Materialities: Objects, Matter, Things
18-21 December 2016

Venue
Doon University, Dehradun

Thematic Introduction
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Thematic Introduction
by
Bill Brown
Convener of the Conference

Since the beginning of our new century, scholars across the disciplines have focused more and more of their attention on objects and things, matter and materiality. New theoretical and critical paradigms have surfaced: “thing theory,” “speculative realism,” “object oriented ontology,” and a range of new materialisms. Who could have predicted that the phenomenological object world—and indeed the material world, the real world, even the thing itself—would return with such a vengeance, having been marginalized or elided for so long by, say, structuralism and deconstruction, by theories of the subject, by the emphasis on discursive or social construction, by critical fixations on the image and the text, and indeed by the materialism named Marxism (in its Althusserian mode)? How do we account for this “material turn” in the Humanities and Social Sciences?

And what difference has it made—what difference might it yet make—to understanding history and culture, to reformulating metaphysical and ethical convictions, to recalibrating the place of the human as a thing among things? This conference will pursue those questions and dramatize Theodor Adorno’s much invoked claim that “we are not to philosophize about concrete things; we are to philosophize, rather, out of those things.” The claim should be read two ways: as an insistence on engaging the concrete and as a warning against simply curating concreteness into a scene of historical or cultural coherence. By Adorno’s light, things and philosophy belong together.

But where had things gone? Within different disciplines, different blockades had established the quarantine. Art History had disengaged the image from its material support; Anthropology transformed objects into goods or signs; History felt most secure with words, not things, as the source of evidence; Philosophy privileged language or Dasein to the point of rendering the being of objects secondary, if not beside the point. But to ask seriously, “What is this thing about things?” is to imagine dramas that transcend these effectively local, intradisciplinary disputes.

One drama no doubt consists of the perceived threat posed by the digitization of the world we once knew, by the separation between communication and substance. The quest for some new engagement with the object (be it archaeological, historical, or philosophical) could be understood as an effort to forestall those dynamics and to cling to a world where objects remain repositories of sensuous and semantic plentitude. Yet media themselves, both old and new, have a materiality of their own, whether this is understood as the physical platform on which any medium depends, as the materialization of relations established through media, or as the broader infrastructure enabling media to operate. Indeed, conversations about the “materiality of communication” were already part of media studies in the closing decades of the twentieth century. The conference will ask how, today, we approach the materiality of media in relation to their dematerializing effects.

It is possible, of course, to argue that any medium (by definition) denies immediate (unmediated) access to materiality. But a different line of reasoning has insisted that media disclose an otherwise inapprehensible materiality. In 1945 André Bazin argued that only the “impassive,” photographic lens, “in stripping the object of habits and preconceived notions . . . can offer it up unsullied to my attention.” By now all kinds
of media (the sonogram, magnetic resonance imaging, etc.) provide access to physical
details that are unavailable to experience. The conference will ask how technology, old
and new, shapes our understanding of materiality and of things that are physical (e.g.
quanta) but inaccessible in the absence of one medium or another.

A very different drama has been provoked by the appearance of new objects, in particular
those that, displacing the role of humans, have caught up with science fiction and
operate most notoriously on the battlefield. Unmanned Combat Air Vehicles can now be
programmed to fight autonomously, detecting and destroying enemy targets. No matter
how agential we understand objects to be and to have always been, we should be poised
to assess a novel distribution of agency outside the confines of theory. The conference will
ask what sort of impact new technologies have had—or should have—on conversations
about the agency of objects and the vibrancy of matter.

Finally, it may be that scholars have turned their attention to the object world because our
most precious object, the earth, seems to be dying, and it has thus become a global object
(it has been produced as an object) within international political and legal discourse. If
one can posit a material unconscious that has provoked this thing about things, it may lie
in the recognition that our most familiar object, our planet, has become uncanny. Various
new ontologies lay claim to a privileged philosophical position from which to address
this uncanniness and to assess ecological crisis. In turn, this conference will assess those
claims for the ethical and political purchase they provide (or prevent) within current
conversations about the environment.

A particular complication arises from a jarring irony. For just when the plea to overcome
anthropocentric thinking was being voiced in various strains of recent theory (Actor
Network Theory, object oriented ontology), geologists began to define the Anthropocene
as the recent (and current) era in which the human plays the most significant role in
shaping the conditions of our planet. On the one hand, that definition would seem to
preclude any differentiation of “man” and “nature”; on the other it seems to demand that
we distinguish anthropos as the principle actor in the ecological tragedy. The conference
will confront that irony by asking what is gained and what is lost by doing away with the
human-nonhuman distinction.

Among the other distinctions that have been undone by some of these new paradigms is
that between subject and object—a legacy of Cartesian method, of Kantian epistemology, of
phenomenological investigation, of psychoanalysis, and of much else besides. The conference
will address this recent (and not so recent) effort to do without the subject/object divide, and
its effort evade epistemological constraints with ontological conclusions. Is it possible to think
“without” or “beyond” the subject?

Martin Heidegger waged his own battle with Kant, and his effort to apprehend the
thingness of things clearly lies behind both thing theory and object oriented ontology.
A host of other thinkers have been invoked to invigorate new modes of materialism and
realism, from Lucretius and Spinoza, to William James, Alfred North Whitehead, and
Gilles Deleuze. The conference will investigate other genealogies, other philosophical
predecessors, and alternative sources for vitalizing the current conversation differently.
Specifically Western epistemologies, ontologies, lexicons, and grammars have served
as the battleground for new materialisms, new realisms, and new political ecologies of
things. Nonwestern thought sometimes appears in a romanticizing reference but not as
the ground for thinking seriously about alternate ontologies. The conference will offer
possibilities for establishing such ground.
Within the Western tradition, Georg Lukács claimed that the culture of rationalization and calculability, effected by the commodity form’s abstraction of the object, conceals “above all the immediate—qualitative and material—character of things as things.” Georges Bataille insisted that because capitalism is “an unreserved surrender to things,” capitalist cultures “place what is essential” beyond or outside “the world of things.” While today’s thinking might be understood as an effort to rectify such habits, and to work toward some kind of redemptive reification, the question of capital, if not excluded altogether, has been relegated to the margins. The conference will thus ask how to relate our moment in the history of capital to the new fascinations with the object world.

Much of the interest in one or another new materialism derives from its irreducibility to the materialism established by Marx: from the conviction, most simply, that economic relations cannot fully explain object relations, and that objects are not fully subject to the commodity form. This conference will provide an opportunity to take an additional step, asking whether, within today’s material turn, there is a way of refreshing the questions we ask about production, distribution, and consumption—a way of re-engaging Marx.

Bruno Latour has argued that Sociology and Anthropology have a great deal to learn from the arts about how the social consists of both persons and things. What literary works (or films, paintings, installations, etc.) teach us most powerfully about that sociality and about the lives of objects within it? Then again, what can the new concern for materiality teach us about the object forms of painting and literature, for instance, and about the networks within which they circulate? The conference will pose such questions as it works to consider the materiality of culture at a moment in which our own intellectual culture has been prompted to make matter make sense.

Special Session

A plenary session of the conference will be devoted to the close reading of The Everest Hotel: A Calendar (first published in 1998) by Irwin Allan Sealy. The Everest Hotel is often considered Sealy’s best work and has gained him an international following after being short-listed for the Booker Prize in 1998. The novel carries a quiet and almost minimalist tone and is a profound meditation about the world of postcolonial India and is informed not only by Sealy’s location within India, but also by his English background, as an Anglo-Indian. Set in the town of Drummondganj, a fictional town in northern India close to the Himalayas, The Everest Hotel centers on a former hotel turned convent-shelter and its inhabitants; a gathering of the abandoned, disenfranchised, and senile with a group of nuns who care for them and whose lives are intertwined with the hotel and its characters. Forming the backdrop of the novel is the political turmoil of a movement for a separate state, and protest against construction of a dam in the region. Sealy introduces each chapter with a rhapsodic, lyrical description of nature: mountains, leaves, flowers, the “objects” of nature, and builds his narrative on details around the place where the humans and things intermingle in the author’s evocation of the seasons in their diurnal motion. Commenting on the form of the novel, Sealy says, “Form is treated like step brother, but actually it’s like kulhar (the earthen pot, in which the hot steaming coffee was served in the old days), which is radically altering the taste of the drink. Form radically alters the consciousness (of the material, you are writing about). Form is not a passive receptacle. Once it’s chosen; you are restricted as well as liberated.”
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**Cultural Program**

*Burhdeva/ Naarad in A Mask Dance-Drama of Garhwal*

by

Vidyadhars’ SRICALA, Srinagar (Garhwal)

Director: Suresh Kala

Event Director, Script and Research: Dr. D. R. Purohit

The play is based on a traditional form of theatre in Garhwal performed during the six-month-long processional rituals of the deities (Jakh, Dwari, Chandika, Kaans and Ksetrapaal) travelling from village to village in the Nandakini, Birahi, Alaknanda and Dhauli rivers of the Badrinath valley. This mask presentation is an attendant ritual to the main performance in which actors personifying mythical and human characters on tableaux enact the drama. The narrative, fused with satirical strain, is built upon witty exchanges between the master director Bhaan and the master performer Burhdeva or Naarad. In this adapted version, the play travels from New Delhi, Middle East, Mussoorie to Washington DC and makes humorous, incisive commentary on the popular figures of Indian politics, Uttarakhand, and of Doon University (the organizers of the present conference).

**Dinner**

Venue: Fusion Destino Hotel

8.30–9.30 pm
Monday, December 19
09.30–11.00 am
First Session
Venue: Senate Hall

Keynote Address
Chair: Arjun Appadurai
Speaker: Bill Brown
Karla Scherer Distinguished Professor in American Culture
University of Chicago
Topic: “Re-Assemblage (Theory, Practice, Thing)”
11.00–11.15 am
Tea/Coffee
11.15–1.15 pm
Second Session
A: Techne of Materiality
Venue: Senate Hall
Chair: Babette B. Tischleder
1. Andrew Bearnot: “Molecular Movement: A Social Alchemical”
5. Sabah Tasnia Rowshon: “Shifting Centers of ‘Object’ in Telecom Sponsored Tele-films”

B: Minding the Matter
Venue: Conference Hall (Room No.113, First Floor)
Chair: Nirmal Selvamony
2. Robin E J: “What is Man’s Proximity to Thought? Taking Correlationism Seriously after Meillassoux”
4. Ramkhok Raikhan: “The Place of Rational Autonomy in Moral Reasoning”
5. Vishwanath Rana: “Experience and Materiality”
6. Kalpataru Kanungo: “Matter: A Philosophical Perspective”

C: Objects: Fictive & Real
Venue: Court Room (Room No. 08, Ground Floor)
Chair: Chanchala K. Naik
1. Aarushie Sharma: “Kinship through Everyday Objects”


1.15 – 2.15 pm
Lunch

2.15 – 4:15 pm
Third Session
*Anthropocene and the Crisis of Humanism*
Venue: Senate Hall

**Plenary**
Chair: Bill Brown

Speaker: R. Radhakrishnan
Chancellor’s Professor of English and Comparative Literature
University of California at Irvine
Topic: “Anthropocene and the Crisis of Agency”

Speaker: Babette B. Tischleder
Professor of North American Studies, University of Goettingen, Goettingen, Germany
Topic: “What is It Like to Be a Thing? Toward a Critical New Materialism as Creative Practice”

Speakers: Kyle Nichols & Bina Gogineni
Skidmore College, USA
Topic: “Understanding and Adapting to the Spatial Unevenness of Materiality in the Anthropocene”

4.15 – 5.45 pm
Fourth Session
*A: Objects in Art & Performance*
Venue: Senate Hall

Chair: Jasbir Jain

1. Annie Julia Wyman: “Prop Comedy, Thing Theory, and the Rage of Leo Gallagher”


4. Rajashree Biswal: “The Question of ‘Art Object’ in ‘Contemporary Community Based Art Practice’ or the ‘Interventionist Mode of Community Based Art Practice’ in India in the Post 1990s”

5. Piyush Raval: “Derrida and Painting: Deconstructing the Western Philosophy of Art”
B: On Illuminated Texts: Materiality and Affect
Venue: Conference Hall
Chair: Rakesh Desai

1. Ruta Dharmadhikari: “Water Matters: Neocolonial Explorations into Thing Theory”

C: Thingness: Overt and Liminal
Venue: Court Room
Chair: E. Raja Rao

1. Bijay K Danta: “The Tyranny of Things and The Pleasure of Words: James Joyce’s Ulysses”
4. Ashwathi Menon: “Thing, Object and Association – An Enquiry”

5.45–6.00 pm
Tea/Coffee
6.00–7.00 pm
Fifth Session
Creativity: Text, Music, Rhythm
Venue: Senate Hall

Plenary
Chair: Kailash C. Baral

Speaker: Bishnu Mohapatra
Poet and Social Scientist
Topic: “Poet’s ‘Things’ and Poet’s Way of Knowing”

Rhy-Dhun
Participants: Aparna Vijayan & Ananya Ghoshal

Aparna and Ananya weave Carnatic and Hindustani styles to improvise and fashion real-time creativity in vocals and dance. In combining movements, patterns and techniques, they aspire to blend different forms and let the differences complement each other beyond disciplinary boundaries. “Rhy-Dhun” is purposefully ambiguous to allow for open-mindedness and ingenuity.

Aparna has received formal training in Carnatic classical vocal music from Smt. Mahalaxmi Ramachandran based in Vadodara for the past 9 years and has finished Madhyama Poorna in Bharatnatyam under Akhil Bharatiya Gandharva Mahavidyalaya Mandal. Ananya is trained in Hindustani classical and semi classical vocals and has completed Visharad in Kathak Nritya from Bharatiya Sangeet Vidya Vihar, West Bengal.
7.00–8.30 pm

**Sixth Season**

*A: Anthropocene, Ecological Poetics and Our Object World*

Venue: Senate Hall

Chair: William D. Pederson

1. Shannon Bell & Gad Horowitz: “Niagara Falls is the Thing”
5. Gagan B. Purohit: “From Object World to a Global Object: A Radical Ontology in Ecocriticism”

**B: Reading Interrupted: Tactility of Reading**

Venue: Conference Hall

Chair: Bijay K. Danta

3. Mashrur Shahid Hossain: “O Tactile Reading”
4. Omendra Kumar Singh: “Materiality of the Text: Thinking Beyond ‘Worldliness’”

**C: Beyond Trauma: Revisiting Remnants**

Venue: Court Room

Chair: D. R. Purohit

1. Shalini Deepa Srinivasan: “Things and Trauma in Joe Sacco’s *Safe Area Goražde*”
2. Baishali Choudhuri and Indrani Mukherjee: “Re-reading Nidia Díaz’ *Prison Diary through Violated Bodies* as Embodied Reconfigurations of Matter”
5. Lalan Kishore Singh: “War and Materiality: Reading Materiality and Immateriality of Things in World War II Fictional Narratives from North East India”

8.30–9.30 pm

Dinner

**Tuesday, December 20**

09.30–11.00 am

**Seventh Session**

Venue: Senate Hall

**Keynote Address**

Chair: R. Radhakrishnan
Speaker: Arjun Appadurai
Goddard Professor of Media, Culture, and Communication
New York University
Topic: “Futures in the Making: Design and the New Materialities”

11.00–11.15 am
Tea/Coffee

11.15–1.15 pm
Eighth Session
A: Materiality and Feminism
Venue: Senate Hall
Chair: Shannon Bell

2. Mandakini V. Jha: “Durkheim’s ‘Social Facts as Things’ and Pre-colonial ‘Feminism’ in India”
3. Shobha Padmakar Shinde: “Materialities and Technologies in Feminisms and Concerns of the Environment”
6. Bharti Sharma: “Third Wave of Feminism and the Issue of Materiality”

B: Thinking with Things in Poetry
Venue: Conference Hall
Chair: Satish C. Aikant

1. Rakesh Desai: “Materiality as Identity: A Reading of Seamus Heaney’s Poetry”
2. Santosh Gupta: “The Importance of Being Everyday Objects in Imtiaz Dharker’s Poetry”
3. Lekha Roy: “Inverted Perspective: Tracing the Subject/Object Dichotomy in the Poetry of Rita Dove”
5. Soni Wadhwa: “Frost’s Wall and Schrodinger’s Cat”
6. Gurleen Kaur: “Is There a Thing qua Thing? Thinginess and the Contemporary Indian Poetry in English”

C: Materiality in Indian Imagination
Venue: Court Room
Chair: Prakash Joshi

6. Kalikinkar Pattanayak: “Gitanjali: Materiality of Creation and Beyond”
1.15 – 2.15 pm
Lunch

2.15 – 4:15 pm
**Ninth Session**
*The State of the Humanities in the Present Time*
Venue: Senate Hall

**Plenary**
Chair & Convener: Sara Guyer

Panelists:
Bill Brown, Arjun Appadurai, R. Radhakrishnan
Discussion

4.15 – 5.45 pm
**Tenth Session**
*A: Matter as Vibrancy: East and West*
Venue: Senate Hall
Chair: Kalidas Misra

1. Nirmal Selvamony: “Performing Matter”
2. Bina Gogineni: “Materialisms: Old and New, East and West”
3. Prasad Pannian: “Species Thinking and Vibrant Materialities: Reading Dipesh Chakrabarty and Jane Bennett”

**B: Places & Objects in Acts of Memory**
Venue: Conference Hall
Chair: Santosh Gupta

1. Dipesh Karmarkar: “Understanding Place as a Thing”
2. Shelly Narang: “Objects, Memory and Home: Construction of Female Identity in Mahasweta Devi’s *Mother of 1084*”
3. Rama Rani Lall: “Memory, Magic and Material Things in *The Glass Menagerie*”
5. Umesh Patra: “Books and Love Letters: Objects or Placeholders?”

**C: Consciousness, Materiality and Social Struggle**
Venue: Court Room
Chair: N. Nagaraju

3. Rashmi Tikku: “Spinning the Loom of Freedom: Gandhi and the Charkha”
5. Aparna Vijayan: “Looking through Nation”
5.45 – 6.00 pm
Tea/Coffee

6.00 – 8.30 pm
Eleventh Session
Irwin Allan Sealy’s “The Everest Hotel: A Calendar”
Venue: Senate Hall

Plenary
Chair: Bishnu Mohapatra

Panelists:
1. Jasbir Jain, Director, Institute for Research in Interdisciplinary Studies, Jaipur: “Baramaha, the Lacanian ‘Real’ and Sealy’s The Everest Hotel”
2. Satish C. Aikant, Former Professor and Chair, Department of English, H. N. B. Garhwal Central University, Uttarakhand: “Of Seasons and Cloistered Spaces: Reading Allan Sealy’s The Everest Hotel”
3. Ananya Ghoshal, Academic Fellow, Balvant Parekh Centre for General Semantics and Other Human Sciences, “Materiality of Sound/Music in Allan Sealy’s The Everest Hotel: A Calendar”
4. Preeti Maneck, Amrut Mody School of Management, Ahmedabad University: “An Ecological Reading of I. Allan Sealy’s The Everest Hotel: A Calendar”
5. Shailesh Kumar Mishra, Assistant Professor of English, Govt. Chandulal Chandrakar Arts and Science College, Patan, Chhatisgarh: “Irwin Allan Sealy’s The Everest Hotel: Things Speak Here”

8.30 – 9.30 pm
Dinner

Wednesday, December 21
09.30 – 11.00 am
Twelfth Session
Venue: Senate Hall

Keynote Address
Chair: Gad Horowitz
Speaker: Sara Guyer
President, Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes & Professor of English, Comparative Literature and Jewish Studies, University of Wisconsin- Madison

11.00 – 11.15 am
Tea/Coffee

11.15 am – 1.15 pm
Thirteenth Session
A: Social Life of Things: Lincoln and Beyond
Venue: Senate Hall

Chair: Shobha Padminakar Shinde
2. Angel L. Marroquin: “Education in Mexico: The Lincoln Link”
3. Renu Nanda: “Material Culture in Teacher Education”

**B: Objects, Exchanges, Identities**

Venue: Conference Hall

Chair: Prasad Pannian

1. N. Nagaraju: “The Tani Tribe of Arunachal and Their Material Habitus”
3. Manashi Bora: “A Materialist Study of Folk Culture with Reference to *Mothers, Daughters, and Others*”
4. Nanditha Rajaram Shastry: “What’s in a Shape? Sculpting Cloth into Veil/Turban in Rama Mehta’s *Inside the Haveli* and Partap Sharma’s *Days of the Turban*”
5. Seema Dagar: “Exploring the Objectification of Colonial Subjects in J. M. Coetzee’s *Foe*”

**C: The Thing Called Literature**

Venue: Court Room

Chair: Chitra Panikkar

1. Smithi Mohan J S: “Fetishizing the Fetish: An Objectified Reading of M. G. Vassanji’s *The Assassin’s Song*”
5. Hariom Singh: “Capitalism, Sexuality and Commodity Fetish in Chick Literature”

**Open Session and Valedictory**

Venue: Senate Hall

Chair: Prafulla C. Kar

1.30–2.30 pm

Lunch

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Keynote Speakers’ Bio-Notes

Arjun Appadurai is the Goddard Professor of Media, Culture, and Communication at New York University. He has held various professorial chairs and visiting appointments at the University of Pennsylvania, University of Chicago, Yale University, and The New School University. In addition, he is a founding editor of Public Culture, one of the most influential cross-disciplinary journals, and has served on several scholarly and advisory bodies in the United States, Latin America, Europe and India. His books include Banking on Words: The Failure of Language in the Age of Derivative Finance (University of Chicago Press, 2015); The Future as a Cultural Fact: Essays on the Global Condition (Verso, 2013); India’s World: The Politics of Creativity in a Globalized Society (Rupa, 2012); Fear of Small Numbers (Duke University Press, 2006); Globalization (Duke University Press, 2001); Modernity at Large (University of Minnesota Press, 1996); The Social Life of Things (Cambridge University Press, 1986) and Worship and Conflict Under Colonial Rule: A South Indian Case (Cambridge University Press, 1981). The nature and significance of his contributions throughout his academic career have earned him the reputation as a leading figure in his fields. He is a Senior Advisor to the Forum on Contemporary Theory.

Bill Brown is Karla Scherer Distinguished Professor in American Culture, English Language and Literature, Visual Arts, and Deputy Provost for the Arts, University of Chicago. He is also Director, The Object Cultures Project, Chicago Center for Contemporary Theory and Co-editor, Critical Inquiry. He is currently working on the intersection of literary, visual and material cultures, an inquiry that asks how inanimate objects enable human subjects (individually and collectively) to form and transform themselves. His major theoretical work is in “thing theory,” which borrows from Heidegger’s object/thing distinction to look the role of objects that have become manifest in a way that sets them apart from the world in which they exist. He edited a special issue of Critical Inquiry on this subject, which won the CELJ award for Best Special Issue of an academic journal in 2002. His books include Other Things (University of Chicago Press, 2015); A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature (University of Chicago Press, 2003) and The Material Unconscious: American Amusement, Stephen Crane, and the Economies of Play (Harvard University Press, 1996).

Sara Guyer is President, Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes (CHCI) & Professor of English, Comparative Literature, and Jewish Studies at the University of Wisconsin- Madison where she teaches courses on Romantic and Post-Holocaust literature, Literary Theory, Public Humanities and Biopolitics. At Madison, she has directed the Center for the Humanities since 2008 and has concentrated on imagining humanities that draw upon the rigors of critical theory, while encouraging both established and emerging scholars to help shape public life. Her championing for the cause of public humanities envisions new audiences for research in literature, history, philosophy, and culture. As a scholar of poetry and rhetoric with a particular interest in romanticism and its legacies, her research seeks to demonstrate the ongoing relevance of romanticism and poetry for thinking about the major social and philosophical issues of our time, including survival, the human after humanism, geographic displacement, and public life. She is the author of Reading with John Clare: Biopoetics, Sovereignty, Romanticism (Fordham, 2015) and Romanticism after Auschwitz (Stanford, 2007). With Steven Miller, she has edited “Literature and the Right to Marriage,” a special issue of Diacritics, and with Celeste Langan, a special issue of Romantic Circles on “Romanticism and Materiality.”
She also edits LitZ, a new book series published by Fordham University Press. Trained at Brandeis, Oxford, Warwick, and Berkeley, Sara has taught previously at UC-Irvine and the University of Oregon and is the recipient of WARF Vilas and Romnes Awards, a Howard Foundation Fellowship, and the Borghesi Family Faculty Fellowship in the College of Letters & Science at Madison.

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List of Participants

1. A. Balu Vijayaraghavan, Research Scholar, Department of Indian and World Literatures, The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, India (Email: balu.vijayaraghavan@gmail.com)
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Abstracts of Papers

A. Balu Vijayaraghavan

Time, Space, Home: Interpreting Home as an Ideological Artefact in Novels

My premise in this paper is that home serves as an ideological artefact in novels, and it is basically endorsed by Lennard J. Davis in *Resisting Novels: Ideology and Fiction* and *Factual Fictions*. In her words, “Novels make sense because of ideology; they embody ideologies; and they promulgate ideology. They exist by virtue of ideology and, as I argue, they owe their origin to the beginning of the modern concept of ideology” (*Factual Fictions* 212). The house we ‘see’ in our mind is largely a cultural artefact. It must be described as a cultural phenomenon with recognizable signs to tell us what kind of a house, what class, whose taste, and so on. All of this description, according to Davis, will depend on ideology. Ideology is in effect the culture’s form of writing a novel about itself for itself. And the novel is a form that incorporates that cultural fiction into a particular story. Likewise, fiction becomes, in turn, one of the ways in which the culture teaches itself about itself, and thus novels become agents inculcating ideology (ibid 24-25).

Objects exist in a locational relationship to the landscape as well as to people. The study of these relationships is very fruitful in understanding the role of the artefact. The significance of the artefact is considered for its own time and place as well. Also, the psychological role of the artefact, as well as its emotional significance, is questioned. Objects are important to people because they demonstrate prestige and social position. We invest in our personalities those objects which link the conscious and unconscious with symbolic significance.

In practice, the term ‘artefact’ is usually reserved for movable pieces rather than structures, but in the current context, it is considered as an object made by a human being, typically one of cultural or historical interest. Artefacts, man-made objects, are objective in relationship to man, the subject. They have an external reality. So it should be possible to view the whole diversity of artefact which is accessible to the appropriate mode of analysis and interpretation. They together offer us a perception of the role of the artefact in social organization.

The argument that home is an ideological artefact is further reinforced by Susan M. Pearce’s theory on artefact and Bakhtin’s idea of *chronotope*. Pearce, in her article “Thinking about things,” states that objects “embody unique information about the nature of man in society” (125). Susan M. Pearce views that an artefact is an object made by a human being, typically one of cultural or historical interest, and it has to be studied in relation to man, the subject. It implies that an artefact is a construct, both of an individual and of the society. Home is evidently an artefact, a man-made construct of social and personal ramifications. It has four major areas, as Pearce observes, like **Material**, **History**, **Environment** and **Significance**. **Material** includes construction and technology, **History** of its function and use, **Environment** its spatial relationships and **Significance** of its emotional and psychological messages. The sum of the understanding of these properties provides the means for the interpretation and evaluation of home as an artefact (125-6).

Home as a metaphor in novels comprises both spatial and temporal orientation, and this is the major locus over which *chronotope* definitely comes into play. In his essay “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel,” Mikhail Bakhtin discusses *chronotope* as
the intrinsic connectedness of the temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. Bakhtin speaks about various kinds of chronotopes – major as well as minor, in the study of novels. Bakhtin's enumeration of new, ‘minor’ chronotopes prompts one to formulate an innovative chronotope for the novels under study in the present work – chronotope of home that can describe how time actually fuses with the space in the formulation of home.

One can then safely infer that home, represented in novels, is an artefact, a human institution depicting simultaneously both the social and personal aspects of life. Thus, it reflects both collective ideology and authentic subjective experience, an object of essential psychological and cultural processes. It is both a spatial and social unit of interaction, a crucible of social system that represents the vital interface between the society and individual.

My contention in the present work is based on the study of three novels – Dickens's *Bleak House*, Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas*, Morrison's *Home*. In *Bleak House*, home is a social construct that acts as an icon of Condition-of-England, a socio-political ideology of Victorian England; in *A House for Mr. Biswas*, home is a postcolonial construct representing the ideology of rootlessness of a diaspora; in Toni Morrison’s *Home*, home represents the ideology of gender, race and memory of African-American women.

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Aarushie Sharma

*Kinship through Everyday Objects*

This paper is a part of my larger research on ‘Kinship and Memory through Everyday Objects’. There are various ways in which kinship has been studied. Descent, alliance, residence, practices, symbols, local idioms of relatedness, etc. are concepts and methods that have been fundamental to the history of kinship studies. In this research, I try to approach kinship through the lens of kinship memory. I argue that if kinship is defined as ‘mutuality of being’ (Sahlins 2013: 2), a definition that covers the range of ways kinship is locally constituted, whether ‘by procreation, social construction or some combination of these’ (*ibid.*), memory plays an indispensable role in these realms of relatedness, a role that despite being present as a subtext, has seldom been acknowledged in the readings of kinship.
To explore the workings of kinship memory, I undertake a study of kinship through everyday objects – one of the sites where social relations and memory of relatedness get objectified. On one hand, these objects may be an embodiment of kinship memory that is active in the present kinship relations. In other words, if kinship is understood as a ‘process’, ‘a gradual accumulation of everyday experiences through living together over time’ (Carsten 2013: 247-48), it carries a certain past that is going into the future. Everyday objects such as land, house, or mundane home possessions can thus be seen as embodying this kinship memory where future oriented past is present. On the other hand, these objects may evoke a past to offset the present life. Here, these objects may emerge as a way through which the intangibles of social relations are held on to, especially when the relations are not ongoing in the present, or ongoing in terms of what was. Thus, a house may be remembered for times gone by, its evocation stimulating and channeling remembrance (Bahloul 1996), or objects such as ancestral photographic montages, wall embroideries of children may be created and held on to in the backdrop of nomadic life and state repression (Empson 2007), or objects may be left behind when the relations embodied no longer hold, or when the weight of the past is too heavy to be carried (Marcoux 2001). Seen in this way, objects not only constitute human subjects but enable human subjects to transform and refurbish their memories and relations. Thus, in terms of embodying and enabling kinship memory or/and memory of kinship, objects emerge as pivotal to the study of kinship.

At a time when a continued study of objects has been intensifying across media studies, material culture studies, science and technology studies (Candlin and Guins 2009), it would be interesting to explore what a study of kinship through objects brings to kinship studies. While objects such as land, totems, soil, property, movables have been intrinsic to the study of kinship relations, I argue that a study that engages with objects more centrally and studies through objects the workings of kinship memory will add more dynamism to study of kinship. This paper is an effort in this direction.

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Breaking into Ourselves: Being and Poetic Materiality

“We awake in the same moment to ourselves and to things”
— Jacques Maritain, Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry

This paper is interested in the phenomenology of the paradoxical invitation that the contemporary avant-garde poem—a difficult, ruptured, disrupted object, riddled with
fragmentary desires and nihilist underpinnings—extends to its reader. The defectiveness of this poetry creates a context for revisiting Heidegger’s concept of ‘the thing’ as cognitively resistant and useless objects that in their brokenness exude an essential ‘thingness’. Heidegger’s juxtaposition of the terms world and earth are handy theoretical spools that could lead to a speculative understanding of the poetics of materiality founded upon the recognition of the ontological priority of the thing over the instrumentalized object. We explore this problematic through the work of two Anglophone poets who have been significantly influenced by Heidegger as well as materialist politics: George Oppen and J. H. Prynne.

The Objectivist poet George Oppen published his second collection, The Materials, in 1962, after a long poetic hiatus of 25 years. In this volume, Oppen reencounters the world in its own materiality and reimagines the poem as a poetic object of its own real and palpable existence. Zukofsky’s famous declaration, “thinking with the things as they exist,” underlines the need for a poetic thinking that transforms the nature of the poem as an existent thing amongst things. The autonomy that is set forth in such a transformation redistributes the emphasis on things where materiality would be valued for its resistance to cognitive categorisations. As Peter Nicholls argues, in breaking away from a ‘formed tradition’ of Pound and other Modernists, Oppen finds his own being among the “stubborn material” of his poetry. The difficulty of his ambivalences and his empirical poetics lead the reader to a contemplation that dwells on the essential materiality of language, things, and the self. We attempt to understand the scope of a Marxist materiality that might be an alternative to the retreat into ‘primordial originality’ prescribed by Heidegger.

J. H. Prynne’s early poetry expresses the desire for wholeness, speaking from a broken and wounded world. These poems, however, demonstrate breakages through obtrusive line breaks and create disjunctive spaces within the continuity that they imagine for themselves; and for Prynne, difficulty becomes a common ground for matter and poetry: “The whole thing it is, the difficult / matter.” On the contrary, there seems to be a rejection of this longing and a postmodern approval of brokenness in his recent poetry. We look at Sub Songs (2010) as espousing poetic materiality through its syntactic disruption and oblique absorption of knowledge structures that foreground a form of ontology that intersects with a historical materialism. Here, the poems simulate a sentient and aware consciousness that constitutes its own material being while remaining abstruse and inoperative. Through a deliberate denial of its own semantic coherence, language takes recourse in its own discord and materiality.

Amitendu Bhattacharya

Food, Hindu Bourgeoisie, and the Cosmopolitan Imagination in Colonial Bengal

Preparing, sharing, consuming and celebrating food both at individual and communal levels have certain social, cultural, political and, above all, ideological implications and consequences. As Supriya Chaudhuri and Rimi B. Chatterjee have argued, food is a system of signs through which human societies give meanings to the material world they inhabit. Likewise, the food practices of the Bengali Hindu bourgeoisie had been crucial to the shaping of their identity as the bhadralok or gentlefolk in the colonial times. The bhadralok – by no means a homogeneous class or group of individuals – were identifiable as much by their Western education as by their epicurean inclinations. Eating was an intricate and refined affair which provided them intellectual stimulation and often spurred
their creative and artistic pursuits. Bengali haute cuisine, therefore, is characterized by class and social distinctions. By reviewing the effects of European eating habits on the gastronomical attitudes of the upper middle class members of the Hindu community, this paper explains how colonialism, food culture, social status and cultural capital helped fashion a new cultural group commonly known by the name of the bhadralok. The paper also considers the ways in which, for the bhadralok, the consumption of particular food items became potent individual acts of defiance as well as of cultural appropriation. In its pressing desire to present itself as a distinctive class, the bourgeoisie sought to separate itself from the other Bengalis and Indians by imbibing ‘Englishness’ through the adoption of certain culinary practices of the colonizers, while simultaneously adhering to their ‘Indianness’ by keeping alive the unique culinary heritage of India, thereby attempting to assert their superiority over their own extended community and over the White Man who was essentially viewed by them as an ‘outcaste’. The paper will further examine the role played by the ‘housewife’ (often referred to as grihalakshmi or ‘the Goddess Lakshmi of the home’) and the hired (Brahmin) cooks – the persons who helped construct and nurture the idea of a bhadralok as an epicure, and, by extension, helped the making of ‘modern’ Indian culture possible – in the prevalent scheme of things.

Amith Kumar P V

The ‘Thing’ about the Blind: The Perception of Objects in Narratives Concerning Visual Disability

Blindness perceives objects in very different ways than the so-called ‘normal’ understanding. In narratives concerning blindness, the object-world shares a relationship with the ‘real’, without conforming to its exactness and accuracy. The visually challenged protagonist envisions a world of her/her own constituted by the tangible perception and descriptive interpretations provided to her/him by the people of her/his personal/professional space. Initially, this world is inhabited by objects that are fluidic with indefinite shapes and sizes; later, due to the imposition of the discourse of those who can ‘see’, these objects get concretized. William R. Paulson writes, blindness “means very different things, and moreover it is very different things, at different times, different places and in different kinds of writing” [1984, 4]. The emphasis on ‘things’ is noticeable here, as the thing about the blind is a vibrant amalgamation of extra-sensory perception, imaginative interpretation and non-visual objectification. Thus, the world of the blind challenges the ocular-centric world-view; that centers on the act of ‘seeing’. As against seeing an object, the blind subject utilizes the ‘other senses’ to feel the object, and ventures into the act of ‘performative identification’ of the thing in question.

The paper seeks to understand the manner in which narratives describe the perception of objects by the blind. For the task of exemplification, the paper takes recourse to three narrative texts: Touching the Rock: An Experience of Blindness [1990] by John M. Hull, The Planet of the Blind [1998] by Stephan Kuusisto and Lights Out: A True Story of Man’s Descent into Blindness [2014] by Subramani.L. Being autobiographical writings, the three texts bring out a range of experiences between the so-called ‘impaired’ persons and the unhampered objects. The paper undertakes an attempt to unravel the manner in which objects communicate with the blind, and also among themselves in the mind of the blind. The questions the paper seeks to ask are – What do we mean by the materiality of blindness? How do the visually challenged persons enter into a dialogic communication with the objects around them? How do the acts of performative identification of the blind differ in
the contexts of perceiving human subjects and material objects? More importantly, how does ‘blindness’ offer ‘insights’ towards understanding the thingness of the ‘dark’ world?

Amritanand Nayak
Looking Back and Looking Around: Locating the Illustrated Manuscripts of Assam and Odisha in Their Materiality

Manuscripts have played a great role in preserving and passing on knowledge over centuries, especially before the invention of printing technology and its spread. Millions of these manuscripts, executed in different media and materials, still lie in the possession of individuals, museums, libraries and institutions. Many of these manuscripts bear images of different shapes, colors and compositions, becoming unique objects of art, and labour.

Against this global backdrop, India has a relatively rich heritage. Illustrated manuscripts of Assam and Odisha constitute a significant part of this rich tradition. In both the regions, such manuscripts flourished in the medieval period, and declined towards the end of the 19th century. In Assam these manuscripts were prepared on the bark of Agaru or Sanchi tree (sanchipat), cotton hand-pressed into paper (tulapat), and in Odisha it was processed palm leaf (talapatra). These artifacts or art objects have become fossils, with some resonance, because of the discontinuity in practice. Though the different materials going into the making of these objects are still available, the process of moulding them into a composite/compound materiality has ceased under the incessant pressure of inclination towards virtuality.

And this has led to the translation of manuscripts with illustrations/illuminations into other forms, more and more volatile. This has made the thread between the objects and the subjects rather thin/shaky, developing ruptures. These objects have been reduced to virtualizations of different degrees, be it print, photo, screen space or digital presence. Hence the understanding of these art objects has become vague and virtual, resulting from and leading to some kind of estrangement between subject and object. This paper strives to argue that a remedy out of such thinking and situation is reliving the process backward from the object/product, passing through a stretch/space of reverse perception and conception, getting a feel of the substantiality/materiality of the ‘pro-.’ Thus, the object/artifact will get back its materiality, and materiality will regain its rightful primacy. This is nothing but ‘looking back’ and ‘looking around’ to arrive at the ‘historical materiality’ of these artifacts, as propounded by Wu Hung, and preventing them from degenerating into ‘screen wallpaper’ through bleeding, as feared by Ruchir Joshi.
Anand Mahanand

The Spiritual and the Material: A Study of Consciousness Raising Tales from Sarala’s Mahabharata

Indian literature has been predominantly religious and much of it has been concerned with disseminating spiritual lessons to the audience. We find traces of the relationship between the spiritual and the material in abundance, from the “apouruseya” texts to the texts created by many contemporary writers. The great epics—The Ramayana and Mahabharata, the Puranas, Hitopadeshas, the texts by the Bhakti poets and those of poets like Sri Aurobindo and Tagore—all exemplify this dichotomy.

In this paper, I will study a few consciousness raising folktales from Sarala’s Mahabharata and discuss how the poet has attempted to spread the message of righteousness and to inculcate other moral values. This is done to elevate humans from their material attachment to the higher realms of spirituality. The paper will explore the reasons behind the employment of such folk narratives by the poet, the ways the poet adopts in shaping them for the ordinary people and the extent these narratives have had an impact on the audience.

Sarala’s Mahabharata was composed in Odia in the fifteenth century. The Poet Sarala Das is regarded as the Adikavi (first poet) of Odisha. Though there has been plenty of critical work on him, the use to which Sarala Das puts folk elements to raise consciousness and the impact on them has received little critical attention. In this respect, the paper will add an additional dimension to the symbiotic relationship between the Spiritual and Material and to the study of Sarala’s Mahabharata.

Ananya Ghoshal

Materiality of Sound/Music in Allan Sealy's The Everest Hotel: A Calendar

In The Everest Hotel, A Calendar Allan Sealy introduces each chapter with intricate and measured description of nature: mountains, leaves, flowers, the “objects” of nature with the bāromāsi, or twelve month folksong tradition based on seasons in Bengali. Deeply musical in import, The Everest Hotel is replete with immense acoustic scopes and Sealy astutely uses improvisation, tradition, patterning, rhythmic momentum, repetition, polyphony, assonance and dissonance in expanding the auditory scope of his text. He uses music as structure, form, as agents of conveying certain emotions and as covert background settings in his work. I propose to analyze how Sealy reflects on the materiality of sound/music in its myriad dimensions and its functions as a medium between the protagonists and the world. “Thing theory,” in making us rethink our relationship to the material forms tells us that, while “objects” are fixed, inanimate, distanced forms exemplifying ‘categories’, “things” are open-ended, semi animate, intimate forms that have lives of their own; acquiring histories. Sonic/Musical entities are those “things,” those liminal forms between the animate and inanimate – both malleable and fragile. As a writer, Sealy is sensitive, and especially concerned, when it comes to soundscapes and the possibility of using those to manipulate the reader’s mind. While the emerging interdisciplinary field of sound culture studies is usually confined to media that actually contain sound in vocals/instrumentals, installations and films, I argue that contemporary fiction must be dealt with in equal vibrancy because of the increased interest in the acoustic scope of cultural experience that has made its entrance into fiction writing in
the recent past. For my work, I draw on an interdisciplinary series of lenses, from the fields of philosophy (Don Ihde, Mladen Dolar), media studies (Doris Kolesch, Sybille Krämer), and sound studies (Michel Chion, Kai Tuuri) along with rewriting of Bakhtin’s term “heteroglossia,” to “heterophonia” and “multisoundedness,” by Justin St. Clair. All these studies point to a multiplicity of media transmissions, pervasive to the point of aural ubiquity, a plurality of sound that constitutes the background- the soundscape that contemporary humans live in and that Sealy seems highly aware of. I also wish to explore how he aestheticizes the ‘everyday life’ of the Everest Hotel through ‘music’ and the ‘objects’ that embody it.

Andrew Bearnot

Molecular Movement: A Social Alchemical

What does it feel like to move like a molecule? Molecular Movement is a collaborative, practice based research project which brings together artists and scientists to explore molecular dynamics simulations as the basis for a novel form of dance. Initiated at The University of Chicago in fall of 2015, our ensemble is steadily growing a chain reaction of interest and insight into the molecular world.

Whether excited or relaxed, the molecule is constantly in motion: vibrating, tumbling, folding and unfolding. The molecule may be thought of as an individual subjectivity brought into social relation through community rituals of exchange. Sharing and stealing electrons. Forming and breaking bonds. Storing and releasing energy. A theater of continuous flux and flow.

We are interested in what Bill Brown calls “the life and law of things, the swarm of electrons” (Thing Theory, 6). Our work animates these concepts, applying a visual grammar and human scale logic to the atomic imaginary where subject object relations blur in uncertainty and (wave particle) duality.

We refer to our improvisation based dances as “simulations.” The choreography governing these movement exercises consists of three parts: rules for motion, initial conditions, and duration. As the simulation evolves stochastically, emergent forms reveal underlying parameters.

Our workshops begin with a basic movement vocabulary of translational, rotational, and vibrational motion. Subsequently, we address more complex motion within larger molecules and interactions between molecules. We utilize simple costumes that extend, connect, and constrain the movement of our ensemble. Bodies, objects, and architecture dance with one another. Attracting. Repelling. Propagating. Resonating. Coordinating. Synthesizing.

Our work expands on limitations of current computational chemical models and simulations, picking up where the supercomputer leaves off. Theoretical chemists rely on quantitative computer simulations which run for days or weeks and produce only a few microseconds of movement data. Yet it was Einstein’s dream of traveling on a beam of light which inspired his theory of relativity. Likewise, Kekulé’s vision of the ouroboros motivated his proposal for the structure of benzene. We are invested in this kind of speculative thinking and projection of personal subjectivity onto the object of inquiry. One must dream it in order to believe it.
We assert that every individual is a variation of a common form. Thus, individuals of all ages and backgrounds are encouraged to participate in our public workshops and are addressed nonhierarchically. In these workshops, participants are simultaneously performer and audience, dancer and researcher, a molecular flashmob.

We understand the site of our simulation as both reaction vessel and ritual space. As Bruno Latour explains of the “Pasteurian microcosmos,” the laboratory is a world apart, an abstraction of the whole, where the invisible is made visible (Give me a Laboratory and I will Raise the World). Like the pagan circle casting and calling forth of the elements, the scene of the petri dish is one of purification and distillation. We dance in vitro to better understand our lives in vivo.

I plan to talk for approximately 10 minutes, followed by a screening of experimental video work based on this project. A sample can be previewed here: https://vimeo.com/169438317 (password: 1905)

Angel L. Marroquin
Education in Mexico: The Lincoln Link

Contemporary Americans will remember the recent U. S. presidential race because of the unprecedented shock value of candidate behavior. History books will recall the 2016 election as the first time that one of America's two major political parties nominated a woman to be President of the United States. And not just any woman. The Democratic candidate had previously served as First Lady for eight years in addition to having amassed her own political credentials. She faced a male Republican who, in contrast, had never held political office but who had achieved a wide public name and face recognition through a “reality television” show that had trumpeted his marketplace brand as a billionaire material success story. Routinely generating headlines with his controversial comments, the Republican nominee cultivated his nationalist brand in the race by turning Mexico into an issue. He championed construction of an American “Berlin Wall” along the shared border as a barrier, a sharp contrast to the welcome that immigrants of earlier centuries received from the iconic Statue of Liberty. He next raised the stakes by repeatedly asserting that he would make Mexico pay for building the wall. Unfortunately, the extremely unpopular current president of Mexico rose to the bait and invited the Republican presidential candidate to Mexico for talks. That ill-advised invitation antagonized the Mexican electorate to the point that the Mexican president's closest cabinet member resigned as a symbolic sacrifice, an attempt to appease vocal critics who found the episode humiliating to Mexicans. Although far from humorous, the flap generated by the incident on both sides of the largely peaceful border was nonetheless reminiscent of the type of chaos characteristic in a Marx brothers movie. It created unprecedented tension between United States and Mexico, geographic neighbors that became modern traditional allies.

The purpose of this study is suggest that despite tensions between Latin America and its Big Brother just over its border, Abraham Lincoln’s legacy presents an alternative material image that has made him Latin America’s favorite 19th Century United States president. Lincoln is universally emblematic of upward mobility. He personified the American “right to rise” in his own life by rising from a frontier log cabin to the President of the United States. He used his presidential power to free slaves, giving them opportunities to rise in
life. Through landmark legislation trifecta in 1862, Lincoln backed and signed three of the most important acts that Congress has ever enacted. The first was the Land Grant College Act that opened up higher education to the working class; the second was the Homestead Act that gave free farms out West to landless immigrants; and the third was the Railway Act that led to the transcontinental railroad that connected the entire nation. As a result, the middle class swelled.

The emblem of Lincoln endures in everyday life in Latin America, too, in material and tangible ways. There are more streets named for the Great Emancipator in Latin America than in any other area of the world, except the United States. Similarly, Latin America is the only area outside the United States where cities are named for Lincoln. Postage stamps depicting Lincoln are common in Latin America. While Mexico has never issued a postage stamp with Lincoln’s image on it, he is remembered in other ways, including paintings (murals), memorial statues and parks bearing his name.

For purposes of analysis, this paper is a case study of Lincoln's name on schools in Mexico. The paper is divided into three parts: (1) a discussion of the enduring appeal that Lincoln has for Mexicans, despite the “Mexican-American War” fueled when the United States’ sense of imperialism morphed into the concept of “Manifest Destiny.” The USA started a war to expand its territory through seizure of more than half the land mass that belonged to Mexico; (2) the results of a survey of schools named for Lincoln that suggests that there are more in Mexico than anywhere outside the United States. For comparison, there are no schools in Canada named for Lincoln; and (3) conclusions suggesting that these tributes to Lincoln are tangible reminders of the democratic values he upheld and that provide a figurative bridge rather than a barrier between Mexico and the United States. Certainly, a wall to seal off the border is contrary to modern nations and the democratic ideals embodied in Lincoln, the first successful 19th Century Republican nominee for President of the United States.

Annie Julia Wyman
Prop Comedy, Thing Theory, and the Rage of Leo Gallagher

If, as Andrew Sofer writes, the stage prop “rescu[es] the material object from the dematerialized sign,” then the comic prop — or prop comedy — rescues the thing from the material object. Bill Brown indicates that, when we stub our toe on a rock, things have their revenge on us; by extension, when a clown slips on a banana peel, she throws that revenge into comic relief. The troublesome category of things is rendered so-to-speak untroubled: the divide, for instance, between determinate, determinable objects and the sheer physicality of indeterminate things becomes a site of play. The same is true of our most comfortable subject-objection relation; both thing theory and comic theory insist that the terms “subject” and “object” can be rendered interchangeable and that, relatedly, the human body is, as Brown quotes from Merleau-Ponty, “a thing among things.”

So far, so obvious. The proposed paper begins to explore the terrain shared by prop comedy and by thing theory — but it also seeks to extend that terrain by considering another of Brown’s gambits: the claim, made via Adorno, that recognizing the otherness of objects is a precondition for ethics — for recognizing any sort of otherness. To that end, the paper reaches far outside the canons of critical respectability to the prop comic Leo Gallagher. Once most famous for alive bit called the Sledg-o-Matic, aparodic infomercial
in which he smashed melons with a hammer, Gallagher is now best known for a stand-up act so racist and homophobic it barely qualifies as anything other than hate speech. In 1986, however, he gave a snide but surprising performance called “I Am An Artist.” Dressed as a caricature of a Frenchman, he disdained his ordinary props and instead flung food on to a 20-foot-high sheet, producing in real time a US map based on regional stereotypes: pea soup for the foggy Pacific Northwest, hot chili for Texas.

Gallagher’s flung food becomes a veritable exercise in the permutations of thingness: commodities are converted into physicalities; those smears of color and texture are then reassembled into an immaterial sign, a dripping, repulsive but recognizable picture of a nation no more substantial or spiritually satisfying than its supermarkets. Extraordinarily, then — especially considering his later career — Gallagher’s prop comedy presses toward social and economic critique. His antics are clearly a response to his own precariousness: his work with things is both anti-elitist — he is no artist, not with his hands full of the wet and paltry delights of the middle-class table — and undergirded by the palpable rage Sianne Ngai reminds us always accompanies a zany’s performance, especially under the regime of post-Fordist late capitalism.

From this last observation, the proposed paper suggests that a careful examination of Gallagher’s prop comedy might help us better understand contemporary US political culture. If we observed the more complex iterations of Gallagher’s often-offensive non-art as carefully as we observe that comic art usually considered literary (drama, stand-up, television) — that is, if we treated his things as if they mattered — what might we learn about the development of reactionary social and political formations, accompanied as they are by what Lauren Berlant calls, faintly echoing Ngai, “a feeling of unfreedom”? And would that act of theoretical attention be so-to-speak more ethical than ignoring them?

Notes
2. All citations from Brown can be found in “Thing Theory,” Critical Inquiry, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Autumn 2001), 1-22.

Aparna Singh
The Resurgence of the ‘Referent’ in the ‘Dialectical-Historical-Material’

In the protracted Western intellectual history and debates either relating, or including the hermeneutic sign, referent, and historicism, the ensuing cross-hatched theoretical configurations haven’t supported or underlined a possible ontological partnership between the Historical/epiphenomenal and the referent, so that for once they are placed on a common plane. This perhaps indicates the absence of any requisite revised theoretical apparatus with which to do so. This paper’s foremost premise and objective is a revised attempt to reconcile the physicality of the Referent with the hermeneutics of the Historical, or even Historicism by locking horns with select trends and currents that wrench them apart, and show the contrary i.e. as long as the Historical remains, the Referent cannot wither
away as well as any continuing relevance or resurgence of the referent will posit ways for the 
re-entry of the historical, as there will always remain an ontological relation between the two. I 
shall enact this by engaging select dismissals of historicism, both within and without the 
epistemologically and genealogically distributed ‘Marxist’ tradition, and highlighting the 
Referent inclusive predisposition of the Historicist frame that will be developed in response 
to the peculiar problematisation of ‘history’ in each case. Therefore, in demystifying and 
deproblematising their dismissals, I shall show how the referent continues to be relevant and 
included in properly adequate Hermeneutic-Historicist inclinations and approaches.

I argue that the historical’s stake in the hermeneutic sign is premised on the claim that 

Discourse is Material i.e. the dialectical-materialism in function at the level of the historical is 
paralleled at the discursive level. This implies that discourse is matter, discursive matter, and 
things are material-discursivities. Making a case for the historical then is also to argue for 
the continuing relevance of, even, the physicality of the referent.

Two specific cases in point for our present purpose are Althusserian/revisionist/structural 
‘Marxism’, and what has come to be known as ‘Presence Philosophy’, both discounting 
and disfiguring the means and mode of incorporating the referent within the hermeneutic 
field—the signifier/signified paradigm—in their own particular ways, and ultimately 
concluding either in the inconsequentially or inadequacy of historicism. For instance, in 
E. P. Thompson’s tackling of Althusser’s thought, we notice that Althusser’s is not a simple 
equation with the ‘essence’ underlying ‘centred’ thought in Western Philosophy. Rather, 
his in many ways may even be pitched as a proponent of the idea of ‘Consciousness’ 
(whose management for internal cohesiveness as well as contextual adaptability ultimately 
graduates/rides onto the level of the historical, but not in Althusserian thought).

However, the problem is situated in his privileging and a procedural (and therefore 
temporal) pre-positioning of antithetical ‘Reason’ over antithetical action, deprivileging 
the latter, for, any claim, even the remotest grasp of it becomes the reserve of ‘specialised’ 
knowledges, and hence is established a sharp, internally homogenized divide between the 
ideological and its counter. Now, the issue I am taking with this does not have to do with 
the neat structural opposition between the ideological and counter-ideological, but, more 
sophisticatedly, with the intrinsic ‘uniformisation’ waged within the two structures. This 
epistemological error, and not the fact of ‘oppositional forces’, generates and tags along 
the many fallouts of binarisation and watertight compartmentalization, not the least 
of which is making all practical knowledges (constructing houses, tilling fields) value-
even, disposable and subsidiary. In the absence of a counterbalancing of idealism by 
materialism, and the loss of this dialectic, all ‘historical’ becomes empirical and politically 
valueless. This is the theological-idealist lopsidedness of structural ‘marxism’—an 
ideological figuration in itself.

The structural coherence of the ideological, or counter-ideological frame is mistaken 
for a ‘same-ness’ of its constituting elements, and therefore a ‘phenomenological 
interchangeability’, when it is not so. Any structural charge or fact, for instance, that of 
ideological impurity carries value, but not invariably and necessarily the same value, and 
therefore not subject to the same norms and questions. It cannot substitute the singular 
and the contextual, as the onus for a comprehensive discursive picture, or discursive 
totality is to be borne together by a synthesis of structure and singularity. In fact their 
epistemological efficacy is placed in their dialectical exchange as well as the realization
of a space for mutuality. It is this blockage of a historicized mutability, or historical-material adaptability that also blocks out the referent.

As concerns Presence Philosophy’s proposition that the hermeneutic sign has no place for the referent, I argue that not only has the signifier (sound-image) been understood as a credible equivalent of the referent, especially because all ‘materiality’ is subject to apprehension in and through language, and hence cannot be accessed outside the sign, but also the following in the spirit of a revisionary approach;

The hermeneutic/linguistic sign and its constituting elements are not only two related yet distinct functions of the mental faculty, but they also possess an additional feature of two distinct pulls—one more conceptual-philosophical, the other more material-historical—that bear or weigh upon the sign. This phenomenological feature of the sign incorporates the ‘physicality of the referent’, and hence the sign cannot be referent-independent, since the very presence of the referent bears on the twin pulls that compose the sign.

_Aparna Vijayan_

**Looking through Nation**

“The world is full of groups relying on their connection with some dominant ‘race’ elsewhere.” – G.T Garratt

A world full of representations manifests to us realities that are perceived in innumerable and multiple manners which conveniently formulate our world-views. Representations take a large chunk of our perception of reality that is fractured, moulded, distorted, tweaked and projected in ways unknown and majorly illegible to us. This is where lies the thing-ness of the thing. Thing-ness could be that vulnerable/unmediated ‘emptiness’ perhaps which is negated by the presence of objects and by the absence of theory. Thing seems to deviate from the notions that the (ap)perceiving subject imparts to it and therefore converting ‘it’ into an object or a material as the outcome of its enquiry, thereby apprehending the materiality of the object (“Thing Theory,” Bill Brown, 2001).

An essentializing capacity is injected into our thoughts, through such a skewed enquiry, which thereby shapes our perceptions of objects, emblems, commodities, totems. Thus focus lies on how the ideas thence produced shall determine the future of our identities, on how objectification of things (produced out of a subject-centered discourse) can keep intact the clarity of its existence within the self-other binary, and how objects shall remain with an essence acquired by it through an engagement with the subject. So is the case of talking about nation and nationalism. It isn’t nation-in-working that’s talked about, but the enquiry is channelized into the question of the dominant idea of a nation, the marginalized idea of a nation and the illegible theoretical conclusions drawn out of a tainted glass window of multiple realities thrown open to us as ideologically-colored categories. Can one imagine a nation as a commodity, in exchange for which it can receive an identity? Or can nation be looked through as a thing, in a way different from how we look at it taking recourse to legible tropological assistance of language, dialogues and discourses sufficiently undermining the meaningfulness of its being, be it animate or inanimate?

Symbolism and use of things as objects perennially have been and shall be a fodder to the discourses of nations, nationalities, nationalisms, identities, with us lurking in the categories and fragments into which society gets divided into. We are left carrying a
beleaguered notion of existence of ‘others’ without looking into the ‘thing’ that lets us be as we are. This paper shall focus on the possibilities of looking at nation and communities alternatively; the rampant objectification of the same, and the need to alternatively read it as a temporal thing existing, be it in animated or non-animated state.

**Arjun Appadurai**  
*Futures in the Making: Design and the New Materialities*

This lecture will focus on new trends in design, which tend to incorporate the future into various tools, devices and platforms. These devices stress consumer convenience rather than price or fashion as their prime virtue, and yet convenience is itself a changing idea, which needs closer examination. These new ideas of convenience are always anticipating product failure and treat the customer as a kind of product analyst. Thus the future that is “made” through these material forms is inevitably transient, vulnerable and experimental. This lecture explores the emergent ontology implicit in this ideology of designed materiality.

**Arul Benito Gerard**  
*Broken Objects: Utopianism in Keston Sutherland’s* *Odes to TL61P*

Keston Sutherland’s *Odes to TL61P* (2013) is an experiment in the forensics of deviance. Picturing a utopia gone wrong, it exposes the failed state of the United Kingdom and a society that has depreciated the experience of sexuality in an age of mechanical and virtual reproduction. The domestic imagery is made of broken objects. The poet conceives the entire reifying nature of social experience under these conditions of crisis as: an anti-social involuntary social gag reflex at the least reference to anything but last resort, a dream in which you get to wish for things, which you can’t think you are told you never ought to wish for, gravely flagging up the hardly flapping tongue. (29)

The text’s rhetoric, composed of melodramatic personal utterances (“It’s dark in there, Deborah”), political commentary and satire (“social justice prevents adequate concentrations of capital”), and philological statements (“You can’t love everyone because you can’t do all the billion different types of love”) encapsulates the claustrophobic nature of the poem (40-41). For example, Sutherland leads the reader into the streets of London protesting against the banks being bailed out, and when he leads us back inside the text, it is into the scenes of domestic abuse which spiral into the lightless prisons of Abu Ghraib. The text teases the reader with its consciousness of its own complicity as well that of the readers on these issues; it asks: “If this is the way that this sentence resorts to your head why know otherwise?” (31). In fact, the entire text is an opening into the alternative forms of knowing each other. *The Odes to TL61P* is a reconfiguration of language, love, politics and everyday experience. It is towards this new order of things that the poet wants the brain to be tickled when he points out in the text that the self in agony begins to envy knowledge once it is unable to comprehend its surroundings. Broken objects receive a significant portion of the text’s attention as it grapples with the political milieu of its times.

In my paper, I examine three broken objects: TL61P (the replaceable part of the washer-dryer), a broken refrigerator door, and broken glass pieces from a window. However in the *Odes*, the machines do not figure prominently as modes of dissemination or knowledge
or centres of epiphany. Nor are the refrigerator and the washer-dryer contrasted with machines that communicate thought. In fact, the only other electronic device that makes its presence felt in the poem is the television.

Sutherland’s TL61P is a replacement part for a Hotpoint dryer. However, the Hotpoint dryer is a discrete image. Even if it is removed from the poem the major theme would stay alive. The anxieties that he expresses through the machine and its parts are also expressed through other images that are found in the poem. These images represent a world where the parts and whole do not function in tandem: a world where profit makes everything replaceable and at times irreplaceable. My paper examines broken objects from the perspective of wrong poetry as theorized by Sutherland and also by offering a critical account on the presence of such objects in the literary tradition. It argues that the utopianism of such poetry could be better understood in the light of the ontic and epistemic play of these dysfunctional artefacts.

**Ashwathi Menon**

**Thing, Object and Association – An Enquiry**

The ‘value’ of any thing is scaled by its utility when glanced through the glass tinted with a materialistic film; it is at this point that the Thing transforms into and ‘Becomes’ an object. The paper envisages to study that it is the value ascribed to the Thing which makes it an Object. Like the nature culture binary discussed by Levi-Strauss of the incest taboo, a clear distinction of what is an object and a thing is not possible. Here an attempt is made to make this distinction clearer by bringing in the aspect of Association. A proposition is made here that a thing becomes and transforms into an object through association. This association is what adds ‘value’ to the thing. In Derridean terms, the Object is the signifier of the Thing that is signified, and reality or the materiality is the sign. If taken further, neither can exist without the other, making the object transcendental. This can be paradoxical as the idea of an Object being transcendental opposes the possibility of materiality attached to the Object and its utility.

To substantiate this premise, the paper takes into consideration the analyses of *The Sandman*, a comic book series by Neil Gaiman. Gaiman is known for his contribution to the genre of fantasy. The protagonist of the series is the king of Dreamland known by multiple names but primarily as Dream. He was captured and has lost all his power. After having escaped he needs to find his ‘tools’ like a bag of sand, a locket, a crown etc. To regain his power, he needs to find them, apparently he had saved an essence of himself in these tools; these tools are the only way of retaining his power. The bag of sand in a common man’s hand was just a bag of sand but with Dream, it has the power of Dreams and Nightmares in it. Similarly, in the Harry Potter, the essence of Voldemort’s life is saved in various Horcrux. Similarly, in the Arthurian Legends, the hunt for the Holy Grail and the association of essence to a thing adds to its value and makes it an object. Thus associations of self or any investment in a Thing transforms it into an Object.

**Atmaram S. Gangane & Sangeeta G. Avachar**

**Materialism and Ecofeminism – The Two Encountering Philosophies in Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed***

Materialism can be speculated through different angles by applying various theories. According to ecofeminists, the beginnings of the present ecological crises lay in the
specific material and cultural developments of the West and the North as reflected in socio-economic structures, science and technology, philosophy and religion. The term ‘Anthropocene’, in the Western philosophy inspired the rise of moral basis for consumerism, private ownership and profit seeking, which drives both ecological and human exploitation. As a result, the world has grown enormously material oriented that made the scholars all over the world to focus on ‘Earth’. This materialistic approach treats Earth as an ‘Object’. The invaluable Earth Object is stripped of her resources and seems to be dying of over-exploitation. At this crucial point of time, Ursula K. Le Guin, the acclaimed science fiction writer contributes to the realm of environmental awareness through her exposure of materialism and its aftermath. Her novels like The Word for World is Forest, The Left Hand of Darkness, and The Dispossessed, have substantially interwoven the philosophies of materialism and environmental awareness through ecofeminism. She intends to interlink environmental sustainability and social equality as interdependent social movements in The Dispossessed. The protagonist, Shevek, travels from his home, Anarres, an ecofeminist utopia to the pre-revolutionary planet Urras so as to bridge a conversation between the two. Le Guin deals with the theme of domination through the contrasting cultures’ positions on possession and ownership. She reveals her insights through the depiction of radically different societies on two close planets Anarres and Urras which orbit around Tau Ceti, a star eleven light years from Earth.

Babette B. Tischleder
What is It Like to Be a Thing? Toward a Critical New Materialism as Creative Practice

In current debates on materiality and objects, scholars agree that things are alive and kicking, even if the new materialisms, thing theory, and speculative realism constitute a rather wide range of critical paradigms. This paper takes up the question of how the current interest in the material object world can be related to our historical moment—the urgent realities associated with the history of capital, the era of the Anthropocene (or the Capitalocene, as Jason Moore calls it), and a growing sense of global ecological crisis.

I will take issue with some of the premises that define recent materialist thought, particularly regarding questions of ontology, agency, realism, relationality, and storytelling. As Bill Brown writes in his thematic introduction, it is the irony of the current Zeitgeist that we have begun to reflect the human impact on our planet as a geological force just in the moment when scholars in philosophy, sociology, and political science are turning to the object world to conceptualize it in ontological and vitalist terms—whether as “thing power” or “hyperobject”—thereby emphasizing the autonomy of object being and the nonhuman.

Addressing the blind spots of such “object-oriented” theorizing, and, relating it to my own work on the life of things, I will propose ways in which a critical new materialism might expand its imaginative scope by considering object life and thingness through a literary lens. Bruno Latour has variously emphasized that actor-network theory draws on literature and narratology for conceptualizing the entanglements between human and nonhuman actants. This paper engages with Latour’s more recent work on “modes of existence” and “entangled agents” in the era of the Anthropocene, contemplating how literary figuration informs his notion of agency and “interobjectivity.” How does his project of writing “geostory” rely on concepts of storytelling?
Considering literary examples by Mark Twain and William Faulkner, the paper proposes practices of reading and interpretation that attend to literary aesthetics and that complicate the narrative premises of actor-network theory. I argue that tone, mood, and perspective are indispensable when imagining the forces of the nonhuman. Literary enactments of the Mississippi River offer ways of engaging the nonhuman that grant “natural” forces not only agency but also personality, thus challenging both the traditional subject/object divide and recent philosophical efforts to think beyond the subject and subjectivity altogether. Shedding light on the way nonhuman agency figures in these creative registers offers an alternative to ontological paradigms that uphold the distinction between being and telling.

My contribution suggests an embodied practice of reading and a creative form of theorizing that probe the convictions of some new materialist and speculative positions by imagining a more-than-human world, in which both agency and subjectivity are granted to many different bodies, both animate and inanimate. The paper thus takes seriously Adorno’s intuition that a critical materialist thinking needs to develop out of concrete things rather than locating them in a realm beyond human design and desire.

Babu Rajan P P
Social Life of Gold (Jewellery) in Kerala

Gold as a “thing” is specifically conforming to the understanding in material culture studies that objects simultaneously are involved in exchanging values and exchange of values. 2013 statistics tells us that India consumed 1120 tons of gold which is around thirty per cent of world gold-consumption, of which seventy-five percent is in the form of jewellery. If one were to say that India is the world capital in terms of gold purchase Kerala surely can claim to be the Indian capital in terms of its share in this consumption. Kerala has sometimes been called as gold’s own country taking into account the enormous, unparalleled, and unprecedented use of gold as jewellery. The spawning and flourishing of jewellery outlets day by day further validates this designation. This also is informative of the extreme social significance of gold as a thing in the , especially contemporary Kerala society. It is only a few years back that Sri Padmanabha Swami temple at the capital city (Thiruvananthapuram) came to limelight of the world through the news of its possession of a great treasure of gold and silverware worth billions of rupees. This paper analyses, among other things, an important gold handout (to Mahatma Gandhi by Kaumudi in 1934 to help him in his “Harijan Upliftment”) in contemporary Indian/Kerala history as a performative act of turning an object of finance capital into cultural capital. It then juxtaposes another incident of gold handout in Kerala by a policewoman on duty in 2008 to a very needy family at a badly-needed time and reads it as a reliving of the original gold handout turning gold as an object of cultural capital as visualised by Pierre Bourdieu in a land of unimaginable perversities vis-à-vis gold. In one way the history of gold in Kerala can be considered as one between handing out and amassing, the former done by Kaumudi in 1934. The symbolic event of its becoming finance capital was witnessed in another function in which the cricketer Sreekanth was awarded gold medal of five sovereigns by Congress party in 2008; a parodic reversal of the earlier event. This paper thus is an assessment of the circulation of gold in the various social and cultural vicissitudes of Kerala. In other words, what is attempted is what Appadurai calls an “object ethnography” of how gold mediates social relationships in Kerala.
Baishali Choudhuri & Indrani Mukherjee
Re-reading Nidia Diaz’ Prison Diary through [Violated] Bodies as Embodied
Reconfigurations of Matter

The present paper proposes a re-reading of Nidia Diaz’ diary Nunca estuve sola not just as a performing discourse exposing the violence of interrogation, torture and rape but also as the backdrop of the material act of demilitarization and democratisation of hyper masculinity in post-dictatorial Salvador. Women have been seen to be enmeshed in the organic materiality of their bodies and body acts. Yet if organic materiality is about feeling, desiring and experiencing by sexed and gendered bodies, then these are “not singular characteristics or capacities of human consciousness. Matter feels, converses, suffers, desires, yearns and remembers” (Barad). During capture, Diaz’ body became a trophy on display before the international press for Duarte’s regime to argue for their human rights record to justify more funds from the Reagan administration. Her “I,” as reflected in the title of the Diary, is constitutive of all her cell-mates and is therefore a plurivocal and an embodied matter. The ‘I’ works like an apparatus which measures selective objects as she hears rape and torture inflicted on other cell mates, implying a kind of entanglement of the discursive and the material. The plurivocal ‘I’ thus blindfolded and embodied is also pushing and pulsating against and along its own materiality as it remembers, re-processes and re-codes itself with full political charge, to resist, subvert and contest biological and social performativity. Rape and disappearance are material threat-potential looming large on her imprisoned self along with her cell-mates who are not her ‘Other’ but her material connections with the responsibility and accountability for the lively relationality of becoming. Diaz insists that the book was not only about the dead but also about those who survived to tell their tales.

Bharti Sharma
Third Wave of Feminism and the Issue of Materiality

Proponents of third wave feminism claim that it allows women to define feminism for themselves by incorporating their own identities into the belief system of what feminism is and what it can become through one’s own perspective. The present paper would be focusing on the model for the ‘empowerment of women’, propelled by the ‘third wave feminists’. It would also discuss how the third wave of feminists have devaluated the ‘materiality’ of the universal project of ‘women-empowerment’ by discussing the goals and objectives reset by this wave. The notion of ‘materiality’ refers to the core substance of reality. As there is a nexus between the religious power and political power in all the societies, which has remained a major cause behind unequal treatment received by men and women in a society, I will try to deal with how the third wave of feminism has dealt with this crucial aspect. There is no doubt in the validity of the fact that in the last few decades our academic debates have raised questions why fourth wave feminists have accused the third wave feminists so bitterly. Is it a reality that in the name of freedom and liberty in terms of free economic activity the women have become prey to market forces and are taking pride to be a commodity in the market? Is economic independence sufficient for empowering women? Nancy Fraser’s critique of feminism with special reference to capitalism is a good example in this regard.
The relationship between human mind and the material world is as old as the history of mankind. Human mind has always attempted to comprehend matter, to have an accurate understanding of and knowledge about matter. The question of matter and materiality has ever remained an immensely engaging and enigmatic issue with the investigative and inferential mind. The mind is seen to be in permanent courtship with this mysterious as well as enchanted mistress, the matter. It has been in an endless romance with her. It has consistently mooned over the mysterious mistress and endeavoured to map out her in her true colour and counters but in vain, for the mistress has never fully opened herself up to him, has never given herself cent percent to her engaging and fastidious ravisher. Notwithstanding his persistent ways of raving and craving, of ravishment and romance, she seems to have remained always defiant to him, has remained outside of his unravelling act, remained enormously incomprehensible and shrouded. She seems to have remained somebody reticent and something residual in her ways with her ravisher. In the binary between mind and matter, the first term ‘mind’ has always assumed the superior position of a wild, valiant knight in endless hunt of its relatively reticent as well as resilient other, the ‘matter.’ A young, dashing, enthusiastic, extremely spirited hunter, the mind has ceaselessly held infinite excursions to the vast, sprawling, variegated and seductive corpus of the other, to at once acquire, occupy, investigate, analyse, overpower, possess and apprehend her and to harness her, or more interestingly, to use, to ravish and abuse her in accordance with his whims and sweet wills. Notwithstanding the fact, the mind has turned to be the latter’s offspring, a product, a fostered child, so to say, of the fecund material world, he has ever proclaimed himself to be the supreme lord of his surrounding world. He has construed matter as his counterpart, his beloved, his pimp to romance with her, to enjoy her, to suppress, subjugate, subdue and silence her and to treat her as his subservient servant in permanent wait at his doorstep, at his bedstead always eager to take his callings. Narcissistic and chauvinistic in nature, the mighty muscular mind has posed himself to be the jack of all trades but eventually to prove himself the master of none. The mighty, massive and magnanimous world of matter and things, on the other hand, has always posed herself to be a pique, a sulky beloved always in readiness to be enamoured, entreated and apprehended by her bully, ravishing and ravaging counterpart. The endless romance of mind at the door and domain of matter has resulted in innumerable rhapsodic rantings about the tolerant mistress. During his long intercourse with this sulky and sacrificing mistress, he has throughout come up with new and innovating accountings about her. He has endeavoured to map her body, to master her being by his inferential and speculative mind and to theorize her by his epistemological frame of mind, to philosophise her by his metaphysical proclivity and to dissect and experiment her in his scientific laboratories to acquire insight into the nature, essence and composition of her being. During his prolonged engagement with her, the mind has sometimes perceived her as the unreal, fake and imitational manifestation of her originary perceptual and entities. Sometimes she has been sermonised to be the transitory, trivial, trash, terrestrial and mortal stuff/thing consistently living in relationship with and revolving around his immortal, immanent, eternal, immutable and irreducible self and consciousness. During the Romantic period, she has been construed to be the wedding garment of the subjective mind, an outward trajectory of the inner being of the
poet, a metaphor for his mind taking hue from it. The pantheistic posturing has infused each and every matter and thing of the world with an invisible but all pervading and all-encompassing divine being. Cognizance of divine entity with matter has led him to worship even inanimate object. Kantian philosophy has taken the whole universe of things as well as beings captive at consciousness. The touchstone of consciousness determines the mode of existence of the extraneous material world. Subsequently natural and physical science has taken over the discipline of metaphysics and worked ceaselessly to explain what has appeared inexplicable and incomprehensible.

This paper aims at shedding some lights on the Promethean venturing of man, on the intellectual and engaging game the mind has played and continues to do so, no matter in whatsoever futile manner, with his endearing as well as enduring partner or rather paramour who has willed to cooperate with his arbitrary and overpowering drive to strip her off her shrouded mysteries.

**Bhupendra Kumar Patel**

**William Golding’s Novels: Portrayal of the Things**

The contribution of Bill Brown in the field of literature is historic as he is regarded as the forerunner of the literary and cultural theory of ‘objects’ and ‘things’. Brown edited an issue of *Critical Inquiry* on the topic of ‘Things’ in 2001. He also edited a book entitled *Things*, which comprises essays from *Critical Inquiry* and other essays. He says that an object becomes a thing when it stops doing its common functions. A school of literature believes that things and the humans interact and the result of this interaction fixes the success of the actions. These ‘things’ make the basis of text. Thus it may be said that ‘things’ support the very form of text. The thing theory has come out as the new dimension of the theory of modernism. Heidegger is regarded as the pioneer of the theory and he was the first renowned philosopher who coined the idea of ‘objects’ and ‘things’. Later in the 21st century, Bill Brown expanded the domain of the literary school. There were a large number of writers and poets who wrote their works dealing with the relationship between the human and the things and among them was William Golding. While it is generally agreed that he based his themes mainly on the theory of existentialism, it may be said that this theory too has a solid reference and relevance with the ‘Thing Theory’. Golding describes the settings of all the scenes of his novels very precisely. Whatever the backgrounds he chooses for the themes of his novels he gives very clear description. He goes further and talks about the effect of the interaction between the human and the things. He masterly plans the activities of his characters wherein they proceed with the story, always adjusting with their places and positions.

**Bijay K Danta**

**The Tyranny of Things and the Pleasure of Words: James Joyce’s *Ulysses***

The aim of this paper is to examine how modernism re-writes the social ecology of things. It exaggerates the tyranny of things in the world and foregrounds the rule of the dystopic in the everyday. Clearly, the dystopic—that which is created and sustained by objects and objectification—is triggered by the excessive presence and absence of things in modern lives and modern writing, and indeed by the spectre of texts substituting human emotions—and eventually human beings—by things. To this extent, the idolatry of objects in ‘our’ world has a social history that needs further attention. No modernist
text dramatizes the battle of humans with things better than Joyce’s *Ulysses*. There is an epistemological asymmetry in our thinking about things as writing turns things to be metaphors, sometimes violently—better described as poetically—dispensing with their materiality, their thing-ness. There is an anxiety that humans may all be exiled by things or, even worse, substituted by them. But then things—‘our’ things—may acquire a life of their own in our absence, by re-writing us, and by ensuring that we never return to the world now colonized by ‘our’ things. I wish to theorize a contrapuntal note that marks most modernist texts. On the one hand, there is the fear that our things might plot our exile from our world or spoil our return to it. Eliot mastered the art of frightening human beings by reminding them of the terror that things carry or hide. On the other hand, this very tyranny of things is countered by the power and pleasure of words. An act of adultery—an event—is turned into a thing through a series of metonymic substitutions or diminishing metonymies. So a man is turned into a hosiery—a vest—and a hose—a pipe or a penile presence/absence—highlighting how human not only possess or represent things but also become things. Similarly, race consciousness translates into a ‘thing’ as Bloom dwells on the ‘offal’ the butcher wraps for him, the smelly offal melting and merging into the smelly Jew. Joyce empowers words and erases them, and then reverses the process to comment on the inevitability and inconsequentiality of things that matter in our lives. I see this as a unique convergence—between the social erotics of desire and the social ecology of things—in other words, a layered social narrative that allows both erotics and ecology to mutate into each other. In *Ulysses* the mutation translates into a carnivalesque celebration of words and things in Molly Bloom’s reverie. This, to my mind, is a moment that celebrates the double life of things that produces and consumes narratives that are socially symbolic acts. These narratives, I argue, critique the layering of ethics and erotics in modern lives. In Joyce, this is done through doubling and repetition as narrative investments. For, the Heideggerian object-thing division is bound in a double-bind of assertion and erasure that oscillates between the materiality of desire and the desire of materiality. I hope to show that Stephen Daedalus’s ‘homecoming’ after a night of peripatetic adventures in a world of words and things substantiates my thesis. Then, of course, language becomes a prisonhouse and a playfield pointing to objects in the world as historically and socially conditioned.

**Bill Brown**

*Re-Assemblage (Theory, Practice, Thing)*

This experiment begins by asking how the inanimate object world, more specifically the world of human artefacts, might contribute to what gets called, these days, “assemblage theory.” That theory is most often grounded in the work of Deleuze and Guattari and depends for its coinage on the translation of the French *agencement* as assemblage (rather than, say, layout or arrangement as in *un angencement de meubles*, a pleasant arrangement of furniture). The theory has paid no mind to the art history of assemblage—this is not a translation of the French *assemblage*. The history of assemblage, as artistic *practice*, is decidedly not the pre-history of assemblage *theory*. But what if it were?

The history of assemblage (in the visual, plastic, and literary arts) can both complicate and refine assemblage theory within the social sciences, even as, no less, that theory enables us to cast artistic practices somewhat differently. My focus, when it comes to recent theoretical work, narrows on Manuel DeLanda; my focus, when it comes to artistic practices, broadens to include Robert Rauschenberg, William Burroughs, and
the contemporary artist Theaster Gates. His very recent work—The Right of Assembly (2015)—dramatizes the potential for understanding the assembly of materials in relation to the assembly of people. The exhibition provides a way for conceptualizing how thing, most commonly designating a material entity, might yet designate (as it once did in many languages) a council or assembly. In this way, the material practice makes a theoretical claim.

Bina Gogineni
Materialisms: Old and New, East and West

The recent resurgence of the real in Metropolitan Western discourse conspicuously omits realism, the aesthetic ideology. Why might this be? One explanation could be that the new intellectual orientation tends to be speculative rather than retrospective. A more substantive explanation might be that realism has been too deeply connected with the disenchanted Enlightenment ideologies (particularly humanism, so-called rationalism, and empiricism) which the new re-emergence of the real undercuts. Indeed, thing theory, object-oriented ontology, neo-vitalism, and speculative realism might all be considered part of an effort to re-enchant the world that orthodox Enlightenment disenchanted. These movements emphasize the materiality of the world independent of humans' epistemological relationship to it. The focus on materiality and embodiment might all be taken as a corrective for what Charles Taylor refers to as “The Great Disembedding” in the secular age.

The re-enchanting effort of the new materialism tends to relate itself neither to the long-standing enchanted worldviews of many non-Western cultures, nor to the history of re-enchantment in the West itself as manifested in what is sometimes referred to as the counter-Enlightenment or radical Enlightenment. Both non-Western enchantment and Western re-enchantment have historically been connected in explicitly metaphysical and political ways. I will elaborate that connection and extend it by integrating the most recent iteration of re-enchantment into the dialectic between enchantment and disenchantment. This framework can perhaps lend historical and metaphysical heft to the new (re)turn to the real, while also broadening its geo-cultural scope.

In addition to these broad brushstrokes, I will offer a case study – what I call “enchanted realism” in India – that will further my integrative and comparative endeavor on behalf of the new materialism(s). Literary realism in India did not develop epistemologically along the same lines as disenchanted Enlightenment Europe; rather, it developed according to its own, very different—namely, sacral—conceptions of the phenomenal world. With reference to the works of Bankim and Tagore, two of India’s earliest and foremost pioneers of the realist novel, I will show that realism is not compulsorily disenchanted on a conceptual level, only on the historically contingent level; if this were not so, then this divergent development of the European novel and the Indian novel, particularly in their earliest phases, would not have happened. Demonstrating this allows realism to be “redeemed,” or rather wrenched away from disenchantment, thereby making it possible for the Metropolitan re-emergence of the real to reconcile itself with its disowned conceptual relative, realism. On the other hand, the Indian enchanted context allows us to identify some limitations in the new materialisms’ understandings of human and object agency. Hindu cosmology, which underwrites the early Indian realist novel, conceives of the phenomenal world as inherently sacral (aniconic sacralty) and the mimetic representation of God/gods in deliberately crafted material form as sacral
(iconic sacrality). In this conception, nature and special objects are charged with divinity, and thus make normative demands on devotees, but they do not have agency in the intentional sense. This suggests that Latour, Bennett, et al., need not implausibly ascribe agency to objects in order to cultivate a worldview in which humans can have reciprocal, intimate, and respectful relationships with objects.

_Bina Gogineni & Kyle Nichols_

**Understanding and Adapting to the Spatial Unevenness of Materiality in the Anthropocene**

The Anthropocene discourse has led to useful interdisciplinary discussions and has caused a wide range of scholars to reconsider humans’ role in the Earth system. The Anthropocene Working Group (AWG), the group charged with formalizing the geologic time frame for the Anthropocene, has stated that the Anthropocene should be useful not only for the geosciences but also for other fields, disciplines, and constituencies. However, the geosciences and the humanities/social sciences are defined by different methods and motivations, and each discipline is focused on divergent aspects of the Anthropocene. A geologically defined Anthropocene would officially recognize man’s impact on the Earth system; however, it could negate many of the humanities/social science perspectives, and it might not meet the aspirations that a broad range of Anthropocene scholars seek—aspirations that perhaps matter more to mitigating the effects of humans on Earth’s system. Shifting from a temporally-based _Anthropocene_ to a spatially-based _Anthroposphere_ may enable a more fruitful interdisciplinary interaction.

The realization of human interactions with nature becomes more obvious through the spatial orientation—an orientation that observes the Anthropocene’s intersections with power and materiality. The relation between the temporal and spatial axes of the Anthropocene can be thought of in this way: the Anthropocene features threshold moments when, at an unprecedented level, particular humans gained power over nature (i.e. “natural resources”), and therefore power over other humans (the two go hand-in-hand). The medium of power has always been space, namely land. The early modern period allowed for the unchecked exploitation of others’ lands for profits, i.e., colonialism, the forerunner of globalization. Unevenness of space is thus a direct reflection of power and is at the heart of the Anthropocene. Even the AWG who aim to keep non-geologic concerns out of their work, argue for the date of the detonation of the first atomic weapon as the start of the Anthropocene, and thus cannot deny the fact of power.

There are several aspects to the Anthropocene that become strikingly clear when shifting from a temporal to a spatial focus. First, the intensification of global inequity of power is coterminous with the intensification of damage to both nature and humans that has happened on uneven spatial-scales. Second, humanity’s ever more audacious attempts to control the environment, turning nature increasingly into a material resource, are commensurate with damage to both parties. However, by looking at the world’s indigenous, poor, subaltern, and super-exploited communities there is a potential to learn how to survive the ills of the Anthropocene, the extremes of which have long since been endured most by these very groups. Adaptive strategies borrowed from these communities might enable us to see alternative modes of coping with the damages. Such modes of responsiveness rather than control over environment are what enable them to survive. Thus, when we pay more attention to space rather than time, we see not only the continuing consequences of this continuing ethical distinction across the world—
the husbanding nations’ exploitation of the non-husbanding cultures—but also possible solutions for mitigation and adaptation. After all, since the current scientific consensus is that we cannot stop or reverse climate change, our only viable strategies for survival are mitigation and adaptation.

Bini B.S.

Ontology of Prosthesis: Unfleshed Things and Fleshing Out of Subjectivity

This paper is an investigation into the materiality of prosthesis that juxtaposes perspectives from biocultural discourses and life writing. In common parlance, the prosthetic limb refers to an artificial part fulfilling the function or filling the absence of an ‘original’ body part which is missing, suggesting art and artfulness. Bodies, subjectivities and prosthetic objects with their technologies for functioning form an assemblage of associations. The prosthetic limb is a material non-organic vitality endowed with energy and movement. It is both addition and replacement. A body that shows deviation from the norm is looked at as ‘marked’ and a prosthetic limb by getting attached to such body marked by absence, ‘deformity, or ‘non-functionality’ of parts is considered a mode of liberating the subject from a deterministic rubric of limited and limiting selfhood. Prosthetic limbs and organs by performing functional and cosmetic roles form a crucial part of being. They may be mechanical extensions supporting and substituting bodily acts; they also exist as inactive things that cover (up) a vacuum.

The prosthetic limbs are not limited to simulating body parts and functions; they improvise and sometimes claim to appear and do better than the ‘natural’ limb. With the use of microprocessors, computerized and hydraulic parts and artificial intelligence, they seem to throb with a will and life of their own. A prosthetic limb is an object that grows into a disembodied detachable alter self with narratives of loss, lacunae, difference, victory over ‘disability’ and coping woven around it. For many, it may symbolize the triumph of technology over the obsoleteness and mutability of flesh. By serving aesthetic, erotic and mechanical functions, the prosthetic object is ushered into a constellation of meanings and relations with the human corporeal entity which it forms a part of. It is an animated and animating yet unfleshed thing that maintains different degrees of identification with the entity of which it appears to be an extension and enhancement. Yet, there is an ontological ambivalence around the prosthetic object, which by attaching itself to and detaching itself from the human body, oscillates between animate and inanimate existence. One may remember Freud’s take about the dependency on the auxiliary organs of technology for accomplishing a level of magnificence which elevates the human to a prosthetic God, nevertheless a discontented one.

Bishnu Mohapatra

Poet’s ‘Things’ and Poet’s Way of Knowing

Does the poet know the world any differently (?), particularly the things that populate it. Do the ‘things’ look at the poet as she/he looks at them? How are their ontologies being acknowledged? The many ways of knowing ‘things’ are quite clearly structured in hierarchies - some claiming ‘superiority’ over others. Within this overarching context of how the world of things is grasped, what does the poet un-conceal? Do poets, like philosophers, seek ‘truth’? Are they burdened by an aspiration to ‘get things right’? Through readings of my poetry interspersed with reflections, I uncover my very different ways of apprehending ‘things’.
Brandon Truett
The Materiality of Abstraction: Jessie Dismorr’s Para-Agenda to Vorticism

In October 1919, Yvor Winters published a short article in the Little Review in which he advances an ideology of modernism. To do so, he maligns the poetry of a largely unknown and understudied artist of the Vorticist collective, Jessie Dismorr. Winters portrays Dismorr as an interloping artist whose fixation on the material world leads her to produce a “philosophy of existence” rather than a poem. In the end, he intimates that she ought to have drawn a picture. Winters ultimately participates in the genealogy of modernist criticism that designs a program of medium-specific abstraction, which finds its most potent distillation in the commentary of Clement Greenberg.

Dismorr is by no means our only example of an avant-garde modernist who moves among media. However, her complex apprehension of poetry’s function learns from her experimentations with visual abstraction, thereby patterning an important para-agenda to Vorticism’s emphasis on rendering cool hard surfaces and evacuating subjectivity. Interpenetrating the fields of the visual and the discursive, Dismorr’s modernist art creates a kind of self-referential material system that supports the modulation of text across media, demystifying the modernist myth of medium-specificity.

Indeed, as Bill Brown has argued in the case of the Language poets and the conceptual art of Lawrence Weiner, there is “a kind of pragmatic impasse when it comes to moving among the visual, plastic, and literary arts” (525). The “inconsistency” of deploying text across media became a principal concern during the ontological questioning of text tout court that transpired during the historical moment of Brown’s inquiry: the dematerialization of art whereby the concept rather than the object took primacy in the mid-1960s and early-1970s. The chiasmus (“text supplanting object / object constituted by text”) teaches us how in fact texts do things but—most importantly—do things differently in specific material environments (525). To invoke Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory, texts embodied in their physical supports, like a chapbook, become actants that impact and facilitate our actions; by accounting for our complex associations with objects, we can ascertain a more capacious model of the social.

The crux of my argument concerns the object/event of a forgotten handwritten chapbook that in 1918 Dismorr “affectionately” dedicated to John Storrs, an American sculptor, and his wife Marguerite. By pairing Dismorr’s poetry with her visual art, I aim to pursue the event of a translation across media, which discloses something like, save its oxymoronic connotation, the materiality of abstraction, that is, the residue of abstraction that results from the artist’s transposition of her creation into an alien medium. From this angle, we put a more constructive spin on Winters’s words: Dismorr fiddles with abstractions in order to glimpse the thingness of the physical and corporeal world, to look at objects and bodies askance, an artistic endeavor that delights in the instability of ranging across media. Using an approach that starts with the object in order to constellate a scene around that object, this paper proposes an alternative methodology that reassembles modernism such that the aperture of critical attention widens, thereby configuring a socio-cultural field in which the object prompts us to rethink aesthetic production.

Work Cited
As Technology continues to acquire the characteristics of life, the perception of Materiality by Humanity is also getting influenced. We discuss three of the major factors in this process both at the Micro and Macro levels.

a) Changing Nature of the ‘Self’:

At the Micro level, while the ‘Self’ was viewed as an Integral entity in the past, in the present Technology Dominated Era, it is being increasingly viewed as a set of parts. Examples of a person celebrating the Birthday of his heart (since it was a transplant) or the introduction of inanimate objects into live human bodies illustrate the ‘set of parts’ view. This has a strong influence on the view of Material World.

b) Existence in Two Spaces:

At the Macro level, Humanity, which has been designed for existence in an integrated single space, today dwells in two dissimilar spaces viz. Real space and Cyber space. While real place has a context, Cyber space is context free, thus causing a fractured perception of Materiality by the occupants.

c) Valorization of Intellectual Property:

Till a few decades ago, valorization of human thought process like the material counterpart was not heard of except for Strategic reasons. Today such valorization, once considered intangible, has become widespread in the world and dominates Material reward perception.

In this paper, we discuss in detail, the influence of these three factors on Materiality and try to evolve a concept of Materiality for the post human era.

The material turn in theoretical discourse has enabled us to explore fresh perspectives in ritual-cultural practices, modes which are considered as exclusive domains for women. In the broad Hindu ritual-cultural domain, male and caste hierarchies dominate those marked sites and sources of power. However, there are practices that are organised and ritualised only by women having both folk and non-folk origins. The materiality of these practices has its resonance in modes that are text and non-text (oral) based. The material significance is obtained from the basic Vedic practice in which a composer can invoke a God/Goddess in hymns and also prescribe a set of dravyas (objects) for the ritual. These objects assume significance in their differentiation in the context of who organizes the ritual. Gender becomes a point of signification in the selection of these materials (dravyas), their arrangements and the process of offering. While all modes of worship in Hindu practice are ritualistic, what differentiates the women specific rituals is that in most cases it works opposite to the normative gender and caste hierarchy where a ritual could be organized only through a Brahmin. This is an important point of departure and differentiation in gender specific cultural-ritual practice that corresponds to the thingness of objects and their meanings.
Having these assumptions in view, the practice of Lakshmi Puja in Odisha seems to undercut a male and caste dominated form of worship and signifies a world that is women’s own. Any married woman across castes in Odia society can offer this Puja without the help of a priest, by creating an ambience of cleanliness liked by the deity and selecting the things of offering (dravyas mostly cooked) for Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and wellbeing, seeking her blessings for the family. This particular practice has a textual version in form of the Lakhami Puran having Goddess Lakshmi, her consort Lord Jagannath and his brother and sister as characters with implications of caste, gender, materiality and other processes signifying power.

The present paper seeks to focus on the intersections of materiality, gender and power in analyzing Lakshmi Puja as a practice and the text of Lakshmi Puran, attempting to develop a critical perspective on gender power from the location of the household having deep cultural resonance.

Chandan Kumar Panda
Dialectic of ‘The Earth’ and ‘The World’ in Bira Kishore Parhi’s Odia Autobiography Dirt Dust Broken Rice: A Heideggerian Perspective

This paper explores how commonplace objects and matter undergo alchemy with the touch of art in Bira Kishore Parhi’s Odia autobiography Dirt Dust Broken Rice (Mali Dhuli Malukha). When these objects, commonplace as they are, are changed into work of art, they come to occupy a dimension, which is uncommon in the commonplace. Instead of remaining isolated contingent objects, they become situated and evolved in the history of an experience. This experience shows itself in the object not as a thing but as a phenomenon. Such is the revelatory power of art as articulated by Heidegger in his essay “The Origin of Work of Art,” which takes Van Gogh’s painting “A Pair of Peasant Shoes” as its ostensible object. As Heidegger states, “The artwork lets us know what the shoes, in truth, are.” (15) Here truth is not a mimetic reproduction or a representational correspondence between fact and statement. Truth in art is what breaks down the materiality of the object into its reality, it is an uncovering, a release into the light of a different significance, an affirmation of essence in its appearance. The self-closing and the self-sheltering nature of the earth find its manifestation through the appearance of the world. In this paper I have made an attempt to study certain objects such as the chalk (Khadi) of his grandfather, the fabric worn by the freedom fighters (Khadara), the tatters of a dead child, the half-burnt wood on the cremation ground in Bira Kishore Parhi’s narrative which evolve from the commonplace to the significant through the transfiguring chemistry of his art.

Chirag Trivedi
From Materiality of Literature to Socio-Cultural Matter: A Postcolonial Inquiry into Modernism in Suresh Joshi’s Gujarati Fiction

Suresh Joshi’s principal achievement is to make the literary West meet the literary East: to bring the avant-garde to Gujarati literary spheres. He propagated a theory of fiction known in Gujarati as Ghatanavilop, which insisted on minimising the plot element and enriching the suggestive potential of language and style. In doing so, Suresh Joshi’s ideas about literature and his literary craftsmanship have focused more on how instead of what – the longstanding debate on the form, materiality and the matter.
Modernism was, for its critics, a notoriously elitist affair. A commentary on whether Western literary devices such as degrees of experimentation and modernism take the work away from the native Eastern common reader is much required; an evaluation of Suresh Joshi’s fiction both by virtue of its ‘high’ subject matter and in the sense used by Gerald Gillespie in writing of the ‘elitist metanarrative’ of comparative literary history, where ‘elite’ points to the intense degree of specialization of each practitioner of literature, is duly analysed at the heart of this paper. Phenomenological investigation as to what kind of impact new forms and materiality have had or should have on not just development but also adjustments in function of literature with focus on the agency of objects and the significance of matter lead the discussion to what can the new concern for materiality suggest about the object forms of literature and the networks within which it circulates.

In Aristotelian sense, literature is heteromerous, since it does have internal structure, with different parts of different literatures made up of different stuffs leading to understanding of genres, styles and thematic variations as constituents of matter and form. Taking cue from this tenet, this paper focuses on questions like: Are ornateness and modernity in the style and open-endedness and obscurity in the means of expression as form inclusive enough if evaluated through reader-response theory; does striving for experiment and innovation in style that made modern Gujarati literature difficult for many, eventually made literature reserved only for those who are deeply within what literature is; does persevered presence of ‘formative features suggest that the acquired substantial ‘matter’ for a generation of writers and readers is simply a shape? Modernism as literary craft in Suresh Joshi’s fiction recognises literary materiality over literary matter. The focus on materiality, through objective recognition and empathetic relish, if aims at connecting the reader to the experience of witnessing the spirit and knowing the literary matter, invites critical inquiries about unconscious breeding of literary elitism, if any. This paper hauls these postcolonial inquiries.

Chitra Panikkar

Object versus Thing Debates: Figurations in Language, Literature, Life

The paper proposes to address the complex figurations of this philosophical debate in language, literary texts, and life instances. Though the background inquiry would span philosophical ruminations ranging from Heidegger’s “What is a Thing?” to the more recent Thing Theory, the paper aspires to reflect on how language and literature have defined the two categories. Linguistic explanations pertaining to the distinction between ‘object’ and ‘thing’ would consequently be examined against the deeper philosophical trail of inquiry. Instances from two or three literary texts that show up objects as distinct from things would be subjected to detailed analysis. Life-worlds where an individual is reduced to a thing -- a number, or where an already objectified woman is specifically appellated ‘the thing’ in community parlance to further demean her status would be commented upon to bring out the complexity that underlies the initial Heideggerean distinction. The hypothesis is that there have been perpetual shifts in the meaning attached to ‘object’ and ‘thing’ as related to space and time.

Dev Vrat Sharma

Material Dimensions of the Indian Thought

The concept of ‘thing’ as a concrete empirical reality has avowedly continued to be central to the Indian thought. Even in the transcendental philosophy ‘thing’ has remained the
focus of both indeterminate knowledge (without the perceiving consciousness) and
determinate knowledge (with the perceiving consciousness). The tradition of materialism
in the Indian context goes back to the 6th century B.C. in the form of *Lokayata Darshan*
(Worldly Philosophy), which held ‘perception’ as the only true source of knowledge
against the other schools of philosophy which accepted multiple valid forms of
epistemology.

The assertion that things assert their ‘presence, and ‘power’, and thereby ‘interrupt’ us, is
tantamount to granting them absolutist dimensions to the complete negation of observing
subject. The manifestedness of the ‘thing’ or the ‘object’ depends upon the independent
entity of the subject which is fundamentally of opposite nature than the object. Moreover,
it is endowed with the power of discerning the presence of the object. The very existence
of the ‘thing’ depends upon the ‘experiential replication’ projected by the perceiving
consciousness. The idea that the world is made up of ‘things’ which are independent of
the human consciousness, is in conflict with quantum physics, and also to the symbolic
transcription of powerful experiences. It should be noted that subtle ‘things’, as against
‘things’ with a concrete and manifested physicality, are more real and long lasting at the
physical plane, and have a more profound impact on our minds and bodies.

Indian thought normally speaks of truth (reality) as a phenomenon, a happening,
a perception, and differentiates between an understanding purely intellectual and
one gained from experiential knowledge. The present study proposes to explore the
dimensions of such concepts as ‘thing’, ‘thingness’, ‘materialism’, ‘realism’, etc. from the
Indian perspective and epistemologies, and as possible ‘alternate anthologies’.

*Dipesh Karmarkar*

**Understanding Place as a Thing**

For a long time, geographers have been engaged in discussions and debates determining
the very nature of space and place. These discussions bring forth multiple meanings of
space and place, resulting out of several points of reference. By and large, it is understood
that spaces are abstract, while places are real; spaces are formless, unbound, while places
are bound and have forms. However, creating duality between space and place poses a
challenge of understanding them in the absence of each other, which further leads to a
limited and incomplete understanding. Thus, for a better understanding of space and
place, it is necessary to explore from where space and place come from, what decide their
existence, and what is the nature of their relationship.

The present paper attempts to understand the space-place in general, and place in
particular with the help of the ‘material-object-thing’ framework. Here, material is viewed
as ‘raw’, from which, an object is composed. The object, which is made, has a definite
shape and function. When the object is caught in a web of relationship, it ‘becomes’ a
thing. In this sense, material is an absolute entity, object is a relative entity, while thing is a
relational entity. So, instead of looking at material, object, and thing as a separate, distinct
entity, they are seen as ‘material-object-thing’, in which, the process of ‘becoming’ is
important. Space, in this framework, is an absolute or apparent material that is made from
the fragments of nature. Humans use the intrinsic qualities of the ‘given’ space/material
to build a settlement. A settlement, in its defined form and structure, ‘becomes’ an object,
serving a function of providing shelter. When people dwelling in the settlement/object
relate themselves to its structure and form as well as intrinsic qualities of surrounding (parcel of) space/material, the settlement ‘becomes’ a place/thing.

At this backdrop, the present paper looks at a place as a thing. A place is a thing with definite location, locale, and sense. Its thingness is not just because it is the assemblage of materials, but also because the abstract meanings, practices, and relations, ascribed by the people (who actually are agents responsible for the ‘becoming’ of a place), find complex material expressions in it. It, further, renders unique identity to the place. Interestingly, these material identities become responsible for taking the place on a drive of reinventing itself, augmenting its materiality. As if a recognition of a thing, which is decorated and presented anew every time, is determined by where it is placed, in front of whom it is placed, what new senses it offer, and most importantly, what is the perception and the intention of the viewer!

E. Raja Rao

The Ideas in Things: A Study of Major’s Reflex and Bone Structure as a Social Hieroglyph

In the previous century, the ‘things’ have been relegated to the background as the human subject was getting primacy in the society. Though William Carlos Williams was the first modernist to emphasize the place of the thing with his words, “No ideas but in things,” things were not without ideas. Much ink has been spilt in drawing the distinction between “human subjects” and “non-human objects” (Brown 15). The modernist era stresses on the “aesthetics of the commodity.” Following the thumb rule of the “return of the repressed,” “Things” have made a come-back to assert themselves. It is time now to recognize, as Bill Brown says, ‘commodity fetishism” as well as the “advent of the object.” The objects today occupy the status of the subjects in determining the fate of the human subject. The subjective estimation of things has been objectified. For example, beauty is “pleasure objectified.” An object transforms itself into a commodity when it gains use value or exchange value. All objects have values in themselves which contribute to the making of the commodity fetishism. All commodities overcome their “doubleness” – their sensuousness as well as their relation to other objects. According to Bill Brown, those objects which have some amount of “excess” are entitled to become things. Thing theory posits a foregrounding of the object. Things could be actors. Though Bruno Latour negates this idea saying they could at best be actants, it is not true. An object with an excess either way – positive or negative – becomes a thing. The thing could also be an active agent like ‘Jes Grew’, the inanimate protagonist of the novel, Mumbo Jumbo by Ishmael Reed. Various reading strategies are adopted to make the best interpretation of these novels. One of the methods is “method of iteration,” which is very close to Gilles Deleuze’s concept of “Repetition.” Through the excess or the “difference” which it causes, the object becomes a thing. The other reading strategies which are applicable to these novels are ‘metonymy,’ ‘synecdoche,’ ‘prosopopoeia’ etc. Replete with ‘things,’ the text becomes “social hieroglyphic” making room for metonymy, synecdoche and other tropes. Critics like Elaine Freedgood say that strong metonymic reading makes allowance for ‘mediations’ from outside the text. The critics who are too much dependent on ‘metonymy’ might commit an error; they might “hardly see the ‘things’ themselves.” Elaine Freedgood suggests a way out from this crisis. According to her, “While commodity fetish is a social hieroglyphic,” commodity is treated both as a material object and a trope.
I would like to discuss Clarence Major’s novel, *Reflex and Bone Structure* in the light of the above reflections; Major confesses in his interview with Rebecca Morrison his allegiance to the modernist credo, “No ideas but in things.” He adds, “It’s the thingness that I’m after.” With his involvement in serious painting, he limns characters which are two dimensional. *Reflex and Bone Structure* which adopts the form of *nouveau roman* creates the major character Cora as a statue, “standing in the doorway.” She is “thingified” with several attributes added to her person. In the novel, the thin veneer between persons and things falls as there is a funginess between persons and things. Inanimate things are added with mythic significance: “The laundry is called Hades. The grocery store next door is also called Hades. The shoe repair shop too … A truck called Hades goes by” (77). The paper will make an attempt to decipher the social hieroglyph of the African American diaspora through the ‘things’ which are present in abundance throughout the novel.

*Gad Horowitz & Shannon Bell*  
*Niagara Falls is the Thing*

**Part I. Mapping the Thing**

In 1923 Count Alfred Korzybski constructed a thing, a contraption, a device with mahogany, metal and string. He called it the anthropometer – the measure of man – probably recalling Protagoras’ “man is the measure of all things.” Later Korzybski renamed it the Structural Differential, and it became the central thing in Korzybski’s discipline General Semantics. The Structural Differential is a thing which maps the world of things showing the relations-in-difference of three levels of things—the event, object and label levels. The event – the submicroscopic and cosmic processes, which go on behind things; the object – the living being’s sensory experience of bounded things (abstracted from the event level); and the label – the human discourses which conceptualize, stabilize and organize the world of things.

So then, the Structural Differential is a thing about things, an icon of all things, a metathing. This presentation will map the thing, the hyperobject we label “Niagara Falls” onto the structural differential noting that the thing is simultaneously nothing but itself – that is, bounded by its edges – and nothing but all the relations with other things that produce it as the thing that it is (cf. Morton’s ‘interobjectivity’), in other words exceeding its edges.

Many decades before Graham Harman’s object oriented ontology Korzybski shows that the thing reveals itself absolutely and simultaneously conceals itself absolutely, fading away into its depths in the event level.

**Part II. Niagara Falls: Hyperobject**

Part Two experiences Niagara Falls as a hyberobject, that is as a “thing” that is “massively distributed in time and space relative to humans”.¹

Timothy Morton, who coined the term hyperobject, stresses that hyperobjects are “‘hyper’ in relation to some other entity, whether they are directly manufactured by humans or not.”² Hyperobjects share five properties identified by Morton³: *viscous, nonlocal, molten, phased, interobjective.*⁴ Hyperobjects, Morton says, “force us to rethink what we mean by object.”⁵ “Because we can’t see to the end of them, hyperobjects are necessarily uncanny.”⁶ “Hyperobjects seem to beckon us further into themselves, making us realize that we’re already lost inside.”⁷
With the above aspects of hyperobjects in mind, we experienced and imaged Niagara Falls from five locations – two separate boat trips going deep inside and touching the foot of the thing; descending under the falls and walking through two tunnels, emerging on viewing platforms 46 metres behind the thing; walking beside the falls and elevated above the thing looking down on the falls from the Skylon Tower and from the SkyWheel. Using iPhone 6, waterproof Lumix and waterproof GoPro 3+ cameras, we did partial shots, distance and close-up magnification. These film images of thing data will accompany our paper. Niagara Falls is viscous which means it “stick[s] to beings that are involved with” it. As a site of natural awe, Niagara Falls goes away with its global visitors as thing data – images and affect.

Notes

4. Niagara Falls is viscous which means it “stick[s] to beings that are involved with” it. (Morton, 2013, Loc 106). While there is a local manifestation – three to be exact: the Horseshoe Falls, the American Falls and the Bridal Veil Falls – these are not directly the hyperobject. The Falls is nonlocal and “more substantial than the local manifestations.” (Morton, 2013, Loc 112) Yet, the three falls, the Niagara River, the entire Great Lakes Basin of which the three falls are a part, the receded glaciers of the last ice age, the effects of global warming and a flow rate for Horseshoe Falls that is the highest of any water falls in the world—more than six million cubic feet (168,000 m$^3$) of water falls over the crest line every minute in high flow, and almost four million cubic feet (110,000 m$^3$) on average (average http://www.niagaraparks.com/about-niagara-falls/geology-facts-figures.html)— these features go into its status as a hyperobject. The existence and composition of the falls is molten— constantly shifting and reconfiguring as an observable entity. The Falls is phased “coming and going as a three dimensional entity that we encounter.” (Morton, 2013, Loc 1262) And the Falls is interobjective formed by relations between more than one object. (Morton, 2013, Loc 1491) Niagara Falls was formed when glaciers receded at the end of the last ice age and water from the newly formed Great Lakes carved a path through the Niagara Escarpment en route to the Atlantic Ocean. (http://www.niagaraparks.com/about-niagara-falls/geology-facts-figures.html).

Gagan B. Purohit

From Object World to a Global Object: A Radical Ontontology in Ecocriticism

The paper argues that anthropocentrism should take cognizance of Derrida’s portmanteau term “ontopology,” which has “rootedness of being to a particular place” as its main thrust; other conditions like location, geography, place and landscape also contribute to the construction of the self. Bakhtin’s concept of “chronotope’, like deep ecology, also counts on the idea of interconnectedness of all forms of living beings on this earth. These theoretical propositions, like the theory of object oriented ontology, problematize the issue of man-nature dualism further, thereby offering open-ended options to choose from. The best that can come out from such a gripping issue is peaceful coexistence, not opposition.
of extremities. "Earth First" seems to be the slogan of the day and it is high time we adhered to such an impasse to do away with a sure death arising out of prolonged domination of the earth. Man would do well to avoid the path of dualism to see that the spirit of hard-won pragmatism is not frittered away in another round of geopolitical one-upmanship. Any recourse to the conventional forms of essentialism and constructionist paradigms would be sure to disrupt the peaceful process of the global object.

Gurleen Kaur

Is There a Thing _qua_ Thing? Thinginess and the Contemporary Indian Poetry in English

The post-90s Indian poetry in English explores the domestic terrains where humans find themselves coexisting and interacting with other actors (living and non-living) leading to a complex transmogrification of one labeled state of identity into another from time to time; and rendering the concept of identity combinational, situational, arbitrary, and hence liminal. A thing made up of clay is perceived as a Shivalingam by an Indian and an ashtray by a Portuguese in Eunice de Souza’s poem “Conversation Piece,” revealing the arbitrariness of cultural associations. This paper studies the ways in which the post-90s Indian poetry in English (in which door frames become a lover’s fantasy, a cupboard becomes a hiding place for a child) describes this fluidity of identity. The bodily presence of a lover, the slushy materiality of a body’s interior, a pair of socks as one of the remnants of a dead child, the feminine contours of a Coca-Cola bottle, the nakedness of a clock’s dissected interior, or the aging of the shoebox, reveal that in a de-codification that renders the identifying boundaries faint, the liminal identity of things and beings dwells in the penumbra. The chimeric merging circulates into the entire sphere of existence where humans find themselves thingified while things emit an organicity of being to the extent that humans and things merge as actors into the production of action. Identity is the fluctuating sum total of all—anticipated and unanticipated—attributes and categories (like, object, fetish, commodity, thing, matter, et cetera) that a thing carries, exudes, and transforms. Yet, every moment, function, field of vision, and point of perception serves a purpose in describing an identity which is truthful for the moment in a limited but true specificity of being. As identity exists in motion, the question that the contemporary Indian poetry asks is this: Is there a stable and pure thing _qua_ thing? Or should we shift the focus to study the quality of thinginess that can fluidly encompass such motion-based ways of charting the reality of all existence? At points of all action, all actors (living and nonliving) come together and generate a tangible and tangled network of tensions, ideologies, and forces. The attributes, till now fixated between the categories of living and non-living, find a merged redistribution at the site of their interaction. Viewing things after suspending the encoded habit of naturalized perception reveals new layers of their being, freeing them from limiting standards of classification, and unleashing through them the multidimensional and ontological omni-thinginess of all existence.

Hariom Singh

Capitalism, Sexuality and Commodity Fetish in Chick Literature

The proposed paper aims to explore the commodification and/or de-commodification of female body in Chick literature. The Chick literature is a late twentieth century phenomenon in English literature which explores the various facets of women’s lives in urban spaces that are typically organized and regulated by the market driven material
relations of productions. Using thing theory and insights from current feminist debates the idea is to discuss the materiality of female body in the sexual ecology of the urban spaces. The oft-repeated insistence on the liberation through the assertion of one’s own sexuality has changed our conception of human behavior in terms of love and intimacy and has effected a role reversal of living and non-living things. As the thing theory problematizes the (pseudo)scientific boundary between animate and inanimate things, I propose to examine and locate the female sexuality in the current debate on the changing nature of material relations of productions.

Popular chick lit novels such as The Bridget Jones’ Diary portray female sexuality in an assertive tone arguing for its liberation, but the choice to engage in display of sexuality is not always entirely the subject’s. The idea of free will is always conditioned by the forces of production. Thus every instance of expression of sexuality may not be liberating in nature. The attempt will be to explore the new economies on which sexual/romantic human relationships are functioning and the materiality of body changed over time within their framework. It will try to establish parallels between other genres, say sci-fi novels, to compare and contrast how the insistence on goods in capitalist economies has animated or not animated the human sex relations.

**Hemant Dave**

**Dematerialising Evidence: The Past in Mainstream Indian Historiography**

Indian history writing has seen some of the most dramatic developments in the last several decades. History has steadily and increasingly moved from humanities to social sciences. In the former, evidence, hard (material) facts, was of prime importance and the trajectory of research often moved from evidence to a hypothesis or a conclusion. In the latter, theory, then called model, comes first and the task of the researcher is to see how to look at the evidence in light of the model in question. Since these historians depend more on models and less on evidence, a complete grasp of evidence is not necessary for them: if the model can enlighten us to look even at small data, it suffices. This has led to the negligence of counter evidence and to first-hand dealing with the data. It is not important for an historian, now, for instance, to be able to decipher an inscription, or read a text in the original source, or to decode a coin legend, or to tell apart the differences between various pottery types. Similar changes have also occurred in the discipline of archaeology.

In Archaeology, it being an empirical discipline, the major thrust is on hard material facts. Earlier, archaeologists kept their descriptions in tandem with the material object they were describing and confined themselves strictly to the objects. This can be seen in the plethora of drawings of potteries, sketches of stratigraphical sections, and pictures of more important antiquities, followed by their faithful description, in any excavation report. However, with the onslaught of post-structuralist and post-modernist theories and the questioning of the legitimacy of (archaeological) knowledge, now the pendulum has swung to the other end: the materiality of the object is sidelined or downplayed. Now, for instance, it has been made possible not to know how to date an image or tell its provenance and yet to write ostensibly a scholarly piece how that image was perceived or politically manipulated at a given time.

The present paper attempts to make a plea for returning to the irreducible objectness of the sources/evidence and to reinstate it in the domain of historical/archaeological discourse. The paper further takes a close look at some of the examples that validate this position.
In a 1914 essay on the impressionist method in literature, the Anglo-German author Ford Madox Ford writes that “the impressionist must always exaggerate” if she is to provide an adequate verisimilitude of “that odd vibration that things in real life really have.” It is an injunction that Ford would bear out in his novel *The Good Soldier* (1915), still celebrated for its unreliable narrator, embodied in the ambiguously naïve John Dowell. Insofar as impressionism aims to dwell in the phenomenology of sensual, embodied life, exaggeration might thus be figured as a strategy that brings narrative back to the body. Less descriptive than performative, exaggerations—Dowell’s overemphatic professions of naïveté in the face of his wife Florence’s adultery, or his lavish praise for Edward Ashburnham—have a reflexive function in this novel, by which its fictitiousness comes to the fore. But while Ford’s exaggerations enable a critique of the limits of objective description, they also give way to another effect, one similarly describable in gestural terms: where Dowell’s narrative cannot be trusted, the reader learns to pay attention to what it suggests.

This paper examines the role of gesture in *The Good Soldier*, in relation to impressionism’s engagements with the vibratory real of the material world. Drawing on Giorgio Agamben’s theory of the gesture as “the exhibition of a mediality[,] the process of making a means visible as such”, I suggest that exaggeration is a particularly effective strategy by which Ford’s impressionism explores the mediality of embodied subjectivity. Through practices of exaggeration that frustrate his novel’s trustworthiness (and its readers), I propose, Ford negotiates the nature of fiction’s access to a pure materiality that can only be suggested. One of the aims of this paper is thus to bridge impressionist aesthetics with recent philosophical interest in gesture, including Alexander Düttmann’s *Philosophy of Exaggeration* as well as Agamben’s better known studies. As Hannah Arendt writes, “thought always exaggerates.”

As a form of gesture, exaggeration demonstrates thinking’s inextricability from its material mediation. And yet, as a demonstration of language’s simultaneous excessiveness and inadequacy to the world it describes—expressed especially in fiction, at once of the world and ex nihilo—exaggeration also points to the contingency of our material circumstances as we understand them, and to the possibility of reconfiguring them anew. My reading of Ford’s impressionism thus seeks to show how figures of embodiment in contemporary theory—such as gesture and exaggeration—might reanimate debates about the place of materiality in modernist narrative practice. I ask how a narrative strategy as committed to the evacuation of narrative’s referentiality as exaggeration might be read, however counterintuitively, as a means of engagement with the chaotic, pulsating, vibratory real in which our making and unmaking take place.

Notes

Jasbir Jain
Baramaha, the Lacanian ‘Real’ and Sealy’s The Everest Hotel

Sealy has worked with the cycle of seasons and the Indian poetic form baramaha, a form which embraces both classical and folk traditions, to express the correspondence between human desires and the change of seasons. Written to express both love poetry as well as mystic aspirations, it is the aspiration of most poets to use it. This paper proposes to work with Sealy’s use of this form in a prose narrative, the happenings he invests it with, and the interweaving of ecological concerns with contemporary politics, all emanating from one centre—The Everest Hotel and its ninety-year old master Jed, who once had climbed mountains but now is struggling to hold on to sanity and his fading memory. The hotel itself has long ceased to be a hotel; it is now a refuge, a home for the cast-offs of society, the lonely and the lost.

A representative community of men and women of different ages is gathered here. The place is managed by mission nuns and lies next to the Christian cemetery and the Muslim graveyard. Follow tale of loss, loneliness, illness and death – alongside the change of seasons, the sprouting of seeds, the blossoming of flowers and the arrival of a young child. Outsiders arrive, live on the periphery and die—murder or self-willed? Rivalries, jealousies and desires are disruptive factors. Violence hovers in the background. One wonders, where is the centre? Jed or Ritu? ‘Ritu’ literally means season. What role has Bisht, the police inspector? And his dream which reminds one of Freud’s unconscious and Lacan’s real, a recognition of the inscrutable emotions and latent desires. Wedged between the concerns of mutability and mortality are the narrative’s journeys into time and space, as two strong-willed people – Ritu and Jed – try their strength over cups of tea, soiled sheets and rows of tubs with Brij a frequent visitor.

The Everest Hotel with its association with the mountains, its past history and present dilapidated condition creates an atmosphere of decay which in its turn brings about a confrontation with the fears and desires we ordinarily fail to acknowledge. Spatial metaphors of enclosed and open spaces contrast with the world of nature. This baramaha brings about a disjunction between the world of nature and human lives. It is hoped that the paper will bring out its psychological implications.

Java Singh
Chronotope of Threshold as a Gateway to “the Rhetoric of the Rich Elsewhere” in the Seaside Narratives of Cristina Peri Rossi.

The paper attempts to further the Gynocritics project of feminist criticism forged by Elaine Showalter, that of locating the feminine difference in the texts of women writers within four possible sites– biology, language, psycho-analytics and culture. Space as an inseparable element of the generation, dissemination and absorption of culture, is one such cultural site; viewed through the lens of object oriented theory, space, may be seen as the “virtual proper being” which when worked upon by different “regimes of attraction” is made visible in its local manifestations -- bars, churches, seaside, museums and other relational constructs, each with its own materiality. Space acquires autonomy when its treatment in a narrative is substantive of correlationism.

The narratives of Cristina Peri Rossi, a noted Uruguayan writer who has suffered triple-exile, in her own country as a homosexual and political activist then in Spain as a
**desarraigado** (uprooted migrant), seem to aver such autonomy for space. The titles of two short story collections, *The Museum of Useless Efforts* and *Private Rooms*, and numerous stories evince the writer’s privileging of space as a major rhetoric in the narrative. Her portrayals of space make for apposite “objects” of study within an object oriented framework and may even suggest pertinent concepts and practices for the yet inchoate field of object oriented feminist literary criticism.

Among several possible local manifestations of space, the seaside, with its implicit liminality, serves as the space for localization of several short stories of Peri Rossi; in *La Anunciación*, *Naúfragos*, *El Sentido de Deber*, and *El Tsunami*, the sea and its adjacent spaces take centre stage, whereas, though to a lesser extent, *En la Playa*, and *La Ciudad de Luzbel* also foreground the seaside as an autonomous object. The Bakhtinian literary chronotope of threshold, abundantly visible in the liminal zones of these seaside narratives, actualizes the perceptibility of the sea, throwing light on the exo-relations of the sea with other objects – mouldy fish nets, decaying boat planks, aggressive fish, smooth rocks, colourful pebbles are set in a context devoid of human relationality. In the lexicon of speculative literary criticism, the perceptible autonomy of the sea and seaside spaces could be rendered as an attempt to go beyond human consciousness in order to glimpse the “primary” and “sensible” qualities of space; as an attempt to transgress the “transparent cage” in order to establish a route to “the great outdoors,” to “the rich elsewhere.” Thus, the paper attempts to make a non-correlationist, non-projective mode of criticism.

Such an enterprise of opening up the possible signatures of the text also responds to Graham Harman’s suggested correction of XXth century literary theories which tended to overmine the object or undermine it either by confining it within the introverted house of mirrors proposed by New Criticism or by projecting it as a hologram generated by the concatenated blend-o-ramic house of mirrors of New Historicism and Deconstructionism.

**K. Lavanya**

**Carnatic Music: A Theory and Praxis of Immateriality?**

In Hinduism, theology centres around the materiality/immateriality dualism, with the central tenet being that the real or material world is illusory, *maya*, while spiritual liberation (which is the aim of life) is achieved by transcending the material world. Hinduism appears to privilege the immaterial spirit or *atma* over the material world. And yet, paradoxically, the immaterial is sought to be attained through material objects such as idols, temples, and a variety of sacral objects, motifs and practices. South Indian Carnatic music is one such sacral site where the motifs and practices of Hinduism are recorded, and thus materialized. At the same time, the performance of this tradition of music is considered an act of transcending the material, of reaching the realm of the immaterial. Carnatic musical compositions are a source of Hindu religious beliefs and philosophy, while the *practice* of Carnatic music is a means to realizing/actualizing this religion/philosophy. Thus, the materiality of this music—practice and performance—simultaneously embodies the immaterial. In Carnatic music lies perhaps a clue to deciphering the materiality/immateriality paradox of Hinduism.

This paper will attempt to examine the materiality/immateriality paradox of Hinduism through Carnatic music. It will do so through a representative study of the texts of Carnatic musical compositions, and their performative aspects and practice.
Kalikinkar Pattanayak

Gitanjali: Materiality of Creation and Beyond

Gitanjali (Song Offerings) which saw the light in 1912 and won the Nobel Prize in 1913 is a magnificent work of art by R.N. Tagore. The materiality of this work baffles all: the photographers try to capture its essence in images, the composers, in music and the artists, in graphic form, yet they admit their limitations. The theme of these songs is harmony and beauty inherent in the whole of creation. It is difficult to say who or where the centre is: Man, Nature, God, Psyche and so on.

The reality, the temporal and transcendental, presented in these songs is different from that presented by other Nobel Laureates of the West like W. B. Yeats or T. S. Eliot. Yeats holds in “The Second Coming” that the ‘centre cannot hold’ and ‘things fall apart’. But in Gitanjali the centre holds and things get integrated. Eliot imagines the world to be a ‘waste land’ but Tagore paints, in words, the green land. Tagore is enchanted by beauty and bounty of creation.

The term ‘materiality’ radiates meaning; it connotes ‘the quality of material’ or ‘substance’ or ‘significance’. The materiality of whole of creation is presented in between the lines of Gitanjali. The perceptive reader is always haunted by the desire to know more about creation: the objects, the living beings, the natural phenomena and ‘the motion and the spirit that impels through all beings’. If the reader is a mystic he tries to experience the ‘divinity in a flower and eternity in an hour’. Tagore mingles the concrete with the abstract, the physical with the metaphysical, the beautiful with the good in such a style which is inimitable.

The objective of this paper is to analyse the exquisite lines of poetry in Gitanjali and to reveal that Tagore is concerned not merely with the materiality of things but something more. He intends ‘to strain the blue out of the sky’. In other words he passes from the visible to the invisible, from the audible to the inaudible, from the material to the immaterial. To him music imagined is sweeter than music heard. Tagore does not stop with the description of an object or a thing or a phenomenon but he makes the reader muse over it. An inquisitive reader feels that Theodor Adorno is right – things cannot be separated from the idea of things: things and philosophy go together. Nature very often acts as a catalyst. Tagore escapes from nature through nature. He digresses to focus and focuses to digress. The aim of this paper is to reveal the enigma which goes with the materiality of any great work of art.

Kalpataru Kanungo

Matter: A Philosophical Perspective

The present article focuses on Matter and its derivative, entity (object). The former, as described here, presents a duality, which is explicit only when a conscious agent describes it either as an empirical phenomenon or a metaphysical concept. The empirical world is sensible where the observer apprehends the object using his/her senses. The metaphysical world, on the other hand, presents entities as non-matter Principle, which is an essence. Aristotle has suggested that the Principle has an affinity toward entity and acts as a Causative force. The latter force orients Matter toward an object, even if the object is not present. The process of generating entity, what I call entitization, is aided by another factor, called entelechy that transforms the potential of the Principle to actual
and completes the process of entitization. The sum total of entities in the sensible world comprises what is called “Nature” whose tendency is to diversify and produce varieties of entities. It is possible that Darwinian Natural Selection and mutation engender the process of diversification.

*Kartik Vora*

**Architectonics in the Anthropocene: Saraceno’s Aerocene Project**

“Is there a more elemental fantasy than that of weightlessness and elevation? I’m enthralled by Saraceno’s whimsical collage of people lingering in the skies - resting, conversing, perhaps even living and working in the space created by semi-transparent membranes hovering like clouds…” - Daniel Birnbaum in *Artforum*, 2004

Peter Sloterdijk elaborates the concept of being-with, after Heidegger’s *Dasein*, to suggest an always being–with–another, which entails the existence of a dwelling that has been built and in which we are enclosed. In Sloterdijk’s theory of spheres users produce small envelopes or micro-spheres. As an alternative to the single globe environments of early cultures, Sloterdijk advocates a plural-spherology where co-subjective bubbles live together simultaneously and create what he defines as foam. This implosion of the solitary globe into a foam made up of multi-chamber systems, whose cells are separated by a thin membrane, allow exchange through osmosis. Bruno Latour complements Sloterdijk’s Spheres with his concept of Networks. Together, the networks describe long-distance and unexpected connections starting from local points, and spheres designate local, fragile, and complex “atmospheric conditions.”

In Tomas Saraceno’s environmental sculptures both these notions coalesce in gigantic “clouds” using membranes and elastic connectors that produce the shape of networks and spheres. Saraceno’s versatile architectonic sculptures are informed by art, architecture, natural sciences and engineering. His floating interactive installations propose new sustainable ways of inhabiting and sensing the environment towards an Aerosolar becoming. Saraceno creates kinesthetic bodily experiences by imaginatively
using multiple layers of membranes vibrating--like one-dimensional, flat universes in contemporary cosmologies in theoretical physics parlance. He experiments with materials and the fundamentals of physics: mass, energy, space, and gravity to create a new bodily experience transforming everyday perceptions of space; and one’s relationship with others. The audience, suspended 25 meters above in the membranes that are moving in undulating waves carrying them up and down, goes through, literally, a gut churning experience. By opening up his artistic vision to global participants in his Aerocene project, Saraceno is inviting innovators to achieve emission-free journey. Although in their nascent experimental phase, these installations could as well be precursors to architecture in the Anthropocene age.

*Kazi Ashraf Uddin*

*From Material to Meta-Material: Reading Visual Text (A)Materially*

Thing theory’s assumption of a human-object relationship hints at a post-human condition destabilizing or revising the structural binaries of function/dysfunction, visibility/invisibility. Such hermeneutic reconsideration about the (a)materiality or thingness of object opens up the ontological status of crude materiality, i.e. objects, trinkets and the like, thus propelling our thinking beyond the parameter of the established causal relation between form and function. Such dismantling effect on the sense of composition leads us to the rethinking of the concept of ‘disability’ (alluding to Crip theory), gender formation, affective manipulation and the like. However, thing theory’s incorporation into Media and Cultural Studies problematizes the very conception of matter as bearing the features of physical substance and thus engages itself in an academic debate regarding the metaphysicality of matter/material. Bill Brown terms such metaphysicality as ‘dematerializing effect’. The mediation between material and (non/a)-material pushes us toward a discursive incorporation of cyber/virtual world (‘ghostly materiality’) as the
site of retaining history, memory and inscription. Walter Benjamin’s coinage ‘materialistic historiography’ can serve as a theoretical complement to the understanding of the visual/virtual media as the space of historical inscription, a mode of mnemotechnic which archives the past. This paper deals with two visual texts - 2011 Martin Scorsese film *Hugo* (America) and 2008 short film *The Last Rites* by Yasmine Kabir (Bangladesh). The reading of these two texts assumes an (a)material approach with a focus on materiality of object/thing dyad and materiality of text (in this case a virtual/visual text) itself as the inscriber of history. The reading of *Hugo* illustrates how the crude materiality of waste material (crashed objects of toys) leads to an assemblage aesthetic turning the crashed objects into an automaton. This automaton’s refurbished functionality as the decipherer and retainer of secret message in a new context endorses the theoretical engagement of thing theory. Therefore, this paper intends to locate the events of thingness of objects and desemanticizing moments in what Rosalind Krauss calls a ‘post-medium condition’. Consolidating a titular shift from material to meta-material, this paper reads a Bangladeshi short-film *The Last Rites* unveiling the untold story of sufferings of the workers of Chittagong ship-breaking yard (Bangladesh). This paper considers the short-film as a mnemonic material for archiving the closeted materialist reality of the ship-breaking yard workers. Thus, this paper investigates into the rugged materiality and metamorphosis of objects and the human-object interaction in such transformation. It also looks into the potentials of popular media as a site for archiving the historiography which casts a very significant influence on (re)-shaping our understanding of contextual reality.

**Khandakar Shahin Ahmed**

**Object as Agency: Authority and Exception in Ismail Kadare’s *The Pyramid***

It is not erroneous to say that the paradigm of governance tacitly consolidates itself by means of manifesting objects as agencies of legitimizing power. The objects, attributed with legal sanction, constitute the zone of qualifying the bare life of the individuals. Placing biological life at the centre of its calculations the modern state, therefore, does nothing other than bring to light the secret tie uniting of power and bare life. In order to politicize the bare life objects are established and circulated as bearers of will of the authority. So, allegiance to the object is the allegiance to the authority. Being skeptical to the object indicates a state of disloyalty to the authority and contiguously it stands for non-conformity with the state. Object, therefore, as manifestation of the authority’s will appears as the legal form of what cannot have legal form. It does not subtract itself from the rule; rather, the rule suspending itself, gives rise to the exception and maintaining itself in relation to the exception, first constitutes itself as a rule. Ismail Kadare’s *The Pyramid* vividly portrays how an object (the pyramid) constitutes the zone of exception to consolidate the centrality of the Pharaoh by incurring the voluntary servitude of the people of Egypt. *The Pyramid* is set in Egypt, beginning around the year 2600 BC, the start of the Pharaoh Cheop’s reign. The new Pharaoh casually decides that he does not want to build a pyramid. But his advisors implore him to reconsider. The pyramid is not only a symbol of life, they tell him, but one of power. Without a pyramid there no Pharaoh, and without a Pharaoh there is no order. He *must* build a pyramid. And so Cheop’s relents. He orders the construction of what would remain the tallest man-made structure for nearly 4,000 years: the Great Pyramid of Giza. The pyramid is the pillar that holds power aloft. If it wavers, everything collapses. This paper is an attempt to address the above mentioned points and positions in Kadare’s *The Pyramid*. 
Empiricising Evil: Uncanny Metamorphosis of Innocuous Objects in Agatha Christie’s *Hickory Dickory Dock*

With the industrialization and urbanization of Europe there was a mad rush for wealth as well as what were traditionally perceived as symbols of high culture, as a *nouveau riche* class endeavored to find an entry into traditionally elite societies. This crass materialism later developed into utilitarianism; and objects that were used to gain respect and recognition in an earlier era in the Western civilization gradually accrued value for their utility. This aspect of objects as not just symbols of tradition, but as signs of property with a monetary value ascribed, is a pet motif of crime fiction writers. This induced a shift from regarding the criminal as given to any or every one of the seven deadly sins in Christianity, to regarding the criminal as mainly moved by the third one: greed. Such gross simplification might be unjust to the umpteen crimes in reality and even in noir fiction, but did provide a guideline for most writers of country house mysteries, mainly in the Golden Age of Detective Fiction. While the objects of desire and raison d’être in these novels varied from huge estates and jewellery to paltry sums of money, the crime is often committed using objects of everyday usage, which are hardly ever associated with evil. Thus, this kind of detective fiction, which treated crime as a game, and finding the criminal as a puzzle that amateurs can indulge in, managed to create a feeling of shock and awe in the reader by such novel usage of mundane materials. The writers of these stories, not only used such objects as weapons, but also as clues to the identity of criminals. The cupboard in Michael Innes’s *A Connoisseur’s Case*, the rose in Ellis Peters’s *The Rose Rent*, and the artefact in Margery Allingham’s *The Black Dudley Murder* are just a few examples of such usage. Non-living things, thus, no longer remained lifeless entities but became portent of evil, as by being in contact with the criminal they assumed the characteristics of the vicious individual. However, such presentation of these humdrum objects is not akin to what the romantics or transcendentalists did; as the writers never personified the objects, but depicted how when the utilitarian mentality of humans is governed by greed it has managed to find an ominous use for apparently harmless things. Such depiction of these objects was converted into an art form by Agatha Christie, who is rightly hailed as the Queen of Crime. In Christie's novels, often household goods such as eye drops, tennis racquets, scissors, golf balls, etc. would uncannily metamorphose into objects of menace, and further into symbols of evil. The paper intends to look at this transmutation of objects in Christie's detective fiction, while focusing mainly on *Hickory Dickory Dock*; thereby showing how evil in detective fiction is empiricised, and no longer remains a hazy mythical image.

Thinking ‘Anthropologically’ through the Ruins of Firoz Shah Kotla: Materials in Conversation with Jinns, Ants and Insaan

Thinking through materialities, this paper attempts to ‘narrate the secularity of moral geography’ associated with practices of Jinn veneration in the ruins of an old Fort called Firoz Shah Kotla in Delhi. Firoz Shah Kotla, also known as Kotla, is a Fort located at the banks of river Yamuna and was built by Sultan Firoz Shah Tughluq during the fourteenth century (1354) and also housed the capital of Firozabad. Archives speak that ‘Kotla’ was abandoned since 1490 AD with the defeat of Tughluq dynasty. At present, Kotla is categorized as the state protected monument under the Archaeological Survey of India.
Benevolent Jinns, who accepts the wishes of people, are believed to reside inside the ruins of the Fort. So people in and around Delhi (mainly, Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs) gather here on most Thursdays with prayers and offerings making both the earth and the sky over here crowded. Based on field visits to Kotla, this paper revolves around the objects that are offered to Jinn, things that form the ruins of the fort as well as matter that constitute force in this space. Thus, the paper would try to locate the cosmological and ecological with the ontological. It also aims to blur the boundaries of human and non-human in terms of shared notions of material and affect, for example, as food and prayer shared among birds, animals, Jinns and Insaan. As a whole, the paper is an attempt to rethink relations, time and space as multiple, through materialities.

As aforementioned, the first section of the paper would deal with the various offerings to Jinn. The lamps, incense sticks, roses and sweets placed on shrines may be considered as ‘actants’ (in Latour’s phrase) and the letters, bangles, locks and coins tied on walls could be considered as ‘mediants’ (as Appadurai puts forth) that would negotiate hopes and worries with Jinns. More than being symbols in a system of beliefs, these are associated with the body and senses and are based on non-verbal and intuition-based communication which would discard the subject-object dualisms. The second section would provide the narrations about the presence of Jinns and saints within this abandoned palace, its dark chambers, and rugged walls made of stones and prison gates that house the cry of bats and black ants that appear and disappear upon the carbon. In other words, these very artefacts in ruins is historical as well as contemporary and forge the vital link across past, present and future as well as among the living and the dead. This could be seen as an extension of the concept of ‘Material Vitalism’ (Deleuze and Guattari) towards thinking of the temporal and spatial. The last section of the paper would focus on Matter and Force: its ‘power to affect and to be affected’. For instance, the wind that blows over Kotla’s landscape is said to have healing qualities and is also an alternate form of the Jinn much like the flames of fire burning inside the chambers or the holes in the tall trees in the garden. It is this assemblage of Materialities with the Spiritual and Ecological that the paper wishes to highlight. In so doing, the paper gives way to the agency of objects in producing an Anthropology that is no more Anthropocentric.

Lalan Kishore Singh
War and Materiality: Reading Materiality and Immateriality of Things in World War II Fictional Narratives from North East India

The act of war has its own dynamics. It spontaneously gauges the materiality or immateriality of things. World War II was not just a catastrophic event, but also one which determined what was material and immaterial in the newly evolving world order. It is indeed revealing to examine colonialism, decolonization and nationalism within the framework of historical event prior, during and after World War II to study how things, in its various forms either gained materiality or became immaterial. The north east region of India, especially the hills of Nagaland and Manipur witnessed and participated, almost immaterially, in a War that the ethnic groups of the region were unwillingly coerced into. Historical narratives of the experience of the conflict have largely valued the western political and military experience, undermining the materiality of the local experience of the conflict. Fictional narratives emanating from the region fill this void by examining how, in this period of transition, every aspect of life, religious, political, social and economic, loses their traditional materiality being subsumed by the material value of modernity.
and a new nationalist identity. The objective of my paper would be to examine, through a reading of select fictional narratives from the region, how this dynamics of materiality and immateriality functions and its consequences socially and culturally.

Lekha Roy

Inverted Perspective: Tracing the Subject/Object Dichotomy in the Poetry of Rita Dove

This paper will analyze a recent trend in African American writing that purports to counter objectification of the black self by paradoxically turning the gaze within. It will focus on select poems of Rita Dove, wherein the poet makes nature the subject that speaks to the individual, himself an object in the natural world. Thus, there is an attempt to escape the entrapment of corporeal objectification through a renewed focus on the subject/object divide by putting man between nature and the viewing plane. The poems themselves build on the metaphor of “winged” entrapment as a function of the aesthetics of black skin. Looking out from her poems, as it were, the artist inverts the linearity of the “gaze” that marks the dichotomous relationship between subject/object, visible/invisible, animate/inanimate, dominant/suppressed. In so doing, her poems light up the epistemic origins of racialized embodiment; cognitive consciousness confronts Hegelian objectivity in its attempt to delink racial identity from its roots in the memory.

According to Adorno, man is not an eidos or essence, but is the result of the intertwining of social forces at the linguistic, cultural and ontological levels. In reversing the relationship between man and nature, Dove invests natural objects with a subjectivity that makes it possible to transcend racial hegemony and engage objectively with nature at an individual level. This enables her to reengage with history and memory to formulate the subjective qualities of the African American rendered invisible in the slanderous objectification resulting from an a priori “captivity of individual consciousness” (Adorno). This countering of Kantian epistemology favours a post-modern blurring of binaries, paradoxically serving the purpose of focusing on the black man as an object devoid of any subjective authority in the formulation of norms.

Dove’s attempt to endow nature with a subjective presence in her tracing of the man-nature dichotomy also blurs the distinction between the roles of the poet and her creation. In poems like “The Hill Has Something to Say” Dove looks out from the canvas into her world, and it is the hill that would whisper the secrets of history to whoever would listen to it. In “Parsley” a parrot is endowed with greater linguistic capabilities than the Haitians who cannot even roll an ‘r’. Also known as “reverse perspective” or “Byzantine perspective,” this technique reveals objectification through sublimation, foregrounding what would have been a minor detail in the traditional linear lens. This paper will analyze the use of this technique to emphasise points of divergence and convergence to deconstruct the racialized objectification of Blackness and its metaphorical connotations. In the process, it will trace the philosophical and historical bases of identity as a racialized domain for African Americans.

Manashi Bora

A Materialist Study of Folk Culture with Reference to Mothers, Daughters, and Others

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed a new cross-disciplinary fascination with the material dimensions of the world. Anthropology, archaeology, and geography have been particularly
affected by what has been termed as the “material turn” in the Humanities. Studies of particular commodities (from salt, tea, and tobacco to magical objects), landscape surveys, exploration of urban spaces and urban materialities testify to a growing interest in things and objects as repositories of knowledge about the world around us. Objects or things are produced by a particular culture at a particular point of historical time. So it is debatable as to whether they are to be regarded as objects per se or as cultural artefacts speaking to us from a particular point in time.

Studies of folk life have become important with the “material turn in the Humanities.” *Mothers, Daughters, and Others* is a collection of translated folk tales from different communities residing in Assam--the Bodos, the Karbis, the Tiwas, the Dimasas etc. The proposed paper seeks to explore how objects/things are specific to particular communities of people and are closely linked to that communities’ sense of an identity distinct from others. For instance, items of clothing like *riha*, *chador*, food items like *pitha*, *kaani*, musical instruments like *dhol*, *pepa* are integral to an Assamese identity and figure prominently in these tales. The paper will focus on the object-world of the above-mentioned communities and explore how objects are related to issues of class, caste and gender. The “roh ghar” (the house which an aggrieved woman enters to express her dissatisfaction with something or to demand something) for instance, features prominently in many of the Assamese tales. In a male-dominated set-up, the “roh-ghar” enables a woman to have her say in certain matters affecting her or her family. Objects are thus not important in themselves but as carriers of cultural significances.

*Mandakini V. Jha*

*Durkheim’s ‘Social Facts as Things’ and Pre-colonial ‘Feminism’ in India*

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) in *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895) presented his overall approach to sociological explanation, including his doctrine of ‘social facts as things’. According to him, the foremost rule to study social facts is to treat them as ‘things’, and in doing so sociological research will have the same degree of certainty as natural science research does. Durkheim sees social phenomena as ‘social facts’, as objective phenomena, and considers this the subject matter of sociology. He believed they have distinctive social characteristics and determinants and are external to individuals, as well as exercise constraints on them in the form of laws or customs, and become prominent whenever social demands are violated. Since social facts comprise practices of the group taken collectively, they impose themselves and are internalized by the individual and, as they are collectively elaborated, they constrain individual behavior. Durkheim defines social fact as “every way of acting, fixed or not, capable of exercising on the individual an external constraint.”

Following Durkheim, this paper looks at women’s status in India before colonization, through various texts, folksongs, folklores, proverbs or folk sayings, in different regions of India and situates pre-colonial ‘feminism’ in India in the context of ‘social facts’ to understand gender relations and politics. It argues that despite ‘social facts’ exercising constraints on the lives of women, elite or ordinary, or differently situated women, there were women, while understanding their location in patriarchy, who were successful in deconstructing knowledge through their women-centered understandings of reality within the dominant social structure and its patriarchal value system, contributing to non-modern feminism in pre-colonial India.

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Manish Solanki
Malik Sajad’s Munnu: Texture of Things and Materiality of Artefacts

The present paper, in keeping with the concept note of this conference, seeks to offer a critical reading of Munnu: A Boy From Kashmir, a graphic novel by the Kashmiri Muslim political cartoonist-artist Malik Sajad, with special focus upon the various ways in which the texture of things as raw material for art impinges upon the materiality of the finished artefacts. This graphic novel, following the traditional trajectory of a typical Künstlerroman, charts the artist-protagonist’s growth from adolescence to maturity. The protagonist Munnu, the alter-ego of the writer Malik Sajad, is growing as a would-be-artist in the politically disturbed region of post-1990s Srinagar (Kashmir). He is also portrayed as a representative of Kashmiri Muslim population which is presented as an endangered species of Kashmiri Hangul deer, i.e., the state animal of Jammu and Kashmir, in this novel. During his journey, Munnu struggles to orient himself in his environment blighted due to the political dispute of Kashmir region between India and Pakistan, with Kashmiris left with no space for political self-determination. In his journey from adolescence to maturity, he is also attempting to master his craft of drawing that he has inherited from his father, who is himself an artisan, creating traditional Kashmiri art-motifs, such as chinar leaf and paisley, on walnut woodblocks, which is also the family’s only source of earning. But due to the rise of Kashmiri Insurgency in 1990s and the resultant steep decline in tourism, this traditional artisan-father finds it very difficult to hold on to, and continue with, his craft, and gradually, is forced to compromise with his art. His youngest son Munnu has inherited the skill of drawing from his father while closely observing and assisting him in his daily work. Later on, he finds his niche as a political cartoonist and realises his destiny as a creative artist. What is worthwhile in this journey is that the novel also meticulously captures the way the materiality of art objects impinges upon the process of Munnu’s artistic/psychological growth. The reading of the novel from this perspective offers a fruitful vantage point to investigate the role of materiality in art and to study how the finished artefacts’ own materiality interferes with the human notion of time, space, process, and participation. The novel also offers instances to examine the ways in which materials facilitate, obstruct, disrupt, or interfere with socio-cultural norms prevailing during the moments of their being transformed into created artefacts, and thereby, it shows how artefacts come to take on their unpredictable (unstable?) status, on their own, eschewing the total control of the artist himself upon his art-material and the finished artefacts as well as the culture of their origin.

Mashrur Shahid Hossain
The Tactile Reading

Roland Barthes’ proclamation of the discursive ‘death of the author’ was complemented by his increasing acknowledgement of the ‘materiality’ of writing and ‘active’ readerhood vis-à-vis ‘writerly’ texts. Derrida’s deconstructive dictum that ‘the reader writes the text’ further problematized the ‘abstract’ act of reading and foregrounded its materiality, not only in the sense that reading involves materials (e.g. the book and the bookmark) and muscular movement (e.g. shuffling pages and pressing keys) but also in the sense that reading has thingness, not because it stops, but because it starts working as such. The present paper explores the materiality, more precisely, the ‘tactility’ of reading with a view to underscoring how contemporary (modern to post-postmodern) literary texts engage the audience in the very acts of scripting, of encoding and plotting. Touching
upon the re-organization of structure and materialization of style performed by readers, the paper is divided into three major, overlapping sections. The first one concentrates on the poems and novels that ‘enforce’ tactile reading. This section samples tactile or three-dimensional poetry (e.g. Farhad Fozouni’s Tehran [0002] Poetry, Tegel), network fiction (e.g. Joyce’s Twilight, A Symphony, and Morrissey’s The Jew’s Daughter), and ‘liberture,’ or what Aarseth called ‘ergodic literature’ (e.g. Saporta’s Composition No. 1, and Queneau’s A Hundred Thousand Billion Poems). The second section reads poems and novels that ‘mobilize’ tactile reading. For example, the ‘cut-up’ and ‘fold-in’ methods in Burroughs and Gysin’s The Third Mind, and Burroughs’ Naked Lunch demand readers’ intervention in unmaking sense while the ‘authentic narrative’ in Egan’s novel, A Visit from the Goon Squad, stimulates readers to plot the story. The third section contends that tactile reading, though demanding, even weird or elitist in some cases, has the potential to re-form our perceptions and praxis of reading. On the one hand, the readers’ agency in re-formulating words/phrase/sentences destabilizes, even alters, the destructive contamination of ‘word virus’ (Burroughs), the discursive hegemony through which the establishment scripts and normalizes ideologies and controls cognitive and visceral movements. On the other hand, the readers’ active, or ‘authentic’ participation (or intervention) in re-structuring a plot dismantles monolithic omnipresence of any figure of authority, providing readers, or ‘narratees’ (Todorov) renewed insights into the problematic nature of representation. The thingness of a book or a reading thus re-forms assumed subject-object relations. To begin with: tactile reading is chaotic ...

Meenakshi Kulkarni

Gau Mata: The Commodification of Cultural Iconography

The cow in India is not just an animal. It is a Cow. It has history, religion, culture, and in the present context, politics, associated with it. Hindu mythology invests the animal with attributes of gentleness, materiality, purity, prosperity, prestige and power. The Cow is thus ‘Gau Mata’, an animal revered, deified and worshipped accordingly. Its iconization is ancient heritage for most Hindus. On the flip side, the boundaries of religious symbolism end at the gates of ethnic minorities, where the cow is slaughtered for its meat and its byproducts.

Contextualizing this dichotomy, this present paper analyzes these twin identities of the Cow.

‘Thing theory’ may de-idealize symbols and signs, divesting them of their semiotic coda to reconfigure them as the ‘things’ they are, reclaiming their materiality, refashioning them into objects and re-inventing their cultural constructs. Materialities fashion new modes of thinking, disinvesting objects of their cultural iconization, to bring back things from the realm of ideation, back into the spatio-temporal world of objectively construing meaning from animate and inanimate objects.

This present paper attempts to further apply the construct of things reclaiming their identities from connotation, signification and iconization to throw up possibilities of re-interpreting the representation of cultural iconography through literature.

The two short stories chosen as entry points into the discussion reflect the writers’ understanding of the Cow as imbued with a socio-cultural and religious symbolism and semantic. This paper will closely examine the 2016 Commonwealth Short Story
Prize winner, Parashar Kulkarni’s “Cow and Company” and Raja Rao’s “The Cow of the Barricades” as texts invested with both socio cultural and religious symbolism, raising the bovine from the animal kingdom into religious iconography. Both stories create an awareness of the shattering of the myth of religio-cultural symbolism when the animal in both stories is stripped of its holy signification to translate into material and physical objects. The commodification of cultural iconography thus justifies thing theory’s postulations.

This paper also attempts to travel beyond interpretation of these literary texts, into present day conundrums engaging the militancy of the Hindutva Brigade, their meta-religiosity in protecting the ‘Gau Mata’ from abattoirs and dining tables of both rich and poor ethnic minorities. The Cow as a ‘thing’, as a material object, belies its iconization, and promotes its commodification.

This paper will seek to explore the cultural materialism of the Cow and create the space for the negotiation of materialism versus commercialism, in the wake of the truly worrying spectre of ethnic cleansing in an India of deep cultural diversity.

The two literary texts chosen for the exploration of thing theory also lend themselves to a critical reading of contemporary events. I will attempt to understand the new phenomenon of appropriation of culture and the growing role of violence in the Hindutva agenda of ‘reclaiming’ a ‘pure’ culture for India through the recent agenda of ‘cow protection’ by self-styled gau rakshaks. Another point of departure for this paper is a critique of Veganism as a corollary to the process of retrieving the cow from iconography to its material properties.

This paper will hope to add to the growing body of research into thing theory and present a different approach to the ‘thingification’ of the Cow.

Meenu Gupta
Materialities in Spirit: Unbroken Universe

Mind and matter become expressions of one substance (Deleuze 1990 b). What Deleuze deploys here is a radically historical concept of ‘stratigraphic’ time (Deleuze 1994). Time is actualised in terms of a series of before and after; but time is also the potential (with each new addition to the series) to redefine the whole. Through my paper I am taking up the Deleuzian intensive ‘spatium’ or the potentiality for spaces in time. If matter tends towards stratification, formation of relative stable bodies, it also has tendency towards escape, a line of flight, deterritorialisation or de-actualisation. Life is the protraction of matter, as matter is the contraction of life. Thus mind and matter, life and matter, rather than binary terms, are different degrees of ‘duration’ (Bergson’s), different tensions, modes of relaxation or contraction, neither opposed nor continuous – different nuances, different actualisations of one and the same, that is, ever differing, internally and externally differing duration. Difference generates further difference, because difference inheres the force of duration (becoming/unbecoming) in all things, in all acts of differentiation and in all things and terms thus differentiated. The strong virtual and passive vitalism of Deleuze and Guattari’s intensive and differential does not stop at ultimate elements but insists that in the beginning are intensities and differential relations. (Claire Colebrook 11-12)

These differentials or intensities enter into relation of material capacities to connect through time. Along with these connections there are series of disjunctions or lines of
divergence. So, in addition to the synthesis of connection (producing relation of powers across a space, or territory) and a synthesis of disjunction (creating distinctions between one potential and another, so that one is male or female, this or that tribe), there is also the synthesis of conjunction: all these bodies and powers regarded as parts of a created whole.

The philosophy provides the continuities and connections between things and systems that science ignores in order to focus on measurable and utilizable data. In fact this makes the real communicable and augments the ultimately pragmatic sciences. Thus Deleuze’s proliferated dualisms – mind and matter, space and duration, intelligence and intuition, territorialisation and deterritorialisation – are the expression of a single force; that is one of these terms conceptually underpins the other. Deleuze and Guattari define matter not as substance that goes through change, but as nothing other than a capacity for change and becoming from which substances are formed. There is a capacity or tendency in what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as ‘social machines’ for deterritorialisation, and this capacity is both what can create new territories or stabilities, and what can destabilise or de-form. ‘Man’ is a consequence of territorialisation; for it is only in the assembling of bodies together that something like a kind or type can emerge. But he is also an effect of deterritorialisation; for it is through the liberation from supposedly tribal, national or racial differences that something like ‘man in general’ can be thought of. Instead of regarding life, time and history as the mechanical arrangement of quantities of force, Deleuze and Guattari create a history that explains the genesis of individuals and their social relations.

Monali Sahu Pathange

Objects of Enchantment: Mind and Matter Correlation in the Fictional Writings of Ben Okri and Salman Rushdie

Among the prominent literary voices in the postcolonial arena, Ben Okri and Salman Rushdie have carved a niche for themselves in terms of a search for anti-colonial sentiment. The language of the two writers is bestowed with a range of significations that exalt the common everyday objects to a higher level of sublime enchantment. The magical prose and delusionary writings of the two writers describe objects not merely as mundane items, but as constituents of a material realm which is surreal, sublime, and bewildering at once. For instance, in Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road* [1991] something as common as masks, a recurrent image, acquires the status of hypnotic tool and elevates the tone of the narrative to a heightened level. To quote from the text, “When I looked out through the mask I saw a different world. There were beings everywhere in the darkness and the spirits were each of them a sun” [284]. The object-metaphor of mask becomes an unraveling agent of revelation and enchantment. Magicality is determined not so much by the characters of the narrative but by the objects of the everyday life described in the narrative.

Similarly, in the writings of Rushdie, one could observe certain persistent objects that exemplify exalted prose. For instance, in *Shalimar, The Clown* [2005] the recurrent image of a curtain distinguishes the existence of two juxtaposed worlds - the innocent and the pristine charm of Kashmir from the violent and terror-stricken land of riots. To quote from the text, “By crossing the mountains they had passed through a curtain and stood now on the threshold of the world of truth, which was invisible to most men” [266]. The passage through a curtain brings out a journey from the earthly to the metaphysical. The narrative utilizes such recurrent object-metaphors to create a meditative prose on the state of human existence.
The paper seeks to understand the significance of object-metaphors in the fictions of the two writers. The material worlds described by these writers exert a delusionary influence on their protagonists. Thus, one could ascertain a curious mind-matter correlation, in that; minds get affected almost in an insane and surrealist manner by the objects surrounding them. The questions the paper seeks to ask are – how do objects determine sanity in the postcolonial space? Is it possible to distinguish the everyday objects from the exalted materiality in the postcolonial world? More importantly, how do the two writers bring about a subversion of the mind/matter dichotomy by populating their writings with material objects?

N Nagaraju

The Tani Tribe of Arunachal and Their Material Habitus

I used to wonder as to why a senior administrator from a local tribe, almost as a general case, when moving to allotted official quarters in a remote tribal state, would erect a traditional wooden house with thatched roof in the backyard attached to the quarters which would ‘spoil’ the look and increase the ‘risk’ of catching fire. Those of us from the plains visiting him in the quarters as guests in the day would be received in the front room on sofas and get one kind of impression, but a few others, including almost everybody from his tribe who would straight away go to the attached traditional hut and make themselves comfortable around the hearth sharing a bamboo mug of their own drink and smoked meat, get another feel. Further, there would be very few ‘things’, apart from the disposable bamboo mugs and green leaves in the hut even for the large group of tribals who often come there. It was almost a necessity for the officer.

Why would the ‘officer’ build the wooden cabin and find comfort in such sparse setting along with his kin more than in the plush quarters with ‘proper’ dining arrangement, table and cutlery? The immediate and informed observation would be that the few things, artefacts, ensure him, as an order of supervenience, a familiar social relations and space as against the superficial pointer that they offer a kind of cultural barrier and protect them from vulgar consumerism.

Materiality, as it is framed in such minimal tribal cultural settings and contexts and in the ‘humility of things’, manifests itself not only conceptually but informs us as to how much it underpins the tribal ties, social relations, and belief systems. Such belief systems as rituals of birth, seasonal festivals, marriage etc., require to be traced to their materiality as they, in a Hegelian sense, consistently reiterate their intimate dependence.

This paper will investigate, on that trajectory, instances of material culture of certain sub categories of Tani tribe who, numbering a few lakhs and spread across several states, are settled in greater majority in the border state of Arunachal; it will limit the enquiry to this state as much for that fact as for the cultural practices of the group which recur in kind of continuity and detailed adherence. Jane Bennett’s vital or new materialism will be referred to as a theoretical tool to take the study beyond the pale of anthropological account.

Namita Laxmi Jagaddeb

Things Smile: A New Materialism in the Air

The Thing Theory presenting new materialism, by all accounts, is a historical necessity. Of course, it may have arrived late, the way the art historian responded to Bill Brown at
the turn of the millennium when the latter told her about his working on things (Critical Inquiry, Vol.28, No.1). But the need of the hour could neither have been overlooked nor postponed, because in the hectic present day world, none appears to have time or mind to think of things. Hence is the urgency.

A casual look at history would unfold mind-boggling instances of how things and objects have been subjected to fetishization, subordination, exploitation in innumerable ways. Be it in philosophy, religion or literature, to say a few, they got lost in various kinds of deification, reification, personification and so on, but at no point of time, things and objects were allowed their allotted places and positions. This resulted in things remaining inaccessible to humanity. Such lack of understanding of the nature of things on the part of man led to their utmost subordination and insensible treatment by a consumer society. Now, all the objects and things are valued in terms of their commercial worth to cater to the uncanny greed of a frenzied generation. Not only this, man who boasts himself as the all power subject at the centre of the world of objects and things has already adopted diverse tactics to wipe them off the face of the earth. Presently, the planet is dying while ravaging of earth, air and water continues unabated. Hence is the urgency of thinking of things.

Bill Brown in his article “Thing Theory” has made an emotional appeal for securing a place for things beyond theory, beyond all fetishization and degradation pleading, “Why not let things alone? Let them rest somewhere else – in the balmy elsewhere beyond theory” (Critical Inquiry, Vol.28, No.1).

This longing for relief calls for the need to recognize things as they are. Things exist in their own right. Man has no business to interfere with their rightful existence. A case in illustration is Canadian novelist Ken Mitchell’s “Stones of the Dalai Lama.” Bob, the protagonist, an American Associate Professor of Sociology along with his wife pocketed two mani stones from a cairn in the Tibetan wilderness to keep as souvenirs. On return, the couple considered it a sin, a curse responsible for a number negative happenings to them. But it is his Holiness, the Dalai Lama who dispelled Bob’s fear by terming it an act of disrespect. This changed the mindset of Bob and as he redeposited the stones at their original Place of the Dead, he experienced a new dawn in self-realization.

Thus, man should learn to live among things, not at the cost of things. He should appreciate: existence is co-existence, a delightful life experience. Hence, the need of the hour is a change of attitude, a fresh mind, a new look at things like that of a child. To this end, a comprehensive initiative needs to be undertaken for mankind to embrace the ancient Vedic wisdom as realized in Shanti Bhav (mind at peace with five elements), Sakshi Bhav (the noting mind as non-committal witness) along with J. Krishnamurti’s Choiceless Awareness. It will be a sensible step in the right direction.

Namrata Pathak
Of Spaces and Bodies: Constructing a Discourse of Materiality in the Performances of Manipuri Playwrights – Ratan Thiyam and H. Kanhailal

In the plays of Ratan Thiyam and H. Kanhailal, each space alludes to a narrative, method, story or data in unconventional ways. Their use of space eulogizes complicated networks of “models” or “maps.” Space here is a site of turbulence that encompasses scales of dimensions. It unleashes an array of contradictory messages. It composes relationships outside of defined concepts and produces a grammar of signs beyond “fetishes,
consciousness, essence, being, matter” (Serres: 137). This space draws on the vitality of deviations that elude taxonomies.

Specifically, Thiyam’s concept of space gives birth to a malleable responsibility to create, to invent, to produce some fluctuating tendencies. For example, in *Nine Hills, One Valley*, the woven reed mats that represent the nine hills surrounding Imphal (also the stage lighting) create a strong sense of geography; but at the same time, the mats signify the stubborn materiality of the Meitheis and a thrust of cultural narcissism. The mats also herald a will to risk loss or project a constraint of our interpretive “will to know.” The fluctuation of colours produces a self-wounding laboratory for discovering, as Sarah Kofman puts it, a “storm of difficulties.” In this context, as audience, we are forced to be wily in finding a path that does not exist. Also there is a threat to the romantic aspiration of giving voice to the voiceless in the invasive stretch of surveillance.

According to Jim Mienczakowski, the verbatim and documentary style performances exhibit the potential of cultural reification. However, quite interestingly, this process evokes an ethnodrama, a conversely loaded phenomenon in which a text/multiple texts are created by readers/informants/actors/critics– this ethnographic semiotics renders the performance in a continual process of validation and cuts across culturally specific signs, symbols, aesthetics, behaviours, languages and bodies. The same is true for Heisnam Kanhailal’s *Pebet* (1975) and *Draupadi* (2000), so much so that these plays transgressively blur boundaries of practices, methods, and techniques to advocate a “public voice” that has been emancipatory and educational.

For Kanhailal, representation of the body on stage is an integral act and it involves the act of writing the body as a text. In his thought-provoking essay, “In Ritual Theatre (Theatre of Transition)” (2004), Kanhailal retorts that the body being a site of multiple signs enchants him as it can be regarded as a repository of “the biological evolution of organism-in-life.” It is a crystallization of subsequent oppression and resistance and a locus of transition – “an intra-cultural exercise.” The body can also be a significant element in the “Ritual of Suffering” as it “is imprisoned by the forces of increasing urban sophistication and the “speed” of the time.” In the context of performance, the body is charged with the complexity of energy, biological, social, and creative.

But the questions are many – how does a theatre space embody the critical realities of materialities in a predominantly non-verbal dramaturgy of rhythm, gestures, and moments? How does the performers’ body counter the dominant tension of the time and connect to the spectators in spatial boundaries? Can we say that the West would fail to understand the cultural expressions that are the characteristics of Asian identity? Is the body biologically trained to cope with the ecosystem and natural environment through various performance techniques – vocabulary, dance, martial art, yoga, mantra and understanding of myth?

Nanditha Rajaram Shastry

*What’s in a Shape? Sculpting Cloth into Veil/Turban in Rama Mehta’s Inside the Haveli and Partap Sharma’s Days of the Turban*

Objects, while not having a life of their own, are always signifiers. Depending on the use made of them, and the contexts of their usage, objects become potent symbols. While some symbols are personal, depending on personal experiences of an individual, most are collective symbols of a community.
“Cloth” is a seemingly innocuous object. But, just as “A Rose by any other name would be as Sweet,” will a cloth be the same, irrespective of what it is turned into? No. They would represent different things. For instance, a pair of shorts might not evoke the same respect, as, say, a suit might.

The different meanings of cloth are reflected in literature. For instance, the letter “A” sewn into the frock of Hester Prynne symbolises many things – foremost being the attitude of society towards her, as a sinner and an outcaste.

This becomes even more significant in the Indian context, where cloth is fashioned into as many different forms as there are cultures. A sari, a salwar-kameez, a pair of jeans – all suggest different things.

Cloth might also suggest violence, repression, and/or angst. This comes through in two Indian English novels – Rama Mehta’s (1923-1978) Inside the Haveli (1977) and Partap Sharma’s (1939-2011) Days of the Turban (1986). In Mehta’s novel, cloth, made into a veil, seemingly suggests repression, but actually means much more. The turban in Sharma’s novel becomes a symbol of not just Sikh identity, but also of violence in Punjab, and the angst felt by its people. In my paper, I will look at how the veil and the turban, two shapes sculpted out of cloth, become representations of the attitude of the people who wear it and the representative cultures.

Nirmal Selvamony

Performing Matter

This paper will argue that matter performs in order to remain such. Put differently, the mode of existence of matter is a kind of performance because what we consider matter is in fact, a set of interactions. Gravity, electro-magnetic force, strong and weak nuclear forces are basically interactions performed by any material entity. These are interactions because each involves, shall we say, two parties, the object, and the universe, which may be regarded as a collection of all the other objects. The two parties may be termed, “agent” and “patient.” Being spatio-temporal interactions, they involve specific contexts. What exactly serves the instrumental role in these interactions may be hard to tell but the teleology of such interactions could be variously explained from different points of view. The performing nature of matter is endorsed also by the etymology of such thing-related words as “object,” and “substance.” Originally, these terms referred to one action or the other. If object is something you “throw against,” substance is what “stands under.” In the case of the latter, the raw material out of which a particular object is made stands under the object. There are two entities involved in the act of standing (an agent [the raw material], and a patient, namely, the object, under which the agent stands), a place and a particular time of the act of standing under, instrument necessary to make the object out of the substance so that the object will gain precedence and the substance or raw material will only “stand under” the object, and end (purpose) of such an act. Unlike the etymological meanings of “object” and “substance,” that of the Tamil word, “prouL” is teleological. porul is substance formed by the harmonizing of elements. The harmonizing of the elements that cohere into an object is a veritable physical performance. The teleological implication of harmony valorizes the innate integrity of porul and exhorts us to understand that there could be threats to its integrity and harmony. When we understand material performance through the theory of agency in tolkaappiyam, we learn that such
performance involves intention, which is usually associated only with non-material agency. However, the paper will problematize the role of intention in material agency and discuss the possibility of continuity of the material and the non-material as suggested by the term *porul* itself. Such ontic continuity challenges not only anthropocentrism (even as ecocriticism does) but also ecocentrism privileged by Deep Ecology and helps look beyond both in the direction of agency. If performance, intrinsic to matter, is teleologically oriented, then human relationship to matter has to be sensitive to such orientation. The sobering effect (of the material turn in critical theory) on the critical theorist (drunk with non-material “mind” and “seme”) could be an effective challenge to the degradation matter has suffered in the hands of the philosophers and critical theorists, only if the turn proves to be a performative one. Unless matter is allowed to perform itself, the material turn we have taken might not free matter from enslavement and destruction.

Omendra Kumar Singh

*Materiality of the Text: Thinking beyond “Worldliness”*

Referred to as ‘linguistic turn’ in literary theory, Structuralism suggested that human experience is only possible through individual’s place within systems of meaning, such as language. Structuralists believed that if formal structures are carefully identified and scientifically analysed, they can produce reliable truths about the language and the world. Thus, the radical import of structural linguistics consisted of its logical import of severing word from the world. However, Post-structuralism rejected structuralism’s methodology and ambition. Jacques Derrida challenged the scientific claims of structuralism, emphasising instead that language is a system of differences in which signification or meaning is perpetually deferred, and cannot be reduced to any structure. Nonetheless Post-structuralism shared structuralist account of language that the real, material world is only accessible through language. Derrida’s statement that language does not transparently reflect the social and historical world, because “there is nothing outside of the text” generated much controversy because it appears to deny that there is a real world outside of language.

Critiquing Derrida’s concept of textuality Edward Said states that Derrida moves us into the text. Said asserts that all texts are worldly, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and of course, the historical moment in which they are located and interpreted. Said’s worldliness refers to an attempt at greater transparency in writing, “a knowing and unafraid attitude toward exploring the world we live in.” Rejecting Said’s charge, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that Said’s critique of Derrida betrays a “profound misapprehension of the notion of textuality.” Instead, Spivak coins the term “worlding” which refers to the way in which writing in general or textuality has provided a rhetorical structure to justify imperial expansion.

The present paper has a two-pronged take on Edward Said’s concept of worldliness to demonstrate that the dichotomy between the text and the world is a false construct. Firstly, drawing on Paul de Man’s concept of the “materiality of the letter” it argues that language is material. De Man argues that our understanding of what is real is actually the use of a complex system of tropes. Thus what we take to be an experience of the material world is in fact an experience of the materiality of the word. Secondly, it is argued in the paper that the event of reading is material for there is always ideological operation at work in the text. As Louis Althusser suggests, texts are material precisely because they
do not transcend the ideological circumstances under which they are read. We are never so much in ideology as when we believe ourselves to be outside it. The paper concludes that the common-sense assumption that there is a stable and transparent correspondence between language and the so-called real world is bound up with the history of imperial expansion. The transparent model of language makes itself available to represent and constitute the world as a stable object of western knowledge.

Payal Jain

Indigenous ‘Matter/s’ in a Foreign Land: A Reading of Objects in Immigrant Fiction

Materiality has had an intriguing relationship with humans since the beginning. We are not only surrounded by materials in our everyday life, but even made up of matter. However, across cultures, materiality has been projected in contrast to the essence, the desirable, and in a way, the goal of human life. Being the most tangible and visible aspect of human life and, yet, the most ignored and demeaned as well, things/objects have curiously lived in the background in the dominant cultural and philosophical discourses for a long time. The recent critical interest in materialities, however, has opened new possibilities to read and reread cultural texts and representation with things, matter and objects as the focal points. While the new materialist approaches are as diverse as anyone can imagine, this paper underlines how ordinary, everyday objects from homeland emerge as ‘things’ in a foreign land. According to the discourses of new materialisms, objects become things and assume materiality when they emerge out of their ‘humility’ and assert their presence with some kind of ‘excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference’. In the words of Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, the editors of New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency and Politics, significance is attached to a “materiality that materializes, evincing immanent modes of self-transformation that compel us to think of causation in far more complex terms; to recognize that phenomena are caught in a multitude of interlocking systems and forces and to consider anew the location and nature of capacities for agency.” The present paper uses this premise, and depicts the altered status of ordinary things in the immigrant experience. Immigrant experience is inevitably marked by a sense of loss, and this loss is mostly of a familiar materiality. Novels like Americanah, The Namesake, Bodies in Motion broadly play upon this notion. Using the tropes related to embodied experience, like food, hair style and clothes, this paper tries to highlight how humans and nonhumans, ideas and matters, subjects and objects interact with each other and influence the identity of each other in a context that is not the familiar and habitual one. The attempt is to challenge the hierarchical binary opposition between the humans and the things, the so-called subjects and objects as agency becomes a contested issue in this framework.

Piyush Raval

Derrida and Painting: Deconstructing the Western Philosophy of Art

The proposed paper seeks to examine Derrida’s concern with things in his study of a number of paintings in La Vérité en Peinture (1978), translated as The Truth in Painting (1987) and Mémoires d’aveugle: L’autoportrait et autes ruines (1990), translated as Memoirs of the Blind: The Self Portrait and Other Ruins (1993). By founding the relationship between written word and image here, Derrida critiques Kant’s idea of inside-outside, Heidegger’s idea of truth and the whole history of Western aesthetics. In Critique of Judgement (1790), Kant had used the Greek term parerga to exclude things such as the gilded frames of paintings, colonnades of palaces, drapery on statues as ornamental adjuncts or peripheral
to aesthetic consideration. Derrida considers such things parergonal, adjunct and essential in giving aesthetic judgement. He also encounters the problem of representational thinking, derived from Plato, in making sense of painting: art as naked thing, without any use value and as a symptom for a wider sense of reality, as in Heidegger’s interpretation of Van Gogh’s painting “Old Shoes with Laces” (1886) in *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1935) and Meyer Shapiro’s critique of this interpretation in *The Still Life as a Personal Object* (1968). Both *The Truth in Painting* and *Memoirs of the Blind*, the paper argues, reveal contemporary concern with things (shoes, laces, frames, etc.) and by grounding philosophical analysis on them, fulfill too Adorno’s claim about how things and philosophy can belong together.

Prakash Joshi

‘Objectifying’ Jewish Consciousness: The ‘Matter’ of the Politics of Antisemitism and Zionism in Howard Jacobson’s *The Finkler Question*

(Re)inaugurating and enunciating ‘Thing Theory’ in our Century in his essay with the same title in issue 01 of volume 28 (2001) of *Critical Inquiry*, Bill Brown begins almost with a ‘deconstruction’ of deconstruction to free ‘objects’ from varying cultural and other material associations in order to show those objects in their pure and open ‘thingness’ (1-2). He carries out this ‘deconstruction’ in a very ‘material’ way, by talking of objects ceasing to be objects on their breakdown and the consequent shift or change in their “relation to human subject” (04). Here, at this stage of the ‘defunct’ object, appear “a latency” and “an excess” in the form of an indefinite and infinite number of continually changing subject-object relationships that had always lain dormant in the object even before it became defunct (05). Thingness of an object, as Brown explains, emerges out of the “amorphousness” and the “anterior physicality” in “the before and after of the object” (05). John Plotz places this thingness of objects in “the margins – of language, of cognition, of material substance” (110). Through his analyses of two of the canonical texts of Thing Theory – *Things* and *Things That Talk*, Plotz says that these margins, which are the zones of things, speak of “the requirements of historicizing objects so that we can reconstruct what sort of significance powerful actors found in them or attached to them” (111). In some major ways, thus, the domain of things is a domain of the unclassified and declassified and defunct objects/things waiting to be variously (re)classified and accordingly (re)constructed into objects.

Here, at this theoretical juncture on the continuum of theorizing, enters Julian Treslove, the protagonist of Howard Jacobson’s *The Finkler Question*, with his weird consciousness at the start and goes on with all that happens to and around him in the course of the narrative. His consciousness, weird in the usual sense of the term for one obsessed with ‘objects’, is there in a state of thingness at the start: “He was a man who saw things coming. Not shadowy premonitions before and after sleep, but real and present dangers in the daylit world. Lamp posts and trees reared up at him, splintering his shins. Speeding cars lost control and rode on to the footpath leaving him lying in a pile of torn tissue and mangled bones. Sharp objects dropped from scaffolding and pierced his skull” (03). Women he “found beautiful...shattered his calm”; and his “faulty chronology” rendered his “clocks all wrong” (03). From here at the start to the moment he meets Hephzibah, it is a journey that slowly unfolds him through his associations with Sam Finkler, an anti-Zionist Jew, and Libor, a nonaligned Jew. Every Jewish matter is a ‘Finkler’ business for him – a “Finkler Question” or a “Finklerish Conspiracy” (17). All this Finkler matter or business turns meaningful to him after, around halfway through the narrative, he meets
Hephzibah who brings meaning and ‘objectness’ to his otherwise ‘thinglike’ existence/ consciousness so far (130 and onward).

The paper examines, in the light of the considerations of Materialities and Thing Theory, the long and subtle journey of Julian Treslove’s consciousness along his transformation from the ‘secularish’ (and, therefore, non-objectlike) Christian identity to the adopted Jewish. At another level, the paper discusses the issues of Antisemitism, Judaism and Zionism through their transition from thingness to materiality for Julian Treslove and for the reader reading his (Treslove’s) history in the narrative.

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Prasad Pannian

Species Thinking and Vibrant Materialities: Reading Dipesh Chakrabarty and Jane Bennett

“The ecological thought imagines interconnectedness, which I call the mesh. Who or what is interconnected with what or with whom? The mesh of interconnected things is vast, perhaps immeasurably so. Each entity in the mesh looks strange. Nothing exists all by itself, and so nothing is fully itself.” This paper will take off from this idea of interconnectedness offered by Tim Morton and examines the affective intensities between humans, objects and things.

By way of representing the interface between people materialities and thing materialities, this paper examines the notion of assemblage as it is represented in select narratives. Largely drawing on Dipesh Chakrabarty’s writings on climate change and Jane Bennett’s Vibrant Matter the paper identifies the importance of vibrant materialities of objects and things in select films and narratives. It is important to note that both these writers are proposing the possibilities of a New Humanism by pushing the limits of the hitherto known human contaminated by all its sanguinary aspects of the past. While Chakrabarty draws insights from climate scientists and argues how humans have become a geological force and how important it is to develop non-ontological ways of thinking human, Jane Bennett proposes “greener forms of human culture and more attentive encounters between people materialities and thing materialities.” She examines how certain objects become vibrant things with certain effectivity of their own. The paper argues that it is important to conjoin the thoughts of Jane Bennett and Dipesh Chakrabarty in order to explore the possibilities of a New Humanities.

Preeti Bhatt

Skinning Them Alive: Objects and Objectification in Alice Munro’s “Vandals”

The present paper examines the Canadian writer Alice Munro’s story titled “Vandals” from the collection Open Secrets (1994) with a focus on the themes that dominate the story – taxidermy and pedophilia. Both taxidermy and pedophilia are an indication of nature’s innocence and adult human’s manipulation and lack of compassion, and involve the objectification of living beings. The description of objects governs the narrative –
things that are associated with a taxidermist’s trade, books on taxidermy, and stuffed
dead bodies of animals and birds. The narrative also hints at sexual abuse of children as
the adult narrator Liza revisits the house and woodland of Ladner that was neighboring
to Liza and her younger brother Kenny’s house when they were kids.

Ladner, a passionate but reclusive taxidermist, maintained a sort of nature reserve of
unproductive land, mostly swamps and bush in Stratton Township. His wife Bea
came friendly to the two kids who often visited Ladner’s land to observe him as he
mechanically performed the stages of skinning, disemboweling, stuffing and mounting
of the dead bodies of birds and animals. Ladner was intentionally cruel also to his wife
as he ridiculed and verbally abused her in front of the children. His freakish passion for
taxidermy concealed another side of his personality – his unnatural attraction towards
children, which, as the narrative suggests, was experienced by both Liza and Kenny. The
narrative contains a hidden subtext that hints at the young Liza’s perplexed struggle to
comprehend Ladner’s repulsive actions which, probably, Bea intentionally overlooked.

Many years later, at Bea’s request, the grown up and happily married Liza visits Ladner’s
house, when Ladner is in hospital waiting for a bypass surgery of his heart, and almost
about to die. Inside the house, as her husband Warren feels awed by the stuffed dead
animals all around, Liza calmly vandalizes the house, destroying everything deliberately
and heartlessly, and rings Bea up to describe the state she has found the house in. Liza’s
fury and her violent outburst appears to be a mature person’s reaction to what she has
undergone in childhood, her belated but justified revenge for being treated as an object of
an adult’s sexual desires when she was a child. Her systematic wrecking of the dead stuffed
animals with their uncanny resemblance to those alive is an expression of her pent up
feelings of outrage and injustice that had been smothered by Ladner as he molested her.

The natural landscape near and around Ladner’s house forms the locale and setting of
the story. Beautiful in their abundance and luxuriance, the objects described – the trees,
plants, flowers and undergrowth – however, point to undercurrents of meaning within
the narrative. Ladner’s inhuman nature and his resemblance to the dead birds that he
stuffs, is painfully noted by the young Liza as she is physically abused by him. Liza’s
psychological turmoil as she grows up is reflected through her decision to convert to
Christianity soon after she has completed high school. The paper examines the complex
and detailed portrayal of objects in Munro’s story, where cruelty and insensitivity makes
people no different than the objects and things that they crave to possess.

Preeti Maneck
An Ecological Reading of I. Allan Sealy’s The Everest Hotel: A Calendar

In this paper I suggest that I. Allan Sealy’s The Everest Hotel: A Calendar is an ecological
critique of the forces of urbanization and modernization in post-colonial India. The setting
for the novel is in a small town of Drummondganj which is situated at the foothills of the
Himalayas. The action takes place at The Everest Hotel, where most of the characters are
located.

Nature itself is a major character in the novel, and Sealy shows how man is located within
the framework of nature and is governed by the systems of nature. The novel is concerned
with the degradation of land due to deforestation and its subsequent effect on the climate
and the life of the people living in the area. The novel begins and ends with the image of
women carrying a headload of wood from the forest in order to sell it in the cities. Within the novel, Sealy has shown the organised manner of deforestation and the protest by the natives against this measure. There is another sub-story about the dam, a development initiative by the government, which has led to submerging of numerous villages. Another important strand of the story that forms the backdrop to the main story is that of the movement for a separate hill state. This happens because the people in the valley town feel that they are not getting any benefits from the development processes initiated by the government and need to have a stronger voice so that their needs are taken into account.

Sealy's concern for nature is woven into the structure of and book; drawing on the Kalidasa's divisions of seasons in *Ritusamhara* Sealy has titled the chapters with names of the seasons, with the story beginning and ending with the summer season, completing an entire round of seasons of the year. Chapters begin with lyrical descriptions of nature and its beauty in minute detail so as to highlight its beauty and the effects of climate changes on nature.

Sealy has also used folk traditions of the Bengali folk poetry of *baramasih*, which depicts the effect of different seasons to depict the story of failed love story of the central protagonist, Ritu, who is also named after the seasons. She is a botanist who sketches flowers as a hobby. She is the one who brings healing to Jed, the ailing owner of the Everest Hotel. Jed is an explorer and collector of flowers from the Himalayas. As the novel opens he is on his death bed, but with Ritu’s entry in his life as his care taker he reverses his decision to give up eating and this gives him a new lease of life.

I suggest in my paper that Sealy has cast Jed in the mould of the Fisher King, an ailing man who has lost his potency. His affliction is reflected in his kingdom, The Everest Hotel and its motley group of inhabitants, and by extension of the allegory, the valley town of Drummondganj which represents the post-colonial India, has become a wasteland. The ecological imbalance in nature is a result of man’s colonizing and draining of natural resources.

**R. Radhakrishnan**

*Anthropocene and the Crisis of Agency*

“Oh my God!, what have we done,” or more appropriately in the passive voice, to suggest the inadvertent ambivalence of agency, “what has been done by us?” is the anguished, horror-struck cry of the human *hegemon/cogito* in the age of the Anthropocene. What should we do, and what should be done now to undo the enormity of what we have done? In whose name, under what *imprimatur* should the undoing be conceived and validated? How should the human even presume to undo when all it has done has been an infernal undoing? Paralyzed and chastened by the critical knowledge that it has been “in the way,” how should the human as *hegemon/cogito*, realize “getting out of the way” as the way out of the crisis, without either *hubris*, or the self-sanctioning passive aggressive piety of humility? How is the being in the human to understand, acknowledge, and commit to answerability namelessly, in a mode of what I have been calling “exilic double-consciousness?” After such knowledge, what praxis? What is demanded in the Age of the Anthropocene is a disjunctive mode of action where the doer does not really do on the basis of a permissible sense of agency underwritten by a reliable knowledge base. Neither passive vehicle nor agentic doer, neither benevolent hegemon nor custodial trustee,
neither spokesperson nor spoken for, the “human” in the Age of the Anthropocene has to find a way to be non-agentially agentic.

In his poignantly prescient book, THE GREAT DERANGEMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE, Amitav Ghosh makes the case that contemporary fiction has for the most part stayed away from the theme of climate change for lack of generic creativity. How is climate change to be talked about, described, narrativized without reference to a human nexus? What would be the appropriate point of view: omniscient narrator, first person, second or third person? What would the fiction be about and what would be its representational onus? Climate change is not really “about” its effects on human civilization: the scale of that “other story,” as Dipesh Chakrabarty has theorized eloquently, is not reducible to anthropocentric plotting and story telling. Tsunamis and earthquakes, volcanoes and landslides are not really “about” anything at all. The human can neither speak for nor about climate change: all eco-mimesis is yet another ruse of representation or ventriloquism mired in the pieties of humanism. The challenge here is not just technical: it is fundamental and epistemological. Is there even a story to tell, and if so, for whom? “The great derangement” is in fact the derangement of the genre known as Life as we have lived so far. So what next, in a context where the very word “next” has no meaning? What is called for is a double-conscious writing under erasure, or “non-writing” committed both to presence as well as the absence, the relevance and the irrelevance of the human. In “being there,” the human has to find a way of “not being there.”

**Rajan Joseph Barrett**

**Thingness of the Indian Government Postcard**

With the advent of the Postal System in India, the postcard was a vehicle of communication, not only for those who wanted to economize but also for the poor, and those who perhaps could not write, but got people to write for them. Thus the postcard seems to have a life which was integral to many citizens.

The system of communication also ensured a writing public who kept writing and communicating the written word though a transparent medium, which could be read by anyone, sometimes even by those it was not meant for. The writing on the postcard could be a line or it could be cluttered over with by fine writing trying to get the maximum information across for the cheapest price may be a quarter anna initially and then five, ten, twenty five and fifty paisa. The culture of noticing beige coloured postcards with the stamp of the Indian Postal system printed on its right hand corner seems a sight slowly disappearing due to the emails, and mobile phones.

Liberalization and Globalization of the economy brought in both technological and economic change to India, and cultural change was the by-product. Besides, the disappearance of loose kerosene, and such professions like Dhobis, the near disappearance of the postcard is a cultural item that has been a part of the materiality of communication for the common people across languages, and seems to be on the verge of extinction.

My paper considering ‘thing theory’ recalls Bill Browns’: ‘We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the windows get filthy, when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily’ (Brown 2001, 4). It is not only the thing called a postcard but a cultural way of life
which seems to disappear with it today: the writing of a postcard, the reply postcard sometimes sent, the preservation of postcards, the reading of postcards aloud to people who were illiterate, and the writing of postcards for people who were illiterate. I do not think that I would like to romanticize the postcard in any way but consider the utilitarian value across class, caste, gender and region as a small but significant instrument of governmental assistance which had a life for more than a century in the subcontinent. The ‘thingness’ of a postcard is much more than just a piece of beige card paper but associations, collaborations, a system etc. which all fit together to make it possible to connect. While considering the thingness of a postcard the nonmaterial associations with it are in many ways part of its ‘thingness’ – the postal system, the transportation system, the linguistic system and of course the context for messages to be sent. While the postcard disappears, some of the systems still will continue but they were contributory factors in the ‘thingness’ of the postcard.

Rajashree Biswal

The Question of ‘Art Object’ in ‘Contemporary Community Based Art Practice’ Or the ‘Interventionist Mode of Community Based Art Practice’ in India in the Post 1990s

This paper proposes to explore and engage with the idea of ‘art object’ in the ‘contemporary community based art practice’ or the ‘interventionist mode of community based art practice’ in India in the post 1990s. ‘Contemporary community based’ art practice in India evolved as a novel form of socially engaged art practice; here the ‘communicative interaction’ between the artist and the existing community or the contextually formed community is of crucial significance. Moreover, the community instead of being a passive viewer of the art object becomes an active participant along with the artist; they engage with the issues of the community through the process of art making. It thus signifies the work of art as an ontological shift to “a process of communicative exchange rather than a physical object” (Kester, 2004, 90).

However, although this practice is premised on ‘communicative interaction’, many a time it manifests itself as installations, performances, conceptual art, or as hybrid forms of art. Hence, one cannot completely waive out the possibility of ‘art object’ here. The production of ‘art object’ may or may not be the intention or may emerge as a byproduct of the process; often it becomes an important ‘trace’ signifying the experience, engagement and the process of the community based art practice. Sometimes the objects generated are ephemeral, cheap and of unpredictable materials or may have concrete presence in the community with functional and aesthetic significance, inviting for new critical discourses in art. Grant H. Kester and Claire Bishop have taken varied positions regarding the significance of art object in this art practice. In my Ph.D. research work, I have argued that in contemporary community based art practice, ‘the expanded field of communicative interaction between the artist and the community, production of agency(ies) and production of art object are inseparable and contribute towards the larger aesthetic effects’ (Biswal, 2015).

Hence, it is important to explore: how do we understand the ‘art object’ in community based art practice, in the short term and long term community based art projects, in the performance based ephemeral community art projects, or in the open ended community based art projects? How is this art object similar to or different from the modernist gallery based art objects and have varied critical functions? This paper intends to understand the distinctness of ‘art objects’ in this practice in three registers: as interventions in the
production, circulation and consumption of art due to the participation of the artist and the community in it; the ‘dematerialization’ of art object, and the ‘agency’ of these objects in their function, circulation, and ‘(changing) social life’ within the community space as well as in the larger cultural discourse. It will engage with the community based art projects of Navjot Altaf, K. P Soman and Sanchayan Ghosh with theoretical references from Kopytoff, Alfred Gell, Bruno Latour and others.

**Rakesh Desai**

**Materiality as Identity: A Reading of Seamus Heaney’s Poetry**

Materiality is immensely relevant to the artistic/ literary mode of representation of reality as the literary creative mode aims at a synthesis of the categories like the particular/the universal; the abstract/ the concrete; the subject/the object. Though often an accentuated privilege is offered to either of the terms depending on who the artist or which the case is, materiality is an element integral to the literary inscription of reality. In this context, the Irish poet Seamus Heaney’s (1939-2013) poetic quest for identity appears to operate significantly through the social and the historical dimensions, which are peopled with things. Native Irish agricultural conventions, evoked in the anthologies like *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) and *Door into the Dark* (1969); or the bog poems, a study into the Irish past, of *Wintering Out* (1972) and *North* (1975); or the poetic response to the troubles in Irish history, and the childhood memories, in *Station Island* (1984); or the sense of borders and being in-between in *The Haw Lantern* (1987); or the sense of balance between history and an object in *The Spirit Level* (1996); or the devastating connotation of the material destruction in 9/11 terror attack of “A Shiver” in *District and Circle* (2006) weave the material fabric of a thing, an object—a kind of objective subjectivity in the poetic mode. Possibly the sense of Irish identity, pronounced specifically in native Irish rural, agricultural contexts; and the suffering of the Roman Catholic minority in Irish nationalist context, specifically in northern Ireland, lead to the formation of the material axis of Seamus Heaney’s quest for identity.

**Rama Rani Lall**

**Memory, Magic and Material Things in *The Glass Menagerie***

In modern times many social disciplines have foregrounded the importance of the material world. A number of new materialisms and “thing theories,” have emerged to highlight the value of objects and things in the world. The question often discussed is whether human beings are only things among other things, in the world. This paper attempts to explore how material objects like houses, food and clothes have a profound effect on human behavior and achievements. In today’s capitalistic culture, material possessions determine the status of a person in society. Yet, no one can deny that without a certain minimal level of material support, no worthwhile achievement is possible. Tennessee Williams is one of the most popular playwrights of America. His first successful play *The Glass Menagerie* was published in 1945. It still remains one of his best plays. The writer calls it a “memory play” and assumes the role of a magician, who can turn back time. His theory of expressionism is propounded in the introductory production notes of the play. He believed that realism is not the key to reality. He says, “The straight realistic play with its genuine frigidaire and authentic ice-cubes, its characters that speak exactly as its audience speaks corresponds to the academic landscape and has the same virtue of photographic likeness.” Williams knew the “unimportance of the photographic in art: that truth, life, or reality is an organic thing which the poetic imagination can represent or suggest, in essence, only through transformation.”
The valuable material things that helped him convey his message are lights and music. The lighting changes with the mood of the characters. The stage is as dim as the participant's lives. The tone, strength, and occurrence of the lights have the power of emotional emphasis. The musical accompaniment of *The Glass Menagerie* is another element of Tennessee Williams' expressionism that characterizes his drama. Its music is like the circus music that expresses the surface vivacity of life and the underlying strain of immutable and unexpressive sorrow. The depiction of the Wingfields' apartment and its ugly uniformity depresses Tom and makes him frantic to escape. On both sides of the building, dark, narrow alleys run into "murky canyons of tangled clotheslines, garbage cans and sinister lattice-work of neighbouring fire escapes.

For Laura, the alley represents the ugly world from which she retreats to gaze into her tiny glass figures. For Amanda, too, the alley is the world of her present hopeless poverty and confusion from which she retreats into her make-believe world of memory and pretence. Thus, nearly every item of the setting is symbolic – even the Paradise Dance Hall, across the alley. This play, unique among William's dramas, combines poetic and unrealistic techniques with grim naturalism to achieve a delicate effect of compassion, fragility and frustration. It remains his most sensitive and effective poetic work. With the help of solid material things and objects he has succeeded in writing a prize-winning play.

*Ramkhok Raikhan*

**The Place of Rational Autonomy in Moral Reasoning**

The divergent positions regarding the ontological status of moral values show that Hume's is-ought divide is debatable. Moore advocated the view that values were non-natural entities or properties. However, his position has been critiqued with the increasing advocacy of the historicity of values, which bring them close to factual experience following Charles Larmore. According to both perspectives – despite their differences – values have a tangible entity like character (Charles Larmore). This trend is a movement towards matter as the source of moral and social norms which regulate the order of society. A change in material conditions results in the change of perception towards one's own culture following Marx. But although such a naturalistic perspective makes values tangible, it does affect the autonomy of reason and its role in moral decision making. This poses a significant question: Is it possible to reconcile moral values as tangible entities with human freedom? Kant's attempt to do so by integrating nature (determinism) and morality (autonomy) in his work *Critique of Judgment*, is not entirely plausible. The distinctness of nature and morality must exist without which there is no possibility of morality, if morality is supposed to be the activity of rational conscious choice. Thus, in effect I will argue for fact/value distinction where rational autonomy has a positive role to perform in deciding 'ought'. The relation of 'ought' and 'is' is not to be construed as 'ought' dependent on 'is' (Moore) but rather 'ought' being an expression of rational autonomy, it implies 'can' (Kant). I will conclude by discussing the implications of such an approach to thinking about values as entities.

*Rashmi Tikku*

**Spinning the Loom of Freedom: Gandhi and the Charkha**

The paper will analyse Gandhi's grasp of the charkha and how he consciously created a new discourse and semantics around it. The charkha is such a ubiquitous presence in India's freedom struggle that its transition from a functional mechanism to a symbol
is almost imperceptible. Gandhi’s letters written to the sceptical Tagore to convince him to espouse the cause of spinning are worth close analysis because in these letters Gandhi shows an almost Heideggerian grasp of charkha as an object that transcends its materiality. Gandhi’s persuasive rhetoric in these letters is a dramatic act of philosophising about the inherent dynamism of things and their fluid meanings. Rebutting Tagore’s critique of the faulty economics of the charkha, Gandhi focuses instead on charkha as an episteme that would encompass an entire nation, uniting a subaltern peasant, a poet, an intellectual and a social activist. Weaving on the charkha for Gandhi is much more than economics. He argues that it is an almost spiritual and meditative act that each person does in isolation but also communally in spirit. Gandhi goes on to argue that the erstwhile obsolete individual charkha, though a time consuming and laborious act was also meditative and spiritual. As a poor bricoleur in a house with broken down tools Gandhi argues that he uses the discarded objects in the national backyard to fashion a new consciousness. As a consequence, for him, by the making and wearing of khadi an indigenous tool (the charkha) becomes an instrument to throw off the borrowed yoke of slavery and wear proudly a new indigenous nationalism. In these letters it is apparent that for Gandhi the charkha becomes a practical, ready to hand tool to knit the subaltern proletariat with the intelligentsia. To understand the dynamics of the position of charkha in the Indian freedom movement Raja Rao’s novel, Kanthapura is an interesting corollary and counterpoint. Besides the letters between Tagore and Gandhi the paper will analyse how Raja Rao’s novel of a small South Indian village re-enacts the change of a people’s consciousness through the act of spinning. Though Gandhi doesn’t appear directly in the novel Raja Rao has created a work which recalibrates the freedom movement from the point of view of spinning, which becomes a smithy in which a consciousness of a nascent nationalism is forged. Kanthapura will be analysed in the spirit of Ngugi wa Thiongo’s argument in Globaletics of novel as theory.

Rebecca A. Hill

Closing the ‘Book of Nature’ and the Origins of the Anthropocene in English Literature

Of the material phenomena early medieval thinkers could not have foreseen, the decision of the International Geological Congress to dub the current epoch “Anthropocene” was no doubt furthest from even their most heretical imaginings of the material universe. That the Book of Nature, one of two ‘texts’ granted by God to the human race, could be thrust along a manmade telos blasphemed upon logic and belief. In fact, the greatest ecological crisis circa 1200 was whether engagement with the material world could abet a soul’s betterment. With twelfth century scholasticism and the doctrine of the postlapsarian world as a backdrop, my paper explores how the injection of Islamic Andalusi metaphoric estrangement into the poetry of Anglo Norman England both vindicates objects from Christian fallenness and turns questions of agency in on themselves.

Michael Scot’s thirteenth century Arabicto Latin translations of Al Bitruji’s De motibus celorum theorized that divine spheres operate under the same laws of physics as mortals. Therefore, a similar life force imbibes all matter, democratizing the value of all objects. Suddenly, the cosmos were not divided between perfect divine and imperfect sublunar orders. Similarly, Ibn Rushd’s commentaries on Aristotle’s De animalibus, De caelo, and De anima, also translated Scot, advanced that the physical universe, as opposed to Platonic ideals, contained divine knowledge. Al Bitruji and Ibn
Rushd elucidates their commentaries with figurative images. Though these metaphors sought to disconcert and estrange the reader, Andalusi philosophers were unafraid of arousing confusion. Since these metaphors subtly gestured at panpsychism, the reader developed universalizing but elusive sentiments of oneness, even as the objects in question came to serve a utilitarian function for individual enlightenment.

During this relatively peaceful and prosperous time, insular epistemology dissatisfied Christian scholars. With exposure to the materially validating learning embedded in Islamic culture, metaphor laden translations from Ibn Rushd and Al Bitruji offered an alternative model of knowledge construction for religious and scholastic purposes. Prolonged engagement with metaphorical estrangement was no longer reserved for the hermetical mystics nor the heretical wizards; rather, it became a trope embraced by lay readers and laid the foundation for the robust English language.

My paper focuses on the impact of this shift on two early Middle English poems written circa King Edward I’s unsuccessful antipollution legislation. The first, “Fowles in the Frith,” a short ecological lyric, and the second, “Swarte smekyd smepes smatyd with smoke” (modernized as “The Blacksmiths”), an onomatopoeic allegory, both question the consciousness of things in nature relative to human experience and the trajectory of the soul. They acknowledge pluralistic object consciousness while challenging humans’ right to tool them. Building upon Jeffrey Jerome Cohen’s and Karl Steel’s application of object oriented ontology to the medieval worldview, I argue that our notion of anthropocene, at least in English speaking history, begins with the willingness of thirteenth century poets and scholars to close the chapter of Book of Nature which assumes that power to define objecthood belongs to God exclusively.

Renu Nanda

Material Culture in Teacher Education

If we create a culture where every teacher believes they need to improve, not because they are not good enough, but because they can be even better, there is no limit to what we can achieve.

– Dylan William, University of London

In the last thirty years, the culture of faculties of education has been transformed. The focus on quality of education has sharpened as people have become concerned about a perceived rise in materialism as standards of living have improved; materialistic ambitions increasingly fill the ideological gap created by the move to a pluralistic society in which there is a less general consensus of values and ethics. In teacher education programme we still operate on construction sites at the intersection between symbolic forms and material necessities of schooling. While teacher education remains both intimate and technical, the materialistic culture necessities have been themselves reduced to symbolic forms. Although noteworthy research in teacher education has been undertaken in the last decades, materialistic culture as formative in the development of teacher educator identities offers a site of new epistemological understanding in teacher education programme. However, material culture provides: concrete objects for empirical examination; a reference point for symbolic interpretation; a lens through which to deconstruct the sometimes-problematic, frequently unarticulated and even tentative nature of teacher educator perceptions in ways that defines the conditions, practices and products of what constitutes becoming a teacher in the 21st century. There is increasing demand for insight into the potential of the
formal teaching-learning process for inculcating materialistic ideas, values. The manner in which teachers are trained has far reaching implications for the youth in schools, and a systematic inquiry into the structure, role, responsibilities, aims and curricular objectives of education is the obvious starting point. Thus, the present paper may help to create more realistic understandings of what being a successful teacher means. The argument in this paper is that at this time the rehabilitation of the cultural significance of “things” in teaching prospective teachers is central to any re-imagining of curriculum and learning. It may help teacher educators who feel they are failing the cultural agency of teaching and those, including ourselves in teacher education, who would assist them. It will further reveal the practicality and viability of incorporating the materialistic culture more centrally in teacher education programs.

Richa Joshi Pandey

Re-membrance of “Things” Past in Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children

The current paper examines Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children in terms of the narrator-subject’s negotiation with “things” from and as the past, signaling a repetitive uneasiness about the untranslatability of “things” – particularly the gap/blank/void/“hole” that these “things” entail. Fleeting frontier(s); shards of memory; fragmentary, incoherent and unutterable “things” and names of the ostensibly quotidian world operating as simulacra, act and interact with each other as excessive manifestations of threatening otherness in a partially remembered and once familiar space. Defamiliarized by their abundance, simultaneity and spontaneity as well as their easy mutability as the subject-narrator himself, “things” of fiction, history (personal and collective) and memory (personal and collective) are liable to spillages/slippages as simulacra. The novel employs a “strategic anthropomorphism” meant to illustrate the subject’s overwhelming threat of being obsolesced by “things.” Far from revealing “memory’s truth,” the unreliable narration is an illustration of the subject’s own inability to come to terms with the hyperreal “things” of history, indicating his constant avoidance of the challenge of really confronting them. This may be read as a fear of history and a desperate attempt to control/undermine/demystify or weaken the terrors of history.

Robin E J

What is Man’s Proximity to Thought? Taking Correlationism Seriously after Meillassoux

This paper analyses the recent critique of transcendental philosophy proposed by Quentin Meillassoux. I found that Meillassoux’s rigorous and seminal identification – transcendental philosophy to correlationism – is a philosophical problem which is worth exploring in very detail. For Meillassoux modern thought, especially phenomenology, conceives knowledge from the standpoint of the finite subject. Despite the internal differences and debate, modern thought hinges on the idea of finitude which claims that finiteness of the subject is the only and necessary standpoint from which the meaning of knowledge can be explicated.

Meillassoux takes man’s proximity to finitude and critically develops it into a non-anthropological finitude without being caught into the distinction between ‘empirical receptivity’ and ‘transcendental constitution’. Or in another way, Meillassoux describes ‘the structure of the world’ (non-totalisable infinity) without reducing it to the ‘structure of human experience’ (Subjectalism).
In referring to this critique, attempting to take correlationism and Subjectalism into account, I would sketch out the theme of modern philosophy: ‘the analytic of finitude’ which claims a certain impossibility of absolute knowledge while keeping the possibility of universals and maintained on one another. In detailing the task set to contemporary philosophy, to which Meillassoux systematically responded, I would ask the question: What is the proximity that man has to thought? This question would serve as the common ground to understand the problem of impossibility of ontology and the possibility of universality of certain experience within the limit of finitude.

The following would be the analytic of the paper:

1. What is the task of philosophy today? (How Foucault and Derrida describe today will be sketched to introduce the current debate between New realism and transcendental phenomenology).
2. What is the ‘beyond’ finitude? (Meillassoux’s critique of transcendental philosophies (Correlationism and Subjectalism) will be explored).
3. What is ‘structure of human experience’? (The idea of ‘transcendental’ will be detailed with adequate quotes from Kant and Husserl)
4. How Kant and Meillassoux think the ‘unconditional’ that is beyond the finitude? (The two unconditional and absolute knowledge which are ‘without an intentional object’ will be explored that appears in Critique of Practical Reason and in After Finitude)

Ruta Dharmadhikari
Water Matters: Neocolonial Explorations into Thing Theory

When people refuse to matter because the materiality of objects displace and re-imagine consciousnesses in a consumerist capitalism of rapidly spawned neocolonialism, the torporization of ideas disintegrates cultural materialism, even producing Fascist proclivities. Power mongering in neocolonialism nurtures hybridities, where natural resources are capitalized into material constructs, automatically lowering the human life value index. In the Bolivia of the new millennium, water as a natural resource diminishes in value, in the face of materialist consumerism of natural resource exploitation in its privatization for capitalist gains. Neocolonialism converts a natural resource into a thing, an essential commodity for exploitation, as against an essential ‘thing’ for sustenance of all forms of life as known existing to mankind. When the three natural resources of air, water and earth become things which contain their own thingness as manifested when their rules of engagement are ignored, when their identities transform from nurturer to destroyer, when they acquire a materiality to apparate as a physicality occupying space as well as time, then the materiality of the natural resource forces a recognition.

The Spanish filmmaker and director Iclair Bollain, in his award winning film, “Even the Rain” (2010) tries to reproduce the nature of colonial expansion by Christopher Columbus in the heartlands of fifteenth-century Bolivia. In the process, he explores the subjectivity of objects as natural as water, and churns up a convincing argument denouncing the materiality into which the ‘thing’ called water is transformed by consumerist multinational greed. Turning to colonial history and postcolonial responses to neocolonialist capitalism, the Bolivian film “Even the Rain” can be read in the shadow of thing theory as a suppository statement disengaging with the discovery of the neocolonial in Everyman and concentrating on the effect of water as a manmade thing, where “even the vapor from our breaths will in future be privatized.” Privatization of water and its resultant atrocities
on geocities, land masses and mind masses as spaces of contestations and exploitation, not negotiations, is the primary trope, which this paper will deal with.

“Even the Rain” brings home the materiality of water, its potential binarization into natural and manmade object, its material consciousness as an objectified, quantified consumer durable, its materiality turned into manmade greed to deprive its own kind of a natural environmental resource. Beyond eco-criticism, lies man’s ability to recourse to Nature in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction. Water becomes hybridized into a manmade product by its elimination from easy access, free consumption and as a source of sustenance. Water is transgressed from resource to source. Outsourcing a natural resource for multinational corporatization landmarks the ethical standards of a nation as decidedly anti-poor, pro-elite and neo-capitalist. The film was banned in Bolivia as it went deep into the heartland of human Bolivian misery in its attempt to imprint the present on its past and not vice versa. Its ‘film within a film’ technique re-creates and re-images Bolivian colonial and indigenous history in an undertaking which refracts latter-day angst of colonial exploitation of mineral wealth and human capital against present day privatization of water and, yet again, human capital.

This present paper examines the film “Even the Rain” as a ‘thing’ which brings immediacy to the thingness of water as an ‘exploitable’, man as ‘negotiable’ and the filmmaking process itself as the most material object to have its own ‘thing’. The film lends itself to the exploration of thing theory against the backdrop of postcolonial theory. Can the materiality of water impinge on its signification as idea; can the meaning of water be disassociated from its cultural and religious venerations? Water becomes a site of contestation and negotiation in the film, producing a conflict of interests between capitalists, indigenous populations and new global economies. The ‘globalectics’ thus engendered translate into a site of discussion for the concept of thing theory.

The paper hopes to add to the scholarship in thing theory and to relate its media intervention into human life value as a tangible and potent corollary.

Sabah Tasnia Rowshon

**Shifting Centers of ‘Object’ in Telecom Sponsored Tele-films**

The paper will illustrate how a material object can obtain both the status of subject and object in the money-driven media industry where Tele-films are used by Telecom companies to promote brands, call-packages, SIM-cards while manipulating the elements of the play (from story-line to selection of performers). In this complex process, the products are elevated to play the role of subject which will determine every segment of drama to reach the desired capitalistic end. The transformation of a material object, from a dominating subject to a mere object of money-making, distorts the long tradition of drama production; the audience no longer stays as audience, rather they become the customers who have been targeted to achieve material success by capitalist groups, namely the Telecom companies. The bridge between play and its audience through human emotion is altered with a capitalistic bridge of product and customers by producing material desire. On the screen, non-human material object is being focused and human existence, human emotion is being established with the help of those products; thus, reducing human existence into the state of an object. On other hand, if analyzed from a capitalistic point of view, the telecom offers and products are objects playing the role of objects. Here, they
are controlled by corporate body, and are detached from living existence, and seen as mere money-making tools.

The human connection between the play and its audience was long established in Aristotle's work, *Poetics*. The human centered, more specifically, the audience-centered play endeavored to indulge the audience into the play by connecting audiences' mind with the play's moral message; not because there was an ulterior motive of profit maximization, but because there was an aim to establish a relation with its audience by purging out the emotion through the process of the catharsis. Adorno and Horkheimer have pointed out that the no real production of entertainment takes place in the media industry. The same old story is repeated with some minor changes. Now, in the reign of capitalistic corporations, the human-centered approach of drama has met a different end, a capitalistic end. The importance of human action, human role, human interaction, and most importantly the human being itself is still highlighted, but on the basis of his relation to the products; they serve the purpose of the background scenario of a product promotion in Telecom sponsored Tele-films. The materialization of human relations plays a crucial role in these dramas where actors, emotions are objects, and the constantly highlighted products are the objects which perform the role of subjects, while destabilizing the human-centered discourse.

This paper will be highlighting the fact that no one state can be fixed for describing the status of an object; the influence of an object can turn human into a thing, a number in a consumer chart. For an analysis, this paper will discuss four of the Airtel sponsored Tele-films to study the intricate cycle of transformation of the material products of Telecom companies from ‘subject’ to ‘object’.

*Sachchidanand Singh*

The Ontology of the Social World: Wittgensteinian Perspectives

There have been different perspectives on the ontological status of the social world amongst the philosophers of social science. Behaviourism, positivism, logical empiricism and others tried to provide a satisfactory philosophical basis for treating actions and events in society along the lines of entities. Such views described and explained what really happens in the social world (from the perspective of everyday life) with a scientifically correct method. However, they homogenized the social and natural into a seamless whole. Yet from the scientific point of view, the social world is distinguishable from natural world. The latter is determined by factors extraneous to human action, while the social domain is an outcome of human action (which is not necessarily volitional). Yet the separation of the social and the natural has led to an apprehension about the social as not being a rigorous enough category for science.

This paper investigates the claim that what is implicit in later work of Wittgenstein and explicitly made by post-Wittgensteinian thinkers is that the idea of a social world is fallacious for it does not adequately deal with the social world as an entity. The latter can be cognized through theoretical explanation and which follows natural scientific method. The critics of physicalist methodological accounts of social science proposed by Comte, Mill and others, have shown that this type of social science does not deal directly and immediately with the social actions which are inherently meaningful. Wittgenstein has reflected on nature of meaning and its relation with language and reality. He argued that the meaning is essentially a social affair. Just as we cannot understand speech
without mastering the rules of linguistic practice, we cannot grasp the significance of or
the reasons for most human actions without knowing the conventions and regulations
governing them. He has mentioned understanding as a method, which approaches the
social world through rules and reasons, instead of laws and causes which make it as
rigorous as natural science.

I discuss the implications of this approach by elaborating the idea of social world and its
necessary elements proposed by philosophers of social science. Weber’s ideal types and
Durkheim’s social facts consider human motives as central to social world. Further, the
post positivist model of theory admits that scientific theorising has historical dimensions.
It upholds that intentionality is a characteristic of everything connected with social world.
It also upholds that intentional phenomena are irreducible to non-intentional ones.

Through these perspectives, I examine the possibility of comprehending the ontology
of social science by turning to it in its own right. It is proposed that understanding
intentional phenomena entails explaining why they occur and are central to meaningful
actions. Hence, the methodological suggestion is that one must either be another member
of the same community or be familiar with its practices by participating in its ‘culture’ or
ways of life. This paper will conclude by examining the responses made by Wittgenstein,
von Wright and Winch to such a method.

Santosh Gupta

The Importance of Being Everyday Objects in Imtiaz Dharker’s Poetry

The subject-object divide in western rationalism has led gradually to placing material
objects on a lower hierarchical scale in epistemology. While many Feminist theorists
and most creative women writers have repeatedly emphasized the great significance of
material environment, objects and facilities in their process of knowing their own selves
and the world, the male philosophers have for the most part moved towards abstraction.
Feminist theorists have underscored how the subject expresses itself through its relation
with living beings and the inanimate objects. Inanimate objects lying around one in
domestic and public spheres in their presence and also in their absence become associated
with meaning, emotions and depositories of memories, just as space is transformed into
social, psychological and sacred space when imagination plays upon it. Taking some
poems of Imtiaz Dharker this paper would explore how even everyday objects acquire
great conceptual, ontological significance. Using some Feminist theory’s engagement with
the value of material objects and materiality in social contexts, this paper will analyse
Dharker’s art of delineating serious religious discourses, political acts of dividing nations
and people and the lives of ordinary men and women through the images derived from
kitchen objects, and small domestic trivia.

Sara Guyer

Anthropomorphities: On the Resilience of the Human in the Humanities

This paper focuses on the resilience of the human in the humanities – even in a
humanities construed as post-human, anti-humanist, and beyond the “human-nonhuman
distinction.” How should we make sense of this sticky legacy – one that reveals an ongoing
confrontation between disciplinary legacies and emerging inquiry? Turning to analyses
of anthropomorphism provides a line of analysis, and one that powerfully connects the
question of the human in the humanities with parallel questions that emerge in discourses in which the dominance of the human subject is simultaneously being rethought and reintroduced, namely, the environmental humanities cast as the Anthropocenic age. What is gained by holding on to the human in the post-human humanities (or post-humanities as they have been called)? And what happens when the human is instead understood as the anthropomorph?

Satish C. Aikant

Of Seasons and Cloistered Spaces: Reading Allan Sealy’s The Everest Hotel

With the ascendancy of colonial paradigm in literary studies there has been an increasing focus on the developments within the postcolonial societies as reflected in imaginative literature, the novel in particular. I Allan Sealy’s novel The Everest Hotel (1998) is a saga of nature and man in a symbiotic relationship. Even in the title of the novel one can discern a collaboration between nature that stands tall and the human communities it shelters.

The novel is subtitled “A Calendar.” The theme and structure evidently follow Kalidasa’s Ritusamhara in its division of seasons, and the baramasi tradition. Using the folk lyric as a framing device the author constructs a “calendar” to address the issues of communal and environmental collapse in the fictional town of Drummondganj, situated between the northern hills, on the edge of the plains, in tune with the primordial nature which does not fail to cast its spell on the inhabitants of the town. Indeed it is the temporal cycle that determines the form of the narrative which starts in summer, goes through the intervening seasons, and ends again in summer, imparting it a formal unity. Each season also mirrors the actions that take place within the narrative. Sealy’s prose, languid and passionate by turns, replicates the variegated moods of nature through its different seasons.

The archetypal motifs of death and resurrection, of decay and regeneration find their correlates in nature which forever renews itself. The protagonist Jed is portrayed as a Yamaraja, the keeper of the dead, in dialogue with Brij, his Nachiketa, the interlocutor. Death is contingent but nature is eternal. Therefore through all the turmoil and social upheavals, the real action of the novel lies in the cloistered spaces, the inner world of the Everest Hotel, its gardens, the rooms and the rooftop. And the music that filters through is the bird-calls, songs of the hill women, their wailing and longings. The message of hope comes through the efflorescence of nature, with its beauty and peace.

Even though the novel does not have any overt political concerns, there are unmistakable echoes of contemporary social tensions and ethnic alienation. It offers a commentary on the relationship of modernity to the contemporary project of the nation building in India and the fate of the marginalized communities within the greater idea of India. For Sealy, the modern necessarily includes the fissured, fractured relationship to notions of community and selfhood within the rapidly globalized visions of society. The novel can also be read as a contemporary allegory on the effect of neo-colonial forms of governance. Sealy takes a positive ecological perspective and comments on environmental degradation due to mega projects of so-called development and the consequent political and social unrest, so widespread.

My paper attempts a critical reading of The Everest Hotel to relate its structural details to the issues of temporality, notions of cyclic change and environmental concerns in contemporary India.
Exploring the Objectification of Colonial Subjects in J. M. Coetzee’s *Foe*

Objectification, a phenomenon, in Foucault’s term, can be possible through “dividing practices” which divide the subject from others. It can be seen when the subject can be differentiated within the realms of good and bad, rich and poor, and powerful and powerless. Subject in Foucault’s notion is the diagnosis of what we are and how the power subjected the subject. It also echoes the idea of Stephen Best where he explains that a muted slave has not simply been objectified, but *thingified*. J. M. Coetzee’s *Foe* traverses through the conduit of objectification of Friday, cannibals slave who has been muted by his master. This novel articulates the testament of power and latent limitations of language, language as an expression of truth and the antithesis of silence. Friday’s tonguelessness is the mystery behind his submission and subjugation to slavery. It can be explored through the power of textuality which has been controlled by the powerful.

Material Feminism: A Study of Rashid Jahan’s *Angarey*

Material feminism is a theoretical framework that looks at global oppression of women, people of colour, and minorities in terms of their concrete economic and social conditions. The practitioners of this theory view gender as social construct. They are of the opinion that women are historically viewed as mere objects for reproduction and their gender role in society has more or less confirmed that. There are many social and economic conditions that have resulted in marginalization of women. Rashid Jahan (1905-1952) vociferously opposed such societal norms for women through her works. She is one of the earliest women writers known for inaugurating a new era of Urdu literature written by women. A medical officer by profession and a communist by ideology she broke every rule by which a Muslim woman from ‘shareef gharana’ was expected to live in pre-independent India of 1920s and 30s. The publication of Rashid Jahan’s *Angarey* (1931), a collection of short stories and plays, co-authored with three male friends including her husband, created a stir among the Muslim genteel for being too radical. She faced severe criticism from Muslim clerics on account of her portrayal of the plight of women and particularly Muslim women behind the ‘veil’ in the most realistic manner. Issues like women education and literacy, safe motherhood, safe contraception, sexual practices, sexual abuse etc. among Muslim women were raised for the first time in India. As a result *Angarey* was banned on charges of being ‘immoral.’ This paper aims at reading Rashid Jahan’s *Angarey* in terms of social relations and analytics grounded in the material conditions of Muslim society in pre-independent India. I shall be focusing on analyzing social arrangements – most notably the family, domesticity, and motherhood – that have promoted women’s marginalization. In other words, I shall be investigating what social and economic constraints prevented women from things like pursuing a career, access to education, opportunity to be self dependent economically etc.

*Irwin Allan Sealy’s The Everest Hotel: Things Speak Here*

The beginning of the present century witnessed another aspect of modernism that proposed that the relationship between the human and the object has as critical an impact on culture and literature as any other thing. It was in 2001 when Professor Bill Brown...
posited his idea on ‘Things’ he referred to ‘Heidegger’s semantic thoughts’ on ‘objects’ and ‘things’ and successfully delineated the distinctions between ‘Objects’ and ‘Things’. Analyzing in light of ‘the Thing Theory’ or the principles of materiality, it may be claimed that Sealy’s work too defines, delineates and exemplifies different shades of these ideas. The work subtly alludes to ideas of Kant, Heidegger, Bill Brown and Arjun Appadurai, peeling off the obtrusive layers of the relationship between the human and the object. The result is an exquisite conglomeration of perspectives of ‘objects’ and ‘things’ reflecting the above masters and enunciating the phenomena of ‘things’. The relationship between a subject and an object and that between the human and the object play pivotal role in the characters’ lives here. This substantial fact applies to all the literary forms of the work. Thus it enhances demands on part of the reader or the critic that he knows how these relationships influence the roles of the situations and characters in different settings. This makes Sealy undoubtedly a great authority in portrayal of a new kind of relationship: the relationships between the human and the thing. Not only does Sealy depict this relation, but also focuses on the transition by which an object gets radically transformed into a thing. It can be said that the things used in this novel speak louder than the characters. The hotel titled as ‘the Everest Hotel’ seems to be the axis round which the theme of the novel revolves. All the characters play their definitive roles around the hotel’s identity. The minute, pellucid, exact, illustrative, exquisite and substantial descriptions of the things around the characters speak a lot about the plot of the novel before the characters start interacting or an individual character tends to divulge what is there in their mind. The Everest Hotel consists of seven chapters and all of them are named after the different seasons or their parts. The novelist himself posits that ‘form’ of a literary work is like a ‘kulhar’ that positively influences the taste of the work. The characters seem to act in accordance with the demand of the things, wherein the places have more command. The town, Drummondganj, its railway station, the hotel, the garden, the flowers, the cemetery and the rest of other places start shaping up in newer incarnations before the reader. Irwin Allan Sealy gives life to his narrative through his magically rhapsodic descriptions of the human and the things and their synergy.

Shalini Deepa Srinivasan

Things and Trauma in Joe Sacco’s Safe Area Goražde

Joe Sacco’s Safe Area Goražde, set in the aftermath of the Bosnian War of 1994-95, develops through his interviews with the people as they wait behind the barricades for the restoration of normalcy. The testimonies of survivors, witnesses, combatants, and their friends and family, mediated by Sacco, create a complex narrative that depicts the horrors of the conflict. Safe Area Goražde is heavy – verbally and pictorially – with the things of everyday life.

War and the density of Sacco’s text draw things into the centre of the narrative and alter them. That it may be preferable, in the wake of trauma, to speak of things rather than events is suggested in Veena Das’ Life and Words – and Sacco’s interviewees seem to corroborate this.

In Safe Area Goražde, I argue in this essay, it is in this capacity that things are deployed: in a process of objectification (in its simplest sense of material manifestation) that serves to acknowledge and testify to trauma without re-enacting it, and to re-collect and rebuild the subject in its wake. Things generate means of identity, they are invested with emotional
and cultural values, and they perform history and space. This combination of attributes makes of quotidian things what Janet Hoskins terms “biographical objects” – objects whose relationships to their subjects accrue meaning and change with time.

Sacco’s text offers us things organized into three categories – language and objects of currency like cigarettes, articles of wear, and household articles. The word ‘things’ is woven through and bookends the comic, enacting the present at each instance, as do cigarettes. Articles of wear (clothes, cosmetics, and shoes) are used to perform mostly individual identity and status, and are therefore aspirational, future-oriented. Household objects, in contrast, are tied closely to the family, to the safety and security of the past – and allow it to be accessed while bypassing the trauma the subject has endured. Homes, as Joe Moran observes, are especially romanticised: damage done to them – bullets, bombs, vandalization – becomes a source of great anxiety.

Homes acquire special biographical significance, for they tie together the past, the present and the future, and act as repositories of all the various articles of identity and tools of communication. In other words, homes speak in things. Christopher Tilley characterizes things as mediums of identity-making. They are also mediums of communication with the ability to convey symbolically the ambiguities, contradictions, and conflicts that cannot be articulated or verbalised. In narratives of trauma, things may illumine, but they are equally adept at obfuscation and deflection, at taking on subjecthood when the human subject wishes for silence.

Shelly Jyoti
Installation Art: Objects, Things and Symbolism

“Things are what we encounter, ideas are what we project.” That’s how Leo Stein schematically put it. Although the experience of an en-counter depends, of course, on the projection of an idea (the idea of en-counter), Stein’s scheme helps to explain the suddenness with which things seem to assert their presence and power.” Leo Stein, The A-B-C of Aesthetics (New York, 1927), p. 44.
As a visual artist, I will attempt to discuss the role of objects in my three works of site specific textile installations: “Indigo Narratives” (2009-14); “Salt: The Great March” (2013-15); “The Khadi March: Just Five Meters” (2016). My work seeks to address historical iconographic elements present within the context of modern Indian history. In my recent art practice, these works overlap literary, visual and material culture exploring two key questions: in the twenty-first century, can the idea of swadharma towards our country be an important thread that can bring positive changes in our society; and how can textiles, both as material objects and because of their artistic form, be used to stitch together to bring urban communities feel responsible towards rural brethren by honoring the work of spinners, weavers, and those who work with their hands? These works examine indigenous communities, colonization, and narratives of immigration through subaltern studies.

Shelly Narang
Objects, Memory and Home: Construction of Female Identity in Mahasweta Devi’s Mother of 1084

This paper seeks to look specifically at one of Mahasweta Devi’s most celebrated texts Mother of 1084 in the context of materiality and power. The text is based on the death of a young Naxalite boy Brati in an encounter and the subsequent trials of his mother. What erupts in the torturous story of remembering for the mother Sujata is a narrative crafted with allusions to a series of objects and material things. In the words of Casey, ‘Material things not only frequently constitute the specific content of places and memories alike, but by their special memorability they draw memory and place together in a quite significant way’,

One sees in this text a vast assemblage of places and objects in the story of a single day, vividly inscribed in the memory of the old mother Sujata alongside the harsh experiences of feeling tired, defeated and betrayed. The paper seeks to understand this process of narrative construction by detailing some of these objects that enable a complex intersection of oppression, hierarchy and discrimination in an otherwise seemingly clinical text.

This will be undertaken in two stages. One, the paper will try and assemble all such objects/sites or materials that unfold the exploitative politics underneath the narrative. At the same time it will also refer to another set of objects or narrative materials that open little chinks through which voices of rebellion can be heard.

Mahasweta uses a plethora of such references right from the repeated emphasis on the female body to objects/sites like home, kitchen, saree, subway that are employed throughout the matrix. She establishes narrative linkages and slippages in a text that otherwise is a disparate search of a mother after her son’s death. Other things being equal, the narrative works both for and against her redemption. She is at once a rebel and a victim, at once a conformist and an iconoclast. This happens due to the interesting narrative options exercised by Mahasweta Devi.

The writer consciously refrains from writing long passages about her misery but lets the array of objects that surround her, the text being one of them, do the talking. As a result the protagonist is placed in a space between a range of contradictory spaces that co-exist. Oscillating between a dramatic inner yearning to an outward contemplative stasis, perspectives are constantly switched as a result of which the readers have no idea of
which way she prefers her story to be. Throughout the writer adroitly builds contexts for Sujata’s identity by creating a fascinating interplay of these objects, making it clear that the identity she is creating here is at once tentative and oppositional.

Shobha Padmakar Shinde

Materialities and Technologies in Feminisms and Concerns of the Environment

Research in technologies and the environment is leading to fresh perspectives on society, politics and the public to examine how natural processes and events come to be articulated through the matter and meanings of collective life. Recent debates in feminism challenge the technologies which are adopted to control women’s bodies, reproductive functions, their work and their relationship with the environment. Underpinned by a shared commitment to rethink materialities in terms of process, relations and events, the material flows connect the spaces of bodies with matters of environmental concerns. The natures of the worlds we inhabit are technologically articulated and contribute to the reimagining of politics, publics and policies in the complexities of these articulations. The politics of technology and the desecration of the environment lead to a rethinking of sites and the spaces available to women in their relationship with the world and the environment. This paper is an attempt to reexamine materialities and technologies of recent times, which have clearly shifted the natural balances in human life and human relationships.

Smithi Mohan J S

Fetishizing the Fetish: An Objectified Reading of M G Vassanji’s The Assassin’s Song

A fetish, according to Alfred C. Haddon, is credited with mysterious powers. To identify a fetish is to expose the inadequate beliefs of those who revere it for what they believe it is capable of. This can be done by pointing to the real, material, qualities of the object and identifying its presumed capacities as really residing elsewhere, be it in the ‘true’ god, in human labour or in arousal by a person of the opposite sex. The attribution of magical or holy properties to objects is inherent in religious consciousness. Treating fetishes as ‘unreal’ overlooks the importance of the object as a mediator of social value. Anthropological concept of fetishism suggests switching the religious connection between God and people onto the connection between people and religious material symbols. Thus Objectified, religious beliefs result in fetishizing sacred spaces, be it a shrine or a temple. As commodification is the order of the day, the ‘thingness of the objectified’ must be enhanced by ‘refetishising’. Such an attempt to ‘fetishize the fetish’ is seen in M G Vassanji’s The Assassin’s Song – a haunting tale of coming to age of the narrator Karsan Dargwalla who is the heir to the shrine of Pirbaag. It is actually the exposure of the secret of the eternal flame at Pirbaag that makes Karsan finally doubt the idea of spiritual powers. He begins to doubt everything when he sees his mother pouring ghee into a large vessel behind the mausoleum to feed the “eternal lamp” of Nur Fazal. This incident which follows Karsan’s investiture shakes his faith in the high mysteries of Pirbaag. At this moment his Bapuji happens to be preaching how all is a lie, a maya. He explains to Karsan how the eternal flame keeps hope alive. People seem to lose their way without miracles and they need a little help. The lamp thus embodies tradition and gives a subtle message about the meaning and purpose of existence. The objectification of hope in the eternal flame is made problematic when the perpetual is put under scanner, thereby shattering the diffused sense of the sacred in an object. An attempt to analyse the intricate nuances of the relationship between agency and objects is also made.
Soni Wadhwa
Frost’s Wall and Schrodinger’s Cat

The enigma of who does not like the wall – be it some force in nature or the “mischief” in the speaker of the poem “Mending Wall” – is one that lends itself wonderfully to a phenomenological reading of being. That “something” of the poem is a known unknown and the way the speaker frames it brings in a disastrous yet ludic understanding of reality. The wall, not unlike Schrodinger’s thought experiment, is accessed in terms of one reality in which one acts or intervenes to find out what has happened. Whether the cat is alive or not, and whether the wall is punctured or not, are questions of mate-realities. What happens when things happen to things? How do literariness and quantum mechanics approach these mate-realities, these realities that could not materialize? And, the ones that did and are, in a way, condemned to be a part of the repetitive tesserae? This paper addresses that tiny possibility when matter is arrested by philosophy, poetry and science just when it is about to not matter.

Stephen Squibb
The Four Fundamental Materialities of Contemporary Class Struggle

A materiality is a theater of class struggle which authors at least three divisions: the division between the material and the immaterial, the division between politics and economics and the division between forces and relations. The neo-orthodox tradition of critical political economy recognizes only one such fundamental materiality; the materiality of production, which orbits around the trans-historical persistence of the labor-process. Decades of research have called this mono-cameral model of social-historical explanation into question. The anomalies have accumulated, and it is now possible to re-articulate the conceptual framework guiding historical and theoretical research. Instead of one fundamental materiality, there are four, as the materialities of representation, reproduction, and distribution are added to that of production. These newly discovered materialities correspond to the value-process, the sex-process and the body-process, respectively, in a way that parallels the relationship between the materiality of production and the labor process.

Each materiality authors its own set of divisions, which are not reducible to those authored by the others. So, for example, in the same way that we have long understood and appreciated that advances in the forces of production have a tendency to undo the received institutional relations in that theater, the same can be said for the forces of representation, reproduction, and distribution, as long as it is understood that the pattern of these disruptions is neither uniform nor consistent. If the cotton gin can be understood as rearranging the forces and relations of production in the 19th century American South, digital representation, birth control and nuclear weapons can be seen as doing something similar in the 20th century theaters of representation, reproduction and distribution. In the same way that what is counted as labor is the site of class struggle in production, what counts as value, sex and the body, are the sites of class struggle in representation, reproduction and distribution.

A number of conclusions follow from the advance of this new framework. Treating sex, value, labor, and body as processes distinct from one another has enormous implications for our understanding of when and how these interact. It is precisely these interactions that have remained obscure in the absence of this framework. Without these distinctions
in hand, scholars and partisans alike have taken turns insisting that one or the other materiality is the one true reality, while the others are reduced to derivative phenomenon. In fact, there is no way of recovering any ontological priority for one materiality over another, though methodologically it may be helpful, even necessary, to proceed as though this is the case. In the galaxy of critical theory, the myriad projects of the past century can be usefully grouped by their relationship, conscious or otherwise, to these different materialities. When such quixotic antagonisms vanish, many traditional confusions about the state, money, humanism or the police are dissolved as these are referred no longer to one materiality or another, but to the matrix of all four.

Surbhi Goel

When Sound, Colour, Movement Materialize in Cinema: Ekphrastic Cinephilic Frisson Arrives

Materiality of film and embodied spectator responses to it constitutes a filmic practice, which locates and vitalizes the very skin of the film. The filmmaker works around the dispositif to bring the whole material world into play, to create a never ceasing experience (freeing the experience from causality). What transpires then is a reading through, viewing of, riffling and tracing of the textures of the film, a haptic, ekphrastic response, a productive contemplation in the face of the inconclusiveness of the aesthetic experience. Mani Kaul’s filmmaking style constitutes collaborative, non-auteuristic, experimental, explorative of the possibilities, incidental cinematics, at the outer edge of serendipitous, intermedial, cross-referential avant garde wherein mise-en scene suture space-time with cinematic objects to expand the experiences and responses to cinema. His expressed attempt is to create an experience devoid of historicity, a constantly evolving movement/mobility/gesture. His films are an opening to alterity – a universe that invites exploration on its own and not via any representative identification, alone. This is the unknowable universe beckoning us. Involuntary memories, epiphanies, connection and association between things, experiences, and traces recover, transform and reanimate constantly. The “play” is away from semblance, instead opening up of potentialities of experience and alternative ontology of objects that exist, come alive, and inhabit the world. Mani Kaul’s Siddheshwari, Uski Roti, Mati Manas, A Historical Sketch of Indian Women are specific films chosen for this paper, which lend occasions for mimetic innervations. These films are open to chances and contingency, wherein co-existence of multiple and even conflicting temporalities create ripples on the surface of the film. What happens is energetic explosion that vitalize the spectator. I propose to line up spectator responses along with mise-en-scene analysis/viewing/reading of the selected films to try and recover this alternative word of cinematic elements. I will draw from the writings of Siegfried Kracauer, Miriam Hansen, Mani Kaul, David Bordwell for extending the discussion qua film analysis. I will also try to recall some of the threads floating around in Kaul’s cinema pertaining to his perspectiveless, multiple viewership technique drawn from miniature painting, attuning to attention while isolating a movement/gesture within a sequence technique, drawn from music. My attempt is to travel between theoretical formulation and film analysis to line up the cinematic objects that actualize in the films of Mani Kaul.

Umesh Patra

Books and Love Letters: Objects or Placeholders?

This paper will study books and love letters as material objects. One would buy a book in order to read it. Once the act of reading is complete, its purpose it served. But then there
are authentic copies as opposed to pirated ones, first editions, gilded books bearing the
signature of the author. But, in an age of what Benjamin calls “mechanical reproduction,”
and Baudrillard calls “simulacra,” we have suffered the loss of the real or the “original.”

However, a famous courtesan in the 19th century once said that she took Byron’s Don Juan
to bed with her and he kept her awake all night. I wonder if one could say that with the
Kindle edition. The Kindle as an object is a placeholder of various books. One can delete
one book and import another. A hardbound or paperback book is exclusively tied to its
printed material. One may highlight or underline certain passages, scribble some notes,
or make calligraphic drawings on its borders. A good book can also be used as a pillow
(something I always do on train journeys) or as a weapon to beat a burglar on his head.
One of my friends was asked in an interview what book he had kept beside his bed the
previous night and was then asked to describe it. With regard to a book, “words” and
“things” do not seem to be as deadly rivals as Peter Schwenger would maintain.

A love letter poses different problems. Today a message can be conveyed as an SMS,
E-mail or in form of a video chat. But these do not serve the functions which a love letter
served. The love letter bears the writer’s own handwriting with inkblots and crossings.
It is tangible. One can hold it, fold it and keep it under the pillow before sleep which
is equivalent to sleeping with one’s love. There are instances where love letters were
written with blood, and sometimes with aromatic ink. A lady can sprinkle her perfume
or plant a kiss on the paper. A billet doux can be touched, smelt, kissed, torn or burnt in a
ritualistic fire. An SMS or an email with the mechanized and unambiguous font does not
lend itself to such services. Deleting the message in a cell phone does not quite add up to
the ceremonial pyre suggesting the severing of an intimate bond. Unlike a love letter, the
reader cannot soak an SMS with one’s tears unless, of course, the gadget is waterproof.
Therefore a love letter is not just a placeholder of a message, but an object in its own
right. On account of the blurry duality between sign and substance, isn’t a love letter
similar to Brownell’s 1857 painting, “The Charter Oak”—the picture of the tree with the
frame made of its wood—or the Victorian photographs stored along with the hair of the
depicted person studied by Geoffrey Batchen? There is something organic and therefore
seductive about books and love letters as objects of desire. These are the concerns this
paper will seek to explore.

Vaibhav Shah

Toward the Ethics of Non-Reductive Equitarian Ontology of Object and Subject:
A Reappraisal of Select Literary Works

Since time immemorial, there has been a predominance of meaning culture which has
overshadowed the importance of materiality. Matter qua matter has been enormously
subjugated by epistemology and ontology. Resultantly, objects have been perceived
in relation to subject’s position and thus denied of any ontic existence of their own.
Disciplines like Philosophy, History, Anthropology, Literature etc. have been key
instruments in valorization of subject and marginalization of objects. Studies in Literature,
for example, have always shown a proclivity to assign meanings and identities to the
objects that occur in literary works. Thus, objects in literary texts are not what they are
but a bundle of meanings that needs to be unraveled to get a real sense of objects. The
methods of foregrounding such hidden meanings of objects have been well supplied by
phenomenology and hermeneutics, thus maximizing the reduction of matter to a non-
onctic entity.
Though the emphasis on material culture in recent times has attracted the attention of scholars worldwide, the totality of objects and humans and their interdependence together (in Heideggerian sense) is yet to be unveiled. The coexistence of subject and object demands an equal recognition of both mind and matter, which can be possible only when both are accepted as ontological entities having equal ontic value. However, amidst the intellectual environment which claims that “human beings are self-interpreting animals,” it is difficult to imagine a total abatement of subject. Also, theories of the subject like Critical Theory, Structuralism, and Deconstruction have been vitally instrumental in subjugation of the objects. The question is then what kind of conditionality can recuperate the biased attitude toward the matter and give it an equal treatment. The question of equal respect to both subject and object leads to yet another important question, i.e. whether the total subjugation by the subject is viable or not.

The proposed paper aims to look for an alternative ontology which can suspend the objectification of the object and the subjectification of the subject. Such a suspension is possible only when an equitarian approach is advanced without any reductionist tendency. In proposing non-reductive equitarian ontology of object and subject, some of the literary texts will be examined where objects have been victimized of a prejudiced reading by the subject. Be it a ‘handkerchief’ in Shakespeare’s *Othello* or ‘headscarf’ in Orhan Pamuk’s *Snow*, the pre-ordained identities of these objects has reduced their role up to an instrument which is exploited by an individual or an institution. The paper will seek to argue that if objects were treated as objects rather than the meanings which they are assigned to, the disjunctive way to perceive matter and mind separately would change the mode of ethical inquiry by asserting a non-reductive equitarian ontology.

_Vandana Pathak_

**Animals Do Matter: Ecology as Subject in Ghosh’s The Hungry Tide**

Derrida’s *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (2008) explicates that it is the predicament of the non-humans to suffer that places them within the complex texture of humans where they face vulnerability and mortality. By toppling the existing praxis, Derrida turned it by subjectifying the non-humans, who had for long been foreshadowed as mere objects, which, according to Baudrillard, had remained passive, poor and shamed. Raymond Williams’ *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1983) states that Nature is perhaps the most complex word in English language. Two paradigms, the ‘thing theory’ and ‘ecocriticism’, could be employed to understand the complexity of the *bhatir desh* / the tide country of Sunderbans in the novel *The Hungry Tide* (2004) by Amitav Ghosh. In the current Anthropocene era, in a ‘shadow place’ that feminist ecophilosopher Val Plumwood talks about, a Tiger roars loudly, in pain and in jouissance. An episode where the European cetologist Piyali Roy cries, horrified at a Tiger killing is juxtaposed with a voice from the past where Kusum, a dispossessed refugee wonders at the inhumanity of the Westerners, whose concern for Tigers surpasses the value of human lives. With the backdrop of the Morichjhampi massacre of 1969, which resulted in large scale raping and massacre of the East Pakistani refugees for violating the Forest Act, the hitherto stable positions of the omnipotent, linguistically empowered hunter and seller Human Subject and the mute, meek, hunted and sold Animal Object are reinterpreted. The major concern of this paper is to examine how the cultural and the symbolic realities emphasize the animalistic complexity of Nature as Subject.
Within anthropology there has been recent interest in understanding what sorts of ‘modern air politics’ imbue our contemporary social worlds (Choy 2012; Choy and Zee 2015; Howe 2016; Bhojvaid 2016; Gunel 2016). These investigations pay particular attention to, ‘how bodily and technical capacities for sensing and negotiating the atmosphere are coming to be cultivated across a number of situations by a diverse array of actors’ (Choy 2012: 1). How do these theorizations aid in thinking about a climate change agent that is an air borne particle – black carbon (BC).

BC is a carbonaceous aerosol. An aerosol is a suspension of fine solid particles or liquid droplets within a gas, e.g. smoke, air pollution, smog, oceanic haze, and tear gas; and is produced both naturally and by human activities. BC particles strongly absorb sunlight and give soot its black colour (C2ES 2010). In the early 2000s as a result of an internationally collaborative and multimillion dollar experiment called the Indian Oceans Experiment (INDOEX), it emerged that BC has climate change effects. Since, this discovery, which put into motion science and research to understand BCs nature, it has emerged as a major contributor to global warming, possibly second to CO2 as the main driver of climate change (ibid).

In my PhD work in my attempt to follow the life of BC and understand how it impacts and reconstructs our social worlds the rubric of Levi Brynat’s (2015) Machine Oriented Ontology (MOO) was adopted. MOO is a variation within the theoretical paradigm of Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) which makes distinct claims about the nature and equality of object relations. MOO is different from OOO, in so far as it treats all objects as machines. The terminology ‘machine’ is used to highlight two things; firstly that machines dynamically operate, such that a machine is what it does, and secondly; to move beyond the distinction between human and non-human and object and subject; the perspective emphasizes that worlds are constituted by interacting machines and this interaction between machines is what must be highlighted, such that a world is nothing more than an assemblage of machines (Bryant 2015). This paper seeks to understand the discovery of BC from the Indian Oceans Experiment which single handedly transitioned the status of BC from soot, to a potential climate change agent. This however could not have been made possible without the main discovery of INDOEX - the Atmospheric Brown Cloud (ABC) floating above the Indian sub-continent (UNEP 2002; UNEP 2008). That is BC released from inefficient bio fuel burning in traditional cookstoves in Indian households and vehicular diesel emissions transpires as smoke to result in the ABC. The question then becomes that if the cloud is central in ascribing the changed status of BC, how are we to follow it? In arguing, what brings things to life, Ingold takes on the painter Paul Klee’s view that, ‘processes of genesis and growth that give rise to forms in the world we inhabit are more important than the form themselves’ (Ingold 2010; 2). Life then, is to be located in the processes of form making in a field of relations, such that emphasis must be paid to processes of formation and flow of transformations rather than the final product (Ingold 2010). In this paper the coming to life of BC is tracked within the larger discourse of climate change by paying attention to formative processes through changing machinic interactions. Thus, the ecology of BC is understood in the way that soot, smoke and the cloud relate to each other.
Notes

1. BC is produced both naturally and by human activities as a result of the incomplete combustion of fossil fuels, bio-fuels and biomass. Primary emissions include emissions from diesel engines, inefficient cook stoves, wood burning and forest fires.

2. Ingold’s imposition attempts to debunk and move beyond Aristotle’s hylomorphic model that posits that the creation of anything is a result of bringing together form (morphe) and matter (hyle), by arguing that the creation of anything is to be understood in its processes of formation and transformation (Ingold 2010).

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Vishwanath Rana

Experience and Materiality

Matter in a scientific definition refers to anything that occupies space and has some mass, and much in the history of western philosophy, there has always been a strict dichotomy between matter and concepts. The paper seeks to briefly introduce some of those contending epistemic formations, with a reading of Samkhya school that loosely is considered as a field of enquiry based on the dichotomy of Purusa and Prakriti or what we can call the ‘self’ and ‘matter’ in which the metaphysical self is preferred over the material Prakriti. The reading will try to bring out the points of confirmation and departure of this ancient school, from the very revered Upanishads. Upanishads: the founding principles of Indian philosophy places supreme centrality on the self i.e the brahman or aatman. Samkhya takes the all creator Purusa as an enjoyer of the matter and of her activity. Herman Oldenberg says, “he (purusa) is not a perpetrator, but a maker of action: a clear attempt not to take from him a certain activity, but at the same time again, not attributing it to him directly.” The action is taken over by ‘Prakriti’ and ‘gunas’, whose laws and conduct are taken from the ‘Purusa’. Further the early Buddhism does bring causality and psychology in their strict enquiry of vedic self, leading to an all continuing debate on experience as a fundamental category for any theoretical formulation. In the methodologies of natural sciences, both in the empirical and rationalistic categories, experience has been eradicated, even the individual itself. In the human sciences it is the Husserlian Phenomenology that has framed a complex reading of experiences and its relation to knowledge, it postulates that the idea of objectivity outside our experience is a mistaken notion.
Sundar Sarrukai considers Indian Philosophical traditions as Phenomenological, in their concern about experience, consciousness and the self. A critical reading of Sarrukai’s essay “Phenomenology of Untouchabilty” brings out the philosophical foundations of untouchability, with both the phenomenological tools from east and west. It calls into question the very nature of experience itself and its epistemological and ontological nature; a further reading will bring out the social voices that seek reclamation through bodies. The new materiality, though not new always, had the potential of creating alternative political discourses for the deprived classes and groups.

Vrinda Mathur
Of Magic, Curses, Signs and Omens: Revisiting Thornton Wilder—
Our Town to The Alcestiad

The landscape of storytelling from Disney fantasies to legendary legacies encodes an enigma which reverberates with polyphonic perspectives and enchanting visions. Whether it is the ‘magic life’ presentations of Wilder’s Our Town or the more ‘enthraling escapades’ of The Skin of Our Teeth the ‘pudding – blessings – adventures’ of The Matchmaker or the curses, signs and omens of The Alcestiad – each one of these plays hides one story into another. Sometimes using the narrative form of make-believe or sometimes the more challenging narrative of prophetic literature, the subject matter and form of these plays foregrounds the technology of enchantment cast in a temporal perspective.

Rich in philosophical speculation and astonishing in theatrical technique, these plays present the All, the Everywhere and the Always. By using complex metaphors of nets, traps, blessings, snares, spells and nooses, the plays present life as a carnival with cataclysmic upheavals and enabling calms.

Defying conventions and playing around with time, history and myth, the visual narrative, in these plays, is filled up with magical powers. The magic patterning encoded in words, images, dialogues, symbols, sights, sounds and rhythm show up small parts of our world – and of our existence in it – in a whole new unusual way. Emily in Our Town asks: “George, is the moon shining on South America, Canada and half the whole world?” As one senses meanings that lie below the surface of the words, the haunting images highlight the way Wilder handles his material. Emily, the protagonist of Our Town, who has died in child birth, comes back from the dead, wearing a white dress, longing to come back to life. She talks to the other dead around her and realizes suddenly “how in the dark live persons are. From morning till night, that’s all they are – troubled.”

My paper seeks to examine the creative process of Thornton Wilder which makes you wonder ‘where that line / image came from? What is it pointing to? – How did he manage to create this particular atmosphere essential for the ‘willing suspension of disbelief.’ The paper seeks to investigate the dynamics of his words, rhythms, silences, pauses, tone, with their wealth of connotations as they work their way through several associations. The sense of wonder and discovery along with pleasure, excitement and exhilaration conjured up from the curse of the Garden of Eden to Apocalyptic echoes, to Blessings, Signs and Omens in The Alcestiad needs to be studied specially and my paper aims to do exactly that. My paper also aims to study the powerful impact of the mythological figures of Apollo, Hercules, Tiresias, Admetus and Alcestis and their functions as enabling structures.
Mary Todd Lincoln has received a bum rap. Reared as a Southern belle from a slave-owning family, half her siblings fought for the Confederacy. She spent lavishly in the Executive Mansion while soldiers were dying on the battlefield; broke down in the White House after losing a son and then again after witnessing the assassination of her spouse. Her only remaining son committed her to a mental asylum.

That traditional view concocted by male historians turned her into a caricature and the butt of bad jokes. It wasn’t until the bicentennial of the Great Emancipator’s birth in 2009, that this view has been challenged by several biographers.

It’s clear that she married down to a frontier hick lawyer who she thought possessed enormous potential. Both before and during his presidency, Mary Todd worked to transform him into material fit for serious consideration by the elite. He took her seriously and listened and even modified his behavior. She first transformed their middle class house into one which may not have fit on Springfield’s Aristocratic Hill but was suitable for holding respectable political and social events. At the same time she continually worked on improving his attire and etiquette. His beard reflected her impact on him—he started to take himself seriously. At the same time she wanted to be taken seriously herself in the exclusive male realm of politics—and she learned from her husband.

She did not marry for wealth or status. In a sense, she became the first female “great emancipator” for women in general and African Americans. Lincoln’s openness was mirrored in the kind of entertaining she arranged in the Executive mansion. If he could insist on the completion of the Capitol dome, she could transform the Executive Mansion into another symbol of American democracy. Even when depressed she continued to visit military hospitals in the DC area and expand the role of the First Lady with the president’s support. Recent biographers have set her contributions in context and for the first time nations have begun recognizing her contributions on postage stamps in her honor. As the most recent biographer of Abraham Lincoln notes, if there had been no Mary Todd, there would have been no Abraham Lincoln.
The Forum on Contemporary Theory has been conducting an intensive Theory/Praxis Course every year since 2003 for the benefit of scholars across disciplines interested in new developments in Theory and their application. The course includes intensive textual readings in specific areas, supported by seminars and talks on broader but related issues. This year the Course will be held in collaboration with The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad during 3 July-29 July 2017. The Forum, which has completed 27 years of its existence, is a member of the Consortium of the Humanities Centers and Institutes (CHCI), so far the only member from South Asia.

Course Outlines

The Course is organized around the following topics to be discussed in-depth by the core faculty, supported by public lectures and mini-seminars by the invited scholars.

a) The Baroque and Early Modern Cultural Change (Faculty: Roland Greene)

The course is concerned with how broad cultural changes—of the sort that occur across several national literatures over a century or more—are theorized and interpreted. While such changes are observed in many periods from the medieval to the postcolonial, this syllabus attends to the emergence of the kind of art known as Baroque, from about 1580 to about 1680 in Europe, the Americas, and Asia. The premise of the course is that the emergence of the Baroque is a complex step toward modernity. The Baroque is often conceived as a seventeenth-century phenomenon formed in response to the conditions of the sixteenth century such as humanism, absolutism, and early capitalism. How is its art identified and defined, especially in light of multiple media and uncertain criteria? How do several kinds of theory and historical scholarship account for the Baroque’s emergence and development in their own ways, and with what advantages and constraints? How might the emergence of the Baroque be imagined as part of the project of modernity? In what ways has the discussion of the Baroque recapitulated some episodes of theory since Nietzsche? Finally, how can we extrapolate from the rich theoretical conversation around the Baroque to other instances of cultural change? The course is intended to provide provocative models for any literary scholar interested in encompassing cultural change in several dimensions.

b) Exilic Writing, Cosmopolitanism, and the Making of World Literature (Faculty: Galin Tihanov)

This course is about the centrality of exile and exilic writing in the making of world literature. The discussion of exile and world literature is embedded in an analysis of cosmopolitanism as a discourse with specific – and historically shifting – political significance. Not only is writing about exile a mode of producing a particular version of the world; it is also a way of thinking about movement, mediations, transfers, and boundaries. Crucially, exile is one of the foundational discourses of modernity that interrogates memory, identity, and language. Today’s notion of world literature is inseparable from a transnational and cosmopolitan perspective, which is intimately – and in a characteristically contradictory manner – linked to exilic experiences and the practice of exilic writing. In this course, we will analyze artefacts (literature, but also some paintings, philosophical texts, and a film) by European, Indian, Japanese, and American authors in order to begin to think about how exile and exilic writing have been inscribed in the very notion of cosmopolitanism and world literature with which we work today.

Core Faculty

a) Roland Greene is Mark Pigott KBE Professor in the School of Humanities and Sciences, Professor of English and Comparative Literature, and, by courtesy, Iberian and Latin American Cultures and Director, Department of Comparative Literature at Stanford University. He is
a scholar of Renaissance culture, especially the literatures of England, Latin Europe, and the transatlantic world, and of poetry and poetics from the sixteenth century to the present. His most recent book is *Five Words: Critical Semantics in the Age of Shakespeare and Cervantes* (2013). He is the editor in chief of the fourth edition of the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (2012) and is the general editor of a series of critical volumes titled *World Literatures Reimagined*. His other books include *Unrequited Conquests: Love and Empire in the Colonial Americas* (1999); *Post-Petrarchism: Origins and Innovations of the Western Lyric Sequence* (1991), a transhistorical study of lyric poetics; and, edited with Elizabeth Fowler, *The Project of Prose in Early Modern Europe and the New World* (1997). His recent essays deal with topics such as the colonial baroque, Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* and *Amoretti*, Sir Thomas Wyatt’s poetry, and Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. In 2015-16 Greene served as President of the Modern Language Association of America. The major initiative of his presidency was the development of a strategic plan to guide the association over the next five years. His theme for the 2016 convention in Austin, Texas was “Literature and Its Publics: Past, Present, and Future.”

b) **Galin Tihanov** is the George Steiner Professor of Comparative Literature at Queen Mary, University of London. He has published widely on German, Russian, and East-European cultural and intellectual history and some of his work has been translated into Bulgarian, Danish, French, German, Macedonian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, and Slovene. His most recent research has been on cosmopolitanism, exile, and transnationalism. Amongst his recent authored and edited books are *Narrativas do Exílio: Cosmopolitismo além da Imaginação Liberal* (2013) and *Enlightenment Cosmopolitanism* (2011, ed. with David Adams). Tihanov is winner, with Evgeny Dobrenko, of the Efim Etkind Prize for Best Book on Russian Culture (2012), awarded for their co-edited *A History of Russian Literary Theory and Criticism: The Soviet Age and Beyond* (2011).

**Participation Criteria**

Participation in the Course is mainly open to scholars in the humanities and social sciences, preferably those working toward research degree, but post-graduate students and post-doctoral scholars in these disciplines and scholars from the disciplines outside the humanities and social sciences interested in inter-disciplinary studies can also apply. A 1000-word essay on why you need to take this Course should be submitted along with the application. Maximum number of participants to be selected is 20.

**Registration Fee**

Each participant is required to pay a registration fee of Rs. 20,000 (Rupees twenty thousand only) to the Forum on Contemporary Theory through a bank draft drawn on a bank in Baroda. The registration fee is non-refundable. The fee will take care of his/ her board and lodging, course fee and other related expenses. The participants will not be paid by the organizers for their travel.

**Deadline for Application**

The last date for receiving application for participation is **15 March, 2017**. The application may be sent to Director, Centre for Contemporary Theory, Baroda. Selection for participation will be made by **25 March, 2017**. Selected candidates are required to send the bank draft favoring Forum on Contemporary Theory before **15 April, 2017**. Course material will be mailed only after receiving the registration fee.

1. **Prafulla C. Kar**, Director, Centre for Contemporary Theory (Email: prafullakar@gmail.com)
2. **Anand Mahanand**, Professor, EFLU, Hyderabad (Email: amahanand991@gmail.com)
3. **Jibu Mathew George**, Asst. Professor, EFLU, Hyderabad (Email: jibugeorge@efluniversity.ac.in)