Adorno and the Architects of Late Style in India

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4 The art of disappearance

Reading Adorno in the house of Dayanita Singh

> Of myself – thanks to that privilege which does not last but which gives one … the faculty of being suddenly the spectator of one's own absence – there was present only the witness, the observer, in travelling-coat and hat, the stranger who does not belong to the house, the photographer who has called to take a photograph of places which one will never see again.
> The process that automatically occurred in my eyes when I caught sight of my grandmother was indeed a photograph.[1]
> (Proust, from *The Guermantes Way* (*Remembrance of Things Past* 2): 141)

Over the better part of the last two decades, Delhi-based photographer Dayanita Singh (b. 1961) has featured increasingly as a major presence within the contemporary spaces of international art exhibition. At the Gwangju and Venice Biennales (2008; 2011 and 2013); in a much-anticipated appearance at the German Pavilion of the latter alongside Ai Weiwei, Romuald Karmakar and Santu Mofokeng (2013); in solo shows which include critically acclaimed exhibitions at Berlin's National Gallery at the Hamburger Bahnhof (2003) and the Serpentine and Hayward Galleries in London (2008; 2013); and after a major retrospective at the Huis Marseille in Amsterdam (2010), Singh's career attests to the propulsive global visibility of Indian artists in this time. While Singh's oeuvre can be conventionally periodised within the context of post-liberalised Indian art and its spectacular, if relatively recent entry into multinational circuits of production and exhibition, the particular trajectory of her career, as well as the ensemble of formal choices that currently comprise her oeuvre, strains at both national and globalist frames of such contextualisation.

Ascriptions of gender and nationality sit uneasily with the artist herself. In an interview in 2013, Singh suggests as much by deflecting a question about her artistic persona, towards a characterisation of the photographic image as an index of "loss". In this oblique appeal to the stock-modernist idiom of photography as a work of mourning, Singh asserts that the experience of "loss" – presumably like photography itself – "has [no] nationality".[2] The statement is doubly suggestive, linking temporalities of both loss and creative

opening to a possibly privative, or otherwise superseded understanding of "nationality". By the same token, the comment foregrounds the difficulty of fixing Singh's artistic choices (and identity) to the traditional parameters of the photograph, considered as both still-image and as an enclosed work of artistic value, within the context of modernist representational practices in India. Suggesting an art form that outlives the losses it nevertheless conveys, Singh raises the question of what photography might still have to offer after the digitalised dissolution of its medium.

The implications of such a "post-national" hypothesis are suggestive both with regard to the possible creative gains for artistic practice that emerge from such an historical conjuncture, as for any critical appraisal of Singh's oeuvre as an instance of properly contemporary artistic practice, which reflects the historicity of its own forms by measuring the distance between the spaces and traditions of the modern, and the current explosion of global sites of art exhibition and circulation. Bearing these implications in mind, I note at the outset, that any introduction to Singh's work would be incomplete without reference to her anomalous socio-political status as an "Indian woman photographer". Trained at the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad and at New York's International Centre of Photography, Singh started out in the 1980s as a photojournalist for national and international publications; her extended assignments from this period demonstrate a significant commitment to questions of social justice, especially as they bear upon corporealised experiences of social suffering. Singh's vertiginous artistic success from the mid-1990s onwards is inextricable from her exceptional, unfolding artistic commitment to the relationship between the photographic medium, and the historical possibilities of its form. As such, Singh's career together with her ongoing multimedial practice presents a notable outlier to norms that, four decades later, continue to bind Indian photographers – especially women – to the hegemony of news reportage within a prolifically mediatised public sphere.

Singh's oeuvre, too, continues to evolve in unanticipated directions despite having developed, in its photographic foundations, almost sequentially across subjects and uses of genre. At the turn of the millennium, Singh established herself through exemplary works of photo-documentation; notable is her series of 21 black-and-white images, titled *I am as I am* (2000), which chronicles the secluded communality of young female novices in a Varanasi ashram. Destabilising the copiously photographed subject of Varanasi from the visual codes of both ethnography and coffee-table tourism, the work is significant for anticipating the consistent obliquity of the photographer's approach to questions of culture, place and (sexual) identity. In elevated camera angles, Singh frequently segments the open interiors of the ashram's terrace from the surrounding, riverine landscape of the city, alternating the view of one massively buttressed space by implicating it in the perspective of another. In its subject matter, the volume comprises of powerfully individuated frontal portraits of novices taken in moments

of leisure, in scenes of collective discipline or in the momentary vertigo of personal pleasure. Yet in individual compositions, and across the pages of the volume, the architectural spaces of *I am as I am* acquire a significance that exceeds the function of context or setting for the portrait – the built environs of the ashram's enclosure are mobilised into the means of a visual relay between a *style of the body*, as captured in the collection's powerfully embodied portraits, and a corresponding *style of privacy* within the secluded communality of the ashram. While this early volume subscribes unambiguously to the genre of the photo-documentary, I suggest that its images accomplish a paradoxical mode of visibility – it is, perhaps, the presence of massive opaque walls, or the surface of an architectural partition, that seta in play the series of portraits that comprise the volume. The coherence of Singh's style reposes, already, in the enfolded contiguities between structures of enclosure and the arresting action of an embodied disclosure (a stylistic integrity, I suggest, at the outset, that also informs the artist's more recent intermedial installation work).

I am as I am was followed by the ground-breaking, *Myself, Mona Ahmed* (2002), a photo-narrative of the migratory life of a self-castrated *hijra* (literally "eunuch", transsexual) from Old Delhi. *Myself, Mona Ahmed* might be approached as the limit term of Singh's investigations of the body – whether in the manner of its iconicity or incommensurability – as elaborated through the photographic construction of space. Alternating between portraits of Mona and her self-narration in e-mail correspondence with the artist and the book's publisher, the volume comprises a visual chronicle of Mona's peregrination through the city of her birth, an account of motherhood (and loss), and Mona's choice of an enduring domicility on the margins of the medieval city, on the grounds of a decrepit Muslim cemetery. *Myself, Mona Ahmed* establishes the body as the intimate contact point between the media of its representation, and the spatial distribution of this image in itineraries of migration, dwelling, kinship, (dis)affiliation and abandonment. As a narrative, the work emerges by dismantling generic differences between visual chronicle, the dramatic arc of character-driven narration, testimony and the auto-fictional possibilities of dialogue (in which the presence of the artist-interlocutor, in turn, finds legibility in the traces of print or electronic typescript). Though uncategorisable by the standards of any of one of these genres – the artist refers to *Myself, Mona Ahmad* as a "visual novel" – the volume is, in this element at least, an affirmation of the narratological possibilities that repose within the book form. As such, Mona's *via dolorosa* displays the history of an always technically mediated sense of "intimacy" – or a sentient history of proximity and distance that unfolds as much between artist and model, as subject and reader, and whose episodes are played out in eroticised registers of pain, communion and self-revelation.[3] Singh's exemplary uses of portraiture remain notable across the narrative, serving everywhere to undercut the camera's demand for a recognisable narrative of sexual confession/transgression – an expectation that is at once solicited and

outstripped by the narrative's relentless frontal identifications of an abject, tender and excessively expressive body.[4]

In a departure from the photo-documentary genre that first established her career, the collections, *Ladies of Calcutta* (1997–1999), and the critically acclaimed *Privacy* (2004) and *Go Away Closer* (2006) develop the artist's intensive engagement with portraiture – a form that Singh stretches across exhibited collections and their published volumes from this period, into arrangements of especially feminine ensembles of lineage, affiliation and physiognomic resemblance. Already significant in these works are ongoing inter-textual references between exhibited collections and their book publications; critical reception from this time conjectures on how Singh's corpus is able to develop almost "seamlessly" through movements of self-reference and reconsolidation (presumably, also between photographic exhibits and their rearrangement for publications).[5] Images from these collections frequently pivot around the genre of the family portrait, an associated exploration of conventions of the sitter's self-presentation and an alignment of the family grouping with feminised performances of filial welcome and leave-taking. (This intimate world of feminine inclusion and departure is thematised, perhaps most powerfully, in compositions that "narrate" the poignancy of bridal leave-taking enacted in public streets in full dress or through the empty spaces of wedding *pandals* (stages) encountered by night. The 2006 series *Beds* or *Ladies of Calcutta* already interpolate such moments into allusions to conjugal bereavement in the persona and daily accoutrements of the Bengali *bidhawa* (widow); the traditional figure of feminine remembrance, also an enduring construct of the nineteenth-century Bengali literary imagination.)

Dislodging the subject of the portrait from its habitual setting, the focus of *Go Away Closer* and *Privacy* initiates Singh's ongoing preoccupation with the dwelling space itself, or the interiors of a built environment which would otherwise serve to "frame", "set" or "hold" in place the photographic subject, in this case, the image and historical presence of the sitter. While this possible slide of focus from figure to ground enters even into Singh's most forthright uses of traditional portraiture (as in the affable sunlit interiors of *Ladies of Calcutta*), its effect is felt most powerfully in the depopulated, intensely enigmatic spaces of *Go Away Closer* and *Privacy*. These continue to retain the conventions of the genre while displacing or even extracting the human figure from its setting, thereby affecting the viewer's perception of both the subject and space of the bourgeois interior in peculiar ways. For the purposes of this discussion, these provocations might be approached through two broad, interrelated directions. First, by rendering a notional "sitter" into the erased/able yet necessary precondition for the photograph's legibility, these images specify "home", in the details of the domestic interior, through departure – or the *traces of disappearance*. The effect is to confront the viewer with a sudden apprehension of empty space, as it opens up between the richly detailed materials and objects of the interior. As the

readings in this chapter will suggest, in moments of such unsettling perceptual reversal, across images and collections, the photographic operation itself becomes an object of visibility. Second, by emplacing visual metaphors of the photographic apparatus within the compositional space of the image, Singh's images from this period already invert orienting distinctions between what is properly internal to the photographic frame, and what is relegated to its outside. By introducing such recessive, ongoing discrepancies between the moment of photographic "capture" and the means through which such visibility is accomplished, Singh's images add time to our assumptions about photographic instantaneity – thereby disclosing the photographic "shot" as, itself, as an exemplary technology and artefact of lateness. This suggestion has implications for critical methods involving questions of artistic biography and oeuvre, and bearing these in mind, I move this introduction forward, to Singh's contemporary installation works, which have garnered exceptional global salience since the publication of these photographic volumes.

In 2012, Singh conceptualised her first presentation of the "museum" installation, a modality of art installation that informs ongoing innovations in her current practice. Titled *File Museum*, the installation presents a dramatic excess of black-and-white photographs, featuring overflowing, palpably degradable paper documents of government agencies. These are placed within the cabinet-like frames of a teak-wood structure similar to a room partition, where the panelled surface might itself be further unfolded (or retracted) through hinges that attach to smaller, recessed spaces – pigeonholes, in which a further plethora of a hundred and forty photographs are sequenced and stored. Suggesting near-illimitable sequences of identities and histories, the screen/cabinet honours the subjection of ordinary lived experience to labyrinthine systems of bureaucratic identification and authentication across India's (post)colonial history. But in its own retractable possibilities, the installation also serves to release the plurality of everyday life into potentially countless manifestations of the display object – where the "object" might be said to range across the writerly mark on paper, the heaped and unruly contents of the box file, as well as the photographic image of such devices of documentation and containment. Altogether, *File Museum* postulates a speculative archive, open, through the incorporation of chance and the unexpected action of the individual viewer on the collection, to incalculable combinations of histories and their narration – a potentiality that would be literally inconceivable outside the makeshift stability of the screen, and its construction, within the exhibition environs itself, of a sheltering space for the photographic encounter. As a curated intervention, the moveable structure of *File Museum* also implicates the touch and judgement of the collector; the artist's own collection of photographs over the preceding three decades are selected, emplaced, and possibly anonymised as notional "objects" of the file museum. Implicating the photograph in a potentially unbound series of renarrations, the installation suggests the

unprogrammed, even disordered manner in which institutional memory might actually exist. Akin to the fan-like structure of display, memory-forms (museums, archives, but also something like a family album) might be opened again, reassembled or invoked through alternative points of contact – especially in contexts for which the traditional function of the exhibition space tends, like the overvalued object of art, towards disuse. Whether because of the moribund cultural status that now attaches to the official document, or the object's self-enclosure from public life as a "work" with discrete artistic or personal value, the materials of display in *File Museum* reappear through the very processes of museolisation to which they have been subjected. In this way, the curated existence of both the photograph *and the traditional spaces of its display* reacquire the power to fascinate.

Fascination – which dispels the immediate evidence of our senses to draw us, rapt, into the haunting details of everyday life – remains the enduring signature of Singh's photographic art as it moves across collections into evolving forms and other materialities. As the readings comprising this study will propose, this quality of absorption is essential to Singh's art, serving to still realist vectors of "actual" or empirical space and time within the photographic frame. Dilating our horizon of perception, Singh's images arrest us in our search for what is properly interior to constructs of visibility. Through uncanny inversions of the compositional coordinates of inside and outside, perception is redirected towards an unverifiable, properly unspatialisable outside. This capacity of form – of remaking interiority by making it into a mystery, of rendering alterity within the tangible structures and conventions of presence – imbues the everyday architecture and tactile surfaces of the home, the cabinet recess, the frame or the household item of the storage cupboard with a powerful affective charge. Singh's ongoing practices with modalities involving the "file-museum" or the temporal "binding" of combinations of photographic narration to the materials of the book cover, affords, above all, a reopening of the photographic object to the individuated agency of the viewer and the postulation of an as-yet unidentified user – even as the visual appearance of all such objects become saturated with the signs of finitude, in evidence of material degradation and museolisation.

From the perspective of this study, historicity – at least in Singh's world – is nothing less than this moveable relation between art and everyday life – a relationality without guarantees that also haunts the moribund structures and institutions of public memory (as in *File Museum*). In uses of the museum–cabinet–partition structure, Singh's contemporary installations conjoin monumental public archives to the fate of disowned "case histories"; the grand scale of history, in other words, is visibly reduced to its entanglement with countless anonymised individual lives and ordinary biographies. Notable is the 2013 exhibition series comprising *File Room Book Object*, which was reconceptualised and produced as the book, *File Room* [http://dayanitasingh.net/file-room/] in the same year. Displacing the still-image from its frame, Singh mobilises the photograph, as both composition and

medium, towards the bound-book cover and so, towards a different order of spatial as well as artistic containment.[6] Implying the literary "binding" of the photograph and its reproduction to narrotological structures of time and space – to divergent "storylines" set in motion by the same material – *File Room* appears to accelerate the dissolution of the traditional frames and genres through which the photographic image is received – a potentiality that will be applied, retroactively, to readings of reflective technologies as we find them in the works of Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno. Altogether, the inflection point between the photographic collection and its possible iterations as file/book/object displaces no less than a suggested history of photography into the space between various media. As we will see, it is the distance between the photograph, the book and the historiographical trace that is placed in relation to the "hinge" – and so given form. Above all a mediatic device, the hinge, whether photographed or a part of the wooden structure of display, lends visibility to the object while also licensing the viewer to reorder images in potentially unfinished sequences.

In light of Singh's most current practices, this chapter revisits the artist's photographic uses of the domestic interior, together with the conventions of portraiture, with a particular focus on selections from the collections *Privacy* and *Go Away Closer*.[7] If excerpts from these works feature as a point of focus in the commentary, it is because the photograph already militates against a chronological history of its development, whether in an account of the artist's oeuvre or in the speculative history of the form suggested by her current practice. In their intricate compositional integrity, the images comprising these photographic collections anticipate the scope, force and provocations of Singh's contemporary installations, in particular, her ongoing uses of the modality of the museum–book–file-room installation. Images in these collections become perceptible through the quality of intimate recognition, say, in the suspension of time that imbues the "still" with the power to fascinate, or otherwise, in the uncanny exposure of architectural surfaces to the outlines of "negative", inverted or inexistent space; the affects that accompany such points of recognition are unsettling, suggesting to the viewer how the structures of photographic interiority, including those of identity and presence, *are already in transit* towards an unnameable outside.

Singh's unfolding corpus of works is a continuous reconstellation of the question of the right distance (*Abstand*) between ourselves, in our particular historical situation, and the photographic object. We have already encountered this question, in previous discussions, through an interrogation of the *Denkbild* (thought-image) in the written text – or the still-point of the allegorical image, in which we witness the dissolution of historical guarantees related to sovereign values of freedom, autonomy, identity and, through this, the inoperability of critical criteria that would allow us to decide, with certitude, on the "correct" perspective to take before the disintegrative image. How do we inherit the object-world of the twentieth-century

photograph? Can the entwinement of that photographed world with the historical structures of the museum, the archive or the public icon still touch us, today, as a claim that extends past the various "endings" through which these founding national forms are narrated in our post-historical conjuncture? As the photograph slips from its holding frame to other devices of exposition, appearance and unanticipated recognition, what orders of futurity are opened to us – as much by the possibility of an artistic practice that emerges through the ongoing dissolution of its own medium, as through the action and choices of visual re-possession by an unforeseen user?

Legacies of the real: Contextualising the interior

In their most accessible or "realistic" aspect, Singh's interiors document the visual resplendence that attaches to depictions of leisured domesticity. While these images focus on the contemporary spaces of upper-/middle-class Indian metropolitan life across communities and cities, their wealth of detail, together with her sitters' pronounced capacities for an individuated self-presentation, invites explicit comparison with depictions of the bourgeois interior in the modes of European and colonial realism. Despite differences in consumption patterns, both modes of narrative realism were articulated at a shared historical and material conjuncture, in which the representational codes of descriptive realism were articulated in and through descriptions of the middle-class interior. In the transition from modern mercantile capitalism to industrialisation, or the era that Adorno identifies with "incipient high-capitalism" in his own analysis of the bourgeois interior in Northern Europe, the accumulation of value on the Continent remained inextricably tied to Empire and competitive nationalism – and therefore, entangled with the birth of a colonial modernity elsewhere. If "high" commodity capitalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century "involve[d] a new valuation placed upon the world as a collection of objects in use", the domestic interior constituted a privileged locus for the consolidation and arrangement of such an object-world across a "global … empire of things" ("Phantasmagorias", Chaudhuri, 173, 178).[8] In her compelling genealogy of nineteenth-century realism, Supriya Chaudhuri aligns the habitus of conspicuous consumption ("expressed as wealth or taste") in domestic fictions of nineteenth-century European and American realism, with the contemporaneous adoption of "new living styles by [a semi-feudal] colonial bourgeoisie" in Bengal, the site of the earliest experiments with realist representational codes in South Asia. For this new class of a consuming, aspirational elite, the expression of leisure was "closely related to the display of wealth" – as it was to world of the realist novel itself (176). Comparing the linkages between interiority, affect and representations of the interior in novelistic realism, Chaudhuri demonstrates how the norm of the "well-furnished" bourgeois interior became the locus of various (often contested) forms of bourgeois

self-verification and consolidation in both Euro-American and colonial contexts in this period.[9] We might approach the furnished interior, first, as a paradigmatic site, and signal, of middle-class modernity in the context of the rapid expansion of commodity markets (across these comparative loci). Accordingly, the interior is, among other things, *a style of the modern* to the extent that it at once actualises and individuates logics of commodity exchange and transfer through personal consumption. Second, as one itinerary taken by capital's universalising drive, the history of the private interior is significant, in this period, for reflecting changes in the values of political economy itself: Within the domain of leisured privacy, a consuming middle-class acquired the accoutrements of a domestic interior and thereby, a social exterior "for the very purpose, as it were, of self-substantiation, *of making representation work* for the individual: that is for the ends of possessive individualism" (Chaudhuri, 174).

In his classic account of realism and the inherent instability of its representational codes, "The Reality Effect", Roland Barthes famously privileges "insignificant" details of the nineteenth-century interior (in the wall barometer and "the little door", in Flaubert and Michelet respectively) to suggest that the most innocuous detailing of objects in a narrative setting acquire the force of a singular ideological claim – they declare, "*we are the real*".[10] The naïve reader encounters these stray details in the flow of the narrative – whether fictional or historiographical – as largely "useless" stopgaps. But in effect, these notated objects ascend everywhere to the privileged status of signification. Slipping from their denotative function in the text into a forceful connotation of reality per se, the "world of objects … arrange[s]" itself as a habitat – an enclosed, symbolically articulated world, in which "men inscribe themselves upon space".[11] The plethora of "useless" material detail that fills the domestic interior is essentially a rhetorical excess within the writerly codes of realism, which, in its residual (rather than strictly representational) function signals the uncontainable material referents of the world of commodity-driven consumption and exchange. Following Chaudhuri's reconstruction of Barthes' thesis through Marxian exchange theory, realism mobilises a superfluity of detail in order to internalise a bewildering, market-driven world of commodity relations, whose plenitude must be constantly reasserted and harnessed towards the end of self-substantiation and individuation. The multiplication of "useless" detail in the domestic interior – whether as richness or redundancy – suggests the intolerability – and perhaps terror – of a space that can be left neither "unattended" nor vacant (Chaudhuri, 177). In the absence of any overarching signified, the excessively notated details of the interior do not so much describe the phenomenal richness of the world as much as simulate such an imagined existential whole through the daily banalities of consumption and use. As such, the thesis on the reality effect goes less to the descriptive social realism of the nineteenth century itself – which after all, attempted to substantiate a moral subject, who sought to put representation to "work" in the service of

"possessive individualism" (Chaudhuri, 174) – than to the form's contemporary inheritors in the era of late commodity capitalism.

With the penetration of the market into every sphere of life, commodity culture renders the phenomenal world "abstractly" by incorporating the sensuous particularity of objects into logics of exchange and equivalence. Even further, under conditions of advanced industrialisation, all items of consumption are consigned to a "shelf-life" even before their actual production, so that the object is already inscribed by the cessation of its use value. In an exchange with Benjamin on the latter's theory of the domestic interior, Adorno claims that at the very moment the object "awakens to appearance" as "what is newest" in the market-driven world of commodity relations, novelty takes the form of "detritus, remnants, ruins".[12] Read through this disintegrative proposition on the interior, Chaudhuri's thesis suggests that the reality effect is already incipient in the original mode of colonial nineteenth-century realism (as it was in the topos of Barthes' concerns); such a claim might be extended towards the formal provocations and historical specificity of Singh's works insofar as these bear on the viewer's presumption about the materiality of things collected within the class-inflected styles of urban Indian interiors. So, while the object settings of Singh's interiors do refer the viewer to the lived experience of their owners, or otherwise feature as items of posthumous remembrance collected around the departed figure of such a hypothesised "owner", these collections of domestic detail appear as oddly insubstantial forms within the photographic frame – as if their phenomenal "reality" were somehow undercut (or, frequently, cut up) by the very devices through which their appearance is captured and transmitted, and to which they owe their continued life. Whether in the pristine surface of the art object, or in the ruins of the mid-century proposition of a sphere or style of "national culture", Singh's reliquaries of privileged interiority serve not only to depict a world of bourgeois consumption and privilege (specified in their various metropolitan locations, in the cities of India's post-colonial modernity). In insistent reversals of perception, they also remind us that our apprehension of such generational continuity is premised *on a visual apparatus* that effectively effaces the very origins that it seeks to manifest and relay into the present.

A cursory glance through the 31 tritone plates comprising *Go Away Closer* [http://dayanitasingh.net/go-away-closer/] reveals how Singh establishes the photographic claim to verisimilitude, and therefore, to self-verification, through profoundly irresolute figures of visibility: Is the work before us a finished product (the accomplished image, like the painted portrait or the commodity object on display)? Or is the work the technology itself (the reflective screen, the lens that magnifies or separates, the open "shutter" reflected on an opaque wall)? Do the gradations of artificially illuminated space bring private rooms to light, or are these the darkroom of their production? And if Singh's abandoned interiors are possessed by traces of a posthumous presence – captured in passing in the movement of turning

one's back to the reflection – does the photograph document life as its referent? Or does "life" begin in the negative, in inversion and cliché, through writerly processes of inscription, delay and inorganicity?

These undecidable questions are staged through the resonant incoherence of Singh's uses of the photographic metaphor, which places the (undeniable) attraction of Singh's descriptive realism under question. Especially implicated in this moment of strain is the image's "insiderist" appeal to chronicles of lineage, historical affiliation and physiognomic resemblance; we might plausibly identify this form of interpellative address as a loose reference to the performative tradition of national allegory, which, in the preceding century, was played out across the spatialised distinctions of the "home" and the "world". Here, such imputed continuities, whether generational or representational, appear to the viewer only after they have been interdicted by processes of de-materialisation, or in the delay that was already coded into the commodity world of (post)colonial interiority. The acute historicity of Singh's vision of the interior, then, is found in such retroactive uncertainty about the status of what we see, together with the codes that authorise *how* we see. Despite the riveting details of documented interiors and their inhabitants, Singh's realism transmits the quality of perceptual doubt into the medium of visibility – where mediatic devices (the shutter, the window, the darkened room, the action of the frame or the cut), are, in turn, cast off as eroded forms into the recesses of the archive. In the manifest unavailability of any formally instantiated relation between inside and outside, Singh's constructions of the bourgeois "interior" become visible as a discrepancy between their descriptive content and the instant of their formal presentation: Given the predominantly feminine registers of generational memory in Singh's uses of portraiture, such a contradiction within the representational codes of the photograph implicates, perhaps especially, the (post)colonial specification of the distance between *ghar* and *baire*. Nevertheless, as Singh's critical biographer Aveek Sen suggests, the precise meaning of the exchange between a historically specified "outside" to the construct (and furnishings) of a privatised interiority remains essentially "inscrutable" to the gaze of the viewer (Sen, 153). Such an elided exchange between the interior, and its preconditions in "the 'public' or 'the 'historic' ", withdraws the image from interpretation and accounts, in no small measure, for the mystery of Singh's compositions (ibid.). Or otherwise, the proper contact point between an (existential, spatial) inside and (a socially determined) outside is felt precisely in its failure to enter the pictorial space. Hence, the startling gaps that open up from within the image frame of Singh's photographs. (The gaps between inside and outside are further postponed and exteriorised through Singh's more recent artistic choices, which install this photographic archive within the nested, recessive spaces of the wooden frame.) The intimate touch, or pressure, of such formally uninstantiable reciprocity is, however, deeply felt – this is one way of considering the acute emotive intensities attending Singh's "domestic dramas" of proximity and separation.

Before proceeding on our examination of the figure of the interior, across the exchanges between Adorno and Benjamin, and its departures, in the work of Singh, I underscore Chaudhuri's caution against any universal methodology that would overstep the "historical differences in patterns of consumption, *even if there appears to be – today – a global movement towards an 'empire of things'*" (Chaudhuri, 178, emphasis added). In the metropolitan context, metonymic detail proliferated the world of nineteenth-century realism, filling its spaces with an illusion of depth and substance, because the form could presuppose a "social practice of self-substantiation through the possession and deployment of material goods" that had evolved over several centuries (177). In the case of colonial modernity, however, realism was a European import; from its inception, the "genre itself [was] a participant in the assimilation of new modes of … self-representation" under conditions of momentous socio-economic change (181). If furniture, like women's dress, was vital to the distinction between "inside/outside", or the distance between the phenomenal world and the social life of things through which contestations over the modern were enacted, *so also was the very idiom of realism*. Within the context of such struggle, the object-life of the interior was detailed through a deep-seated "ambivalence" regarding the "sumptuary codes" and practices of consumption itself – the equivocal value of consumption also extended to *the consumption of the realist image* (179). In the period of merchant capitalism, such ambivalence was typically troped (and so contained) as an aspect of colonial intrusion into the domestic sphere of "tradition" (recall Chapter 1). Consequently, the ideological valences of the bourgeois interior of postcolonial modernity are at once comparable to, and disparate from its European analogues (179).[13]

Singh's sitters might indeed indicate the increasing incorporation of cultural and historical distances into the "global movement towards an 'empire of things'" insofar as they display no evident "strain" in enunciating the relationship of the physical world of things to the social life of commodities (Chaudhuri, 178, 181). After all, so much of the attraction of these portraits (as well as their implicit ideological force) resides in the suggestion of globally contemporaneous scenes of family life, which undercuts ethnographically inflected assumptions about "cultural" differences between the middle-class interior in the Indian metropolitan context and its "Western" counterparts (see for example the facing plates on webpages *Privacy*, http://dayanitasingh.net/privacy/) Nevertheless, the posed and theatrical nature of the setting of high/bourgeois subjectivity is stressed in such a way as to compete with, and sometimes engulf the easy presence of their owners – thereby implicating the conditions of their legibility, and our perception of the specificities of these images, in preceding regimes of realist representation. (Consider, for example, the unoccupied, high-backed chairs or the colonial bedframes that are a hallmark of Singh's photographic oeuvre; these are distinctly reminiscent of early studio photography, and also the mid-century

period films that Chaudhuri places in a direct line of continuity with their nineteenth-century precedents.)

The fascination of Singh's interiors derives, in no small part, from the viewer's continuing interpellation into a recognisable tradition of realist representation, immersed, as it is, in associations with the domestic materials (and mediatised image) of the well-furnished interior. Once the site of a historical struggle over the modern, the space of the domestic interior and a repertoire of related representational forms, played a pivotal role in the articulation of various styles of national realism encountered in previous discussions. In collections such as *Privacy* and *Go Away Closer*, moments of such recognition – alternatively compelling and fleeting – are, to a great extent, citations of (such a) tradition, as of its integral link to aesthetic technologies that range from the novel form to the camera. Singh's interiors confront us with the vanishing residues of a history of artistic representation as it "awakens to appearance", *for a second time*, as superfluity (Benjamin, *BSW3* 63). This proposition bears, especially, on the refractory image of the photographic apparatus as it occurs within the compositional frame, in oblique visual allusions to the role of photography in the historical framing of the modern. Altogether, the captivating detail of Singh's compositions afford us a speculative historical method through which we might encounter some of the closures that confront traditions of realist signification in India – traced, through different routes, in the preceding chapters – and, therein, their renewed possibilities for this moment.

Towards a method: Reflection, reversal and "the semblance of things" in Adorno's Kierkegaard

> The living room is small, comfortable and like a cabinet.
> (Kierkegaard, *Diary of a Seducer*, cited in Adorno, *K* 43)[14]

In the section of the exposé of the *Arcades Project* titled "Louis-Philippe, or the Interior", Walter Benjamin sites the emergence of the nineteenth-century domestic interior in the transformative separation of social life into private and public spheres. From a spatialised distinction between the living space and the place of work, there emerges, for Benjamin, an unprecedented if thoroughly ambiguous construction of modern privacy. If the workplace (the office) was where the individual had to account for everyday realities of market-driven competition and self-advancement, he now "requires that the interior support him in his illusions" of escape from such compulsion (*CB* 167; *Arcades* 19)[15]. As an anonymous refuge from the expectations that attach to the individual's social exterior in public spaces, the interior comprises, for Benjamin, the site of a fantasy that becomes integral to the "universe" of the private person (*Arcades* 20). Through an imagistic analysis of metropolitan or "big city" spaces, Benjamin's thesis famously proposes

the "phantasmagoria of the interior" (ibid.) – a proposition that rescales the fantastical character of the commodity in high capitalist culture, established through global commodity logics, into the value of privacy.

In the anonymised privacy of the interior, the individual regales the commodity fetish into a projection of enduring psychological depth and substance. Benjamin aligns the "phantasmagoric" (physical and psychic) spaces of such interiority with dramatic metaphors of recessive internalisation and enclosure. As such, the interior is

> not just the universe of the private individual; *it is also his etui*. Ever since the time of Louis Philippe, the bourgeois has shown a tendency to compensate for the absence of any trace of private life in the big city. He tries to do this within the four walls of his apartment. It is as if he had made it a point of honor not to allow the traces of his everyday objects and accessories to get lost… He has a marked preference for velour and plush, which *preserve the imprint of all contact*. In the style characteristic of the Second Empire, the apartment becomes a sort of cockpit. *The traces of its inhabitant are molded into the interior*.
>
> (Benjamin, 20, emphasis added)[16]

While the domestic interior emerges as a place of amassed personal value, such accumulation impresses ("moulds") itself onto the surfaces of the interior in such a way as to close around and assimilate the individual into its object setting: The "*etui*" man emerges, thus, as both the agent and object of such capture. The turn towards fantasy, as underscored by Benjamin's analysis, suggests that such an assimilation of the coordinates of inside and outside entails, in particular, a process of self-effacement insofar as the difference between the owner and the object – the vectors of "possessive individualism" – disappears. This possibility – of the incremental disappearance of the values of autonomy and self-differentiation associated with bourgeois individualism – is premised on a prior, sociologically "objective" reality that succeeds in erasing the "traces" of social production from the surfaces of the object itself (ibid.). In this way, Benjamin rearticulates the cultural logic of commodity fetishism, as it appears originally in Marx:

> The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves… It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things.
>
> (Marx, *Capital* 164–165)[17]

For Benjamin, the *etui* man, the "true resident of the interior", is specified in the persona of "the collector" (*CB* 168; *Arcades* 19). It is the collector

who properly internalises (and so lends affective meaning) to the profusion of commodities in the outside world in a bid to individualise these objects; or, what is the same, to "*preserve*" them from corrosive logics of commodification (ibid.). But the desire for such a form of individuation is itself symptomatic of the ubiquitous principle of commodity fetishism under conditions of advanced capitalism; the collector's attempt to rescue objects from the *bazaar* of replaceable interchangeable things, is also the moment in which he must necessarily "succumb" to the erotic charge of the inorganic (Abbas, 220).[18] By emplacing the commodity in the interior, the collector "struggle[s] against universal commodification"; he attempts to reinscribe the object with a value that is autonomous of its market worth (ibid.). With the same gesture, and in a moment of entrenched irony, the collector puts an end to the object's use value, dis-housing it, absolutely, from its origins in prior social purpose.

Hence, the object (and by extension, its use as detail within the private apartment) is one form of the "phantom" or surrogate interiority that passes, now, under the sign of "individualism". Under socio-economic conditions that dictate the increasing impoverishment of individual experience, interiority is premised on physical distance not only from public spaces regulated by logics of work and the marketplace but also from older, "traditional" ontologies in which the social life of objects was directed by an active awareness of their "origins [in] human interaction" and communal purpose (Vogel, *AN* 17)[19]. By putting the object to work in the service of a "phantasmagoric" space of origination, the collector links its "restoration" to a fabricated past. Amassing the remains of this imagined past, the collector re-orders them through the exercise of amateur "preference"; he is incapable of a rigorous understanding of the object's place in history (Benjamin, ibid). In his ignorance about the origins of the object and its authorising social purposes, the enthusiast enacts the ambiguous possibility *that history itself now amounts to a decidedly "minor" effort;* it is comprised not of works of enduring mastery, but of a strategic, practicable reconstruction of materials that failed, in the first place, to "make it" to the status of a "cultural treasure" (Abbas, 1988, 223). Following Abbas's comprehensive account of these implications, the collector saves or preserves the object by "strip[ping]" it of its commodity character but in the process, he also deprives the item of any use value – he identifies it *as a work of art*. The upshot: art, like the curated elements of the past, "turns into [an] object of mere contemplation" (Abbas, 220). As the object of personal taste, connoisseurship, or what Pierre Bourdieu discusses as (middle-class) "distinction", the artwork is downgraded, as it were, into *yet another type of commodity.*

Over the course of their 13-year-long correspondence, Adorno advanced several, stringent responses to drafts of this aspect of the *Arcades Project*. In particular, Adorno expressed dissatisfaction at the elliptical nature of Benjamin's insights into the oneiric world of the nineteenth-century interior, urging further historical specificity regarding the relationship of

the commodity to both spatial and existential constructs of interiority in the era of "world trade and imperialism" and more exposition of the ambiguities that attended Benjamin's proposition of the *etui* man (Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, Vol. 3).[20] In the so-called Hornberg letter of 1935, which Adorno addressed to Benjamin while on holiday in the Black Forest, Adorno refers Benjamin (somewhat insistently) to his own habilitation thesis, *Kierkegaard: The Construction of the Aesthetic* (1931), and its lengthy discussion of the bourgeois interior in Kierkegaard's philosophical work. In a concentrated postscript to their correspondence, Adorno further clarifies his position by making implicit reference to Benjamin's early work on *The Origin of the German Mourning Play* (1928). In this focused if unresolved comment, Adorno proposes that if, under conditions of advanced industrial capitalism, the object-world of the interior was essentially an evacuated form, turning only on the illusion of duration and substance, such a fantasy was invariably inflected with ambivalence. In the inorganic fetish item, "desire" tends to be driven, compulsively, into registers of "fear": "While things in appearance are awakened to what is newest, death transforms the meanings [of the new] to what is most ancient" (Adorno, *BSW3* 63). For Adorno, such mortification was not a matter of metaphysical necessity but an historical feature of the termination of the object's use value – the very point of Benjamin's proposition of the *etui* man – which Adorno had himself sought to elaborate in *Kierkegaard*. In that book, Adorno reads Kierkegaard through a set of images that unfold through the eminently optical metaphor of reflection. Demonstrating how the nineteenth-century interior could be viewed through a plane of "revers[al]", Adorno sought to disclose the constituent forms of interiority in their negative imprint, as it were, in ruined appearances of "detritus" and the "prehistoric"(*K* 39; *BSW3* 60; *K* 46). In fact, in elaborating the ideal of nineteenth-century privacy through the traces of its remains in the historical present, Adorno had already referenced Benjamin's proposition on the "powerful cipher"-like possibilities of the commodity's appearance (*K* 45). Directly citing Benjamin's thesis on the "petrified, primordial landscape" of allegory in his own study of Kierkegaard, Adorno located the disposition towards fragmentation and inorganicity at the heart of his genealogy of bourgeois interiority and its contemporary crisis in early twentieth-century Europe – thereby also aligning the optical apparatus with his own, redemptive critical methodology (*K* 54).

Reflection

> He who looks into the window-mirror … is the private person, solitary, inactive and separated from the economic process of production.
>
> (Adorno, *Kierkegaard* 42)

> To change the direction of this conceptuality, to give it a turn toward nonidentity, is the hinge of negative dialectics.
>
> (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 12)

Within the decidedly materialist premises of Adorno's study of Kierkegaard, the spaces of the mid to early nineteenth-century interior are revealed in their historical relationship to the (belated) emergence of an industrialised modernity in Northern Europe. Beset by the collectivisation of labour on the one hand, and by the penetration of the routinised time of labour into family and leisure and on the other, the lived spaces of a financially independent bourgeoisie became increasingly identified with the collection of objects, or the possession of things in use. A site of commodity exchange and value transfer, the nineteenth-century interior also "disguises" – in the sense of Marx's "character mask" – its vitalist origins in the escalating velocities of capital's circulation.[21] As such, the birth and consolidation of the domestic interior is identified by Adorno as one of the primary instruments of the reproduction of capital: The interior is the site of the commodity fetish, which is pressed onto the figure of the private man and thereby, into the service of a projected norm of a psychological interiority. The intangible habitus of the "apartment", then, is a material precondition for the ideologically ambiguous "person" of Kierkegaard (i.e. his multiple philosophical personae), and also the primary means of this subject's social presentation. Adorno's "Kierkegaard" is the "personification" of the tenuous positionality of cultural proprietorship at the threshold of "incipient high-capitalism" – understood, in Adorno's conjuncture, as a period inaugurated through the decline of a sphere of experience that had, however briefly, been inured to the imperatives of both market and labour (*K* 39).[22] With the onset of industrialisation in Germany and much of Northern Europe (in their relative underdevelopment with France or England at this time), a rentier class emerged through its historical exemption from participation in a public life; by the middle of the nineteenth century, however, the rentier's relative autonomy from the cultures of labour and market had become increasingly subject to regulation by the universalising drive of capital. The inhabitant of the domestic dwelling place and the genealogical origin of the liberal-bourgeois norm of privacy is thus identified with a cultivated, if ambiguous personhood, that was involved "neither in the creation of economic value nor in capital accumulation" (Sherman, 19).[23] The stakes of Adorno's treatment of the rentier-persona turn on the fate of this twofold cultural privilege of financial/aesthetic autonomy, identified, now, with the rentier's increasingly untenable claim to freedom from market-driven logics of exchange and equivalence. As the subject of uncertain, even dubious privilege, the rentier is discoverable, for Adorno, only at the limit point of the relation between inside and outside; hence, Adorno's decisive emplacement of introversion, or the value of privacy, in the cloistered, increasingly dematerialised space of the bourgeois "apartment".

In the section titled *Interieur*, Adorno identifies the central conceit of Kierkegaard's constructs of bourgeois interiority with the "window mirror". Referenced in Kierkegaard's *Diary of the Seducer* (1843), this fashionable optical device is tacitly (and anachronistically) treated by Adorno as the apparatus of the *camera obscura*. A commercially popular oddity in the

domestic spaces of the mid- to late nineteenth-century apartment, the "spy" was attached to a widow frame in order to bring the reflected external world of the street into the apartment. At once a means of specular contraction and extensive *pro*-jection, this device allowed the resident of the interior the redoubled pleasures of solitary self-reflection and social surveillance. Adorno exposes the contradiction in any claim to an authentic private individual, here, through a focus on the duplicitous partitionings/incorporations of the window mirror within the artificially magnified spaces of the apartment. The emblematic privacy of Kierkaard's self-sufficient subject appears through its spectacularisation for a distanced, and equally insubstantial, other:

> The window mirror is a characteristic furnishing of the spacious 19th century apartment … [Its] function is to project the endless row of apartment buildings into the isolated bourgeois drawing room; by the mirror, *the living room dominates the reflected row at the same time [as] it is delimited by it… The window mirror testifies to objectlessness* – it casts into the apartment only the semblance of things – and isolated privacy.
>
> (Adorno, *K* 42, emphasis mine)

Insofar as subjectivity participates in the object-world through labour and social production, the predicament of such aestheticised (stylised) isolation attests to how the actual relation between subjects is experienced – through registers of remoteness and failed contact – what Chaudhiri, in an analogue with early realist depictions of the colonial interior, identified with ambivalence (Adorno, 39). In the context of industrial capital, and Adorno's concerns, the result of such "objectless interiority" is an atomistic agent who veers between the will to "dominate" the external world, and the interiorised compulsion toward psychological "subordinat[ion]" (30, 42). Hence, the window mirror never operates as a means of specular reciprocity; rather, it is, itself, *an image without ground*, a pure reflection of a tautological present. Citing from *Diary of Seducer*, Adorno demonstrates how this device of (self)visibility operates, in effect, *as a screen*; it produces a plethora of signs, but these are no more than an alibi for the absence of any referent in the "real" or phenomenal world.

> The "lamp shaped like a flower"; the "dream orient", fit together out of a "cut paper lampshade … a rug made of osier"; the room an officer's cabin, full of precious decorations greedily collected across the seas – the complete *fata morgana* of decadent ornaments receives its meaning not from the material of which they are made, but from the *interieur* that unifies the imposture of things in the form of a still life.
>
> (Adorno, *K* 43–44)

It is not only that the mirror effaces all trace of exchange between projections of interiority and its own material origins (*qua* its status as a commodity) in the world of social production. More forcefully, the manifold operations

of such erasure is sited, for Adorno, *on the very surface of the reflective technology*. Here, Adorno reverses his polemic against Kierkegaardian aestheticism to redeem its implicit truth-claim: As a simulacrum of presence, interiority is an existential nullity and a sociologically "real" index of cultural production under the sign of the commodity fetish. The "apartment", and its details into which the window mirror projects, prismatically, the "semblance of things", is reconfigured through Adorno's re-reading from a passive reflection of the times, to its most refractory image. Reflecting on the ideological stakes of an established philosophy of inwardness for the present, the image of the interior exposes to time – *or as we watch* – the particular mode of subjectivity that underlies such a value system – what we "see" through the multi-faceted reflections of the interior is both the accomplishment of the value of bourgeois privacy and its increasing relegation to superfluity *through the magnified emptiness of its historical forms*.

Reversal

> The utmost distance alone would be proximity.
>
> (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 57)

Significantly, this moment of representational or expressive disintegration is the turning point against the "organ of the eye"; the perspective of the discarded object enters into the text through a purely "*mechanical*" opening within sequence of technologically produced images (*K* 44, 52). The (re) turn of such "sudden historical figures" is indicated, in Adorno's cinematic treatment of the interior, through knowledges that exceed intentional models of "expression", in the unsolicited affects of "distress", nostalgic "yearning", in the figure of an "organic" body subject to withdrawal and eventual disappearance or, otherwise, through the somatic "grip" (*Greif*, from *Angreifen*) of the rejected object, as it returns to perception (*K* 39, 43, 44, 45, 51). In reversed and inverted form, the mirror image, or the apparatus of reflection, no longer reduplicates a world that disguises itself as transhistorical and natural in "naïve realism", or in a "philosophy of objectivity" that reverts to an additive, description of sociological facts (*ND* 184). Nor does it project us back out into a purposive future ordered by the imperatives of "progressive" development and synchronicity, or the sway of the "most recent" into which (any) society might exist equitably, and in equivalence, if only its constituents were granted an entry point (*ND* 184). Indeed, it is only in the mediatic image of an abandoned future that "mute things speak" to us anew (*K* 44). Revisited through such a speculative standpoint, the image apparatus "constructs" the predicament of temporal and formal non-coincidence into the principle of its own visibility (ibid). A construction, then, not only in the sense of being "ideological", in its partiality and inadequation (to the empirical reality, "out there", of which it is an effect). The image is a construct, rather, because of its conceptualism – because it comes to light as the

composite abstraction of its forms, distancing us from both the immediacy of lived experience as well as the sociological preconditions for such experience: "This is what makes the text a cipher. Implicit in Kierkegaard's metaphor of scripture is the unalterable givenness of the text itself as well as its unreadableness as that of a 'cryptogram' composed of 'ciphers' whose origin is historical" (*K* 25). In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and *Aesthetic Theory*, the trope of the "hieroglyph" is directly related to a mediatic encounter with the screen. Adorno's immanent critique and rescue of the optical image is outlined, itself, as a delayed inscriptive move. Here is a writing that strives to redeem both the "realism" and "objectivity" of the image by rendering it not in its depictive grasp over a substantial moral subject – the interiority of the modern individual – but as the mirror-writing (*Schrift*) of its vanishing forms.

The optics of inversion, screening and a withdrawal from the frame of representation are processes that give rigorous form and visibility to the possibilities of an aesthetic of negative or "empty" space, as we encounter them in Singh's photographic oeuvre. The point of comparison is, perhaps, more significant when inverted: When passed through the actuality of Singh's photographs of a profoundly fictive interiority, the figure of Benjamin's "poor collector", and the constructs of the late nineteenth-century *etui*-world, become available for new artistic, ethical and historical reconfigurations (Abbas, 1988, 226). To put this another way: Singh's artistic repertoire might be deployed *as the action of "reversal"* enacted on and through finished forms of ideation and expression, towards their exposition for new contexts and audiences. Adorno associates such movement with the redemptive force of critique. From the perspective of a different historical moment, through the specific urgencies of postcolonial lateness, Singh's photography redeems what remains implicit in the quarrel, itself, between Benjamin and Adorno – "interiority" signals the uncertain threshold between histories of commodification, and the incremental erasure of the value and capacities of bourgeois autonomy *not only for the object of "cultural criticism"* (in the image-based contentions that pass between Adorno and Benjamin); but also for other formations and related traditions of the modern as they come to be constituted, in their historical specificities, under the law of the commodity fetish. Or again: The "thought-image" of interiority signals an unresolved, even transformative *relationship to inherited objects and the history of their degradation* under logics of advanced capitalism to the extent that subjectivity ("interiority") becomes released from the eroded individualistic values of proprietorship and mastery.

After cultural history

> Culture never has the translucency of custom. In effect, it is the very opposite of custom, which is always the deterioration of culture.
>
> (Fanon, "On National Culture" 161)

> What appears to be the decline of culture is its coming to pure self-consciousness … Only when neutralized and reified does culture allow itself to be idolized…
>
> (Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society", *Prisms* 24)

Biographical annotations to Singh's work remain preoccupied with the question of Singh's artistic identity as it relates to the (sociological) verisimilitude of her representations of the upper-/middle-class domestic interior. Hence, the content of Singh's photographic interiors is tacitly or inadvertently aligned, for this view, with a fin de siècle threshold in which the historical prerogative of elite self-representation in the postcolonial nation turns (nostalgically) back on itself to document the passing of its enclosed world of privilege. Yet, by turning over the pages of *Privacy* and *Go Away Closer*, we glimpse, everywhere, how the putative "subjects" of Singh's portraits appear not in themselves but through inverted images (of reflection) that place the object-world of leisured domesticity, as well as its owners, under the sign of semblance. Especially in the works *Privacy* and *Go Away Closer*, the object-dominated settings of Singh's interiors are charged with such intensity that they do not so much surround the sitter's figure (wherever this is present) as proclaim a value that is apart or even beyond that of her own. Characterised by a near-hallucinatory attention to detail, the urbane object-worlds of Singh's collection waver above the viewer's awareness of their socio-historical function, suggesting how their affective content might have outlasted the life and presence of its original owner – our sense of their "reality" is inflected by an emotive awareness of the absent perspective of such ownership. Casting an enigmatic hold over the frame of visibility, items of middle-class use become aligned with the very spaces of their consumption – the family apartment or the private bedroom – even as such projected space moves to assimilate the depictive content of Singh's portraits in ways that resist the biographical tendency in critical commentary.

In *Privacy* and *Go Away Closer,* scenes of private life appear themselves in the form of metonymic partialities, in gestures towards a larger photographic or "narratorial" horizon that is never entirely elucidated by the series. So, photographs of the domestic interior are mixed with interrupted snatches of mid-century civic history, where such an imputed social whole is in turn related to images of empty theatres or cinema halls, or, perhaps, to mediatic rituals of collective spectatorship and performance. Furthermore, each implied "episode" of private, public or communal cohabitation in these works is indexed by the possessions of a missing presence. In unoccupied chairs, on the surface of fastidiously made-up beds that are watched over by their deceased users, in interstitial gaps between hanging portraits, on the remnants of wall space or in the perishable spillage of archival documents, things acquire a refracted form of visibility. The affective intensities of these images are a measure of the excessively private meaning that all such abandoned objects might hold for the viewer, once she is introduced

into the spaces of a posthumous survival. But these objects also operate as framing devices within the space the composition, imputing their historical meaning to technics of visibility that are properly "remov[ed] from the … subjective dynamics of expression" (Adorno, *Missa* 576).[24] In this aspect, Singh's interiors do not so much represent a given social world or a way of life, as much as internalise the possibility of its absence into the media and "mechanics" of the reflective apparatus (Adorno, *K* 52).

Suggestively, Singh's specifications of empty space frequently align the missing figure of "proprietorship" with recurring allusions to the proverbial Father of the post-Independent republic, Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru is thus referenced as a departed, if vital presence within the play of kinship, conjugality and historical affiliation that informs Singh's "narratives" of the bourgeois interior. Invoked through the remainders of preserved personal effects or through the living spaces of his home at Anand Bhavan, now a museum in Allahabad, Nehru's strikingly iconic features are often juxtaposed, in the form of public portraiture, against the anonymous interiors of *Privacy* and *Go Away Closer*. Frequently withheld from identification altogether, his person is signalled metonymically, through the distinctive modernity of its attending objects; these items are archived today, within the publicly accessible interiors of his family home. In their manifest detachment from utility (as museum items) the rooms and objects of Anand Bhavan appear through signs of recent departure or abandonment. Insofar as these two collections are also interspersed with artefacts alluding to other, equally posthumous figures of ordinary domestic life, the photographed spaces of Anand Bhavan serve to both recall and deflate the public memory of Nehru (specified in these images in the functional, socialist design of the public spaces of a national culture, or as the style of mid-century elite self-fashioning).

The arrangement of images in these collections might be approached as an attempt to level the privileged historical gaze. In elegant paratextual essays on Singh's collections, Sen approaches the Allahabad images, in particular, as forms of contraction that reduce the viewer's experience of the museological space to point of unshakeable perceptual doubt. Drawing the viewer away from the city-space into the physical environs of the family home, Singh's photographs of Anand Bhavan proceed to involve the (real as well as notional) museum-goer within incrementally reduced frames of representation and display. The series of images in this collection move almost sequentially, from the archive into the bedroom, and eventually into the acutely recessed spaces of the cabinet. Such an increasingly "privatised" relationship to space serves to confound the distinction between the means of historical incorporation, collection and display, and their purported *content*. The diminishing scale of presentation discloses to the viewer how the "containers" of museological space are as much on display as the personalised objects of acquisition or ornament, which are the ostensible focus of the exhibit. Such an implied withdrawal of historical experience into the minutiae of everyday life – a predicament of which both Benjamin

and Adorno were acutely aware – also characterises the visual itinerary of the camera. Rather than disguising its presence within the arrangement of such interiorised space, the camera's "look" is registered through such a processes of withdrawal, in signs of dematerialised or insubstantial presence.

In the first instance, the objects of Singh's photographic archives acquire their visibility only after they have been stripped of immediate function; by the same token, they also appear to be immobilised by the camera's gaze, acquiring renewed significance within spatial contexts (like the museum) that have been emptied of human presence. Like relics or the arrangement of a still-life, this kind of visibility is premised on the viewer's pronounced inability to decipher the context of their appearance – in a disconcerting visual detail, the scripted historical references of the archive or the catalogue are seen to remain physically attached to the items on display. If, as Sen suggests, the camera documents the hospitality of austere, "hauntingly ordinary" spaces of inhabitation and departure in all these ways, such an increasingly interiorised experience of (physical, photographic, ideological) space eventually turns upon itself. In a reversal for the viewer, "the very ordinariness of the rooms become sharply strange; their privacy, their capacity to draw us closer to intimate silences are *wordlessly turned inside out on to the realm of the "public' and the "historic*" (Sen, 153, emphasis mine).[25] In the course of such involution and displacement, it is the apparatus of visibility – the camera, the photographic image, or the frame – which is illuminated in its "collusion" with archival processes of periodisation, documentation and monumentalisation (153). The photographic encounter is thereby disclosed as an unnerving intrusion into the realm of intimacy – both the archive and image are implicated in a forcible appropriation of the remnants of lived experience, which are "neutralised", in Adorno's sense, into rigidified enumerations of the "preserved and the memorialized" (Adorno, "Cultural Criticism", Sen 153).[26]

Such an unresolved movement of "turn[ing] inside out" renders the spaces of the container – the room, the cabinet case, the archive itself – into structural homologies of the objects contained. Through movements of inversion and mimetic resemblance, the lost and repossessed object of Singh's archive emerges *as a receptacle itself* – an enclosure that exceeds the materialities contained. The accomplishment of such turning point between inside and outside in these images is nothing other than the location of an unspecified perceptual opening – a kind of perceptual dilation that runs through Singh's compositions –- which, for Sen, ultimately breaks into the captured "beauty of ordinariness" to dispel it towards "something that profoundly unsettles … the evidence of our senses" (53). Taking this proposition further, I suggest that the "wordless" touch of "history", "public[ity]" or the "outside" on the "inside", is not accomplished *within the optical field of the image at all*. Rather, by ceaselessly substituting one into the image of the other, it is the photographic opening, or the expulsion of vision, onto a perceptually uncertain horizon of possibility, that comes to

light. To resituate Adorno's method of reversal, that is, of reading through the *still point* (*Punkt*) of the reflective surfaces of the interior – the unanticipated possibilities of perception in Singh's photographic oeuvre, together with their further installation into the framing devices of the archive, are generated out of the "necessary and legitimate condition" of reification itself (*K* 39).

"Mirror and mourning"[27]

> Everyone carries around a room about inside him … If one … pricks up one's ears and listens, say, in the night, when everything round about is quite, one hears, for instance, the rattling of a mirror not quite firmly fastened to the wall.
>
> (Kafka, Blue Octavo Notebook)

> The echo of a single footstep takes a long time to disappear…
>
> (Kierkegaard, *Diary of a Seducer*, cited in Adorno, *K* 46)

In light of such a proposition, I turn to a reading of an unsettling image of Nehru's collared *galabandh* tunics [http://dayanitasingh.net/go-away-closer/ electronic p. 5; Steidl, 2007) originally part of the Allahabad collection, the photograph is now included within the many scenes of the "domestic interior" comprising *Privacy*. Two mid-length, buttoned-down and high-collared white tunics hang upright within the dark-wood structure of either a clothes' cupboard or a museum-display cabinet; the container is visible in the composition only as a near-opaque background to the shirts, and no hangers or hooks are visible in that background. The shirt on the viewer's left faces her directly, the second, its elbow grazing the other's, is turned slightly away to the right. The suspended trouser-bottoms of the tunic on the left are visible at the bottom of the photograph, and the shape is duplicated and unfolded in shadows that appear in place of a corresponding trouser set, limb-like, under the shirt the right. Across the upper sleeve and shirt fronts are dim striations of light, indicating the glass-fronted surface that presumably covers these suspended objects of display. In the context of Singh's photographic works, these items of clothing are exemplary of remaindered appearances that achieve visibility as empty openings – or as ellipses – with the phenomenological play of appearance and dissolution that comprises the composition as a whole. Suspended in white, weightless and vertical succession behind a glass-doored cabinet, these apparitional forms operate, in the most obvious instance, as a metonym as much for the man and the private citizen; as for archival methods of collection, aggregation and statistical enumeration. Extracting the figure of human "intentionality" altogether from the forms by which they come to light, these doubly ranged items of clothing resist the scrutinising gaze, which, if we were to paraphrase Sen, inflects perceptual consciousness with an indelibly subjectivist

cast by bringing both personal interest and the historiographical process into a "collusive" affinity with the norms of proprietorship and mastery. In a somewhat different vein, I suggest that by placing their own inorganicity on display, these hanging forms operate as *devices of containment* – as unexpected closures within our line of sight, these do not so much return or even reorient our gaze towards alternate configurations of inside/outside, as much as confront us with an automatic generation of their en-shrouding or crypt-like countenance.

To be suspended within this recessive, dimly illuminated interior is to be "encrypted" by the outside, or, in other words, to be *en*-"ciphered" by the contact point of such an inassimilable outside (*K* 126). This proposition might be paraphrased through what Lacan would sometimes term the "*extimité*", or the (social, historical) exteriority that is presumed to be outside the intimate core of social and psychologically coherent experience: The contents of the "interior" order of memory are discovered, *pace* Lacan, in that region of non-distinction, the "edge", whose action serves to distinguish between conventional orders of an interior self and a cultural outside, but which also screens over the spatio-temporal continuum between these distances (Lacan, 150, 152).[28] To be touched, inscribed or encrypted at/by the edge, then, is not only to stand at the threshold of symbolic conceptions of (inner)self and (externalised) other, but to be in the "vacuole", the empty and atemporal "interdiction at the centre" that generates these spatialised distinctions and yet remains unsymbolisable by all such "bipartitional" relations (Miller, 75, 76).[29]

Consider how the specular relation in the image of Nehru's clothing/coverings is not captured figurally, but exposed in the sheen of the cabinet's glass-fronted doors: Is it not the pure vacuity of such gleaming that is finally revealed to the viewer? – a gleam that returns the gaze, not in an acknowledgement of the viewer's presence, but again, to the blind, white surfaces of the two tunics? In discovering herself in the reflection of such an unseeing surface, the subject is alerted to how she is not registered – not as she presently is, at least – in the look of the departed. While the empty glances of the tunics return us to ourselves in this way, such a moment of "self-recuperation" is accomplished only through a grazing of looks – in other words, in looks that fail to meet directly within the image space. The uncanny, mirror-like shine of the surface is the space of such a deflected encounter. Its aura, its dim luminosity, is not reducible to the various representational codes of the photograph (history/privacy, inside/outside). In the gleam of glass and screen, the photograph accomplishes a counter-actualisation of these culturally coded spaces of experience – a point of standstill, to recall the exchange on "objectless interiority" between Adorno and Benjamin, which renders the internal incoherence of the image into the very principle of its appearance.

In their indexical aspect, or as physical traces, the tunics appear in place of a deceased human presence; "moulded" into the shape of such absence, they belong decisively to Singh's other photographic allegories of the

poignancy of separation. But in their second register, as the chance moment of photographic *ex-posure*, these empty forms stage a paradoxical scene of reciprocity that serves to interrupt closed economies of self-identification/othering. Coming to light as inverted images of the apparatus of visibility – rather than as human forms – the glass and the white tunics are exposed as fully desubjectified presences. Indifferent to our presence, they do not "mirror" us at all. That is, they deprive sight of a stable point of identification; they consign the viewer to a retroactive negation of her presence before the screen. Inscribed into the very means by which the image acquires visibility, such alterity marks a temporal shift in the relation between the subject and the work. The specular exchange that is encrypted into Singh's cabinet is disclosed as a relation to the non-relational – to an irreducible alterity – which Lacan defined as the "ethical relation" to that which remains intransigently proximate and prior to socially coded representations of self/other, history/interiority, possession/loss. The absence of the loved one – here, perhaps, the vestigial "physiognomy" of the idea of national culture, but also the singularity of an ordinary unnamed life – exceeds all tropes of enclosure and containment. In this instance, reflection casts the viewer towards the impossible picture of her disappearance from "the screen" – the glass, the light, the white surface, which simply fail to register the viewer in her embodied particularities, thereby opening the field of the viewer's gaze towards an inexorable, always excessive process of self-othering.

Intimacy, then, is tied to serialised, perhaps even automatic processes of excision, self-extraction and substitution. By proleptically reaching for this object of lost intimacy, the viewer is, in the same gesture, confronted by the vacuity of her own "internalised" standpoint. Tracing the relay between loss and proximity, absence and recollection – or between signs of departure, which is elsewhere, for someone else, an arrival – Singh's accounts of a wounding intimacy cannot but have charged ethico-political implications. In the first instance, "intimacy" announces a limit to paradigms of aesthetic recovery in which the absence of the departed object might be "worked through" via canons of symbolic refusal and substitution. No doubt a piece that belongs to the genre of mourning work, the image of Nehru's *kurtas* is nevertheless an interruption of that form – it suspends altogether the presumption of an interiorised model of "consciousness", which would operate as the precondition for identity and its (generational) transmissibility in the wake of loss. In abjuring incorporative logics of inclusion and interiorisation as such, the work addresses the viewer as the empty frame, the evacuated enclosure, the apparatus itself of technologically mediated loss. The "subject" of Singh's works might be construed through the confrontation not merely of loss, but by the mirror-like reduplication of such absence, which is registered, in the image cited here, as a moment of inherent pictorial and temporal non-equivalence. At once insubstantial and undetermined by existing frameworks of hermeneutical or normative verification, the uncertainty of phenomenal experience is resolute. It is specified, through

the form of emptiness, as the very ground of perception in the historical present. Delineating a radically uncertain horizon of perceptual experience, the image incorporates the symbolic or representational traditions of "loss" and "recuperation" themselves into its repertory of disappearances. It thereby also incriminates traditional models of memorialisation in the "continuum" of "cultural history", which, as we saw, forgets or even destroys the figure of "anonymous toil" by interpellating it into the work's production and transmission "from owner to another" (Benjamin, "Theses on History", *Illuminations* 265; see also Bewes, 45).

Ultimately, Singh's specification of historical conventions that represent kinship, historical affiliation and generational memory register the impossibility of "documenting" or in other words, idealising such foundational origins through the accomplishment of a disinterested historical truth. Instead, the work's designations of empty space operate through a formal indifference to the work of symbolisation – thereby generating a surplus of affective intensities that fail to be "contained" by the various representational conceits of the photographic narrative.

That the photograph is an auto-affective technology is signalled only provisionally by the thematic of "intimacy"; the emotive surpluses that accompany the viewer's perception of the *etui* interior are properly unnamable and aleatory, open to the contingency of meaning. Further, by introducing a moment of temporal incoherence into the forms of immediate presentation, the photographic enclosure operates as a kind of haptic "teletechnology", or what Benjamin identified as the "posthumous shock" of the photographic shot (Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, Vol. 4, 328).[30] In other words, while establishing contact between the distanced coordinates of inside/outside, the shutter's snap introduces disjunction and non-equivalence into the photographic aspiration for instantaneity. Thus, the presentation is always viewed posthumously, or in relation to a present already abandoned by the lost or departed object – a perspective that thereby invites "the spectre of non-fulfillment" into each organic presentation of nation, home, family and the structure of perceptual consciousness itself as it stands before the image (Comay, 11).[31]

Velocities of "national culture": Disintegration

What are the politics of a social world coded through gestures of feminised privacy, greeting and leave-taking, if this totality is itself looped internally through the vanished authority of the (national) patriarch? And if the human touch remains an intractable presence even within the abandoned arrangements of the domestic interior, why chasten the remnants of such experience by casting it – in the uncaptioned, unnumbered pages of *Privacy* – onto the threshold of withdrawal from recognisable orders of identity, presence and class-based affiliation? These disquieting ambiguities are glimpsed behind even the most familiar presentations of the "family",

whether figured as a globally recognisable model of sociable, middle-class privacy (*Go Away Closer*, as only one example) or as a historically identifiable visual archive that links the photographic presentation of interiority to traditions of painterly portraiture (especially as developed through the academic or art-school genre in the colonial metropolis), allegory and cinematic conventions of iconicity that reach back to the black-and-white world of the mid-century *auteur* (*Ladies of Calcutta*).

In the first instance, Singh's "portraits of empty space" from the turn of the millennium might be approached contextually, as a sustained if unresolved reflection on the fate of cultural space in the context of a "politics of disappearance". This suggestion extends Ackbar Abbas's notable thesis on Hong Kong at the moment of its handover from one imperial power (Britain) to another form of coloniality (China), to a discussion of the Indian metropolis in the wake of market liberalisation. Without reducing the specificities of one instance of disappearing space to the other, I share Abbas's proposition that resurgent preoccupations with the image and identity of the (post) colonial metropolis is symptomatic of periods of rapid socio-historical transition, in which the experience of cultural space becomes increasingly subject to processes of "abstraction".[32] By abstraction, Abbas means, above all, the material and ideological transformation of the erstwhile (post)colonial metropolis into the "global city" (3). Drawing on Paul Virilio's work on the relationship of "disappearance to speed", Abbas centralises Virilio's proposition that "in the wake of electronic technology and the mediatisation of the real", the experience of "physical dimensions loses all meaning through sensory overload" (Abbas, 9). Where Virilio argued that regimes of enclosed space (in geography or built environments) are destabilised through the intensified force of informatic "speed", Abbas specifies this thesis for narratives of postcolonial (under)development in the era of globalisation.

If postcoloniality might be understood as the historical attempt to "overcome … the colonial condition" through the "promise" of spatial and temporal co-presence with "the West", such a chronological imagination of time is itself condensed, under conditions of tele-informatic speed, into the instantaneity of the electronic image. This compression of the extended history of colonialism into the experience of global simultaneity is especially interesting for Abbas, because it brings to light, as never before, the "strange historical loop" by which the erstwhile spaces of the colonial city are now perceived as "*forerunners*" to "what the contemporary world capitalist city would become" (Abbas, 3, citing King, 38, emphasis in original). Insofar as the colonial metropolis was "pioneered … to incorporate precapitalist, preindustrial societies into the world economy", it was also especially capable of accommodating ethnically, linguistically and socio-economically diverse populations – a dynamic, even vitalistic feature of the colonial metropolis that "primes" it to "perform well as a global city" today (Abbas, 3).

What is brought to visibility in the image of the global city, is then, this history of "unclean breaks and unclear connections" between older regimes

of postcolonial time, and globalisation. By coming to light as a prefiguration of the "contemporary capitalist world city", the postcolonial metropolis constitutes a "'hyper-anticipatory and predictive'" form of global visibility (Abbas, 3; Virilio, *Aesthetics of Disappearance*, 20, cited in Abbas, 22). This proposition bears, in turn, on established concepts of both "space" and "visibility" as they relate to processes of mediatised appearance under logics of late capitalism. For Abbas, spaces of visibility in the colonial city can no longer be related to "'colonialism" (*per se*); they must be related to "changed and changing space, this colonial space of disappearance that in many ways does not resemble 'colonialism' at all" (Abbas, 3). By reducing the scale of postcolonial speed to the registers of lived experience within the "changed and changing space" of the urban milieu, Abbas's study of Hong Kong on the threshold of decolonisation demonstrates how in the course of the city's transition from colonial metropolis to global city – or in its introduction into multinational circuits of tele-informatic information and financial competition – perception itself becomes saturated by signs of such anticipated "world-historical" transfiguration.

In light of this thesis, it is significant that since the liberalisation of the Indian economy in the early nineteen nineties, urban renewal projects first initiated by the state have been narrated by both corporate interests and an economically enfranchised middle-class citizenry, as centrepieces to the remaking of a national future.[33] Marked by a violent expansion and reorganisation of urban space, these processes have been considered in extended and dedicated detail by Ananya Roy as an aspect of a new ethos of "political entrepreneurialism" – under the imperatives of such a "home-grown" order of neoliberal politics, a heterogeneity of interests, ideological positions and actors are accommodated into the aspirational image of "the world-class city". Such an ethos of inclusivity is not necessarily imposed by (what remains) a strong and interventionist state. Rather, insofar as such a consensus on the "good city" is "organized as neighbourhood associations and reform movements" – very much through the appeal to civic sense and virtue, and in excess of propertied interests – "it is produced and disseminated through middle-class politics" (Roy, 266). Under the neoliberal organisation of capitalism, then, an "activist state seeking to open up new spaces for the accumulation of capital" works flexibly with the demands of multinational finance to consolidate the spatial and ideological centrality of the "middle-class consumer citizen" within the norm of "freed" space.

If the "phantasmagoria of the world-class city" (in Roy's phrase) requires and further authorises "the smashing of the homes and livelihoods of the urban poor", it does so precisely by interpellating the visibility of poverty into its own expansive world view. By rendering inequality into a historically contingent feature of lived (middle class) experience, the "Asian city itself" comes to light, as if for the first time, as the proper "subject" of world history (Roy, 260; 27).[34] Put differently, the utopist projection of a resurgent Asia requires the shame of "third world" unevenness to come to light, in order

that the claims of the poor or the displaced might thereafter be managed or devalorised through "class projects of spatial purification" (Fernandes, 516). Significantly, this reconfigured narrative of postcolonial development proceeds through the appeal to inclusivity and the moral efficacy of civic self-governance (Fernandes and Heller, 516).[35] Compressing the long duration of national development into the promissory image of a globally contemporaneous "Asian century", such a steeply accelerated narration of postcolonial time represents a significant departure from earlier teleologies of state-led development. In a cautionary reminder, Partha Chatterjee recalls that in Nehruvian India, "no organic idea of the Indian city of the future was available" despite the state's emphatic insistence on institutional and ideological centralisation. In the present, the technologies of an entrepreneurial, flexible state are strategically implemented by an empowered middle-class citizenry; the latter operate as the "personnel", as it were, for the construction and management of this "city of the future" (Fernandes and Heller, 2006; Chatterjee, 14).[36]

Not only the most recent fiction of "organic" growth but also, arguably, the most violently incorporative in the history of post-independent India, the figure of the "world class city" remains embedded within globally dominant practices of "referencing 'Asia'" (Roy, 264). Within the shared coordinates of a millenary imagination, "Asia" comes to light as an ascendant economic and civilisational power on the strength of the presumed or potential vitality of its cities. Domesticating referents to other urban spaces that range from "Singapore", "Shanghai" to "Hong Kong", the production of urban space emerges as, itself, a visible attestation to a "world-class" future in which every trace of historical or socio-economic "lag" is/will be overcome. The hyper-anticipatory image of the global city relegates the "third world" stigma of poverty to an historical contingency, addressing it as a feature of an aberrational survival or imminent extinction. As such, the image operates as a "regulating fiction" for both policy as well as the self-narration of a monolithically imagined "middle-class" (despite its socio-economically disparate and ethnically stratified constituencies) (Robinson, cited in Roy, 264)[37].

To follow Abbas's thesis on disappearance in Hong Kong is also, then, to trace its material displacement into other contexts. Not only a circulating sign, but an effect of the global circulation of capital, Abbas's city of disappearance might be discovered, for our purposes, within the "homegrown" visibilities of the world-class Indian city (Roy, 262–264). Produced through metonymic narratives of "urban emulation" and "serial geographical seduction", the perception of urban space, and the significance of its visibility for an imagined national totality in India, demands critical reconsideration as, precisely, an accumulated history of damage and violent refusal – what Abbas associates, in a somewhat different historical trajectory, with the pathology of "reverse hallucination … [a] not seeing of what *is* there" (Abbas, 6).

"Disappearance" is not (or not only) a matter of symbolic effacement or even physical extirpation. It is, in effect, a spectacular intensification of

the experience of time. From the perspective of the animating concerns of this book, it is a process that demonstrates an escalation of the chronological norm of postcolonial development through the planned obsolescence of lived urban space on the one hand, and the ephemerality of preceding regimes of memory, duration and presence, on the other. Benjamin asserted that "anything about which one knows that one soon will not have it around, becomes an image" – citing this alignment of the image with the perception of imminent disappearance, Abbas argues that the imagined loss of place (in the case of Hong Kong before the handover) "precipitates … an intense and unprecedented concern with historical and cultural specificity" (Abbas, *CPD* 7). As such, the politics of "disappearance" might be identified with an active practice of "replacement and substitution where the perceived danger" of imminent change or loss is re-contained "through representations that are familiar and plausible" (Abbas, 7, 8).

India's precipitous entry into globalised or post-industrial transnational market systems in the mid-1990s was for many, a delayed eventuality; an ongoing process, this transition has led to the definitive devalorisation of the traditional locus and sources of state legitimacy even while consolidating its force in unprecedented fashion, in other aspects. Such a transformation of the moral authority of the state has profoundly changed the discursive terms of both nationalism and the various subnationalisms of India's federal system of representation. In this context, it could be argued with Abbas that the resulting dismantlement of twentieth-century construct of "politics" *as* such has inaugurated an "unprecedented" suffusion (rather than extinction) of the spaces of cultural visibility in India today (Abbas, 7). Writing at the conclusion of his essay on postmodernism, Fredric Jameson indicates how, under the current organisation of global capitalism, the status of "culture" itself undergoes a radical transformation in relation to other aspects of social relations. This is

> the point at which everything in our social life – from economic value and state power to practices and to the very structure of the psyche itself – can be said to have become "cultural" in some original yet untheorized sense.
>
> (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 47, 48; cited in Abbas, *CPD* 7)

Jameson's hyperbolic claim regarding an "original" transformation in the relation between the spaces and institutions of society, politics and culture (in advanced industrial societies) indicates a momentous "shift in the *status of culture itself*"; while this implication has been displaced by Abbas towards his own, now celebrated insights into the exceptional case of Hong Kong's decolonisation, it also invites a conjunctural reflection on comparable tensions and contradictions within metropolitan experience in India today (Abbas, 7). If both national and metropolitan registers of belonging continue to participate in the "phantasmagoria" of postcolonial

transformation, the question of "place" is still captivated by older teleologies of developmentalist time, even as the trajectory of these worlding narratives are redirected in new ways. "Place", in other words, must be understood through its contemporary relation to speed and abstraction – those primary descriptors of the image form in the age of media liberalisation.

In the Indian situation, an older visual regime of national "borders and sovereignty" has been reimagined (rather than surpassed) within this profoundly altered understanding of the historical present. Indeed, the "renationalization" of cultural identity has been accelerated to an unprecedented degree within the totalised space of media-visibility (Sundaram, 84; Fernandes, 2000).[38] In other words, the media image has emerged not as a means or even aspect of "culture"; it operates as meta-referent for "*all* cultural politics" within the ambit of the post-liberalised nation-state (Sundaram, 90, emphasis mine). Whatever the stakes of the range of discussions undertaken within the "contested terrain" of middle-class subjectivity in India today, these developments suggest the formal transformation of the media itself into an "iconic space" of appearing – a "monumental" space, in its own right, which both incorporates and dematerialises other contending spheres of socio-political life into the virtualised physiognomy of a "national people" (Sundaram, 90). If the worlding practices of Indian urbanism/economic nationalism is one effect of the interpellative force of middle-class address, these processes are underwritten by the production – or hyper-production – of the image-space itself. The latter appears through a superabundance of cultural signs, fully in excess of its discrete representational content, as a placeholder for an "untheoriz[able]" or otherwise cognitively "unmappable" historical moment. In Jameson's designation, this is the moment in which "everything in … social life … becomes 'cultural' "; by the same token, this is also a description of "*abstraction* as the contemporary mode of disappearance" (Jameson, cited in Abbas, 7, 9).

As the experience of space becomes oversaturated with multifarious, internally incompatible signs, it is the visual which becomes increasingly dominant, as a mode of appearance, under logics of late capitalism. The image is not (or not only) a supplement for the collapsing scales of spatio-temporal experience that Abbas places under the sign of "abstraction", and which Adorno, before him, analysed under through the projections of "objectless interiority". We misunderstand the ascendancy of the image in such a moment if we construe it, in exclusively functionalist terms, as a kind of compensatory form of identity –- an alibi for the loss of a historically secure standpoint whose unavailability, in the present, is registered in the reversals between "the fast and the slow [or in] the absence of transition between big and small" (Abbas, 9).[39] Neither is the virtual a symptom of the formal breakdown of "reality", as the analogical line becomes increasingly superannuated by a preference for digital abstraction (the dot, the matrix, the pixel). Rather than causing, correcting or even cushioning the lack of the

concrete in the spaces of lived experience, the media image as the "iconic space" of visibility *is* the "concrete" form taken by abstraction in our globalist present (Sundaram, 90; Abbas, 9).

Ghosts in the machine

As "appearances" whose very perceptibility is "posited on the imminence of disappearance", Singh's interiors are historical attestations to the asynchronic loops by which the signs of an older, hypothesised national culture have been repositioned within a globalist conjuncture marked by new semiotic formations (Abbas, 11). These are brought about by decentralised informational "flows", the geographical remapping of the organisation and values of corporate capital as it moves from traditional, Euro-American centres of hegemony to the "non-West" and the consolidation of a transnational elite for whom the value of (national) "culture", the persistence of "tradition" or even the old, postcolonial claim to spatio-temporal co-presence with "the West" emerges as a primary implement of self-assertion within the arena of multinational financial competition.

The thesis on the "politics of disappearance", or the trajectory of the commodity fetish from Adorno and Benjamin to Abbas, might be resituated within Singh's images, and the particular historical exigencies their aesthetic presupposes, first, via the manner of the sitter's self-presentation. If Singh's feminine portraits are at once acutely individualised and always in excess of their immediate appearance, this is because her subjects achieve expressivity by way of reference to a pre-existing visual archive – one marked by the historical centrality of the "icon". Singh's portraits make copious references to canvases, the accoutrements of classical musical or literary culture, or to feminised continuities in "family" appearance. Like a visual gesture of address or invitation, these enfold the viewer into an intimate or "insiderist discourse" of recognition and distance. Notwithstanding the artist's own resistance to a "nationalised" identification of her works, and at least in this aspect, these collections might be approached as testaments to the longue durée of modernist presentation whereby the "interiorised" subject reproduced herself, through the various apparatuses of collectively authorised appearance, in an incarnate performance of the disparate, and perhaps contradictory domestic/external registers of national belonging.

Second, if simultaneously, the allegorical paradigm of ritualised narratives of *ghar* and *baire* is itself aligned with the velocity of the image; in the age of media liberalisation, it is the screen, the window, the surface itself that comes to appearance. In this aspect, the entire historical saga through which the "protagonist-performer-'nationalist'" makes herself symbolically available to a culturally determined subject of address is compressed into a reflexive awareness of the means of such production. In a post-historical moment, the features of an authentic or intimate "interiority" are a chiaroscuro of the medium of their representation – the disembodied effect of historically

specified techniques of iconicity, gesture and a performative style of public address (Rajadhyaksha, 125). Such a prosthetic, even automatised form of visibility comes to stand in for traditions of allegory and iconicity associated with the socialist aesthetic of national modernism. I suggested earlier that by cutting the presentation of "interiority" as such from its empirical relationship to space, Singh's photographed interiors tend to flatten the depth from which an ethically embodied spectator might gain access to such space. It is precisely the fictionalising possibilities of such immaterial space that suffuses Singh's photographic enactments of kinship with both pathos and new potentialities, where "intimacy" itself becomes a sign of the ultimate (spatial, hermeneutical) inaccessibility of its interiorised world. This is to say, that as spectacularised scenes of leave-taking and arrival, Singh's hospitable interiors are already placed on the threshold of withdrawing space.[40]

For a previous generation of artists, "the deployment of authenticity for the fictional production of the 'exemplary' spectator" was investigated through the ideal of the fully formed subject of "national/socialist realism" (Rajadhyakshya, 119).[41] Determined through traditionally over-coded registers of inside/outside, the historicity of Singh's photographs of empty space might be located in movements of partitioning and partiality rather than in the accomplishment of symbolic coincidence or intersection. As if seen "through a plane of disjunction", the interior functions as the visual correlate of a "situation where the facade" – rather than the figure of national-icon-performer – operates increasingly as though on stage, as literally performing, with no functional relationships to any real space to which a "citizen" might have access (Rajadhyakshya, 119; emphasis in original).[42] Neither a reference to the apparent desertion of hitherto "habitable spaces of circulation" that Virilio associates (nostalgically) with the classical *polis*, nor a symptom of millenary narratives of cultural survival or resurgence, disappearance might be approached, in the final instance, as a reflexive staging of the production/contraction of cultural space within the very means of visibility (Virilio, *Speed and Politics* 6).[43] In this alternative aspect, the visual image engages its preconditions in withdrawing or disappearing space without becoming incorporated into the continuum of such an order. This kind of counter-appearance is misconstrued if it is aligned with a strongly interventionist aesthetic – as a modality of "resistance" – insofar as it makes no attempt to correct or reverse the politics of disappearance (Abbas, 8).

In Adorno's "construction of the aesthetic", the figure who resided within the domestic interior became visible to the reader only so far as the fictional strictures of Kierkegaard's own text permitted – that is, if the human figure appeared to us at all, it was because it appeared through *the same hallucinatory movement* that incorporated an "empirical" social reality into the increasingly contracted horizons of a *textual* "interior". As a counter-figure to both Kierkegaard's pseudonymous personae and his "real", historically embodied presence, the ghostly *Punkt* of the Kierkegaardian interior did nothing more than "*reverse* the on-going reversals" between the living and

the vanished past. As the operation of reversal, the punctuated figure of the ghost emerged as a perceptible, even recognisable presence only by holding apart – dis-integrating – the various coordinates of narrative identification ("Kierkegaard"/ "persona"; body/artefact) that made up the narrative present.

Repositioned as an aspect of aesthetic construction, the "phantasmagoria" of an interiorised, authentic subject, comes to light in a negative, or entirely interstitial space of visibility. "Instantiated in the moment of indifference between death and meaning", or between the redundancy of a mortified form and its inaccessible inner content, the phantasm serves to expose such hyphenated space to scrutiny (Adorno, *BSW3* 63). Space is longer experienced as the matter of an extant physical environment; rather, it emerges processually, as a movement between the various media of its appearance. "Constellated between alienated things and disappearing meaning", our sensible entanglement with the image form becomes inseparable from the techniques that stage such an encounter – visual techniques that are, in turn, seen to produce the phenomenological experience of space. Visibility, then, is attached less to a perceptually guaranteed reality than to the "phantom objectivity" of a world of broken forms in which every analytical or hermeneutical category is punctured by a sense of unrelieved "perplexity" (Adorno, Postscript to the Hornberg letter, *BSW3* 63; Lukács, *TN* 23; Benjamin, *BSW3* 155). The "sociological" veracity of Singh's images resides here: Space becomes apprehensible not in itself, as the enclosed, "defensible" totality that Virilio identifies with epoch of the territory and the map, but as a series of self-displacing "insertion[s] into a continuum, … as an interval, gap … an area of non-coincidence, such as the deliberate implantation of an outsider perspective in a familiar or familial interior" (*Entanglements*, Chow, 19).[44]

Consider, in this regard, the photograph of a paved pathway (http://dayanitasingh.net/go-away-closer/electronic p. 9, FundaciónMapfre p. 197), which appears rather unexpectedly in the midst of the various scenes of middle-class interiority that comprise the 32 tritone plates of *Go Away Closer*.[45] Captured through an indeterminate use of scale, this "grid" of plotted urban space is incrementally absorbed into the reflected light of its watery surface; it is impossible to tell whether the path comprises a truly depthless material plane, or whether its ostensible "shallowness" is the effect of pooled water as it rises up to the surface just at that point where the gradient of the pathway unexpectedly dips away from the walker. As such, the path appears as an ambiguous trope for a point of "public" entry into the collection of images that are assembled within both the built and photographically generated spaces of the domestic interior – these include the fragmented references to Anand Bhavan – as of the wider, worlding practices of the twentieth-century (post)colonial metropolis that is the "narrated" content of these works. But the photograph also functions as a rigorously optical situation in which the access point to the image, as such, recedes

from the embodied perspective of the viewer. Forgoing a linear orientation of the eye, the image flattens its presentation into an experience of space that is cut off from the empirical coordinates of perceptual consciousness. This is an incisive visual account of what Ashis Rajadhyakshya identifies as a strictly "enunciative" mode of presentation. Lacking any referent in "real" space or time, we are confronted by a "purely symbolic relation" to space – a *trompe l'oeil* not only of the (idealised) developmentalist space of the colonial metropolis, but of the very experience of movement as it collapses into the reflective surface of a screen. I would extend Rajadhyaksha's thesis to note how, by dematerialising our relationship to space altogether, the image accomplishes a remarkable temporal extension of the eye, which is momentarily dislodged from *Go Away Closer* and *Privacy*'s ambiguous, figural codifications of welcome and departure. Relinquishing the viewer to a moment of unsurpassable lateness – an "afterness" that must abide within the media of perception after all gestures of leave-taking have been completed – the path itself appears to "take off" – as if in a line of flight – towards an elevated if entirely unverifiable vanishing point located outside the frame.

As a particular form of visibility, then, the ghost is only another "image" in the unfolding sequence of images that comprised the Benjaminian model of historical (re)collection and transmission – a figure of movement that passes through the violently reified contact points between interiority, the commodity object and the art work. As such, the ghost responds to disappearing space by reduplicating a set of existing conditions that make up the "vanishing present" while also disjoining the moment of its own presentation from these preconditions. By deflecting, redirecting or taking off from the trajectory of historical disappearance, such mediatised acts of staging "enable the epistemic limit of these conditions to become palpably perceptible – and marked off in their historical particularity" (Chow, 19).[46] In other words, rather than contesting the politics of disappearance, this kind of cultural production interposes itself, however tenuously, into the very processes that would reduce the instant of the image's presentation to totemistic iterations of the archaism and the cliché. Bereft of "authority" – as a visible discrepancy within norms of mastery or proprietorship – the figure of passing illuminates a point of reception, inheritance and retelling that remains unforeseeable within the frameworks of subjective perception (Benjamin, *BSW3* 146).

Specified as a moment of non-equivalence within the photographic frame, or as departure from even the outermost horizon of an empirical subject of perception, space, in Singh's world, is a counter-actualisation of its own (phenomenal or symbolic) forms. Singh's architectural constructions of emptiness might be compared, at this point of the discussion, to the brief, "cipher-like" illuminations of the Adornian reflection (Adorno, *K* 25). By bringing the phantasmagoria of progressive, developmentalist time to stand-still, these photographs involve us in the momentary experience of useless

space – rupturing the seemingly impenetrable enchantment of a world-class destiny, the ruined formations of the historical present confront us with forsaken knowledges of accumulated muteness, failure and "anonymous toil" (Benjamin, "Theses on History", *Illuminations* 265). The contemporaneity of Singh's images reside here: In the returning opacities of the wall, the consumed-through object, and the exclusionary partitionings that make for the radiant work of art, Singh's images suggest that the mid-century attempt to align the practices of art with those of freedom runs, historically, into an insuperable paradox. In every instance, the physiognomy of cultural, class- or gendered-based proprietorship is concretised – as appearance – only as the remaindered, incessantly exteriorised *effect* of the apparatus of visibility.

In the unlocatable domicile of Nehru's ghost, in the flight path that migrates past the horizons of perceptible experience, or in the abandoned wall (unfinished or ruined) that stands in lieu of the home, Singh's images bear witness to the inability of new apparatuses of state and capital to fulfill their promise to reform and transcend these walls, in this place, through an epochal transformation of time. "Blasting the epoch" out of periodised narratives of "historical continuity", or the "life" out of reified, biographical accounts of a "lifework", Singh's portraits of vestigial space are captivating because they sever us, in intimate movements of self-excision and partitioning, from the deceit of organic, fulfilled time.[47] Transmitting the image of modernism's exhausted or otherwise abandoned future into the present, Singh's counter-spaces are discovered, in their alterity to every established mode of perceptual or normative certainty, as sheer openings within the horizon of lived experience.

Notes

1 Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, Vol. 2, 141, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1983).
2 Rachel Spence, "Infinite Possibilities", *The Financial Times*, 26 April 2013, www.ft.com/content/4d9bced8-a90f-11e2-bcfb-00144feabdc0 (accessed 13 June 2014).
3 Bersani and Philips, *Intimacies* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 28–125. *Myself, Mona Ahmed* might well exemplify an aesthetic of "impersonal narcissism", or what psychoanalytic literary critic Leo Bersani identifies an anti-egoistical model of pleasure, which troubles logics of gratification, premised on closed economies of self-loss/self-recuperation in the other.
4 The story and mannerism of "Mona Ahmed" remains a vital point of interlocution within and between the collections that comprise Singh's more recent oeuvre. Significantly, Singh chose to represent her exhibit at the 2013 Venice Biennale through abbreviated references to *Myself, Mona Ahmed*, which was reconfigured for the occasion as a site-based video installation. Presented through the interactive modalities of digitalised media, Singh's most recent iteration of the work, *Mona Darling* (2000), deliberately imagines the collection less as a complete photographic narrative, and more as an electronic/informational "file" – thereby,

perhaps, casting the portrait of Mona, the genre of the photographic documentary, as well as the modernist appeal to the intimate affiliation between artist and model into the spaces of an unresolved, user-generated archive of images.

5 As a detailed account of Singh's career would show, publishing comes to constitute an essential part of Singh's practice after the various iterations of *Myself, Mona Ahmad*. From this point, Singh initiated multiple projects conjoining photography and its publishable formats – a compilation of so-called book-objects – in collaboration with the German publisher Gerhard Steidl – which continue to be sequenced and reconstructed as books, art objects, exhibitions and catalogues. Collections that established Singh as a photographer, including *Privacy, Chairs* and the critical, *Go Away Closer* are reassembled through the book's multiple possibilities for legibility and display; these collections have been followed by the seven-volume *Sent a Letter* and *Blue Book* (2008), *Dream Villa* (2010), *Fileroom* (2013), *Museum of Chance* (2016), *Museum Bhavan* (2017) and, most recently, Singh's alignment of her artistic practice and persona with the print form, somewhere between image and typescript, as between art-object and consumer item, in *Pop-up Bookshop/My Offset World* (2018).

6 The series was published in an innovative format, involving different bound, cloth covers with an "title image" not replicated elsewhere in the series. Involving the viewer/read/consumer in chance, Singh re-employed the format for the *Museum of Chance Book Object* two years later, sequencing the back and front covers with unique pairs of photographs and thereby expanding the indeterminant value of the art/object by displacing its claims from those of singular aesthetic artefact to the status of reproducible commodity.

7 I refer to the published collections in the volumes *Privacy* (Göttingen: Steidl Publishers, 2004) and *Go Away Closer* (Göttingen: Steidl Publishers, 2007).

8 Supriya Chaudhuri, "Phantasmagorias of the Interior: Furniture, Modernity, and Early Bengali Fiction", *Journal of Victorian Culture* 15(2) (2010): 173–193.

9 Edgar Allan Poe, "The Philosophy of Furniture" (1840), in *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. James A. Harrison (New York: AMS Press, 1965), XIV, 101.

10 Barthes, "The Reality Effect" in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 148.

11 Barthes, "The World as Object" in *Roland Barthes: Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1981), 4. If the object world is at once a dwelling space and a legible "inscription" of a particular way of life, it also the site of what Pierre Bourdieu terms the *habitus*, a set of dispositions and inculcated values that gives a person's sense of place and social standing in the world. In their visual detail, the "furnishings" of lived space are the apparatus by which "interiority", or a socially inscribed subjectivity, is itself articulated and reproduced over time (Chaudhuri, 176).

12 Theodor W. Adorno, "Exchange with Theodor W. Adorno" in *Benjamin: Selected Writings*, eds. Michael W. Jennings et al. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2002), vol. 3, 63 (hereafter cited in text as *BSW3*); Walter Benjamin, "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth-century (1939)" in *The Arcades Project*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 20; Chaudhuri, 175.

13 "In her comparison between Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Kopal Kundala* (1885) and Tagore's late unfinished *Jogajog/Relationships* (1929), Chaudhuri demonstrates two divergent aesthetic responses, and subsequent articulations

of a discrepant ethical subject. Exhibiting a shared "ambivalence" with regard to inherited realist representational codes, both texts presuppose a "lack of fit between the sumptuary codes of modern mercantile capitalism and a profound suspicion of the world and its goods that is encoded as an older or 'traditional' way of life (Chaudhuri, 179).

14 Theodor W. Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic,* trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 24–47 (hereafter cited in the text as *K*).

15 Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Verso, 1985), 167–168 (hereafter cited in the text as *CB*).

16 Benjamin, "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth-century", Exposé of 1939, in *The Arcades Project,* 14–26.

17 Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. B. Fowkes, vol. 1 of 3 (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).

18 Ackbar Abbas, "Walter Benjamin's Collector: The Fate of Modern Experience", *New Literary History* 20(1) (1988): 217–237.

19 Steven Vogel, "The Problem of Nature in Lukács" in *Against Nature: The Concept of Nature in Critical Theory* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), 13–32 (hereafter cited in the text as *AN*).

20 Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, ed. Michael Jennings, vol. 3 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2002), 59–61. See Chaudhuri's gloss on this exchange. Benjamin's decisive response to Adorno's charge, that his thesis on the "phantasmagoria of the interior" lacks historical specificity, is located in in Benjamin's treatment of Poe. An inheritor of the realist novel, detective fiction materialises of the mortification of value – the "corpse" – that is always housed within the domestic interior.

21 The term "character mask" was used by Marx through the 1840s and 1860s, and would be appropriated and developed into a dominant conceit in Lukács' notion of reification in *History and Class Consciousness*. Marx argues that individuals exist intersubjectively for each other as representatives of commodities, or as commodity owners, where such representations are normatively predetermined by the relations between capital and labor power: "The characters who appear on the economic stage are merely personifications of economic relations" (*Capital*, chapter 2, 179). Therefore, "it is not individuals who are set free by free competition but rather it is capital that is set free". *Grundrisse*, 650–651.

22 Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. B. Fowkes, vol. 1 (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 179.

23 David Sherman reminds us that Kierkegaard lived off a fixed investment, as others of his class, and was therefore always "subject to market fluctuations (such as the one accompanying the 1848 workers' revolt)" (Sherman, 19).

24 "Alienated Masterpiece: The *Missa Solemnis* (1959)", in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 569–583. Hereafter cited as *Missa*.

25 Aveek Sen, "The Eye in Thought", in *Dayanita Singh* (Madrid and London: FundaciónMapfre/Penguin Studio, 2010).

26 T.W. Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society" in *Prisms*, ed. and trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen and Samuel Weber (Amherst, MA: MIT Press, 1983).

27 Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, 42.

28 J. Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis Seminar VII*, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Norton Books, 1997).

The word "extimite" is used in the untranslated *Seminar XVI : Lacan, Le séminaire de Jacques Lacan, Livre XVI, D'un Autre à l'autre (1968–1969)* (Paris: Seuil, 2006).

29 J-A Miller, "Extimite", in *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure and Society*, eds. Mark Bracher, M. Alcorn, R. Corthell and F. Massardier-Kennedy (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 74–87.

30 Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelare", in *Selected Writings Volume 4*, 1938–1940, trans. Edmund Jephcott et. al. and eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003).

31 Rebecca Comay. "Proust. Photography, Trauma", *Discourse* 31(1–2) (Winter 2009): 86–107.

32 Ackbar Abbas, *Hong Kong: Culture and the Politics of Disappearance* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 8–10 (hereafter cited in the text as *CPD*).

33 The National Urban Renewal Mission was launched in 2005 as a homage to India's postcolonial moderniser, Jawaharlal Nehru, and makes the case for state and corporate investment in urban infrastructure. Yoking the economic future of the nation to the city, the mission statement predicts a massive increase in India's urban population from 28 per cent in 2011 to 40 per cent in 2021. The state has since implemented this idea at multiple, and often uncoordinated scales of operation (at national, federal and municipal levels). It deploys a three-principle "socio-spatial technologies" to advance the idea of the world-class city through the deregulation of space. These include slum evictions (undertaken on massive scale in Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore as well as the erstwhile Left-front led Kolkata, since the mid-1990s, where such a "clearing" of space participates in the broader criminalisation of urban poverty across India); the setting up of Special Economic Zones; and the construction of vast, planned peri-urban "new" towns. While all of these technologies point to the "activist" intervention of the state, the idea of the world-class city has been advanced through an informal if consistently maintained compact between the representatives of such a pragmatically "flexible" state, multinational corporate interests and an increasingly self-governing metropolitan citizenry. The latter, in turn, interpellate themselves into these worlding processes under the sign "not only of the 'Global Indian'", but also increasingly "in the name of the 'ordinary' middle class consumer-citizen" (Roy, 263, 265; Fernandes, 2006).

34 Ananya Roy, "The Blockade of the World-Class City: Dialectical Images of Indian Urbanism", in *Worlding Cities: Asian Experiments and the Art of Being Global*, eds. Ananya Roy and Aihwa Ong (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2011).

35 Leela Fernandes and P. Heller, "Hegemonic Aspirations: New Middle Class Politics and India's Democracy in Comparative Perspective", *Critical Asian Studies* 38(4) (2006): 495–522.

36 Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflection on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

37 J. Robinson, "Global and World Cities: A View from Off the Map", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 26(3): 531–554. 2002.

While the National Urban Renewal Mission makes mention of China and its uses of Special Economic Zones, the emergence of the post-industrial

"world-class city" as an aesthetic norm makes is articulated in the policy brief *Vision Mumbai*, undertaken by the private consultancy firm, McKinsey and Company, at the behest of powerful professional private interests represented by the non-governmental activist body, Bombay First (2003). The following year saw the eviction of 300,000 slum-dwellers in Mumbai in a move undertaken – independently – by the state government of Maharashtra in what might now be viewed as the precursor to an ambitious urban "reclamation" scheme, which seeks to clear the "congested" city centre through the redevelopment of slums and mill lands.

38 R. Sundaram, *Pirate Modernity: Delhi's Media Urbanism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

39 For a version of this kind of argument, see Chaitanya Sambrani's curatorial essay to the important exhibit of contemporary Indian art, "The Edge of Desire" (2007). Locating the anxiety over place (in both popular and aesthetic discourse) in the transformation in public visual culture since liberalisation, Sambrani presents a perhaps overly functionalist analysis of the relation between the "homogenizing force of global capital" that threatens to extirpate all "survival[s]" of the local and the emergence of politically authorised forms of fundamentalism in the mid-1990s. The latter is posed as a compensation for the erosion of older regimes of nation and belonging, as experienced in India's transition to post-industrial market systems.

40 Hence, perhaps, as Sen suggests, the mystery of "inscrutably *private* moments that are enacted in public in wintery streets and inside ephemeral and fantastically lit wedding-tents [*pandals*]" (Sen, 124; emphasis mine).

41 Ashis Rajadhyakshya, *Indian Cinema in the Time of Celluloid: from Bollywood to the Emergency* (Calcutta/Indianapolis: Seagull Books/University of Indiana Press, 2009).

42 See, as exemplary images of such empty, non-functional or dissolvable space, photographs of the wedding stage, typically constructed in Indian metros as a *trompe l'oeil* of monumental architecture, whether historic or mythological, on pp. 7–9 of *Go Away Closer*; the wall, apparently unfinished or abandoned in its construction as an enclosure, from *Blue Book* (Steidl, 2009), reprinted in *Dayanita Singh*, p. 147 or the paved pathway, from *Go Away Closer*, discussed below.

43 Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics*, trans. Marc Pollizotti (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2006).

44 Rey Chow, "When Reflexivity becomes Porn: Mutations of a Modernist Theoretical Introduction" in *Entanglements or Transmedial Thinking about Capture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 14–30.

45 FundaciónMapfre, *Dayanita Singh* (London: Penguin Studio, 2010).

46 Rey Chow, "Postcolonial Visibilities: Questions Inspired by Deleuze's Method" in *Entanglements, or Transmedial Thinking about Capture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 151–168.

47 Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", *Illuminations*, 263.

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