Press, 1992), 443–468(appendix).

icons are not 'iconological' in the Panofskian sense because they lack a crucial characteristic of iconological synthesis. They lack the *historical* dimension, that distinguishing characteristic of Panofskian iconology that *grounds* the meaning of the art work in a historically specific time-space. This 'grounding' or historical contextualization marks the art work as a reflection of the specific socio-cultural circumstances and the ideological ethos within which it originated.[111]

Going by these criteria, Desai's study of Khajuraho's religious imagery is incontrovertibly iconological. The scholar focuses on three temples; the Chausath Yogini, the Lakshmana temple and the Kandariya Mahadeva temple. Basing her chronology for these temples on Krishna Deva's dates, she interprets the abundant architectural sculpture in terms of the social, political and religious ethos that prevailed in this region between the 10th and 12th centuries.[112] Desai's major contribution is linking the individual sculptures and their configurative sequences to specific cult formations and practices that thrived in this region of Central India during the 10th to 12th centuries. Refuting the popular catch-all *Kaula-Kapalika* cult hypothesis, she constructs a layered account of cultic development, tensions and reconciliations in 10th-12th century central India, with an interesting emphasis on the rapprochement between Tantric *vamacara* and the Brahmanical mainstream. Desai relates the Chausath Yogini temple to the Yogini-Kaula cult; she posits, however, that yogini worship had a wider popular base, including some of the area's Jaina population. The Lakshmana Temple was affiliated to Pancaratra Vaisnavism, according to Desai, and the Kandariya Mahadeva, to a form of Saiva Siddhanta; both these systems were, at that moment in their history, in the process of reconciling Brahmanical and Tantric cultic practices.

It is possible to map the conceptual 'ecology' of artworks as they are objectified in Desai's text. The author builds her study on a base of hundreds of individual sculptures with confirmed iconographic identities. Interestingly, it is not the identification of individual icons, but her interpretation of their

[111]See Padma Kaimal's criticism of Coomaraswamy's a-historical interpretation of Nataraja iconography in Padma Kaimal, "Shiva Nataraja: Shifting Meanings of an Icon," *The Art Bulletin* 81, no. 3 (September 1, 1999), 390- 419

[112]Desai's primary source for chronology seems to be Krishna Deva, *Temples of Khajuraho*vols 1 and 2 (Archaeological Survey of India, 1990).

placement *within* the total sculptural/architectural scheme of the temple, that Desai's emphasizes as the key to her iconological study, its basic analytic unit. The patterns and hierarchies that emerge from the configuration of the sculptural scheme appear to encode, to a surprising extent, the details and nuances of cultic practices and their interaction with political power during this period. The 'well-integrated' sculpture-architecture system within each temple, then, forms the inner circle of the network of connections that Desai constructs. Inscriptions found on the monuments in Khajuraho and neighbouring regions are next in proximity. They are followed by literary sources. Desai examines a few prominent Pancaratra and Saiva Siddhanta texts, Puranas (particularly the Siva and Agni Puranas) and contemporaneous Vastu Sastras from neighbouring Malwa and Gujarat (as substitutes for the 'missing' Visva Karma Sastra of this reigion.) Finally, Desai refers to Sanskrit literary works produced for the central Indian courts during this period, drawing our attention to the widespread use of linguistic devices such as *slesha* (puns) and *sandhya-bhasha* (double entendre). The allegorical play, *Prabodhachandrodaya,* written by Krishna Misra to celebrate the victory of Chandella king Kirtivarman, is examined in for its significance for the Lakshmana temple.[113]

Somewhat at a tangent, Desai introduces a few metaphysical covering theories in the manner of the idealist-metaphysical school. For example, in her introduction, Desai mentions the possible relevance of Kramrisch's metaphysical concept of the 'temple as a monument of manifestation' and the graded manifestations of Siva.[114] In her epilogue, she introduces another concept with respect to Saiva Siddhanta ritual – the 'cosmological principles of emission and reabsorption'.[115] Curiously, these metaphysical constructs, unanchored by historical particularization, float around like insoluble coagulates in an otherwise homogenously contextualist account.

Desai's Interpretation of Erotic Imagery: A Critique

An important agenda of Desai's text seems to be to disperse some of the disproportionate interest that the erotic imagery of Khajuraho has always attracted. The very title phrase *Religious Imagery* impresses us with the

[113]See Desai, *The Religious Imagery Of Khajuraho*, particularly pages 181–189, 218–220
[114]Ibid., 6–8.
[115]Ibid., 199.

stern and serious intent of the book; the author follows this up in the preface with the statement that "we must note that the erotic figures form only a small part of the vast sculptural scheme of the Khajuraho."[116] Within the body of the text, Desai sustains her effort to defuse the charge accumulated by the erotic sculptures in the popular imagination. Though by her own admission, the 'erotic motif' can be found scattered across various high-visibility sculptured surfaces of the temples in Khajuraho – the door jambs, *narathara*, *vedibandha, jangha*, *shikhara* niches and so on – Desai focuses our attention on the scenes of copulation on the *kapili* walls. This is an interesting tactic; it allows the author to narrow the focus of her complex explanation, which cannot be expanded to accommodate all the occurrences of erotic figures in Khajuraho.[117]

To summarize Desai's position on the erotic figures: 1) The figures' placement on the *kapili* walls of *sandhara* temples, which architecturally speaking, marks the transition between the *mandapa* and the *garbha griha* and cosmologically speaking, the phenomenal and transcendental world, has a magico-defensive function. The erotic scene protects the juncture, which is supposed to be one of the most vulnerable parts of the temple. 2) It gives 'delight to the people'. [This is an aspect that Desai passes over rapidly; she does mention that to take these scenes literally would mean joining the ranks of the 'mudhas' - from the point of view of the Tantric texts]. 3) The erotic imagery had a parallel in the high literary culture of the period; the images were visual equivalents (or translations) of a larger cultural convention of literary puns and double entendres. It follows that they are to be interpreted in terms of metaphors and symbols, and not taken literally. 4) Erotic scenes have Tantric significance – in case of the copulatory scenes on the *kapili walls* of the Visvanatha and Kandariya Mahadeva temples, Desai suspects that the configuration might conceal a *yantra* such as the Kamakala Yantra, possibly a secret component of the temple ritual. 5) At the 'highest' level, the erotic scene "embodies through *sandhya-bhasha* some yogic-philosophical concept".[118]

[116]Ibid., xxvi.
[117]Ibid., 181, 190–197.
[118]Ibid., 196–197.

Desai's layered interpretation of the erotic scenes on the Khajuraho temple walls appears to me to be another case of *overdetermination*. It should be noted that she does not leave the option of choosing between explanatory theories to the reader. My charge of overdetermination would also collapse if the author had shifted the burden of interpretation to *reception* rather than intention. However she retains all five explanations and stacks them up on the side of intention.

Agency and the Materiality of the Art work

The Khajuraho temples, for Desai "represent a creative moment in Indian art when artistic talent combined with religious aspirations to produce a meaningful form." [119] Throughout the text, the scholar construes agency as jointly exercised by the royal or wealthy patrons, the *sutradharas* or chief architects (like Chhichchha) and the royal gurus or *acaryas*.[120] Desai makes frequent references to 'the architect' in the singular, sometimes using this term interchangeably with *sutradhara*. In the chapter on Kandariya Mahadeva, she repeatedly uses the curious term 'artist-priest', which she glosses in the epilogue as '*sthapaka*'.[121] Desai is of the opinion that "the intricately structured iconic themes of the Khajuraho temples suggest the role of the *acharya* in guiding the *sutradhara*. Both of them together have designed these marvellous temples expressing profound concepts through the non-discursive language of art."[122] Not surprisingly, Desai dedicates her book to "the *acharyas*, *sutradharas* and patrons of Kharjuravahaka"; this makes for an interesting contrast with Berkson's dedication, to the physical makers of art works, not to the ideologues (see previous section).

Devangana Desai's interpretation of Khajuraho imagery retains a core of idealism which contradicts the materialist orientation of the contextualist and cultural history aspects of the work. This is manifests at several levels. Firstly, as mentioned earlier, there are a few a-historical metaphysical formulations scattered around the text to ambush the unsuspecting reader; they are starkly incompatible with the historical and cultural contextualization that is the theoretical mainstay of the book. Secondly, the entire cultural

[119]Ibid., 5.
[120]Ibid., 11, 17, 42, 47, 149, 202, 208.
[121]Ibid., 149, 208.
[122]Ibid., 208.

context of *The Religious Imagery of Khajuraho* is reconstructed from the intellectual and political history perspective. Sanskrit religious texts, *vastu* and literary texts and royal inscriptions are virtually the only secondary documents Desai uses. Even allowing for the fact that the culture of 10th century Kharjuravahaka was dominated by the temples and a highly sophisticated Sanskritic culture, there is no real attempt to read between the lines or against the grain to reconstruct a more down-to-earth social or economic history, which is a distinctive characteristic of Desai's earlier work.[123] Finally, Desai's iconological interpretation (like Panofsky's and Coomaraswamy's) frames the artwork exclusively as the *crystallization of an idea*, completely sidelining its other aspects as a material entity, a product of ancient facture, a strange and striking 'presence' in our midst. What we see through the scholar's frame are meaningful 'images', vehicles of content, somewhat dematerialized, their exuberant material and visual presence reined in by a rigorously contextualizing, intellectually sober interpretation. The penultimate paragraph of her epilogue is revealing; it exposes Desai's acute embarrassment at the irrepressible materiality, the sensual 'excess' of the sculptural figuration, an excess that resists all scholarly attempts as suppression. "Khajuraho's art is sophisticated and ideational. Though apparently it may look frivolous and sensual, actually it is serious and profound…."[124]

Like many scholars of Indian art history writing in the 1990's, Desai is tapping simultaneously into two diametrically opposed traditions, both of which have a tendency to dematerialize the art object. The first is the logocentric metaphysical-idealist school of the nationalists which continues to be our most important *theoretical* precedent for the interpretation of content in pre-modern Indian art. The second, ironically, is a fashionable branch of poststructuralist theory that, ever after the linguistic turn frames artworks as 'texts', 'signs', 'representations', 'images',– as anything except *material* entities that also present with certain non-representational attributes that are resistant to easy interpretation. To go back to a vital thesis of Hans-Ulrich

[123]Devangana Desai, *Erotic Sculpture of India: A Socio-cultural Study* (Tata McGraw-Hill, 1975); and Desai, "Social Dimensions of Art in Early India," *Social Scientist* 18, no. 3 (March 1990), 3-32.
[124]Desai, *The Religious Imagery Of Khajuraho*, 208.

Gumbrecht's book, the 'meaning effects' generated by most iconographical/iconological analyses are so compelling that they tend to overwhelm the "presence effects" of the artwork.[125]

The history and post-history of the art work

Like Joanna Williams' *Art of Gupta India*, Desai's *The Religious Imagery of Khajuraho* is an attempt to contextualize artworks within a political and socio-cultural ethos of a particular location in history. Like Williams, Desai is meticulously historicist; two extensive chapters deal exclusively with the historical background, political and cultic, against which the artistic expressions of Khajuraho may be viewed.[126] Most of the primary texts that the scholar refers to in connection with Khajuraho's imagery are from Central India and from 8th to 12th centuries – fulfilling what Georges Didi-Huberman terms the ideal of *euchronistic consonance*.[127]Another instance of Desai's scrupulous historical method is revealed in her rejection of Shobitha Punja's 'Marriage of Siva' hypothesis. Desai rejects this theory primarily on the grounds that there is no mention of this local popular tradition in the inscriptions or literary texts of the Chandella period.

Desai successfully demonstrates that the imagery of Khajuraho reflects the socio- cultural, political and cultic ethos of its originary time space. However, like a majority of Indian iconographical/iconological studies produces till the 1990's, Desai's study tends to treat 'meaning' as intrinsic property of the artwork. Reconstructing (somewhat reductively) her schema for the meaning-making process at Khajuraho, we have *acaryas* who put together an iconographic design based on Pancaratra/Saiva Siddhanta metaphysical concepts, *Puranic* lore, *Vastu* traditions and some inputs from the world of Sanskrit literary culture of the period. *Sutradharas* and sculptors translate the design into visual form and encapsulate it in material form through their sculptural schemes. Thus artistic intention (both at the level of design and execution) locks meaning into the artwork; this meaning is potentially available to any interpreter armed with the right combination of keys.

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[125]Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford University Press, 2004).
[126]Desai, *The Religious Imagery Of Khajuraho*, 21–80.
[127]Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images: Questioning The Ends Of A Certain History Of Art* (Penn State Press, 2005), 35.

As semiotics and other constructivist approaches interpretation have demonstrated, meaning is not something that is an objective property of the artwork; meaning is more like an *event* that happens whenever a viewing subject encounters the art work. As a consequence, in the real world, an artwork always exceeds and sometimes subverts its intended meaning. So, in order to *understand* an artwork's position within a meaning producing network one needs to go beyond merely *interpreting* it in terms of this text or that myth. No study that purports to contextualize a work of art historically can afford to see it as merely 'reflecting' the ethos of its time or the intention of its makers; this would result in marooning the work within an idealist ivory tower. This is especially true for large-scale artistic programmes like the Khajuraho temples. Once they enter the social context, artworks become agents in their own right, influencing the ethos as much as they are influenced by it. Because Desai's account is completely preoccupied with intention and design, it skips the other half of the story – reception. How were the images received by the public of that period? What rituals and performances animated the temple spaces? When viewed from the perspective of reception, the erotic imagery refuses to succumb to scholarly sublimation. We are forced to ask blatantly anachronistic questions such as - in what respects did 10th century horizons of 'propriety' and 'decency' differ from ours? Instead of facing these sometimes philistine but vital issues that 'animate' the past as well as the present of the sculptures, Desai's study tends to surround the site in an impenetrable historicity, and an unimpeachable metaphysics.[128]

An interesting contrast is posed by Padma Kaimal's article "Playful Ambiguity and Political Authority in the Large Relief at Māmallapuram," published in 1994.[129] Kaimal advances a theory that the relief was intended to be read both as *Gangavatarana* and as *Kiratarjuneya* in addition to encoding other meanings. She speculates that the sculptors of the relief deliberately coded

[128]At the other end of the historiographical spectrum, Tapati Guha Thakurta's article "What Makes for the 'Authentic' Female Nude in Indian Art?" devotes a section to the recent post-history of Khajuraho, where the author deals not with Khajuraho itself but with "representations" of Khajuraho in the popular and scholarly realm. "What Makes for the 'Authentic' Female Nude in Indian Art?" in Shivaji Panikkar et al. eds., *Towards a New Art History: Studies in Indian Art: Essays Presented in Honour of Prof. Ratan Parimoo* (D.K. Printworld, 2003).

[129] Padma Kaimal, " Playful Ambiguity and Political Authority in the Large Relief at Māmallapuram," Ars Orientalis, Vol. 24 (1994), 1-27.

certain representational elements ambiguously to elicit a complex response from their viewers – 'a deciphering game'.[130] Although Kaimal cites literary parallels similar to Desai's - Bharavi's *Kiratarjuniyam,* and the plays *Bhagavaddajuka* and Mattavilasa – to demonstrate the usage of *dhvani* and Sanskrit double entendres, and folk humour (in the case of the latter two) – textual references form a minor part of her interpretation.[131] Even as she emphasizes the relief's multivalence as a product of deliberate artistic intention, Kaimal takes the vital leap across the communication divide and conjectures different kinds of *reception*, from viewers 'already integrated into Pallava culture' to sea-faring traders from distant lands.

Unlike Desai, Kaimal pays attention to some striking formal and expressive aspects of the works, its visual and material qualities.

> Viewers drawn to this relief by its address to the sea and its monumental scale are then urged to study the composition at some length, moving to the left and right repeatedly and perhaps interacting with other members of the large crowds that probably assembled before this broad frieze. A deep pit in front of the relief establishes a distance of some ten meters between the audience and the carved surface, delaying a bit longer the viewer's recognition of figures presented...The figures accommodate both the moving viewer and the large crowds by projecting prominently and at a consistent angle from the rock face. Figural proportions are not distorted, that is, in order to privilege a single viewing angle….[132]

The public work of art emerges as a very 'sociable' presence in Kaimal's text, with *its own form of agency*. The meanings it generates are not to be found in some esoteric text but are actively negotiated by viewers interacting in the inter-subjective space it gathers around itself. The relief's visual and material qualities play a vital role in this communication, not because they conform to some 'higher' formal principles but because of their sheer material presence, dominating the viewer's space – the remarkable scale, the clarity and

[130]Ibid., 1.
[131]Ibid., 12,20.
[132]Ibid., 3.

complexity of figuration, the (inferred) virtuosity of the carvers of hard granite and the undeniable attractiveness of the work.

Finally, Kaimal releases the relief from its epistemologically constructed bondage to its originary context (a 200-year sentence, in the context of my analysis) to let it infiltrate the present. She writes (not dismissively as Coomaraswamy would) about modern viewers of the relief who, though they have lost much of the original viewing context, continue to mill around the relief, responding to the lure of its configurative richness, its 'encoded ambiguities' and its humour.[133] This approach is furthered by Richard Davis in his *Lives of Indian Images* which combines the insights of reader-response criticism and material culture studies to follow the 'post-history' of a selection of Indian artefacts.[134] There is some debate on whether the post-history of an artwork should be considered a part of its analysis and interpretation within art history; some writers argue that this approach is more anthropological than art-historical.[135] The answer to this will depend, I presume, on whether individual art historians recognize a few fundamental modifications in how we frame a work of art:

1) Formal characteristics are not fully 'objective' properties of the work but emerge from our physical interaction with them.

2) Likewise, the meaning of an artwork is not somehow mysteriously encapsulated in its material form, like a 'soul' within a body. Meanings are partly 'intentional', but intended meanings are modified and new meanings generated every time viewers encounter the work and attempt to interpret it.

3) Works of art often physically outlive their original contexts of creation and reception; if we accept that the two major aspects of the artwork we study – their form and meaning – are not completely bonded to their originary contexts, it follows that each of their subsequent 'lives' are as important as their historical one.

[133]Ibid., 21.
[134]Richard H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Limited, 1997).
[135] For a discussion of this issue, see "Sweetmeats or Corpses? Art History and Ethnohistory," Michael W. Meister Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics, No. 27 (Spring, 1995), 118-132.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

The pre-modern sculptural artefact – the theoretical focus of this historiographical study – has been shown to undergo diverse discursive objectifications in the last two centuries. Adopting a version of Arjun Appadurai's 'methodological fetishism' and following the 'lives' of these artefacts through a selection of discourses has enabled a closer look at the *processes* of objectification that the artefacts have endured; and this includes their framing within the current mainstream discourse of art history. The study has attempted to demonstrate what this process of (re-)objectification entails. Each of the discourses under analysis subsumes the artefact within its own particular 'domain of objects', recasting the object within a special physical and conceptual ecology, re-negotiating subject—object relations, reframing the object's 'salient features'. Of central significance to this inquiry is how the 'visuality' and 'materiality' of the artefact have been refigured within each discursive formation.

To summarize the findings of this project; the Romantic travelogue of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries embeds sculptural artefacts within their larger architectural matrix which is, in turn, amalgamated seamlessly into its immediate natural surroundings. Artefacts-in-landscape are objectified as 'wonders' and framed as 'sublime', 'beautiful' or 'picturesque' in keeping with Romantic conventions. The Romantic traveller confronts the 'otherness' of her objects, without trying to domesticate their strangeness by subjecting them to one or the other regime of rationalization. Subject-object relations within this discourse can be understood as a fascinating negotiation between proximity and distance, between objectivity and immersion. Of all the discourses studied here, the Romantic travelogue is perhaps most alive to the *material presence* of its objects – and this feature makes the discourse worthy of a closer look in the context of today's art history. However, at least three characteristics of the Romantic framing make it incompatible with the objectives of the modern discipline. Although it is keenly aware of the historicity of its objects (the idea of the 'ruin', for example), Romantic discourse prefers to fetishise this aspect rather than to investigate it. Consequently, it is content to attribute its own philosophical meanings to

these 'wonders'; it evinces little interest in their historically intended meanings. Finally, at an ontological level, the artefact-in-landscape is more an 'object stimulating aesthetic contemplation' than a 'work of art' *per se.*

Contemporaneously, the antiquities discourse is careful to *abstract* man-made artefacts from their natural surroundings, in keeping with its epistemological mandate of separating 'all that is performed by Man' from 'all that is produced by Nature'. As the cultural counterparts of natural 'curiosities', these objects are further classified into categories such as 'objects of utility', products of the ' mechanical arts', 'fine arts' and 'antiquities'. Pre-modern sculptural artefacts are objectified within this brand new domain of objects - 'antiquities', a domain which also encompasses manuscripts, inscriptions, coins, architecture and so on. The primary value given to antiquities is a historical one – they are to serve as a precious reserve that will eventually illuminate the history of the subcontinent. Till the 1830's, literary antiquities (texts, manuscripts, inscriptions and coins) were the *paradigmatic* objects within the antiquities discourse, a discourse propelled almost entirely by philological research. 'Visual' antiquities such as sculptural artefacts, by contrast, were treated to a certain ambivalence, because the colonial establishment had no means of directly extracting 'history' from these objects. They were subjected to a regime of (non-standardized) measurement and attenuated empirical description. Lacking chronological landmarks, researchers were free to speculate on their historical or anthropological relevance.

The antiquities researcher, unlike the Romantic traveler, situates himself 'outside' (and usually 'above') the frame – surveying his objects from a position of detachment. The object itself is de-aestheticized, its visual and material qualities reduced to *objective* attributes, with mainly evidentiary status. I have tried to demonstrate that a few historical and epistemological constraints prevented this discourse from completely reifying the domain of antiquities, and from turning the 'objectivity' of the antiquities researcher into the aggressive 'objectivism' of the colonial archaeologist. In the antiquities discourse, the 'domain of objects' itself is a largely conceptual field, not yet resolved into the itemized list of material entities (slotted on a dateline and classified into types) that we encounter in the colonial archaeological

discourse. Woven into the antiquities discourse is the philosophical notion of 'Universal history' and an open-ended humanist approach to historical inquiries, not yet congealed into an instrumentalist attitude towards the colonized nation. Most importantly, this discourse never loses sight of the *artefactual* origin of antiquities.

In many ways a logical extension of the antiquities discourse, colonial archaeology came into its own close on the heels of the disenfranchisement of the literary preoccupations of the Asiatic Society philologists. Within the archaeological frame, textual sources were treated with suspicion, as were the maulvis and pandits who helped interpret them. Unlike the garrulous literary text, the archaeological object rarely 'speaks for itself' – it is obediently reticent, passively awaiting the scientific process of classifying and chronologizing which turns it into a 'document of history'. History itself, in the mid-19th century, shed its philosophical and anthropological trappings to become a positivist enterprise – basically political history, signposted with chronological landmarks. Colonial archaeology represses the artefactual origins of the archaeological object and subjects it to a forensic analytic regime borrowed from natural history. The reifying and objectivist gaze of the colonial archaeologist, distills the visual attributes of the object into pure 'evidence' – evidence that can be 'contained' within the colonial archive, in the form of measurements, dry descriptions and illustrations. Ironically, in the midst of all this increasingly systematic documentation, the actual material preservation of artefacts is in jeopardy.

Conservation initiatives became a reality only after the Revolt, coinciding with the institutionalization and professionalization of archaeology, the establishment of the first Imperial museum in India and the legalization of the Imperial state's physical claim on archaeological objects. Museumized and monumentalized, a selection of the erstwhile 'documents of history' are re-objectified by the Imperial state, and harnessed to the service of the British Raj's new rhetoric of display. These monuments and musealia undergo a *singularization* and re-aestheticization that they were denied as members of the archaeological archive, and are charged with the new responsibility of proclaiming Imperial power, 'impartiality' and 'benevolence'. Their visuality and materiality, acknowledged once again, is now programmatically mediated

by the official colonialist version of history. This, along with the aesthetics of *arrested decay*, implies that they are emptied of their originally intended and subsequent meanings and contexts and unavailable for any appropriations other than the officially sanctioned historical one. The display of these artefacts in Indian museums and their monumentalization *in situ* creates an interesting split in subject positions *vis a vis* the object. On the one hand, the Imperial state stands in a position of authority 'above' these objects, as the munificent proprietor and knowledgeable mediator of the artefactual 'Other'. Colonialist art history supplies the script for this performance. On the other hand, native subjects are expected to stand 'below' the objects, quiescent and grateful recipients of the performance staged for their benefit, whose educational thrust was to enable them to confront their own artefactual heritage without resorting to 'irrational' claims and ungoverned imaginings. The failure of this strategy of mediation haunts us to this day.

Nationalist art history endeavoured to de-reify pre-modern artefacts by removing the 'archaeological' bias that attended their objectification, with a view to restoring their relevance to the people of the nation. Re-objectified as *Art*, sculptural artefacts occupy centre-stage in the nationalist account and the discourse gestures towards re-casting them within an *indigenous* aesthetic frame. What this indigenous aesthetic was, however, is never clearly spelt out or theorized in a way that makes it directly applicable to an understanding of the objects' phenomenal attributes. This is a puzzling lacuna in Indian art history and theory, one that has not been filled even today. One possible explanation is the pervasive nature of the influence of Ananda Coomaraswamy, whose ideas virtually dictated the agenda for art historical research for several decades in the twentieth century. Coomaraswamy's writings are characterized by an ambivalent relationship with aesthetics and a peculiar refusal to engage with the visuality and materiality of the art objects he *interprets* in great detail. By focusing on the iconographical and metaphysical *content* rather than on the form or aesthetics of the objects it studied, the nationalist discourse sought to establish pre-modern Indian art on par with, or even above the 'intellectual' artistic productions of the West.

In the idealist formulations of the nationalist discourse, Indian art is de-materialized. It loses its moorings in the historical, cultural and material

circumstances that surround artistic production and floats free into a rarefied realm of metaphysical Ideals. The origin of art objects in *facture* is de-emphasized because the Indian Artist within this discourse is an Ideal entity with little or no agency. He is merely channel through which metaphysical Ideas are given a material manifestation. Individual art objects are transformed into illustrations of Ideal archetypes; their unique visual and material manifestations are dismissed as 'accidents' of history. Thus at one level, the objects are de-historicized. At another, their ontological association with the past is further cemented because the past itself is idealized and erected as a paradigm for the dystopic present. The colonialist splitting of subject positions mentioned previously, is perpetuated in the nationalist discourse, with one important difference. The knowledgeable nationalist art historian, who speaks on behalf of Indian Art interpreting it (apparently) for the nation, positions himself on the same side of the colonial divide as the people of the nation - the beneficiaries of this education. In my opinion, the nationalist discourse on Indian Art was aimed as much for a Western audience as for the people of the nation (if not more). It is also possible to argue that the objectivism of colonial archaeology finds an echo in Coomaraswamy's approach to Indian art. This claim is not as implausible as it sounds because Coomaraswamy's philosophy bears the unmistakable stamp of Platonic metaphysical objectivism.

In the final section of this inquiry, I suggested that post-independence art history in India continues to grapple with the epistemological legacies of colonial and nationalist discourses even as it breaks new empirical ground. Despite the overall development of historiographical awareness, clearly evident in the art history texts published from the 1980's onwards, residues of nationalist and colonialist epistemologies continue to haunt the discipline at a structural level, sometimes even co-existing within a single text. For example, despite her theoretical sophistication and methodological rigour, Joanna Williams' recourse to the motif as the repository of style in *Art of Gupta India* betrays the lasting influence of the objectivism of colonial archaeology, with its atomistic approach to morphology.

Moreover, the recent mainstream discipline of Indian art history is not a homogenous entity – it is characterized by noticeably different subject

positions and consequently, different kinds of art historical object. For example, Carmel Berkson's objectification of the sculptural artefact in her *Life of Form in Indian Sculpture* differs from Devangana Desai's framing of her primary objects in *The Religious Imagery of Khajuraho*; this difference is not merely a function of distinct methodologies or approaches to the 'same object'. To cast the distinction in terms of Hans Gumbrecht's formulation, Desai's primary objects are defined almost entirely in terms of their 'official' meanings and 'meaning effects' (and are entirely tied up with their originary historical context).[1] Berkson, on the other hand, acknowledges the material *presence* of her objects, separating this from the 'authorized' content of the sculptural artefact, which she relegates to a secondary position in the reception and understanding of her objects.

These discrepancies in subject-object relations (and the differential framing of the visuality and materiality of artworks) in recent art historical discourse need not be construed as a weakness of the discipline of Indian art history; in fact, it is possible to argue that this diversity is actually a sign of the robustness of the discipline. However, it cannot be denied that this occupying of different subject positions and objectifying of Indian art in different ways can no longer be adopted as 'default' operations, involuntary perpetuations of colonial and nationalist framings. One of the primary intentions of this enquiry has been to *problematize* and *historicize* recent Indian art history's framing of its objects; to scrutinize its epistemologies at a theoretical level. By demonstrating that subject-objects relations within the today's mainstream art history discourse are diverse, contingent and to a large extent, historically formed, (as are its construction of the visuality and materiality of its objects), I hope to have diminished the notion that mainstream Indian art history has somehow 'arrived'. Our political, economic and cultural contexts have changed and will continue to change our subject positions and consequently, our objects. Both these are actually highly contradiction-ridden locations (under the serene, apparently homogenous facade of the discipline in India) which I feel ought to be contested and theorized more rigorously.

[1] Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht,. *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey*. Stanford University Press, 2004.

Looking to the Future:

There is some comfort in knowing that are many possible futures in store for the discipline. If I were to choose among them, I would opt for an Indian art history that:

1. Is reflexive and historiographically aware.
2. Is critically interested not only in the originary contexts and entanglements of its primary objects but also in subsequent ones (including the present contexts of reception and use).
3. Is more engaged with theorizing and re-constructing agency, artistic intention and *facture* in a nuanced way (a serious lacuna in the field of pre-modern Indian art).
4. Is as involved in framing the *materiality* of its primary objects as with their *visuality*.
5. Is in possession of a theoretical frame that can deal with art works not merely as representations with 'meaning effects' but of artworks as *presentations* – as sites replete with 'presence effects'.
6. Takes reception seriously and engages with 'embodied' viewing and *affect* at a theoretical level; develops a vocabulary evolved enough to deal with the haptic, kinaesthetic, proprioceptive aspects of our response to sculpture and architecture, in particular.

Does **New Art History** in India fit the bill? After it was first officially heralded in the volume *Towards a New Art History: Studies in Indian Art* (pub 2003), new art history in India has developed in several interesting directions. The sheer diversity of emerging trends precludes the possibility of consolidating the changes under some thematically organized historiographical description and is far beyond the scope of this essay. However, it is possible to identify some common ground shared by a number of recent 'new art history' texts. I examine a few of these commonalities that are relevant to my project.

As mentioned in the introduction, historiographical awareness is a distinguishing feature of much new art history writing in India. However, our multiple and disparate historiographical legacies need to be framed more

theoretically in my opinion, in terms of epistemology and theoretical structures. Only when this kind of approach is combined with the (more popular) ideology critique will the discipline in India be able to exorcise some of the more tenacious and elusive spectres of colonial and nationalist frames. Another feature of new art historical texts is that they are increasingly reflexive; the critical/interpretivist underpinnings of much recent writing reveals awareness about the partial and provisional nature of art historical interpretation, its entanglements with the present, with the ideological and material contexts of the interpreting subject.

A pervasive problem associated with new art history in India needs to be evaluated critically; this is its tendency to frame art objects almost exclusively as 'texts' or 'representations', to be interpreted in terms of the political, economic and ideological stakes present in their originary contexts – their patrons, artists and audiences. That such contextualization *exponentially* enriches our understanding of, and engagement with, the pre-modern artwork cannot be denied. However, the exclusive focus on this approach has lead to the eclipse of certain equally important (non-representational) aspects of the work – specifically, what might be termed its 'presentational' specificity and value. Justifiably suspicious of both formalist approaches to Indian art and of various received aesthetic framings, many of the latest, most interesting art historical writings simply turn away from dealing with the material and visual qualities of art altogether to focus on matters of interpretation and contextualization. This programmatic blindness to the visual/material 'presence' of art objects is a characteristic of several recent writings.

Are codified aesthetics (Indian/Western) and formalist approaches (Kant-inspired/modernist/metaphysical) actually *indispensible* to the discipline's framing and representing of visual and material qualities of works of art? Can art historians not look beyond textbook theories of aesthetics and formal and stylistic analysis (most of them incompatible with new art history's constructivist/critical theory orientation) for newer ways of framing these attributes? Recent art historical writing has acquired much sophistication in reflexively contextualizing and interpreting artworks, 'reading' them as mediating and mediated representations, unearthing the political, social,

economic and ideological structures that underlie the production and reception of art, often animating artworks with unprecedented levels of contemporary relevance. Why can this theoretical sophistication and reflexivity not be extended to the discipline's framing of the material and visual qualities of artworks as well? If we are willing to accept, for example, that the *meaning* of an pre-modern work of art is not simply 'discovered' by today's art historian but at least partially 'produced' in the encounter between the object and the contemporary subject, why is the same insight not applied to the contemporary subject's encounter with the visual/material attributes of the work?

As the present inquiry has demonstrated, a significant (even defining) feature of the visual and material attributes of sculptural artefacts is that they are not as universally accessible or self-evident as they are generally made out to be. The ways in which we represent them in our (inherited) discourses determine, to a large extent, what aspects of their visual/material attributes we are open to and what aspects elude us. Just as art historians' 'reading' of art objects as 'representations' is not a value-neutral operation valid across temporal and geographical contexts, their framing of the visuality and materiality of art objects are historically and culturally specific *constructs,* partly pre-determined by discursive and disciplinary structures to which the art historian conforms and by her/his subject position. Reframing the visuality and materiality of our primary objects then, entails more than merely 'looking' at works of art with a 'fresh pair of eyes'. The radically *mediated* nature of visuality and materiality renders this a much more complicated operation. To use a metaphor, the most we can do in this direction is to exchange our old frames (or lenses) for new ones - better calibrated to suit our specific contextual and disciplinary requirements.

New Frames for Old

In this last section, I make a brief mention of possible disciplinary and theoretical sources for alternative frames that my ideal version of Indian art history could adapt to its own purposes, in order to overcome some of the chronic deficiencies that I have highlighted in the course of the present inquiry. This is with specific reference to the discipline's problematic and unreflexive framing of the visuality and more specifically, the materiality of

its primary objects, its obsession with the originary contexts of art production and concomitant reluctance to consider the post-histories of art works, its awkwardness with the theoretical issues of agency, artistic intention and facture and finally, its relative neglect of the issue of reception and obliviousness to *embodied, culturally situated* viewing. What follows is a sketchy gathering of insights from a wide range of fields, disciplines and areas of inquiry that could be modified for art historical uses. While I realize that not all of these insights are compatible with each other, I make no attempt to resolve their incompatibilities and to consolidate them here.

Visual Culture Studies, Indian art history's disciplinary neighbour for over a decade, is grounded in epistemological and ideological premises that give it a distinct advantage over art history when it comes to theorizing visual reception and spectatorship, the cultural mediation of visual experience, subject-object relations, the 'social construction of vision' and so on. As the borders between art history and Visual Culture become increasingly porous, Visual Culture has contributed considerably towards shaking art history's inherent conservatism, broadening and democratizing its field of objects, revolutionizing art historical methodologies and injecting the older discipline with stronger doses of reflexivity and ideological awareness. Unlike art history, Visual Culture is not weighted down by historicism and hobbled by the 'time-tested' philosophical constructs of aesthetics and formalism. So is the interdiscipline Visual Culture the panacea for all of art history's ills mentioned earlier?

In their introduction to *Visual Culture: Images and Interpretations*, Norman Bryson, Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey propose 'a history of images' as a corrective to the history of art, which they problematize for its naturalized assumptions about the validity of aesthetic value. The history of images then, would focus on the cultural meaning of the works both in their originary as well as in their subsequent contexts, including on our own reception of these images. This proposal appears to resolve three of Indian art history's problems at once – the ideologically problematic issue of aesthetics/cultural value, art history's overwhelming historicism, and its resistance to theorizing reception. The flipside of this is that the proposed history of images (and Visual Culture Studies in general) also *exacerbate*s three other problems that

have firm roots within art history. 1) By privileging the 'disembodied image' over the 'embodied artefact', Visual Culture elevates vision over other sensory modalities and ways of apprehending the world. As a result, the complex materiality of the object, its material being, is reified and reduced to the status of the 'image'. Our mode of apprehending the 'image' is thus (by definition) ocularcentric – the tactile, kinaesthetic and proprioceptive aspects of our response to the material object are not recognized. 2) Visual Culture's tendency to level all art works to the status of 'representation' implies a neglect of medium specificity. A poem is no different from a painting when they are both to be read as 'texts'. 'Meaning effects' once again overwhelm 'presence effects' and there is no space for accommodating the very specific material qualities of artefacts, and affect. 3) Finally, because of this neglect of materiality and because of Visual Culture's reception-biased treatment of images, agency, artistic intention and facture are sidelined even more severely.

In her response to the *Visual Culture Questionnaire* published in the journal *October*, Carol Armstrong makes two very significant remarks. She characterizes the *material dimension* of cultural objects as irreducibly particular, as a potential site of resistance and recalcitrance, "a pocket of occlusion within the smooth functioning of systems of domination…a glitch in the great worldwide web of images and representations." Her second point has a phenomenological slant, inspired by Heidegger – the subsumption of material objects within the textual model constitutes a discrediting of 'the particular intelligence involved in material facture'.[2]

Phenomenology as a field of philosophical enquiry has evolved remarkably sophisticated approaches to the materiality and presence of phenomenal things and our embodied interactions with them. The primacy given to direct experience within phenomenology might appear quaint and somewhat naïve in the context of contemporary theory. However, it could be just the sort of naivete that historians of pre-modern Indian art might critically embrace – a broad-spectrum antidote to both our persistent inherited frames and to contemporary theory's cynical attitude to the possibility of unmediated

[2] See Carol Armstrong's response to the famous "Visual Culture Questionnaire", *October*, Vol. 77, (Summer, 1996), 27-28.

experience. In the course of researching this thesis, I discovered my personal affinity for a small group of phenomenology-inspired art historians and theorists – a group that includes Georges Didi-Huberman, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Hans Belting and David Summers. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* and his unfinished *The Visible and the Invisible* have important insights to offer about the corporeal core of our perception of the world; their potential as sources for a theory of materiality, and for theorizing our tactile, kinaesthetic and proprioceptive responses to artefacts, needs to be explored. Martin Heidegger's remarkable and difficult writings on material, facture and technology, on things and objecthood, have been sources of inspiration for this project. Examining the potential of phenomenology's insights to rework some of Indian art history's formulations is a project for the immediate future.

As mentioned earlier, some of the recent formulations of anthropology and material culture studies have had a significant influence in the conceptualizing of this study. The material culture approach to artefacts as *agents* could be combined with theories of reception, to give us a more materiality-driven understanding of artworks that outlast their originary contexts. In *Art and Agency*, Alfred Gell develops an *anthropological* theory of art which positions art works as social agents functioning within social networks which have a performative, interventionist function not restricted to passively encoding a society's views about the world.[3] Gell's radical theory distances itself both from the formalist-aesthetic modes as well as the semiotic approaches to art. It points instead to the technical virtuosity showcased by the work as the source of the artwork's power, its continuing persuasion and 'enchantment'.

[3] Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: Towards a New Anthropological Theory*. Oxford University Press, 1998.

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