

The **Scholars Lecture Series**, initiated in spring 1994, is designed to encourage and promote the exchange of ideas among our most distinguished guest lecturers, University faculty, and students in the Scholars Program. The lecture series further enhances the intellectual experience, cultural awareness, and social consciousness of exceptional students in the College of Arts and Science.

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCE — 2011–2012 **SCHOLARS LECTURE SERIES**



NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

**Irving H. Jurow Lecture Hall Room 101A, Silver Center for Arts and Science
100 Washington Square East** All lectures are scheduled from 5 to 6 pm

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 21 THE RENAISSANCE TATTOO

Juliet Fleming, Associate Professor of English

Standard accounts of tattooing in Europe place its inception in the 18th century, when James Cook returned to England from the Polynesian archipelago with the tattooed islander known to the British as Omai. This talk marshals evidence that tattooing was indigenous to Britain from before the first century c.e., and argues that it was still in practice there in the 18th century, even as Cook's men discussed it as something unknown to them. Professor Fleming thus asks what it is that enables tattoos to stand as a sign of "otherness"—even to those who bear them.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 5 MISSISSIPPI CARD PLAYER: A DIFFERENT WAY OF LOOKING AT PROBABILITY

Samuel Marateck, Senior Lecturer in Computer Science, NYU Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences

Building on a simple technique used in elementary probability, this lecture puts forth a method that can be used to solve complex problems. These problems include counting the number of ways of getting from one point to another on a grid, determining the number of ways of getting different card hands and their probabilities, and calculating binomial and multinomial distributions.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 20 MODERN HUMAN ORIGINS IN TROPICAL AFRICA: A TALE OF ARCHAEOLOGY, EXTINCTIONS, AND VOLCANOES

Christian Tryon, Assistant Professor of Anthropology

Fossil, genetic, and archaeological evidence suggest that all living humans descend from an African population of *Homo sapiens* that originated and dispersed some 50,000–200,000 years ago. Field surveys and excavations on several islands in Lake Victoria (the largest in Africa) provide exciting new data. These include stone tools and other artifacts that tell us how these ancestral groups lived, sediments and fossil animals that tell us about the changing environments in which they lived, and volcanic ash deposits that tell us when these important events in human evolution occurred.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 8 AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF RETINAL RODS: MATHEMATICS AND BIOLOGY

Daniel Tranchina, Professor of Biology, Mathematics, and Neural Science

The first steps in seeing are mediated by retinal rods under conditions of dim illumination. They encode information by transforming light into an electrical signal. Rods are exquisitely sensitive under dark-adapted conditions. Two salient features of rods are their reliable, robust responses to single photons and their enormous capacity to adjust their sensitivity according to the ambient light level. This lecture will also address the interplay between mathematics and biology in elucidating the function of rod photoreceptors.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 21 THE ENLIGHTENMENT AS A TEXTUAL JOURNEY

Anne Deneys-Tunney, Professor of French

When Immanuel Kant in September 1784 answered the question "What is the Enlightenment?", he defined it as a chance for humankind to come out of a self-imposed immaturity. And he added a crucial distinction: a revolution can only overthrow political power; it cannot free people in their thinking. Only a revolution of the mind can truly free humankind of prejudices and oppression. If Kant celebrates the new possibilities of freedom for individuals, he gives almost no indication of how they can achieve this new way of thinking. Professor Deneys-Tunney will analyze how traveling becomes a way to reach a new freedom of thinking during the Enlightenment. She will analyze how 18th century travelers define a new way of travel—"the philosophical travel"—and how traveling becomes the ultimate experience in which the "self" can find him or herself in relation to the "other."

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 1 CULTURE AND ECONOMICS

Raquel Fernández, Professor of Economics

The field of economics has a long history of neglecting any robust study of the role of culture in economic outcomes. Recently there has been a resurgence of interest in this area. Professor Fernández will discuss how one can rigorously study culture's impact by focusing primarily on women's economic role in society.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 1 REFLECTIONS ON THE STUDY OF MIDDLE EAST POLITICS IN AN AGE OF UPRISING: FROM IRAN'S GREENS TO THE "ARAB SPRING"

Arang Keshavarzian, Associate Professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies

Much of the scholarship on the Middle East in the last ten to fifteen years has focused on elite politics, authoritarian survival, and Islamist political organizations. Meanwhile, the mass rallies in the wake of the 2009 presidential elections and the various public protests of 2011, which have overthrown or threatened regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, and beyond, have exposed how the political status quo in the region is vulnerable and faces challenges from political sensibilities and organizations that go well beyond Islamist politics. What explains the profound disconnect between mainstream political science research on the Middle East and the current political dynamics of the region? This lecture argues that the answer lies with the scholarship being framed not by socio-economic dynamics in the region, but by disciplinary concerns of political scientists and the policy concerns of funding agencies and US policy-makers.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 8 RETHINKING THE RELATION BETWEEN HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE AMERICAN GOOD LIFE

Crystal Parikh, Associate Professor of English and Social and Cultural Analysis

This lecture describes how, in the historical development of human rights discourses and instruments since 1945, the subject of human rights has largely been imagined to be a latent or emergent *American* subject. In other words, in international politics, American life has been equated with "good life" across the globe from the Cold War onwards, so that a human rights subject is expected to be American in character and desires, even if it is not actually (and usually is not) an American. Professor Parikh will explain how, at the same time, dynamic human rights principles and politics allow us to recognize other political aspirations and social relations, both in the United States and elsewhere, without falling back on simple notions of cultural relativism.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 23 A CONSPIRACY OF EQUALS: INTERNATIONALISM IN INTERWAR INDIA

Manu Goswami, Associate Professor of History

This lecture explores the making and meaning of internationalism in the interwar era in India. It focuses on the work and practice of a cohort of Indian exiles in Europe and America who sought to fashion a politics that was anti-imperial, yet also critical of nationalism.

MONDAY, MARCH 5 MOLECULAR DESIGN: FROM ANTIBIOTICS TO ICE CREAM

Kent Kirshenbaum, Associate Professor of Chemistry

Professor Kirshenbaum's laboratory seeks to craft new chemical structures tailored to carry out particular functions at the molecular level. In this endeavor, he and his colleagues are inspired by the ability of nature's biological molecules to fold into elaborate three-dimensional structures. They are extending the relationship between structure and function to new synthetic molecules. The current research emerging from his lab can be described as Chemical Origami—learning how to guide the folding of flexible molecules. They employ a molecular design approach to create new materials and advanced therapeutics. As part of a science outreach program, they are extending the molecular design concept to collaborations with chefs and culinary innovators. This lecture will also highlight recent advances in the design of drug molecules and unusual desserts.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 21 THE LIMITS TO WHAT WE SEE

Denis Pelli, Professor of Psychology

Visual perception is limited by computational inefficiency in binding the simple features that comprise a complex object and by clutter around the object. This lecture will examine what we really see and how we see the world around us.



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LECTURERS

ANNE DENEYS-TUNNEY, professor of French at New York University, received her academic training in France, where she was a Fellow at the École Normale Supérieure. She earned baccalaureate and doctoral degrees at the University Denis Diderot, Paris VII. Her field of research is 18th and 20th century literature and philosophy, the relationship between philosophy and literature during the Enlightenment in Europe, and political philosophy and the implications of technological development on democracy and ethics today. She recently published a book on the contemporary French writer Philippe Sollers entitled *Philippe Sollers ou l'impatience de la pensée*. She is the author of *Un autre Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Le Paradoxe de la technique*, and *Écritures du corps, de Descartes à Laclos*. She has also published over 60 articles and book reviews and is currently writing a book on the Enlightenment. Her teaching interests include: the Enlightenment and its contemporary interpretation, the contemporary novel and philosophy, technology and politics, psychoanalysis and literary criticism, women's studies, and theater.

RAQUEL FERNÁNDEZ is professor of Economics at New York University. She has previously served as a tenured professor at the London School of Economics and Boston University and held visiting positions at various institutions, including ECARES in Brussels, UPF in Barcelona, the University of Chicago, the Paris School of Economics, the IIES in Stockholm, the World Bank, the Federal Reserve Board, and the IMF. She has also served as co-editor of the *Journal of International Economics* and as associate editor of the *Review of Economic Dynamics* and *Economia*. She serves on the Executive Committee of the Latin American and Caribbean Economic Association and as an advisor to the World Bank's World Development Report on Gender Equality and Development. She is the recipient of several NSF grants and a Spencer Fellowship, and was named a National Fellow at the Hoover Institute and a Visiting Scholar at the Russell Sage Foundation. Her most recent research lies in the areas of culture and economics, development and gender issues, inequality, and political economy.

JULIET FLEMING is associate professor of English. She received her Ph.D. at the University of Pennsylvania. Her research interests focus on Renaissance literature and culture, history of the book, literary theory, and theories of writing. Professor Fleming's recent publications include *Graffiti and the Writing Arts of Early Modern England* and *Taxidermies: the Work of Peter Briggs*. Her numerous fellowships and awards include the Choice Outstanding Academic Title Award for *Graffiti and the Writing Arts of Early Modern England* and the Ahmanson/Getty Fellowship from UCLA.

MANU GOSWAMI is associate professor of History at New York University. She is the author of *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space*, as well as articles on political economy, nationalism, and social theory which have appeared in the *American Historical Review*, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, and *boundary 2*. She was a Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study in the School of Social Science from 2010 to 2011.

ARANG KESHAVARZIAN is associate professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at New York University. He earned his Ph.D. from the Department of Politics at Princeton University. He is the author of *Bazaar and State in Iran: the Politics of the Tehran Marketplace* and several articles in edited volumes and journals, including *Politics and Society*, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, *Geopolitics*, and *Middle East Report*. He is currently conducting research on a project examining imperialism and globalization from the vantage point of the circuits of exchange, movement, and control in the Persian Gulf.

KENT KIRSHENBAUM joined the faculty of New York University in 2002 and is currently an associate professor in the Department of Chemistry. He obtained his Ph.D. in pharmaceutical chemistry from the University of California, San Francisco. He teaches classes in biochemistry and leads a research group in bioorganic chemistry with a focus on the folding of biomimetic macromolecules. His research includes extensive contributions from undergraduate scientists and collaborations with biomedical investigators at NYU's School of Medicine. Recent advances include the

development of a potent antibiotic for combating Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) infections. He is a co-founder of a science outreach program called the Experimental Cuisine Collective. His work appeared in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* and has been featured on the *Food Network*, *Cooking Channel*, *Discovery Channel*, *PBS*, *Time* magazine, and *Art Culinaire*.

SAMUEL MARATECK, senior lecturer in the Department of Computer Science at the NYU Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences, has published seven textbooks on computer science, a film series on probability and statistics, and journal articles in mathematics and physics (one of which was published in Mandarin by the Chinese Academy of Sciences). He also developed a technique with the late Peter Rosen, former director of High Energy and Nuclear Physics at the U.S. Department of Energy, which is known in the literature as the Marateck-Rosen Plot. He has received numerous teaching awards while at NYU, including the prestigious CAS Golden Dozen Award.

CRYSTAL PARIKH is associate professor in the Departments of English and Social and Cultural Analysis, and Director of Undergraduate Studies in SCA. She received her Ph.D. in English Language and Literature from the University of Maryland at College Park. Her areas of research and teaching include Asian American studies, Latino studies, critical race theory, theories of gender and sexuality, and 20th century and contemporary American literature. In addition to several articles, Professor Parikh has recently published *An Ethics of Betrayal: The Politics of Otherness in Emergent U.S. Literature and Culture*, which won the Modern Language Association Prize in United States Latina and Latino and Chicana and Chicano Literary Studies. She is currently working on a new book about human rights discourses and contemporary U.S. writers of color.

DENIS PELLI is professor of Psychology. He received his Ph.D. at Cambridge University and began his tenure at NYU in 1995. Professor Pelli has contributed several new techniques of measurement, as well as major empirical findings and theoretical accounts that have combined to provide much of the support for the modern understanding of object recognition. His methods are widely used in research and therapy settings. The Pelli-Robson Contrast Sensitivity Chart is used in clinical trials of eye therapies; vision labs use the Psychophysics Toolbox of MATLAB to generate stimuli and run vision experiments; and the QUEST algorithm is used to measure threshold. Professor Pelli has published extensively in the field and is the editor of *PLoS ONE* and the *Journal of Vision*. He is a Fellow of the Optical Society of America and has been the recipient of their Leadership Award-New Focus Prize.

DANIEL TRANCHINA is professor of Biology, Mathematics, and Neural Science. He earned his Ph.D. at Rockefeller University and joined the faculty at NYU in 1984 with a joint appointment in the Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences and the Department of Biology. His research analyzes the biology and mathematics information processing that takes place in the retina in order to better understand the neural mechanisms underlying visual perception. In his research Professor Tranchina combines theoretical analysis, mathematical modeling and computer simulation with experimental studies. He has published widely in the field and has been the recipient of a Whitehead Fellowship.

CHRISTIAN TRYON, assistant professor of Anthropology, received his Ph.D. from the University of Connecticut. Prior to joining the Anthropology Department and the Center for the Study of Human Origins at New York University, he was a post-doctoral fellow in the Human Origins Program at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History and the *Centre d'études préhistoire, antiquité et moyen-âge* of the *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* in Valbonne-Sophia Antipolis, France, as well as a visiting assistant professor at George Washington University. His research interests focus on exploring the behavioral evolution of Middle and Later Pleistocene hominins and the origin of *Homo sapiens*. He has conducted archaeological and geological fieldwork since 1994 in Kenya, Turkey, France, and North America, and serves as an associate editor of the *Journal of Human Evolution*.