

Dream kitsch – folk art, indigenous media and ‘9/11’: The work of *pat* in the era of electronic transmission

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This article explores the process of transmission of the image(s) of 9/11 through an ethnographic/art-historical examination of Bengali (Indian) *pat* (traditional scroll painting) made by a community of rural Indian artisans with little or no exposure to mass-media. It transpires that while the impact of mass-media – often held responsible for the extinction of ‘authentic’ folk art – has been somewhat exaggerated, the argument put forward here is that the putative anteriority of a time before representation, is largely an illusion.

No one really dreams any longer of the Blue Flower. Whoever...[does so] must have overslept...The dream has grown gray. The gray coating of dust on things is its best part. Dreams are now a shortcut to banality. Technology consigns the outer image of things to a long farewell...It is then that the hand retrieves this outer cast in dreams and, even as they are slipping away, makes contact with familiar contours. It catches hold of objects at their most threadbare and timeworn point...And which side does an object turn toward dreams? What point is its most decrepit? It is the side worn through by habit and patched with cheap maxims. The side which things turn toward the dream is kitsch.

Walter Benjamin

Art teaches us to look into objects. Folk art and kitsch allow us to look outward from within objects.

Walter Benjamin

Made in the USA

If one no longer dreams of the blue flower, what is the stuff of the dreams of our time? *Our* dreams are *Made in the USA*. I met Madhusudan Chitrakar in a remote village (called Naya) in West Midnapore (West Bengal, India) in a wayside shack while working as a consultant in a project of Jadavpur University (Calcutta). Madhusudan (age 40) is a traditional *patua* (painter of traditional scroll paintings called *pat*), Chitrakar or Patidar by *jati* (caste) though he can no longer afford to depend solely on his caste-occupation to make a living. The times have changed. His father was a full-time *patua*, eking out a precarious living, showing *pat* to villagers. His wife, Hajra, helps Madhusudan with his work of ‘keeping the tradition alive’. The father has lung cancer and is unlikely to live much longer. He had some formal education, he studied up to the 8th standard in the village school while Madhusudan reads his native Bengali script haltingly. They never had any land.

For Madhusudan, buying a newspaper is a luxury. But his father loves reading newspapers, even old ones, which offer him dreams of various belongings – to the nation, to the country and so on. To the extent the newspaper is a luxury (let us not even think of television), and many people are illiterate anyway, belonging to these imagined communities has a price, literally. Not everyone can afford to be a citizen or, for that matter, participate in the so-called ‘mass-mediated spectacle’.

So, there is not much point in foraging into the vast body of literature on the constitutive role of mass-media in shaping the subjectivities of the ‘consumer-citizens’ (Featherstone, 1993) in order to understand Madhusudan’s ‘*Amricaner pat*’ (his words; if pronounced properly, it should have been *Americaner Pat*, meaning the *pat*

about America), painted roughly after about a year of '11 September'¹ and sold to avid foreign tourists looking for exotic souvenirs and the Indian connoisseurs of 'folk' or 'popular culture'. This is not to evacuate the embattled ground for representation painstakingly prepared by 'cultural studies' over the last three or four decades (Frow, 1997). I do not want to relegate the lived time of these 'simple' people (what von Schiller called 'the customs of country folk and the primitive world' [von Schiller, 1966]) to a time *before* representation. Central to my concern here is the nostalgic slant of the Romantic and Neo-Romantic account, summed up famously in an aphorism of Feuerbach in 1872: 'In unknowing man was at home in his dwelling; in knowledge, he is estranged' (quoted in Koerner, 1998: 317). By reversing the usual connection between knowledge, representation and certainty, this surprising sentence stands at the crossroads of a historic disavowal of representation *as such*. In stating that unknowing fosters belonging, Feuerbach, crystallizing the Romantic critique of Enlightenment, argued not that instrumental knowledge has failed to produce, but that it has overproduced. As a result of this perverse excess, uncertainty has increased and the world is now covered with an inscrutable density of contingent representations. Hence, his yearning for what Hans Blumenberg termed 'the enclaves of unknowing': in the tradition of 'historical sociology' inaugurated by Tönnies' ideal of the closed, local, organic *Gemeinschaft* of the medieval town as opposed to the open, global and constructed urban *Gesellschaft* of the modern world. Today, the reach of mass-media *everywhere* is supposed to testify the density of representation covering the surface of the earth. What I want to point out, this time against the grain, is that mass-media cannot be taken as a constant function cutting across all historical formations; it possesses different valences in different contexts. Further, the binary opposition between mass-media and folklore, between an unmediated, organic 'life' and its 'simulated', 'hyperreal' representation(s) in media where it doubles up as the enemy of 'true' experience – is not of much service in understanding the *entangled* world we inhabit.

Madhusudan (and other *patuas* I met) is always on the lookout for new themes. Only the academic *babus* from Calcutta want the arty 'traditional', 'authentic' stuff (Shiner, 1994: 225–34): those recursive, dull stories from *Manasamangal* or *Ramayana*.³ Madhusudan knows that god is dead. I observed that the *patuas* themselves do not 'use' *pat*: it has no 'use-value'. They paste *filmi* Bollywood pictures or colourful calendars with Islamic themes on their walls. The same is true for their traditional clientele – the Hindu villagers whose gods and goddesses are the subject-matter of traditional *pats*.⁴ Nobody 'needs' *pat* any more, except the urban, *babu*⁵ collectors of 'folk art' and the discerning, reflexive Euro-American 'post-tourists'. Madhusudan owns a cheap transistor set and loves listening to the FM radio but he longs for a television – even a black-and-white one would do. And he experiments with new themes, hoping to come across gullible buyers and tourists. However, it needs to be pointed out in this context that the *patua* community at Naya is a close-knit one. When a new theme is incorporated in their repertoire, everybody does more or less the same thing. The individual variations are rather minor. In this particular case of the *Americaner pat*, it was first conceived and executed by Mantu and Gurupada – two leading *patuas*. The rest simply followed suit. *Patuas* are still artisans, notions like 'expression' and individual 'innovation' are rather foreign to them. If you want a particular story to be rendered into *pat*, they will have no qualms about doing it. Also, there is no 'copyright': one is entitled to copy other's works.⁶

The origin of *pat* – the narrative scroll painting with ballads – is lost in hoary obscurity. But there is definitive literary evidence to demonstrate that *pat* as a practice existed during the time of Buddha. As for the technique of narration, the Bengali *pat* is said to be ‘distinctly reminiscent of . . . the Buddhist narrative art . . . in the stone relief of Sanchi, Bharhuth, Bodh Gaya, and Amarabati . . . and in the mural paintings of Ajanta [6th century BCE]’ (Sanyal, 1984: 125). *Pat* was revived as Bengal’s ‘living national art’ by Gurusaday Dutt, ICS, the cultural nationalist and revivalist, during the 1930s as part of the Bengali cultural (re)awakening (Dutt, 1990). *Pat* is a performance – members of the Chitrakar or Patua caste exhibited *pat* to their neighbours, receiving cash or rice in exchange. This caste-based system of reciprocity (*jajmani*) atrophied long ago but *pat* continued to hold sway, especially in remote rural areas, at least till the 1980s. As I found out, it was the arrival of the cassette culture, television (in relatively affluent rural households) and video-parlours, which saw to the end of *pat* as an indigenous media. Many *patuas* recalled with nostalgia that as children, they used to accompany their fathers and uncles to fairs and festivals where *pat* was shown to the eager rural crowds. Out of the five or six districts of West Bengal where there were sizable *patua* populations,⁷ only a few clusters have survived, in Midnapore and Beerbhoom districts, thanks to the emergence of an urban market, foreign buyers and the occasional patronage of the government. For all practical purposes, *pat* has been reduced to just pictures, the performative dimension being nearly lost.

In those days when *pat* partly served as a kind of local newspaper, there was a class of *pat* called *Kaliyug Pat* where contemporary (mostly sensational) events were depicted. Many of the surviving *Kalighat Pats* are about contemporary events (Jain, 1999). However, Madhusudan painted his *Amricaner pat* with foreign buyers in mind, who lapped it up, paying hard cash for this ‘intercultural’ marvel. At the time of my interaction with Madhusudan (2004–5), apart from half a dozen individual foreign buyers, the Peabody Essex Museum (Salem, USA) had purchased the *Amricaner Pat* through a Calcutta middleman. Madhusudan showed me the photocopies of correspondence between the museum authorities and the middleman. The museum requested the middleman to provide them with ‘indigenous’ explanation of the *pat* and the middleman promptly cooked up a slightly ‘primitive’ version of the standard story of the 9/11 incident and sent it to them in writing. So, when *the* image of the crumbling Twin Towers, carried by the circuit of global flows in ‘touristscape’,⁸ reaches its locale in an ‘ethnic’ garb, a hermeneutic circle seems to be completed. Yet, as soon as we look closely, this ‘recognition’, giving rise to what Baudrillard calls the moment of ‘ecstasy’ arising out of perfect communication characteristic of ‘post-modern’, ‘post-spectacle’, ‘post-social’ systems, seems a little premature.⁹ The Baudrillardian vision of late capitalism is a regime of pure homogeneity in which all resistance to instrumental control has disappeared and all heterogeneity has been submitted to disassembly, reassembly, investment and exchange: any system can be interfaced with any other. However, I argue that the *Amricaner pat*, far from signifying such an imaginary perfection, is emblematic of stress – the privileged pathology affecting the world-system today. For, the locale of the *Amricaner pat*, *pace* Appadurai (1995: 178–200), is not just a conceit fabricated by the global image machines: it is less or more, as I hope to demonstrate in this article.

Appadurai's contribution has been in deontologizing the local – in initiating the analysis of how the 'local' is fabricated by the global media in a radically 'delocalized' world. In his reckoning, the 'local', rather than being the 'ground' – the site of a plenitude of meaning – turns out to be a mere figural *effect*, caught, as it were, in the interstices of the omnipresent Global. I want to critique the *localism* of this globalization-speak and its metropolitan myopia.

Appadurai's thinking about 'locality' in the performative is not extended to the 'global'; one cannot be a constructivist while talking about 'locality' and simultaneously, a realist when thinking 'globality'. And this prevents him from thinking *the global as a kind of locality* whose 'production' requires all kinds of work, including the work of well-meaning cosmopolitanists like himself. The 'global' is not axiomatic, it cannot be taken as an ontological ground. Even in this era of 'globalization', it is, at best, an ethical project. As Gupta and Ferguson argue, the global/local binary is unproductive and instead, we need to think in terms of a difference-producing set of relations: we need to turn away from the theory which posits a 'pre-given world of separate and discrete "peoples and cultures"' and explore instead the *construction of differences* in the historical process (Gupta and Ferguson, 2002). What passes for *the Global* today, are phenomena strictly localized in the North: *the Global* is no more than an inflated local. This is true not only of the MNCs and McDonalds, but also of information, especially after '11 September' (Savio, 2002).

However, mine is not a claim for the agency of some resurgent, lurid 'local'. What I wish to point out is that the coding of a message may not, necessarily, control its reception: encoding and decoding are separate and autonomous processes (Hall, 1993). Even in this era of 'deterritorialized', 'simulated' images generated by what Armand Mattelart called 'International Image Markets' (Mattelart et al., 1993), there remains the agentive moment of decoding. Agency has to be restored to the silent majorities who, supposedly, consume passively without having a share in the production of meaning. It is now incumbent upon me to demonstrate this. My interactions with Madhusudan and his neighbours reveal that the immediate incitement to this *pat* was a *jatra* performance in the locality called *America jvalcche* (America is burning) by a Calcutta troupe called *Digvijayi Opera* in the aftermath of the 11 September. It staged the crash on the World Trade Center building as a spectacle, using models, gunpowder and *trompe l'oeil* techniques.¹⁰ *Jatra* is an age-old indigenous performance tradition known for its brand of cheap melodrama, droll theatricality and flat, black and white depictions.¹¹ Far from declining, the *jatra* style has permeated the whole gamut of popular performances in Bengal, from popular cinema to television soaps. These have become celluloid or televised *jatras* of sorts. Apart from the *jatra*, other bits of information also went into the making of the *pat*. The ballad (supposed to accompany the gradual unfolding of the *pat* scroll) inventories these (see the Appendix for a rough translation of the ballad). It demonstrates the palimpsest character and heterogeneous nature of this information. These came from word of mouth and face-to-face interaction. Yet, this face-to-face milieu – neighbourhood – cannot be posited in a way such that the impact of mass-media can be measured *against* it. Madhusudan had a rather diffuse awareness of the hardening of western attitude toward Islam, was familiar with the term Taliban, but had little awareness of the threat posed by the clash of the two fundamentalisms. These do not simply add up to the coherence of a *discourse* on terrorism, which is

not simply or even mainly, a story of rivalry between Bush and Laden acted out in an epic scale.

Madhusudan's version of 9/11 runs as follows. Once upon a time, there were two grandees called Bush and Laden who were good friends. One day, Bush made an off-the-cuff snide comment about Laden, which deeply upset him. Instead of reacting immediately, he went on a secret mission to Afghanistan. The *pat* then goes on to depict Laden's clandestine preparations involving the bizarre ritual of Taliban terrorists drinking the blood of a slain dog and taking an oath of allegiance to Laden. In due course, the Taliban terrorists land up in the USA and the crash on the World Trade Center building takes place, causing massive casualties. Gradually terrorism spreads all over the world, including Calcutta where two cops were gunned down in front of the United States Information Services building (by local mafia and unconnected to global terrorism). Somewhat inconclusively, the song ends with a call for peace but it is not clear as to who gave this call or how it is to be enforced. The visual, on the other hand, ends with Laden's entry into the caves of Torabora in Afghanistan.

The key to the meaning of the *pat* lies in the very first line of the ballad which states that the World Trade Centre crash is an *ajab* event. The Bengali word *ajab*, derived from the ancient Arabic word *aja'ib*, means 'marvellous'. The *ajab* is the site of excess, not unreal but super-real, challenging the quotidian regime of judgement and taste. Medieval Arabic and Indo-Islamic travelogues were authorized by an aesthetic of the marvellous, foregrounded in a *different* theory of the relation between language and 'reality'.¹² The *patuas* are subaltern Muslims occupying an in-between position between the two communities (the Hindus and the Muslims). While they practice Islam and go to the mosque, they also abide by typically Hindu *jati* (caste) restrictions and everybody has two names, one Islamic and another Hindu. Most important, their traditional caste occupation is depicting Hindu gods and goddesses, in *pat* as well as in other mediums (in clay dolls and earthen *saras*, both meant for ritual use). However, my point about the popular Bengali *ajab* can be made quite plainly by citing subaltern chapbooks sold on Calcutta pavements entitled '*Biswer Ajab Khabor*', containing obscure and fantastic information about the 'marvels' of the world.¹³ The World Trade Center crash qua *ajab* is thus conceived as happening in a register which is radically different from the mundane and the quotidian. Shall I say it happened as if in a dream?

9/11 AS A BENGALI FOLKLORE

Let us give Madhusudan a hearing. His story of the Bush–Laden conflict is highly coloured by the *jatra* which incorporated some subsidiary narratives as props to support the main one about the 9/11 crash. In fact, the *jatra* was performed on three different stages simultaneously – two of these being subsidiaries while the spectacle of the World Trade Center crash took place on the main or the central one (the *jatra* people use the word 'cyclorama' to describe this system of multiple narration involving more than one stage). One of the subsidiary narratives woven into the main one was about the youngest son of the Chaudhuries – the rich Zamindari house of Sonarpur (a rural suburb of Calcutta). This son, like many of his ilk, went to the USA for higher studies but before going abroad, he promised to his parents as well his fiancée that in due course he would come back to the country and undergo a proper

desi wedding. Also, he vowed not to indulge in excesses such as sex, alcohol and other sinful pleasures offered by the affluent West. Exactly the opposite happened: he immersed himself in carnal pleasures, forgot all about his girl and never called his parents. The story of the youngest son of the Chaudhuries who perished in the World Trade Center crash is just one motif in the larger narrative of the increasing sinfulness of the world – a familiar motif in the *puranic* grand-narrative deeply ingrained in the Indian mind. According to the *puranic* eschatology, there are four epochs in human history and the passing of each signifies progressive and cumulative pollution of the world. The last of these eras is the *kaliyug* (the present is always located in *kaliyug*) when the earth is so full of sin and strife that its destruction becomes imminent. It is only after a grand and spectacular destruction (*parlaya*) that it would be possible to make a fresh

start from a clean slate. I did not have a chance to see the *jatra* myself (by the time I met Madhusudan, it ceased to be a part of the repertoire of the *Digvijayi Opera*) but hearing him talking about his somewhat hazy recollection of the narrative of the *jatra*, I gather that it framed the 9/11 crash in a way – grounding it in various subsidiary narratives that is – such that the World Trade Center crash appears as a kind of grand finale symptomatic of the imminent end of the *kaliyug*: a sign of the times to come.

As for the other sources of information about 9/11, Madhusudan confessed that he simply did not register its importance when he heard the news on the radio on the 12 September morning. Also (now he recollects), he heard people casually discussing the event (published in all Bengali newspapers) in tea-shop *addas* in the bazaar he frequents. He recollects that Vivekananda Maity, a local *dada*, was discussing the event with his clique when Madhusudan was sitting on a nearby bench, sipping tea. However he had no proper understanding of the significance of 9/11. He knows little about the wider world and international politics. He chuckled in disbelief when I told him that developments in the wider world do affect his life and living conditions. He thinks that he and his like are too insignificant to figure in *rajniti* – the blanket Bengali word for not just party politics but more generally, events and developments at large. When I chose as my exemplar the prices of everyday necessities like rice or onion (the price of onion skyrocketed a few years ago because of the then Bharatiya Janata Party government's unwillingness to import onion on the face of a bad harvest), he seemed to concede my point. However, even I found it quite difficult to explain to him the 'worldhistorical' significance of 9/11 and its repercussion on the configuration of forces in the world today.

The gaps in his understanding of '9/11' become quite blatant when he tries to explain the storyline of the *pat*. At the time I met him, he had two 9/11 *pats* ready for sale. I photographed both (see Figures A1–A8 and B1–B8). Minor variations notwithstanding, these are more or less same. The first frame of the *pat* A (Figure A1) depicts Bush and Laden talking on the mobile phone as friends. The second and the third (Figures A2 and A3 respectively) are supposed to depict UN meetings and deliberations among various nations about the consequences of 9/11, the threat of the imminent war and the resultant situation. It is at this point that Madhusudan's narrative inadequacy becomes obvious: he is unable to explain this sudden hiatus between Bush and Laden who were depicted in the first panel as friends. He lamely

points out that the conflict might be the result of some off-the-cuff comment of Bush during the phone conversation which Laden found deeply upsetting or offensive. However, he is convinced that before this fall-out, Bush and Laden were on good terms and used to call each other quite often. Madhusudan did not know anything about the Gulf War or the Israel–Palestine conflict. Frame 4 (Figure A4) depicts the clandestine preparation of Laden and his followers somewhere in Afghanistan. Laden makes them drink the blood of a slain dog and take an oath of allegiance. Muslims are supposed to hate dogs and drinking the blood of a dog is a sacrilege (*haram*). The idea behind making a Muslim drink a dog's blood while taking an oath, according to folk Bengali Muslim belief, is that the drinker is condemned to redeem himself of the sacrilege by keeping the vow. Frame 5 (Figure A5) depicts the rogue aeroplane approaching the World Trade Center. Frame 6 (Figure A6) shows the crash. Frame 7 (Figure A7) depicts the devastation after the crash including the TV journalists video-recording the destruction and the debris. Frame 8 (Figure A8) shows Laden's entry into the cave of Torabora on horseback after the US army invaded Afghanistan. I was in touch with Madhusudan till the end of 2004 and he did not seem to be interested in the subsequent events such as the invasion of Iraq.

The narrative of global terrorism is thus reabsorbed in the traditional fairy-tale narrative of *pat* and its visual repertoire. This comes across clearly from an inspection of the visual: the predominance of non-mimetic elements, the divisions of pictorial space, the linear application of colours, absence of perspective, foreshortening, cast-shadows, chiaroscuro, the decorative motifs deliberately subverting the reality-effect and so on. The emphasis on detail and decoration and the intricately painted border, subtly shift attention away from the effects of verisimilitude (more on this later). The entranced viewer is within the narrative before he knows it. The mimetic message is clear: it is representation, not 'reality'.

Bad folk art

The Indian narrative painting tradition(s) – what the art critic Gulammohammed Sheikh calls the '*divyakatha*' tradition – operates on the basis of a clear-cut 'distinction of the physical world of mortals from that of the *devas*', demarcating 'the worlds of tangible reality and the region of the fabulous [*alukika*]' (Sheikh, 1994: 253). This is clearly discernable from the scales in which the figures are drawn. In *Amricaner pat*, the ordinary mortals are drawn in proportionate scale (in relation to the environment in which they appear) while the portrayal of larger than life figures like Laden and Bush – the two main protagonists of the story – are done in dimensions quite opposed to the norm of proportionate scale. In the very first frame (Figure A1), both Bush and Laden are depicted in ways which go on to show their larger-than-life stature as epic heroes. While their companions appear as smaller in size, the background in which they are set (domed mosque for Laden and domed building for Bush) seems to suggest a kind of panoramic vista – a vast distance in clear visibility that the naked eye would not be able to encompass in a single glance under normal circumstances. This suggestion of vast space against which the two figures are framed, is clearly a device for uplifting and denormalizing them in the viewers' eyes. The portrayal of the Twin Towers – used here as a kind of visual metaphor separating the two heroes – is clearly indicative of the fact that this is not 'reality' in the form of life observed. It is this very positioning that enables the two figures – looking frontally at the viewers but seated somewhat obliquely in a position

from which it is normally not possible to gaze frontally – to ‘give’ *darshan* to potential beholders.¹⁴ However, despite some ambiguous signs which may distract the uninitiated (e.g. the decorative motifs at the bottom of the frame), this picture as a whole is not meant to convey the impression of a static ‘arrested movement’ as in photographs or in ordinary pictures. Actually, the frame garners several points of viewing to open upwards from the bottom of the picture to the distant horizon at the top. This, as Sheikh has observed, while commenting on a similar scroll-painting, is

‘achieved by successive lifting of the picture plains corresponding to the figure placed upon them at different operational levels. Designed as a gradually unfolding rather than a static backdrop...the vast area it encompassed made it imperative for the viewer to discover it by tracking its spaces along with the figure – in an extended viewing *in time*, so that the narrative taking place in such spaces as seemingly focused on a single event in effect incorporate[s] several movements, quite evidently using the devices of continuous narration. While this method of spatial articulation invented continuously shifting horizon lines on a single plane, its true achievement lay in linking the mobile vision in imperceptible continuum’. (Sheikh, 1994: 261)

We should also note here that *patas* a form – the narrative as well as the visual – resists narrative historicity: the process of locating a tale in specific time and place. The notion of historicity questions the relevance of continuous narration and the co-existence of multiple events taking place on a single plane. But, it would now seem, with the episodic representation of a series of (contemporary) events in one *pat*, that the narrative has finally entered the time of history and that of the chronicle. But this judgment is definitely premature for our *pat* where there are various formal devices to subvert the tenor of a historical worldliness into what Sheikh has called, quite aptly, ‘a *nazar*’ or ‘a vision’ (Shiekh, 1994: 262). One of these is the continuously running and intricately decorated margin within which the narrative unfolds. Art-historians have commented on the epochal significance of the frame in the evolution of the visual economy of painting, but the frame is not the same thing as a well-pronounced margin.¹⁵ Frame is something added-on: it is *external* to the picture and belongs to the space of the observer rather than to the space of representation. The frame thus acts as a kind of boundary or enclosure within which the *work* of representation takes place. However, the frame is not just an enclosure, it is also a *closure*. Louis Marin has argued that the convention of a well-delineated frame presupposes a certain problematic of representation (Marin, 2001). To represent, writes Marin, ‘means to present oneself representing something. Every representation thus includes two dimensions, reflexive – to present oneself – and, transitive – to represent something’ (Marin, 2001: 353). Quite obviously, the device of the frame is an index of the reflexive dimension of the representational act while the pictorial space is related to the transitive dimension of the same act. Now if the plastic space becomes inclusive of the frame (as in our *Amricaner pat* with its elaborate border or margin consisting of figurative motifs whose function, apparently, is purely decorative), the transitive dimension of the representational act is seriously compromised. In other words, the border in our *pat* is symptomatic of a heightened reflexivity acutely aware of the representational act itself. In contradistinction to frame, which is added *after* the picture is made, the elaborate margin of our *pat* is already a part of the plastic space (the margin is added linearly from top to bottom as the vertical scrolls are being created). Thus, the relationship between the margin and what it encloses is not framed through a fiction of anteriority and deferral (as in easel painting). Unlike so

many photographic essays on '9/11', our *pat* does *not* even seek to *represent* an 'event' through verisimilitude whose facticity is said to be beyond or before representation.

The convention of the frame, as it evolved in western Europe from late antiquity to the Renaissance, has important implications for the emergence of signatorial authorship (the convention of signing a painting emerged with the Renaissance) and determining the nature of what Francastel (1994) called 'plastic space'. Ancient Romans used to have false windows and doors painted with views of the outside world in order to fool the gullible. The Renaissance completed the myth of this illusionism and framed pictures painted in oil perpetuated the legacy of the windowed vision. The important thing about 'illusionism' is that it changed the entire conception of plastic space from what it used to be under the medieval world-view. From the Renaissance onwards, '[t]he shadow of the artist hovered over every illusionistic picture like a ghost, asserting that the painting was his – and no one else's – view taken from a particular point in time and space' (Sheikh, 1993: 143). Velázquez's *Las Meninas* (1656) dramatically captured this new sense of illusionism: one has to stand at a particular spot at some distance from the canvas (exhibited in the Prado in a special room) in order to appreciate its uniqueness. This spot is nothing other than the point from where the painter himself took the view. As one stands at that point and looks in the picture, the painter looks straight into the viewer's eyes. It is this coincidence of the two gazes which spell out the larger truth of 'modern' vision: viewing is essentially a matter of 'point of view'. As Heidegger (1977) reminded us in his essay on 'world picture', the modern subject constitutes itself as subject by becoming the viewer of a world laid out before him as in a picture. As space becomes contingent on viewpoints ('It is, therefore, solely from a human standpoint that we can speak of space' – Immanuel Kant was to state near the opening of the *Critique of Pure Reason*), the vestiges of absolute space, of an order located in places themselves (think of the medieval *Mappa Mundi*), loses ground. In the pre-modern deep space, pictorial or otherwise, the humans were placed *alongside* other created things, to be viewed only by an omnivoyant God. The individual, to reiterate, was thus, not constituted as a viewer standing before a picture – the picture was not a window into the world. On the contrary, pictures looked at their viewers, they were 'observed', so to speak. Historically, the convention of the frame along with the idea of signatorial authorship, signified the epochal metamorphosis of the viewers into mere witnesses of the artist's view who connive with the artist's viewpoint.

Erwin Panofsky's 1927 essay, 'Perspective as Symbolic Form' demonstrates this graphically (Panofsky, 1991). It was Panofsky who enabled art historians to contest the view that linear perspective as developed in Renaissance art is a categorically truer way of representing the world. Following Panofsky, we must ask of our material 'not whether it has perspective, but which perspective it has'. In what can be called the *Kunstwollen*¹⁶ of pre-modern Indian art (if we still trust the kind of formalistic, style-centred art-historical scholarship that was somewhat challenged by Panofsky who prioritized meaning over style) the viewer is not considered as a witness but an active participant in the realization of the image. Asserting that '[for Mughal paintings] the process of negotiating a figure-space construct as well as colour was metaphoric', Sheikh advances the claim that Indian paintings should be understood through the '*gestalt* of an *incomplete* work of art'. This can mean various things of which the most obvious is the culture of disposability (as opposed to the 'aura' of the

work of art in early modern Europe) in which 'art' (including sculpture) circulated in India. Artworks

were seen to be *living* while in usage: hence periodic repainting or remaking formed part of their basic *raison d'être*. Floor painting at the doorstep or murals on cow-dung walls meant continual effacement and ritual repainting, daily or seasonally. A Pabuj[i] *phad* when worn out is given a ritual funerary immersion in a river or a lake. An overused manuscript would make room for replacement by another of its kind. So the survival of originals is more out of accident rather than an intent to conserve them for posterity . . . The visual culture that artists grew up in was presumably as ephemeral and regenerative as the painted picture. (Sheikh, 2000: 299–302)

Until recently, Bengali *pats* were not meant to be preserved and were simply thrown away when worn out. Apart from this disposability, the other thing to note about Indian visual culture is the collective nature of the work (several artists would collaborate on a single picture), the absence of the idea of authorship and interdependence of the visual image on literary, oral and various performative traditions (calligraphy, story-telling, dance, music, traditional theatre and so on). Painting, despite the influences exerted by European prints on the master craftsmen in the Mughal courts of Jahangir and Shahjahan (it was from this period that we get to hear about the names of the individual *ustads*), never really attained the stature of an independent and autonomous activity, as in post-Renaissance Europe.

'[A] painting remained partially empty until the catalytic eye of an informed viewer inhabited/completed it' (Sheikh, 2000: 306). This is brought out by various characteristic features shared by 'high' as well as 'low' Indian art: the tendency of not portraying emotions in the faces of characters, a predilection for portraying human images (in non-religious settings) in profile, the stress on primary colours while the intermediaries are left to the viewer's mind. Illusionism was unsuitable for most Indian paintings also because these are mostly outdoor visions. The physical practices of image-viewing in India – in manuscript illustrations, in murals, in scrolls, in icons painted on various media meant for *darshanic* viewing and in the Mughal '*muraqqas* (copied by regional rulers) – ruled out the convention of hanging framed pictures on the wall. As a result, the viewing practices also differ considerably: the Indian images prompt reading *across* rather than looking *into* the pictorial field. While the murals indicate a scanning method corresponding to the successive opening of spatial units as the viewer walked (Lannoy, 1975: 45–8), scrolls also unfold in time (in Bengali *pat*, the *patua* guides the viewer with the help of a stick acting as a kind of indicator as the *pat* unfolds). Hence Sheikh is right in asserting that '[in] such practices the prolonged sequence of time involved in apprising the pictorial space is antithetical to the notion to which illusionism so faithfully adheres, of arresting a climatic moment'.

So, if our *Amricaner pat* cannot readily be assimilated to the representational economy underlying the images of '9/11' disseminated by the metropolitan media, should we then try to recycle the thesis of a 'resistant' local asserting itself against the global hegemony of western image-machines? Let us postpone our deliberation for a minute and try to think through another variant of the global/local binary. If there is an *a priori* vector of resistance ingrained in the local, what kind of theorization endorses this putative intransigence? Today, an influential trajectory of thought endorses a 'resistant' local in the name of the 'everyday' (Guy Debord, cited in

Osborne, 1995: 192, wrote that the everyday is ‘the measure of all things’), in the name of ‘dwelling’, ‘habitation’ and so on. Heidegger wrote that ‘the public’ – meaning the political, as mediated by media and representation – ‘obscures everything’. The Heideggerian take on the everyday in the name of ‘dwelling’ is just one variant of a well-entrenched notion, which opposes the ‘particularism’ of the everyday to the ‘universality’ of the public realm (Arendt, 1958).

For Agnes Heller (a disciple of Arendt), whose account of the everyday both demonstrates its strength as well its dangers, the everyday is the realm of an alienation from species-being, expressed in class antagonism, private property, and the division of labour. Meanwhile, the politics of the everyday is that of a struggle to liberate the particularist masses into a realm of universality (Heller, 1984). In a peculiar reversal, in certain variants of post-colonial theory, this very anthropomorphism of the everyday – its immediacy, its narrativity, the fact that it is structured by the principles of economy and repetition (Felski, 1999/2000: 18–22) – is turned into signs of ‘resistance’ – making it inherently resilient to the technologization and instrumentalization of lifeworld(s) under late capitalism (Chakrabarty, 2000: 72–96). Yet, metalanguage always accompanies language in use: it is utter nonsense to say that reflexivity is wholly absent from the everyday, that it is solely a preserve of the pre-reflexive and the immediate. And more ominously, as recent scholarship shows, the arithmomorphic ‘universals’ – scientific, technical or philosophical rationalities – are permeated by anthropomorphism and narrative (Lakoff and Johnson, 1987; Lakoff and Núñez, 2000). Which is to say, the privilege accorded to the everyday and the ‘local’ on the ground of their supposed immediacy, is largely a self-deception. It is at this point that Benjamin’s pioneering attempt to think through a ‘magic’ or ‘myth’ of the modern – collapsing the apparently irreconcilable binaries like the beckoning of the hi-tech and the enchantment of the primitive fetish – assumes a strategic significance (Benjamin, 1999a: 510).

Dream kitsch

The myth of an originary and centred cosmos, of a self-enclosed ‘universe of recognition’, still persists in ethnology as exemplified by Marc Augé’s (1999) recent study of the role of dream and myths in the age of satellite TV and the internet. The working of myth is presented as a source of creativity in ‘traditional’ societies whereas the consequence of the invasion of the modern everyday by mass-media is shown to be destructive and disastrous. The invasion of ‘reality’ by fictions fabricated by media and its images breaks down the time-honoured, firm line of demarcation between ground reality and myth or dreams. We are not only losing our sense of reality, but also our ability to create those ‘fictions’ (myth, collective memory and so on) which have for so long sustained our collective sense of identity. My analysis of the humble Bengali *Amricaner pat* goes on to show that the meeting of these two different narrative logics – that of the hi-tech and folklore, of kitsch and dream, of media and myth – does not necessarily call for the deployment of the *topos* of a now and a then. The real world has never confirmed this model of a universal rupture. Augé’s distinction between a fiction that is ‘fabricated’ by media and a primordial, immediate ‘reality’, between likeness and presence, does not simply hold because what he calls ‘reality’ is also a ‘fiction’ in some sense: our worldly experiences are inescapably anthropomorphic and structured by narrative (Crites, 1995).

It is far more productive, in my view, to think in terms of a more flexible logic of negotiation between mass-media and what remains today of the vernacular myths or folklores. For all his naïveté of the opposition of ‘good’ myth to ‘bad’ mass-media, Augé’s work underscores the need to think through the notion of ‘dream’ as a form of thought and the centrality of dreaming in the human. What if we think in terms of dream-logic in negotiating a relationship between ‘11 September’ and what Madhusudan makes of it – as it is churned through an image industry whose range extends from the *New York Times* and CNN to our own *Digvijayi Opera*?¹⁷ Recall here Freud’s analysis of the palimpsest nature of dream-image resulting from censorship, distortions, displacements, condensations, overdeterminations and such like – all characterized by an instability of energy cathexes. The conventional reading of Freud’s dream theory maintains a rigid distinction between a prior presence and its representation in dream. And yet, as we have seen, 9/11 understood as an *ur*-presence has no privilege in *Amricaner pat*. It is about ‘11 September’ and simultaneously, it is not wholly or even mainly about the events of 9/11. In fact, if we include *Amricaner pat* in the inventory of representations occasioned by the event, then ‘9/11’ would become semantically so inflated, incorporating so diverse a range of meanings that it would lose all specificity: it would mean nothing at all. What *Amricaner pat* is to ‘9/11’, the Freudian dream image is to ‘reality’. ‘Reality’ here refers not to a prior presence (as Lacanian readings of Freud have amply demonstrated, see Weber, 1991: 38–58) but to representations which refer, in turn, to other representations. It follows that the *Amricaner pat* has another history, another trajectory which is not erased, annulled or nullified by its ‘contamination’ with mass-media and the global image industry. Thus, I refuse the critique of representation as abstraction; I refuse the narrative teleology that relegates real history and the time of lived experience to a time before representation and the mass-mediated spectacle (Debord, 1995).¹⁸ For better or worse, we live in an ontologically heterogeneous but entangled world.¹⁹ Not everyone inhabits the same Now, as Ernst Bloch tersely reminded us.

I want to conclude here by going back to where I began: Benjamin’s early (1925) essay, *Dream Kitsch*, from which I cited a few lines to serve as an epigram for these jottings (1999b). As is well-known, this essay marks the beginning of Benjamin’s negotiations with Surrealism, especially with Aragon’s acclaimed novel, *Le Paysan de Paris* (Calderbank, 2003; Hansen, 1987). There, the modern everyday of big cities like Paris is shown to be saturated with the marvellous, a lyrically intense dreamworld in which arises the basis for a ‘mythology of the modern’. The arcades there appear as ‘places where men go calmly about their mysterious lives and in which a profound religion is gradually taking shape. These sites are not yet inhabited by a divinity. It is forming there, a new godhead precipitating in these re-creations of Ephesus . . .’ (Aragon, 1980: 28). Benjamin’s appreciation of Aragon did not mean a passive acquiescence of this ‘dream world’; he wrote: ‘whereas Aragon persists within the realm of dream . . . [my] concern is to find the constellation of awakening. While in Aragon there remains an impressionistic element, namely mythology . . . here it is a question of the dissolution of ‘mythology’ into the space of history’ (Benjamin, 1999d: 845). In fact, the entire argument of the *Dream Kitsch* essay is that the inter-penetration of the two realms (dream and history, myth and kitsch) is not an anthropological constant but a historically specific phenomenon peculiar to late capitalism. Kitsch – the banal by-products of mass-culture resulting from eccentric, global circulation of things, are assimilated into dreams, thereby obscuring the oneiric

'blue horizon' of the Neo-Romantics with a 'grey coating of dust'. The dream does not open up a vista on the archaic as a promised horizon of lyrical escape but is already saturated with the mundane objects of the modern everyday life. Further, in Benjamin's 'profane illumination' of dreams, kitsch (not in Clement Greenberg's sense of sentimental, low-brow 'art' but as useless, outmoded artefacts, whose place in the prevailing regime of value is ambiguous) and the so-called 'folk art' play a special role. He wrote in '*Several Points on Folk Art*' that whereas 'art teaches us to see into things', 'folk art and kitsch allow us to look out *through* things' (1999c: 278–80). Thus, thinking through 'folk art', which exists today only as kitsch, as some kind of detritus or cultural debris, can be a modest beginning towards a certain politicalization of things.

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Notes

1. The inverted commas around 11 September indicate what can be called the *citatoriality* of 11 September or 9/11. Commenting on the event after a few weeks, Derrida said to his interlocutor: 'When you say "September 11" you are already citing, are you not? You are...recalling, as if in quotation marks, a date or a dating that has taken over our public space'. A little later, by way of clarification, he wrote, 'I am speaking here of the *discourse* that comes to be, in a pervasive and overwhelming, hegemonic fashion, *accredited* in the world's public space' (Derrida, 2003: 85, 93; emphasis in the original). These two comments point toward two different logics of framing 9/11. First, it might be argued that it is a singular event and its singularity is so absolute that by pronouncing '9/11' one is not using language in its usual referential function but pressing it to name something that is in fact unnamable and beyond language: terror and trauma. As Hal Foster explains:

Lacan [following Freud] describes the traumatic as a missed encounter with the real. As missed the real cannot be represented; it can only be repeated . . . repetition is not reproduction in the sense of representation (of a referent) or simulation . . . Rather repetition serves to screen the real understood as traumatic . . . repetition produces a second order of trauma, here at the level of technique. (Foster, 1997: 354–58)

Second, this repetition is not automatic: one is incessantly exhorted to repeat the image(s) of 9/11 by the immensely powerful western media machine that seeks to monumentalize it as a great world historical event. And this they do through the repetition of the 9/11 images – it becomes what Allen Feldman has called, a 'mediatic event'. He writes:

Aggressive technologies of image making and image imposition...do not simply refract or record an event, but *become* the event by materially transcribing a political code onto...cultural memory...by immersing spectator-participants in fear-provoking simulations of space–time actuality...thereby blurring whatever boundaries still pertained between war, desire and pleasure. (Feldman, 2005: 205; emphasis mine)

The actuarial gaze has a certain 'ocular aggression' built into it and the risk that is sought to be invoked by it has a 'cinematic structure'. Feldman clarifies:

The actuarial gaze . . . practices an aesthetics of space–time compression that renders the unfolding disaster serviceable to the expansion of . . . [a diabolical] scopic regime. Consider media's stabilization and synchronic reorganization of diachronic fragments in the circular video

repetition of the attack, burning and collapse of the World Trade Center. The actuality aesthetic of televisual witnessing used mechanical repetition and digital manipulation, such as freeze-framing, and slow motion, to reverse, spatialize and petrify violence; thereby extracting the event known as 9/11 from the chaotic temporal debris and from the affective flows of terror and disorder. (2005: 211)

Under this 'aesthetics of catastrophe', as Rosalind Morris has argued cogently, the event quickly becomes its image and the imaginary investment in images obstruct social relations based in fully symbolic, that is, linguistic practices. She terms this compulsive predilection for images that resist translation, 'fetishism', which is shown to be part of a wider 'technical fundamentalism' characteristic of today's America (Morris, 2004: 401–23).

2. *Manasamangal* is a *Mangalkavya* (literally, poems of well-being) – a genre of Bengali epic poems written approximately between the 13th–18th centuries, depicting the greatness of popular, indigenous deities. The poems are known as *Mangalkavya* because it was believed that listening to these poems about the deities brought both spiritual and material benefits. *Mangalkavya* describe the greatness of a particular deity, usually one indigenous to Bengal or an indigenous deity fused with an Aryan god. They also depict the conflict between the indigenous deities and the alien deities, which ended with the victory of the indigenous gods. The story of *Manasamangal* begins with the conflict of the merchant Chand Sadagar with Manasa (the folk, indigenous goddess of snakes) and ends with Chand becoming an ardent devotee of Manasa. Chand is a worshipper of Shiva, but Manasa hopes that she can win over Chand to her worship. But, far from worshipping her, Chand refuses to even recognize her as a deity. Manasa takes revenge upon Chand by destroying seven of his ships at sea and killing his seven sons. Finally, Behula, the newly-wed wife of Chand's youngest son Lakhindar, makes the goddess bow to her love for her husband through her strength of character, limitless courage and deep devotion. Behula succeeds in bringing Chand's seven sons back to life and rescuing their ships. The story of *Manasamangal* is very popular with the *patuas*.

3. The *Ramayana* is an ancient Sanskrit epic attributed to the poet Valmiki and is an important part of the Hindu canon. The *Ramayana* consists of 24,000 verses and tells the story of a prince, Rama of Ayodhya, whose wife Sita is abducted by the demon king of Lanka, Ravana. In its current form, the Valmiki *Ramayana* is dated variously from 500 BCE to 100 BCE. As with most traditional epics, since it has gone through a long process of interpolations and redactions, it is impossible to date it accurately. Like its epic cousin *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana* is not just an ordinary story. It contains the teachings of ancient Hindu sages and presents them through allegory in narrative and the interspersing of the philosophical and the devotional. It is fundamental to the cultural consciousness of India.

4. It should be added here that the subject-matter of *patas* can also be folk Islamic themes like the gospel of Satya Pir and also a variety of secular themes.

5. In British India, *Babu* came to mean a native Indian clerk. The word was used as a term of respect attached to a proper name, like 'Mr' or 'Sir'. But later *Babu*, without the suffix, was generally used contemptuously as signifying a semi-literate native, with a mere veneer of modern education. In the early 20th century the term *Babu* was frequently used to refer to bureaucrats and other government officials, especially by the Indian media; in this sense the word hints at corrupt and/or lazy work practices. Now it also refers to the educated, well-to-do, effete Bengali upper class.

6. The anthropologist Frank J. Korom spent extended periods among the *patuas* of Midnapur and he claims to have come across discussions on 'originality' and 'copyright' among the more progressive *patuas* (Korom, 2006). In fact, since there is fierce competition among the *patuas* for patrons, it is in their economic interest to protect a particular theme or motif.

7. In a Bengali anthology on *pat* in West Bengal published in 2001, we find mention of six districts – Bankura, Purulia, Birbhum, Howrah, 24 Parganas and Midnapore – where active *patua* communities existed in the recent past. See Bhattacharya (2001). Of course, the essays in the anthology were written much earlier, in the 1980s and 1990s. As of now, there are just two clusters of *patuas* still practising their art and both are in Midnapore. Birbhum also has a few *patua* households. For a stylistic analysis of the regional schools of *pat*, see Singh (2000).

8. 'Touristscape' is my neologism after Arjun Appadurai's 'ethnoscape', 'media-scape' and so on

(Appadurai, 1995: 27–47).

9. Baudrillard, the melancholic-fatalist prophet of post-modernism claims: 'Today the scene and the mirror have given way to a screen and a network. There is no longer any transcendence or depth, but only the immanent surface of operations unfolding, the smooth and functional surface of communication. In the image of television, the most beautiful prototypical object of this new era, the surrounding universe and our very bodies are becoming monitoring screen.' And this post-historical, post-social condition is unprecedented to the extent that the erstwhile categories of Critical Theory like alienation or reification are unable to capture the present:

[T]he consumer society was lived under the sign of alienation; it was a society of spectacle – but at least there was spectacle, and the spectacle, even if alienated, is never obscene. Obscenity begins when there is no more spectacle, no more stage, no more theatre, no more illusion, when everything becomes immediately transparent, visible, exposed in the raw and inexorable light of information and communication. *We no longer partake the drama of alienation, but are in the ecstasy of communication . . .* Ecstasy is all functions abolished into one dimension, the dimension of communication. All events, all spaces, all memories are abolished in the sole dimension of information. (Baudrillard, 1988: 12, 21–22, 23; emphasis in the original)

10. Interview with the proprietor, *Digvijayi Opera*, 396 Rabindra Sarani, Calcutta 700006, 15 February, 2004. This troupe usually produces *palas* (plays) based on contemporary themes. For example, in 2004, their production was called '*Saddam – The Captive Hero*'.

11. To the best of my knowledge, the only ethnographic monograph on contemporary Bengali *jatra* is in Swedish (Nygren, 2005).

12. See Mukhopadhyay, 1999.

13. See Anonymous, 2006.

14. In his magisterial work on Indian devotional chromolithographs, Christopher Pinney has drawn our attention to the embodied, corporeal aesthetics (as opposed to the practice of disinterested representation) immanent in the Indian practice of *darshan*, of seeing and being seen by the deity, which is physically transformative (Pinney, 2004: 8–12).

15. 'Besides the prepared ground we tend to take for granted the regular margin and frame as essential features of the image'. It is not commonly realized how late an invention is the frame. It was preceded by the rectangular field divided into bands; the horizontals as ground lines or strips connecting and supporting the figures were more pronounced visually than the separate vertical edges of the field. Apparently it was late in the second millennium BCE (if even then) before one thought of a continuous isolating frame around an image, a homogeneous enclosure like a city wall. When salient and when enclosing pictures with perspective views, the frame sets the picture surface back into depth and helps to deepen the view; it is like a window frame through which is seen a space behind the glass. The frame belongs then to the space of the observer rather than of the illusory, three-dimensional world disclosed within and behind. It is a finding and focusing device placed between the observer and the image. (Schapiro, 1994: 7)

16. For a recent critique of the Viennese art historian Alois Riegl's notion of *Kunstwollen*, which is undergoing a remarkable revival now, see Olin (1992).

17. On the metropolitan career of *the* image of '9/11' see Chermak et al. (2003). The essays I have found useful in this volume are: Christopher P. Campbell, 'Commodifying September 11: Advertising, Myth and Hegemony'; Fritz Breithaupt, 'Rituals of Trauma: How the Media Fabricated September 11'; and, Amy Reynolds and Brooke Barnett, "'America under Attack": CNN's Verbal and Visual Framing of September 11'.

18. Debord has been recycled and used often in recent, post-9/11 'leftist' polemics. See, for example, Retort (2004: 5–21); Smith (2003: 33–51).

19. For a critique of 'spectacle', see Mukhopadhyay (2005: 35–60).

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Illustrations

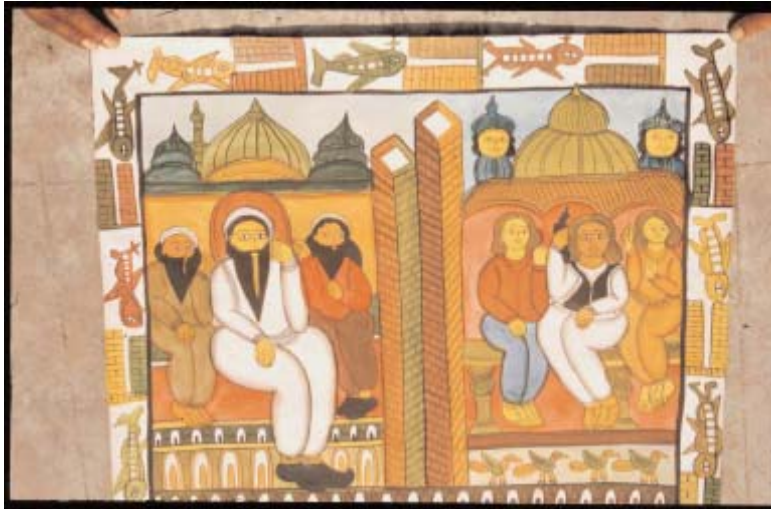


Figure 1: A1

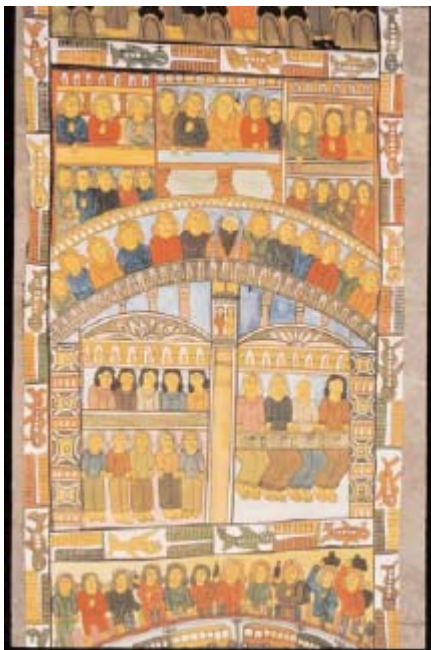


Figure 2: A2

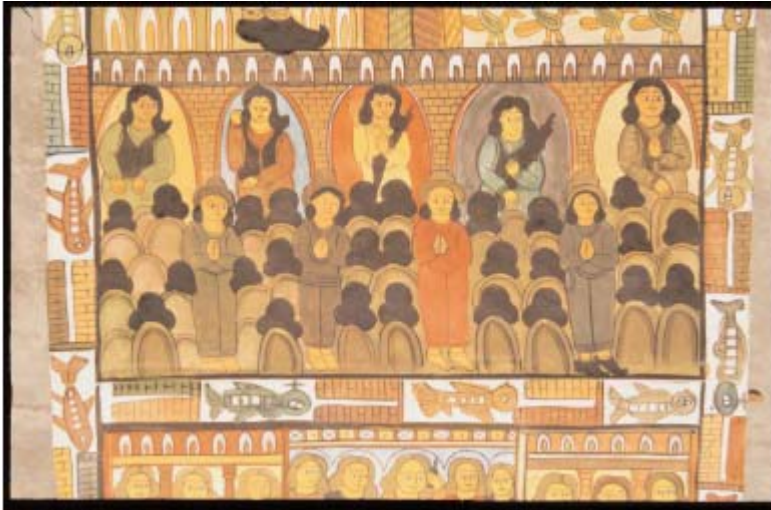


Figure 3: A3 (above)

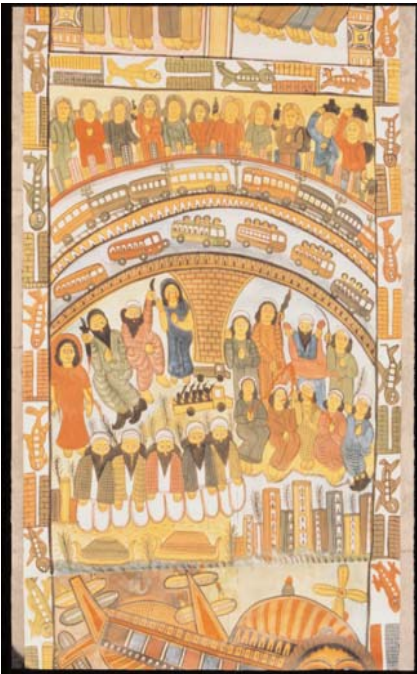


Figure 4: A4



Figure 5: A5

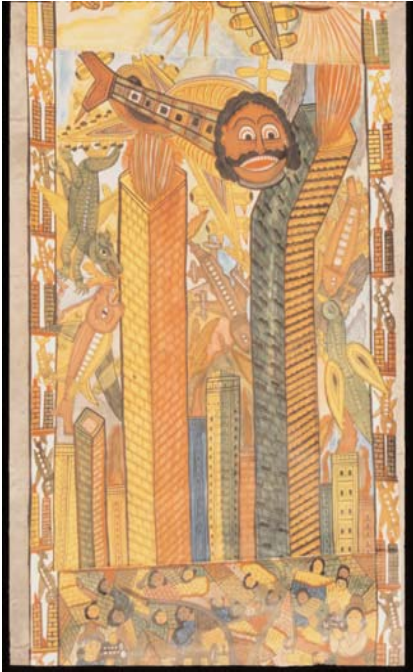


Figure 6: A6



Figure 7: A7



Figure 8: A8



Figure 9: B1



Figure 10: B2



FIGURE B3 (above)

FIGURE B4 (above)

Figure 12: B5

Figure 11: B3 and B4

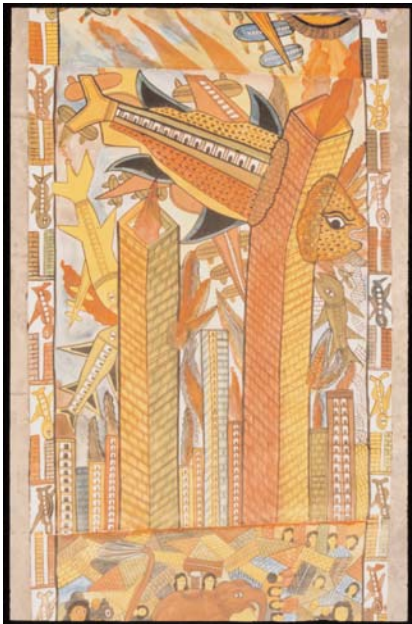


Figure 13: B6

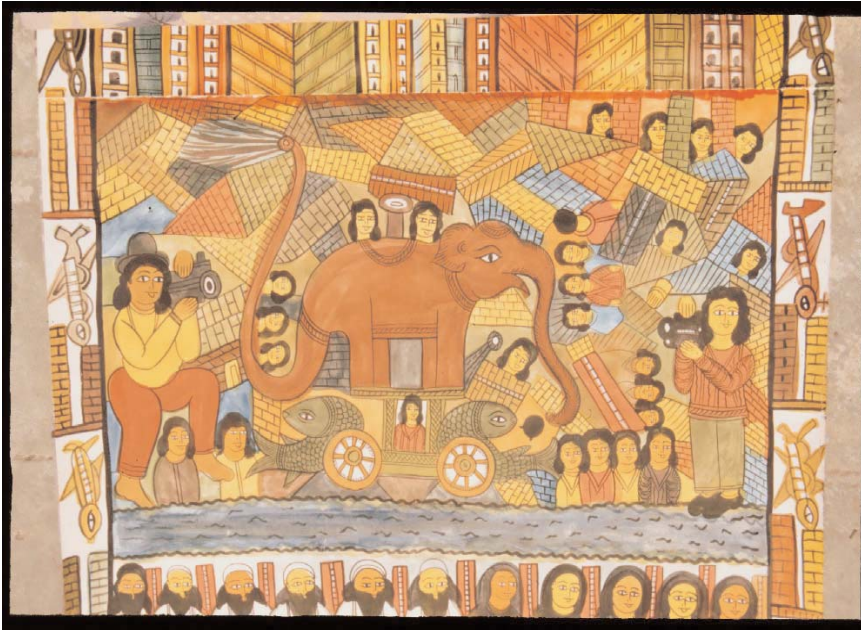


Figure 14: B7



Figure 15: B8

Appendix

Translation of the ballad accompanying *Amricaner pat*

The plane-crash in America is an *ajab* event.
George Bush laments, O Laden! how deceptive you are!
You caused such great damages.
Oh God, tell us how to wipe our tears and grieve!
The plane crash in America is an *ajab* event.

Now let us lend our ears to Laden and his followers.
He is saying: the enemy is about to get me,
I'll have to run for my life.
O Khuda, everybody is blaming me!
The plane-crash in America is an *ajab* event.

Bush is asking the foreigners: tell us a way to capture Laden.
Some say, it's not Laden, it's Ramji Singh; some say, it's Abu Salem.
But nobody knows who's truly behind the mischief.
In Calcutta, many notables work in the American Centre.
That place also fell under terrorist attack.
Many lives were lost to bullets.
All these are fall-outs of the event at Pentagon.
The terrorist cannot be easily recognized.
They are causing bloodshed by targeting temples and mosques
The Talibans have sworn by drinking the blood of a slain dog to continue the
terror with human-bombs.
The plane crash in America is an *ajab* event.

[Journalists are] taking photographs and scribbling reports,
The wounded are being taken to hospitals,
Doctors are complaining that the place is overcrowded,
Patients have to lie on the floor.
They are coming all the time, without respite
Nobody knows whether they'll live or die.
Everybody is weeping: the sky, the wind, and the plants.
Children are weeping in their mothers' laps looking for their fathers.
But we all want peace, we don't want war and terror.
Peace is what we want, peace is what our country wants.
The damage caused by the plane-crash in America can never be recuperated.