*Visual Culture and the Politics of Locality in Modern India: A Review Essay**

AJAY J. SINHA

Mount Holyoke College, U.S.A.

"The fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture."

Martin Heidegger[1]

"Historical monuments, we can argue, live their modern lives primarily as images."

Tapati Guha-Thakurta[2]

I. Picture and Image

The visual image has recently attracted much attention among scholars of modern South Asia. The interest is sparked largely by a widespread use of media images in Hindu religious politics of contemporary India.[3] This review essay draws attention to two significant

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[1] Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture", in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, translated and with an introduction by William Lovitt, New York, Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1977, 134.

[2] "Compulsions of Visual Representation in Colonial India," in *Traces of India: Photography, Architecture, and the Politics of Representation, 1850–1900*, edited by Maria Antonella Pelizzari, Montreal, Canadian Centre for Architecture and New Haven, Yale Center for British Art, 2003, 110.

[3] The literature is vast. See Anuradha Kapur, "Diety to Crusader," in *Hindus and Others: The Question of Identity in India Today*, edited by Gyanendra Pandey (New Delhi, 1993); Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press,1999); Christiane Brosius and Melissa Butcher (eds.), *Image journeys: Audio-visual media and cultural change in India* (New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications, 1999); Arvind Rajagopal, *Politics after Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Indian Public* (Cambridge, U.K.,

interventions in this context. Christopher Pinney's *'Photos of Gods': The Printed Image and the Political Struggle in India*,[4] and Tapati Guha-Thakurta's *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India*[5] go beyond the topical interest in contemporary media to explore a historical link between preoccupations with the visual image and the experience of modernity in India. The purpose of this essay is to read these important books, coincidentally published in 2004, for their focus on the centrality of image practices and visual discourses in India, giving depth and complexity to Heidegger's idea of modernity as an age in which the world is primarily experienced as a picture.[6]

For Heidegger, a picture is a grid of coordinates represented by the mathematical system of linear perspective and defined as a scientific and mathematical mode for organising the perceptual world into a sensible unity. As Pinney explains, such a mode of controlling and ordering the sensory experience was introduced in India through British colonialism (18), but "image" represents the underbelly of such a hegemonic visual regime. For both Pinney and Guha-Thakurta, image is not only the visual artifact but, more fundamentally, the

New York, Cambridge University Press, 2001); Philip Lutgendorf, "Evolving a monkey: Hanuman, poster art and postcolonial anxiety," *Contributions to Indian Sociology*,vol. 36, nos. 1 and 2, January–August 2002 (Special issue titled "Beyond Appearance? Visual Practices and Ideologies in Modern India" edited by Sumathi Ramaswamy), 71–112; and Raminder Kaur, *Performative Politics and the Cultures of Hinduism: Public Uses of Religion in India* (Delhi, Permanent Black, 2003).

[4] Christopher Pinney, *'Photos of Gods': The Printed Image and the Political Struggle in India*, London, Reaktion Books, 2004.

[5] Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (under "Cultures of History" series edited by Nicholas Dirks), New York, Columbia University Press, 2004.

[6] Preoccupation with visual image as a defining moment for Western modernity has been the subject of vast literature. Topics the two authors bring into India include Martin Jay's formulation of "scopic regimes of modernity" (Martin Jay, "The Scopic Regimes of Modernity," in *Vision and Visuality* edited by Hal Foster, San Francisco, 1988, 3–27); Jonathan Crary's attention to visual technologies embodied by scientific instruments, street entertainment and popular forms such as photography and film (Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1996); Stephen Bann's analysis of the disciplining of image through art history and museums (Stephen Bann, *The Clothing of Clio: A Study of the Representation of History in Nineteenth Century Britain and France*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984); and a radical questioning of art history's privileging of work of art in Donald Preziosi, "Seeing Through Art History," in *Knowledges: Historical and Critical Studies in Disciplinarity*, edited by Ellen Messer-Davidow, David R. Shumway, and David J. Sylvan (Charlottesville, University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

visual regime in which Indian artifacts participate, and the social and political affect of visual and material things. Their study spans a century and a quarter, marked by the consolidation of British colonial rule in the late-19th century, anti-colonial movements in the early-20th century, and the formation of a post-colonial nation in mid-20th century. Pinney's *Photos of Gods* is an account of commercially produced, colourful lithographic prints of Indian gods and goddesses that were made by artists trained in British art schools at least since late-1870s. These chromolithographs continue to be bought and sold as calendar images or individual framed pictures through a network of publishers, distributors, traders and clients, and displayed in offices, shops, homes and street shrines in rural and urban India. Pinney's project is to analyse in this popular consumption of prints the historical evolution of what he calls "Indian Hindu scopic regimes" (Pinney 9). Guha-Thakurta's *Monuments, Objects, Histories* is concerned with the way discovery, display and reproducibility of historical monuments and artifacts create a public memory of India's past. In particular she is interested in the disciplinary practices of art history, art museums and archaeology, and their role in authorizing that memory through scientific modes of collecting and evaluating those artifacts.

For both scholars, then, image is a field on which contentions over cultural memory and values take place. Both, Pinney and Guha-Thakurta, examine their subjects with an acute, critical awareness of a public culture developing in the historical present of their writing, when both popular god prints and historical monuments have become charged with a politics of Hindu religious essentialism (Hindutva). A close scrutiny of visual artifacts brings the two books close to art history, but the scholars locate themselves outside that discipline and in critical relation to it. They question the centrality of a work of art, in whose singularity, visual properties, and iconography art history usually finds the key to cultural meanings. Instead, they emphasize how visual regimes are shaped by the interplay of various image practices, pay close attention to the mediating role of technologies such as print, photography and film, and analyze mass-produced artifacts such as art books, posters, and trade labels. This approach locates the two works within an interpretative mode some scholars have come to call visual culture.[7] An inquiry into the diversity and

[7] Such an opposition of art history and visual culture is, of course, questionable. For debates among art historians on whether visual culture is a new field or business as usual, see *October* 77, 1996, (special issue on Visual Culture). Interest in the visual

instability of the visual field is productive. But significant differences between the two scholars' work also suggest conflicts within the field of visual culture, and contending visions of how India's modernity is created within it.

II. Image Practices

Let me begin with Pinney, who proposes to "rearrange Indian history so that central place can be found for the visual" (8). The insistence on the visual image is a reaction against scholarly reading of media images in relation to contemporary politics, which Pinney calls an easy "physiognomic reading of artistic documents, that is reading into them what is already known through other means."[8] Eight chapters and an epilogue are built instead on a rigorous conceptual frame to attend closely to the making, circulation, and cultural work of god pictures themselves, offering insightful readings of individual images to underscore the way they shape the desires and expectations of common people in relation to the dominant politics of modern India.

Pinney develops his "image-based history" through a series of conceptual oppositions embedded within three major coordinating themes. The first theme is the nature and status of the visual image itself. To define image, Pinney uses W.J.T. Mitchell's idea of a picture as "not just a surface but a face that faces the beholder" (8). If considerations relating to "surface" lead to an exploration of a picture's distance from the beholder, and its own thingness or objecthood, "face" centers on the intimate relationship of image to its viewers—in other words, the social affect and efficacy of making, viewing, and surrounding oneself with images. Pinney calls the first the conventional approach of aesthetics, which in his estimation is "disinterested representation, which over-cerebralizes and textualizes the image" (8). By contrast, he addresses his concerns for affect as "'corpothetics'—embodied corporeal aesthetics," through which images can be understood as "compressed performances" that bring the viewer and the viewed into dynamic social relationships.

image is so widespread that it amounts to nothing less than what W.J.T. Mitchell has described as a "pictorial turn" in various human science disciplines. See Mitchell, "The Pictorial Turn," in his *Picture Theory* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994).

[8] Pinney is quoting Carlo Ginzburg's warning to social scientists, after E.H. Gombrich.

In the Indian context, "corpothetics" of god prints plays out within what Pinney calls "Indian Hindu scopic regimes" a notion indebted to Martin Jay's idea of "scopic regimes of modernity."[9] This idea centres on the Hindu concept of Darshan, borrowing from scholars of Indian religion who have described it as a worshipper's relationship of "'seeing and being seen' by a deity, but which also connotes a whole range of ideas relating to 'insight', 'knowledge', and 'philosophy'" (8–9). Pinney describes the Darshanic visual system not simply as a modern subculture developing in India, but rather "the backdrop against which a new kind of history has to be written" (9). A vivid, archive-rich account of a vast human network of production and consumption of popular images forms the basis for a brilliant history of "alternative modernity" in India (204). In that history, the opposition between Darshan's corpothetics and the imperatives of disinterested aesthetics makes "Indian Hindu scopic regimes" nothing less than a powerful "countertheory of Western visuality."[10]

Pinney's corpothetic visuality gains a sharp political edge through his second coordinating theme, which relates to the role of god prints in the social and political culture of modern India. According to Pinney, prints of Hindu gods and goddesses reconfigure a relationship that had evolved historically between religion and politics in colonial India, in which the two "were conceptually titrated into separate domains, politics being placed under strict surveillance and religion conceptualized as autonomous" (11). Applying to India Theodore Adorno's insight on a split between high and low art in Western modernity, Pinney describes the relationship between religion and politics as a similar split between "torn halves of an integral freedom, to which however they do not add up." As in Adorno's "high and low," Pinney describes two distinct levels of public attitudes towards religion in modern India, elite and popular. The cultural elites maintained the divide between religion and politics during and after the colonial period, while the popular culture saw the two "realigned in a new and deadly form" through the agency of chromolithographs (11). The realignment was

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[9] See Martin Jay, "Scopic Regimes of Modernity," in *Vision and Visuality*, edited by Hal Foster(New York, The New Press, 1988), 3–28.

[10] The phrase is from Christopher Pinney, "Indian Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Or, What Happens When Peasants 'Get Hold' of Images," in *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*, edited by Faye D. Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughold, and Brian Larkin (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, University of California Press, 2002), 356.

deadly because the force field of popular religion chromolithographs produced also nurtured anti-authoritarian sentiments since late-19th century.

The field of religious imagery comes into being through what Pinney calls "print capitalism" using Benedict Anderson, who had described the role of the print media in the emergence of Western European nationalism. Anderson argues that in late-18th and 19th century Europe the wide circulation of printed literature such as the daily newspaper made it possible for millions of widely-located readers to imagine themselves as citizens of a new and modern community called "nation" through daily consumption of news and by shunning their previous affiliations with kinship, religion, and kingdoms. But Pinney points at a significant difference. Unlike Anderson's Europe, in India old beliefs in the authority and stability of king, god, and sacred text did not wane as a result of the new nation. Instead, they took on new intensities through the medium of chromolithographs. In god prints, Pinney reads a continuation of what Anderson, using Walter Benjamin, calls "messianic time" (the simultaneous presence of past and future described through myth and embodied by every human action), which was replaced in Europe by "homogeneous, empty time" (in which individuals have equal stake in a new, national patrimony as described by narrative history). The difference makes India not simply an extension of the European model but a different sort of nation, one that is split between "official" nationalism, evolving within the framework of Western colonial institutions and its imperatives of "homogeneous, empty time," and an unofficial nation space evolving outside colonial institutions and within a culture infused with figurations of "messianic time." Pinney demonstrates the agency of such figurations in the popular resistance of prints both, to the British colonial rule whose censorship they escape, and the "official" nationalism of leading elites, for whom they provide a popular base while also resisting their hegemonic representations of the Indian nation.

Pinney's third coordinating theme is a distinction between what he calls "text-based histories and critical approaches" and a history based on images themselves (202). Pinney describes this distinction using Jean-Francois Lyotard's characterization of "discourse" and "figure." "Discourse" is driven by a search for meaning, or what Lyotard calls "linguistic-philosophical closure," whereas "figure" is "relatively free of the demands of meaning" and is "a space where intensities are felt." While "discourse" limits cultural practices using "predatory

reason,"[11] "figure" embodies a multiplicity of social affects (21–22). Lyotard helps Pinney define two distinct modes of cultural production, one over-determined by textual practices, the other based on figural intensities. The modes also occupy two distinct social registers, to describe which Pinney uses media scholar Arvind Rajagopal's idea of "split public" (203). Textual discourse is assigned to the ruling elite and educated, urban, middle class, and image-based figuration belongs to the underprivileged classes and rural peasants.

Oppositional thinking is important to Pinney's argument. Thus, Adorno's "unequal halves" of high and low art, routed through Lyotard's distinctions, create a finely-layered, if slippery, series of social and cultural dichotomies: between politics and religion; between the colonial administrators and the social underclass; between "official" nationalism of political leaders and the "national feeling" of a diffused population (103–104); between urban elites and rural subalterns; between the institutional culture of liberal academics and popular culture; and between "text-based histories" and "image-based histories" (202–203). Dichotomy also defines India's visual culture, where Pinney's distinguishes the "corpothetics" of commercially produced god pictures from the "aesthetic" imperative and "fine arts" practice of colonial art schools.

These dichotomous categories shape the chronological as well as interpretative structure of Pinney's historical narrative. The book traces a transformation from "fine arts aesthetics" to the corpothetics of popular prints drawing here on a final opposition: Michael Fried's distinction between "absorption and theatricality" in the context of Western painting (22–23). Fried defines "absorption" as a strategy commonly used in oil painting since the 18th century, whereby the subject of a picture does not acknowledge the presence of the viewer, but allows the viewer to enjoy it only vicariously, as a voyeur. By contrast, in "theatrical" images, figures look out of the picture plane and directly engage the viewer. Fried identifies a shift of interest from "theatricality" to "absorption" in French painting between the early and mid-18th century, in which absorption also signals a turn towards modernity. For Pinney, it is precisely the opposite. Absorption defines a sort of global pre-history for India's modernity: "Absorption, indirectness and history painting were part of the package exported by the colonial state into its Government

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[11] Susan Buck-Morss' phrase.

Art Schools in the nineteenth century." While Fried writes a history of Western painting as a progression of absorptive images from 18th century to high modernism, Pinney reverses that history so that Indian god pictures shift steadily from absorption to theatricality in late-19th and early-20th centuries.

Photos of the Gods charts the passage from "absorption" to "theatricality" by beginning in chapter 1 with a discussion of the training of native artists in the "absorptive" tradition of Government art schools in colonial cities such as Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. Principally, this involved learning techniques of oil painting and a system of linear perspective, whereby a picture frame is given the coherence of a window, framing "a mathematically regular ordering of time, space and human action" (Pinney 18, quoting this Heideggerian idea of picture from Anuradha Kapur). This type of composition takes place around a vanishing point, which is defined in an isomorphic relation to a single, disembodied eye of the viewer located outside the fictive picture window. This disembodied, mono-ocular system is a visual analogue for the neo-Kantian idea of "aesthetics," which Pinney calls a "disinterested" and "overcerebralized" way of picturing the world from a physical and psychological distance as opposed to his "corpothetics" view of god pictures. In the colonial period, the geometrical ordering of the world amounts to an attempt of colonizers to turn "natives" from devotional images to "art."

Chapter 2 and 3 describe a politics of mimesis among the late-19th century artists of the Calcutta Art Studio and the Chitrashala Press, Pune, Maharashtra, who closely apply the formula of academic realism to god images in an effort to make gods appear more "real." Pinney calls this colonial mimicry "xeno-real," where realism is detached from its original claim on an unmediated representation of the visible world and re-used as an available cultural currency for investing god pictures with a magical significance. Chapter 4 describes the pressure of the "xeno-real" in a major artist of the 19th century, Raja Ravi Varma, whose oil paintings for the courtly elite were crafted within the "absorptive" tradition while his chromolithographs adapt to the popular demands for "theatricality." Chapter 5 analyzes the "retraditionalization" of Ravi Varma-like academic realism in works of early-20th century artists at the pilgrim site of Nathadwara. Nathadwara images fully include theatricality within the visual system of Darshan, in which god figures look back at the adoring viewer. The Nathadwara artist Narottam Narayan Sharma especially fascinates Pinney, who describes Narottam's creative process and talents for

theatricality with great attention and affection. Narottam's "Murli Manohar" (1934) and "Kailash Pati Shankar" (1935) use academic realism, and possibly photography, to locate fleshy bodies of gods in a pastoral landscape. A "partial repudiation" of realism occurs when the landscape, instead of receding into the distance, is given "a surface density and plenitude" and gods directly face the viewer. For Pinney, this is a significant departure from the "absorptive" pictures of the Calcutta Art Studio. "Rather than a window on reality, the images become icons whose foundational rationale is an engagement with the viewer." Pinney attributes the enormous popularity of Nathadwara images, such as Narottam's "Murli Manohar" ("the best-selling image in the history of the industry"), to a growth of rural market where "ritual utility of images became paramount" (92–96).

Indeed, Nathadwara is marked as a defining moment in Pinney's arguments regarding corpothetics, for it represents "the triumph of devotional images that permit mutual looking, over narrative images whose main function is pedagogic" (92). Two further chapters describe the spread of Nathadwara's figuration of Darshan's "mutual looking" and its pastoral aesthetics in a wide variety of images that create an abundance of social affects Pinney calls the "dangerous corporeality" of "national feeling" (103). These restless chapters on political imagery from the colonial to the post-colonial period fully play out Lyotard's dichotomy between figuration and discourse. Chapter 6 describes the diversity of "Indian Hindu scopic regimes" in relation to British censorship of religious imagery (such as that of the Cow Protection Movement, and the fierce goddess Kali), and those of nationalist leaders (such as Gandhi and Bhagat Singh). In Chapter 7, the Nathadwara style's "chameleon-like agility" (167) brings into being many new and different kinds of "public, exhortatory" images after Independence, having "many similarities with images produced elsewhere in the world" (eroticized village girls, gods dancing like Bollywood film stars, Mother India with flag, militant heroes such as Bhagat Singh, Rana Pratap, and Shivaji, children in soldiers' uniforms, gods embodying industrial machinery). Such images also fuel a Hindu "cultural nationalism that would ultimately control the national government before the end of the century" (166). Finally, chapter 8 further develops the theme of rural image consumption by offering a detailed ethnography of the Darshanic mode of image reception in the village of Bhatisuda in central India. This is followed by an epilogue that emphasizes the usefulness of Pinney's image-based history against other kinds of histories of modern India.

Pinney's book describes the cultural politics of image with bracing clarity and polemical sharpness. Yet, the polarized categories that structure his argument produce an analysis in which popular images become progressively othered. In spite of Pinney's substantial research on urban practitioners, the Darshan-based visual regime of prints is ultimately defined as a rural praxis. Pinney's book sets the reader up for a periodized reading of this praxis, so that as we move from late-19th century to the present, and from "absorption to theatricality," we also move from urban image practices to rural consumption. Chapters 5 on Nathadwara and 8 on Bhatisuda together suggest the twin centres of Pinney's book, where "Indian Hindu scopic regimes" are fully embodied by chromolithographs' devotional aesthetics of Darshan. In an imperfect world of urban politics, which other chapters describe, Nathadwara's "pastoral realism" and the consumption of god pictures in Bhatisuda form two perfectly matched halves of a unified corpothetics, giving flesh to the idea that "Darshan's mode of interaction (especially as practiced by the rural consumers described in chapter 7[12]) mobilizes vision as part of a unified human sensorium, and visual interaction can be physically transformative" (9).[13]

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[12] Actually chapter 8.

[13] Pinney's framework for Darshan derives from two influential works on this practice, namely Diane Eck's *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* (Chambersburg, PA, 1981), and Laurance A. Babb, "Glancing: Visual Interaction in Hinduism," *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 37, 1981, 378–410. Eck defines Darshan as an integrated scopic regime in India using ancient Puranic and Upanishadic texts, film theory, and ethnography of villages and pilgrim sites, in essence forging a link between modern practices, ancient concepts of vision, and popular temple worship. Pinney ultimately locates this connective vision in rural India, as in chapter 8. It is worth pointing out, however, that some scholars have linked Darshan's mode of interactive "seeing and being seen" with the development of modern market economy. Kajri Jain, for example, locates the work of calendar prints of gods in what she has called "the ethos of the bazaar," where devotional affect is treated as a "capital" generated through the circulation and exchange of god prints. Jain also relates the Nathadwara aesthetics and the preponderance of Vaishnava subject in god pictures to the rise of Vaishnava ethos among the mercantile class of traders and publishers since the 19th century. See Kajri Jain, "More than meets the eye: The circulation of images and the embodiment of value," *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, volume 36, nos. 1 and 2, January–August 2002 (special issue titled "Beyond Appearances? Visual Practices and Ideologies in Modern India" edited by Sumathi Ramaswamy), 33–70. Also see her "The Efficacious Image: Pictures and Power in Indian Mass Culture," in *Iconographies and the Nation in India*, edited by Richard H. Davis (Hyderabad, Orient Longman, 2006). In Laurence A. Babb, whose account of the ocular dynamics of Darshan in an anthropological context Pinney extensively uses, there is a brief suggestion of the connection between Darshan and mercantile community in the following footnote relating to the "accrual of higher visions" through visionary practices among the

In Pinney, we do not get a clear sense of the urban clientele of god pictures, although Pinney acknowledges that cities could provide a picture different from his (182). The title for his final chapter, "What Pictures Want Now: Rural Consumers of Images, 1980–2000," assimilates the contemporary period with rural consumption. The "Now" of the title does not refer to the political reality of the "1980–2000," but rather it is a point of arrival and fulfillment for the book's theme of "Indian Hindu scopic regimes."[14] Pinney weeds out of this chapter all historical coordinates, including reference to the rise of Hindu nationalism that had rigged the country from its urban base in precisely the two decades framing the chapter. This is a telling omission. We are given a close, deeply sympathetic account of the experiences of religious longing and attachments in Bhatisuda, a small town in central India in which the author has worked for nearly three decades and which remains at the centre of much of his arguments regarding modern Indian visual culture. A description of the spatial configuration and demography of the village takes us on a journey to its periphery, where untouchables live, and where lengthy quotations from members of this underclass, especially women (the rock bottom of subaltern identity) place the reader in a subjective position in relation to village experiences with god pictures.

It is easy to forget that Pinney's village is selectively represented: untouchable groups living on the edge are far more visible than other residents, and the middle-class merchants who bring the urban distributive network of prints to the village are virtually missing. The nearly exclusive group of subalterns is thus essentialized, located within a closed circuit of unmediated relations with the village gods depicted in prints. The *barkat* or desire for plenitude they expect from images, and the trance-like way in which they engage with them, become modes of symbolic transgression. This village is one of radical alterity, in which local village gods outnumber national ones and overtly political images as well as urbanized *filmi* gods are virtually non-existent (185–190). In Pinney's words, "The turn away from colonial absorption is here absolute" (194). The village seems

Brahma Kumari sect of North India: "It is possibly significant that the movement originated among the business community of Hyderabad and Karachi; their practices and beliefs may then be a reflection of a more general Vaishya emphasis on what Marriott (1976) has called "minimal transaction strategy." See Babb, 1981, footnote 5, p. 401.

[14] In the epilogue which follows the chapter, Pinney argues against scholars who attend to the political realities of today.

utterly detached from urban sites, and residents have no interest in the producers and publishers of the images that adorn their homes. Furthermore, Pinney removes his own presence as a metropolitan scholar by carefully undermining and erasing his participation in his documentation. For instance, when he mentioned his personal connection with an artist whose image hung on a villager's wall, he writes, "this information was never greeted with any fascination, and there was never any attempt to uncover further information about the artist or his work. The blank indifference my immodest claims provoked indicated a profound and utterly deep indifference to the circumstances in which these all-important images were created. This reflected villagers' engagement with images as the sources of future interventions, rather than as embodiments of past intentionalities"[15] (190). In sum, the "Now" of this chapter towards which the entire book is diverted is an ahistorical, ethnographic present, where god prints embody a hermetic circuit of connection between an isolated, even timeless village and its unhindered access to rural gods.[16]

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[15] The lack of interest with makers in Pinney's account differs from Stephen Inglis' account of South Indian villagers who were not only aware of urban artists of their god prints but also held some of them in very high regard. Stephen R. Inglis, "Suitable for Framing: The Work of a Modern Master," in *Media and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia*, edited by Lawrence A. Babb and Susan S. Wadley (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 51–75.

[16] My criticism here is that the village is not sufficiently theorized. Rather it is described as a timeless ur-site for moral and sacred plenitude, towards which the "Indian Hindu scopic regimes" pull. Such a village, thriving in sacred capital even while it is economically underprivileged, slips back to the paradigmatic colonial idea of a self-sufficient "Indian Village Community." Compare Pinney's "relatively historically uninflected" village practice (205) to Sir Charles Metcalf, who in 1830 imagined India through a resilient network of such villages, and wrote: "The union of the village communities, each one forming a separate little state in itself, has... contributed more than any other cause to the preservation of the people of India through all the revolutions and changes which they have suffered, and is in a high degree conducive to their happiness, and to the enjoyment of a great portion of freedom and independence." For a detailed discussion on the colonial imaginings of the Indian village, see Anand Yang, *Bazaar India: Markets, Society, and the Colonial State in Gangetic Bihar* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 1998), 6–10. Pinney has problematized the village in a few different ways in previous articles, but the unease remains. See also his "Piercing the Skin of the Idol," in *Beyond Aesthetics: Art and the Technologies of Enchantment*, edited by Christopher Pinney and Nicholas Thomas, (Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2001), 157–180. For a rather different treatment of Bhatisuda's resilience, see Pinney's *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs* (London, Reaktion Press, and Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1997).

The title of Pinney's closing chapter, "What Pictures Want Now," partly derives from W.J.T. Mitchell's well-known essay, "What Do Pictures *Really* Want?"[17] Like Mitchell, Pinney describes the figural intensities of god pictures as embodiments of subaltern desires that exceed any discursive interpretations that attempt to master them. But Mitchell's essay explores this excess by stressing a double edge (after the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan) in the word "want," meaning both desire and lack. Mitchell compares the image's relationship with viewers to that between women's desire/lack in relation to male imaginary (via Freud) and black African identity in relation to the white imaginary (via Franz Fanon). To explore the "want" of image is to recognize the image's stern resistance to interpretation. Mitchell's anxious reflection on this resistance suggests that images introduce an endlessly conflicted practice of interpretation, forming a double bind for viewers who are doomed to interpret something that will always exceed interpretations and ultimately may "simply want to be." Pinney misses this connotation of want as a problematic "lack," on which Mitchell's essay centres, and instead interprets Mitchell's "want" quite simply as underclass desires as they are revealed to the ethnographer.

While relying on Mitchell's conception of image as "a face that faces the beholder" (8), Pinney removes the puzzlement of the beholder implied in Mitchell's confrontation. For Mitchell, the picture as a "face" is deeply problematic, and ultimately unknowable. Pinney gives this face the concreteness of an ethnographic body, engendered by the corpothetics of Darshan, and a mode of sociality that exists in a space and time beyond contemporary history. The anxiety of confronting the utter silence of an image/face, which Mitchell suggests by the force of his restless word "Really," is turned into a point of restful arrival in the ethnographic "Now" of Pinney's title.

III. Image Disciplines

It is useful to introduce the work of Guha-Thakurta at this point, for her *Monuments, Objects, Histories* contrasts with Pinney's book in a number of significant ways. A comparison of specific issues in the two books will thus be useful for our understanding of the limits

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[17] W.J.T. Mitchell, "What Do Pictures *Really* Want?," *October*, 77, 1996, 71–82.

and possibilities of modern Indian visual culture. Like Pinney, Guha-Thakurta is interested in the relation of image and discursive practices to power, and attends to her visual subjects as forms of popular resistance within power relations determined by colonial imperatives and nationalistic institutions. Only that Pinney distances his realm of popular prints from institutional practices. By contrast, Guha-Thakurta argues that institutional practices "cannot be explained away in terms of a simple binary of scholarly versus popular or academic versus political knowledges, for, as in the present, the earlier years of the twentieth century saw the deep imbrication of experts and professionals in the web of demands and desires that came to be woven around the hard proof of the material remains of the past" (xix). In her analysis of contentions over the status of historical artifacts during the last century and a quarter, she discovers a subaltern politics precisely in what Pinney might call "high" art disciplines and "text-based discourse."

In many ways, Guha-Thakurta is working in Pinney's blind spot. Where Pinney sees continuities, Guha-Thakurta sees discontinuities. While Pinney connects popular imagery during the last century and a quarter with a single "Indian Hindu" scopic regime organized around Darshan, Guha-Thakurta describes the evocation of "Hindu" by Indian practitioners at different times in ways that give the term vastly different meanings between the anti-colonial nationalism of early-20th century and the post-colonial nationalism of late-20th century. At the same time, interestingly, where Pinney sees discontinuities, Guha-Thakurta sees continuities. Pinney polarizes text-based practices and image-based practices, and aligns them with an urban-rural divide, while Guha-Thakurta defines a vast, colonial force field that comes into being in the 19th century and arranges a variety of practices, regions, and locales, both rural and urban, into disciplinary networks, archaeological sites, and research institutions.

In telling the story of knowledge production and institution building in modern India, Guha-Thakurta's nine chapters emphasize "ambivalences and dissensions that resided at the heart of these practices, anticipating in different ways the dilemmas and dangers of the present" (xix). Chapter 1 describes the foundation of art history and archaeology in the work of two pioneering colonial scholars, James Fergusson and Alexander Cunningham. During the mid- and late-19th century, these men sought to create a scientific and objective knowledge of India's artifacts, and Guha-Thakurta locates their project within the context of British popular taste for

the picturesque and fascination with photography as a means of memorializing the Empire. Chapter 2 examines the life of a major colonial art museum, the Indian Museum in Calcutta, as a quirky center of disciplinary knowledge, whose museological practices were defined by natural history, and whose reputation as Jadughar, or magic house, undermined its aura as an art museum in popular imagination. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 are key in Guha-Thakurta's arguments regarding subaltern practices. Here she analyzes the evolution of a "vernacular" practice of art history and archaeology in Bengal in the late-19th century and a politics of "local" research in relation to the colonial and national institutions that emerge in the early-20th century. Chapters 6 and 7, dealing with a period immediately after India's Independence in mid-century, describe the emergence of a national canon for Indian art history through the institutional authority of the National Museum in Delhi and the formation of "Indian sculpture" as a legitimate field of art historical study. Finally, chapters 8 and 9 show the undoing of that institutional authority and the exposure of its objects to the (political) demands and (erotic) desires of popular culture, a move that leads the reader to confront the battles regarding artifacts that are currently unfolding at the boundaries of disciplinary and institutional practices. In a way close to Pinney's emphasis on social affect in chromolithographs, Guha-Thakurta's detailed analysis of shifting cultural claims in image archives, texts, and the career paths of individual practitioners shows "the extent to which the articulation of national scholarly authorities was embroiled in these cultural claims and affective bonds" at different moments of modern history (xix).

The first notable point of contrast between Pinney and Guha-Thakurta concerns their treatment of image practitioners. Both carefully follow biographical paths in order to emphasize human agency, but while Pinney's artists are pulled towards their calling for commercial chromolithographs, Guha-Thakurta's practitioners negotiate social profit by fulfilling various needs, desires, and demands of their modern profession. The difference becomes clear if we compare the accounts of practitioners who appear in both books. The artist Ananda Prasad Bagchi (1849–1905), a graduate of the Government School of Art in Calcutta, is significant for Pinney as the founding member of the chromolithographic press, the Calcutta Art Studio, in 1878. Pinney's Bagchi initiates the commercial picture industry's "unravelling" of "fine arts" training in a way that suggests artistic dissent (24). For Guha-Thakurta, Bagchi's work acquires a

very different importance. He teaches oil and portrait painting in the same art school since the late-1860s. In the late 1870s, seemingly along with his commercial venture, Bagchi also leads a team of ex-graduates to accompany the archaeologist Rajendralal Mitra on a tour to the ancient stone temples in Bhubanesvara, Orissa. He returns from this trip with ground plans and drawings that were published in Mitra's "The Antiquities of Orissa, volume 2 (Calcutta: Newman, 1880). (Guha-Thakurta, 96, 143, and 325, note 32). Unlike Pinney, thus, Guha-Thakurta's Bagchi has a hybrid career, which she traces across the divide of "fine arts" and popular practices. Guha-Thakurta calls this kind of crossing over the "bilinguality" of Indian practitioners, a means by which they fulfill both, the scientific and realistic imperatives of Western knowledge as well as the sacred imperatives of what Pinney would call "Hindu scopic regimes." In a single artistic career, Guha-Thakurta's artists offer visual representations relating to both, "empty historical time" as well as "messianic time" in a way Pinney's model does not allow.

Guha-Thakurta shows that "text-based discourse" also evolves into a "bilingual" practice in colonial India. In a telling example, Rajendralal Mitra, whom Bagchi had accompanied to Orissa, became a "native" archaeologist of great reputation through his expert mediation between scientific archaeology, Western antiquarian interests, and Brahmanical knowledge of Sanskrit texts and temples, which he effectively uses for building a collection of ancient manuscripts for the Asiatic Society in Calcutta and for archaeological restoration of temples (chapter 3). The force of Mitra's hybrid practice is fully conveyed in the famous Fergusson-Mitra debate regarding the origins of Indian architecture, described in Mitra's "Antiquities of Orissa." The debate was centered on the interpretation of the earliest stone remains during the reign of the Mauryan emperor Ashoka in the 3rd century B.C.E., which Fergusson attributed to a formative Grecian influence while Mitra attributed it to indigenous architectural prototypes that had since perished. The debate on the antiquity and formation of Indian architecture involved a politics of authenticity, which Mitra fully played out using procedures of scientific analysis and aesthetic evaluation of monuments established by Fergusson himself, only shifting their terms. Where Fergusson saw "decadence" in the overabundance of ornaments on temples, Mitra described "grandeur," "the very soul of an architectural monument," and the determining source of "India's place in the history of art." For Mitra, Orissa's geographical isolation from a fraught history

of external influence, especially "inroads of the Muhammadans," provided undisturbed archaeological evidence for the continuity of an authentic architectural tradition that was pan-Indian, pre-Islamic, Hindu and Aryan (103–108). While Guha-Thakurta's account of the mimesis of a colonial science chooses to highlight Mitra's politics against colonial racism, we can also see in this scientific debate the earliest seed of Pinney's "Indian Hindu scopic regimes." In those early scholarly debates, however, the Hindu seed seems only part of an institutional politics, not the wholesale, "deadly" reconfiguration of religion in public culture, as Pinney describes. For Guha-Thakurta, that danger arises later.

Guha-Thakurta's bilinguality differs from Pinney's local and popular practices in that it creates a textual space "between" an institutional science and its local application.[18] For Pinney, the desire of popular practice is to erase its official and institutional other; for Guha-Thakurta, such distinctions are impossible. At one level, Guha-Thakurta describes bilinguality quite literally as a scholar's simultaneous use of both English and Bengali, which differs from Pinney's sense of a "split public," divided into different constituencies of readership for English and Hindi presses.[19] At another levels, Guha-Thakurta describes bilinguality as a discursive mode by which colonial subjects produce a "local" art historical and archaeological knowledge of both, regional artifacts of Bengal (chapter 4) and a robustly indigenous tradition of ancient Indian monuments (chapter 5). In Rakhaldas Bannerjee, Guha-Thakurta's prime example for the Indianization of a professional archaeologist and art historian in early-20th century, bilinguality furthermore becomes "a critical tool with which to negotiate a new Bengali readership who would espouse the cause of a new 'scientific' scholarship while traversing a route that would take him from academic to more popular histories, from the rigors of fact and evidence to the romance of storytelling" (123).

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[18] Instead of bilinguality, Pinney sees "the existence of hostile continua within societies in which there are strikingly similar oppositions between popular practices of corporeal visuality and elite 'decarnalized' practices." Pinney, "The Indian Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, Or What Happens When Peasants 'Get Hold' of Images," in *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*, edited by Faye D. Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughold, and Brian Larkin, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, University of California Press, 2002), 356. In the book, see his discussion of Nathadwara artist B.G. Sharma, who, in the 1990s, renounces his earlier career in popular image industry, and turns instead to make Mughal-style miniature paintings on ivory (150).

[19] Pinney, 203. Ideas regarding public and presses are borrowed from Arvind Rajagopal.

Guha-Thakurta's attention to Bengali art history as a bilingual genre of writing contains an idea similar to Pinney's "xeno-real" in that it is a practice of Western scientific realism that, paradoxically, denatures the relationship between science and objective truth. By considering art history as, precisely, a literary "genre" rather than a hegemonic discourse (133), Guha-Thakurta draws attention to the mixing of literary conventions that both mediates the realistic fiction of scientific history and creates a local readership for scholarly discourse.

Guha-Thakurta's biliguality is partly comparable to Pinney's "inter-ocularity" in as much as it is characterized by the exchange and cross-fertilization of a wide variety of visual and cultural practices. Pinney's eloquent examples are the many carryovers between chromolithographs, popular theatre, mystical practices, hagiography (his chapter 2), film, and photography (his chapters 4 and 5). Among Guha-Thakurta's examples, I find poignancy in John Fergusson's negotiation between scientific documentation and evaluation of historical monuments on the one hand and the British picturesque tradition of exoticizing them on the other (her chapter 1), suggesting that bilinguality was not limited only to the "natives." Another example of a bilingual (or trans-lingual) space is the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad in Calcutta, discussed in chapter 4 as a museum and research institute in which practices of collecting, classifying, displaying and textualizing archaeological artifacts in the early-20th century involved a wide network of art historians, antiquarians, archaeologists, artists, school teachers, local rulers, Sanskrit pandits, priests, maulavis, draftsmen, collectors and writers—all invested in the objectivity of archaeological knowledge but equally willing to reroute artifacts and retool colonial archaeological knowledge for a local Bengali audience.

But while Guha-Thakurta's bilinguality is a mode of border crossing that is located primarily in individual cultural practitioners, Pinney's inter-ocularity is a discursive (as well as "recursive") space of popular culture whose territory is staked explicitly against academic discourse of fine arts. In his geographical and ethnographic mapping of the inter-ocular landscape of "Indian Hindu scopic regimes," Pinney sees nuance, texture and diversity, but no internal conflicts among individual practitioners. By contrast, Guha-Thakurta's practitioners are fraught with contradictions. For instance, while Bengali art historians such as Shyamacharan Srimali (chapter 5) used Western scholarship as a model for their own work, they operated against the overwhelming spectre of India's artistic degeneration built into that model. These art historians claimed their institutional authority by

conducting detailed iconographic studies of Hindu imagery that was quite inaccessible to European antiquarians, and at the same time used this Western analytical mode to assert their "national pride" in a heritage accessible only to Indians. Guha-Thakurta points out that "The contradiction was never resolved, for it was never confronted as such. If anything, it was sidestepped in the attempts of the middle class to carve out its own middle space between tradition and modernity, in the crosscurrents of Western art education and the search for Indianness" (152).

Guha-Thakurta's subjects are internally split, whereas Pinney's occupy coherent cultural spaces. His prints are demarcated in such a way that artists working for its commercial sphere need to distance themselves from "fine arts." Nathadwara artist B.G. Sharma, initially one of Pinney's stars for his extremely successful, brightly colored prints of the 1950s, is later regarded in a lack-lustre light for his disavowal in the 1990s of his earlier practice in favour of Mughal-style miniatures on ivory that are to be "found only in a museum" (Pinney, 150–156). For Guha-Thakurta, Sharma-like artists in Bengal demonstrate the conflict of a class "wedged between two worlds: on the one hand, the exclusive world of European "high art" of Calcutta, to which it sought entry but was denied full access; on the other hand, the world of popular "bazaar" pictures, from which it sharply dissociated itself even as it shared in its bonds of an inherited indigenous culture" (Guha-Thakurta, 152). In this complex view, all practioners, including art historians Shyamacharan Srimali and Rakhaldas Bannerjee, "fine" artists Abanindranath Tagore and M.F. Husain, and commercial artists such as the Bombay-based Nathadwara artist Indra A. Sharma (who poses against an automobile along with two other artists in a photograph in Pinney 160) and Ananda Prasad Bagchi (founder of Calcutta Art Studio who was also a junior colleague to art historian Shyamacharan Srimali at Calcutta's Government Art School), become part of the "middle space" of interconnected cultural economy in which each could define social profit for themselves by producing and reproducing various tactics of authenticity.[20] In this light, we may even regard Pinney's B.G. Sharma's aspirations for aesthetically refined, museum-worthy images as both an expression of the conflict of the middle class as well as a tactic of social profit the artist articulates in the middle space of possibilities available to him.

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[20] I am indebted to a conversation with Mala Marwah for the idea of social profit.

This brings me to a further point of difference between the two books. For Guha-Thakurta, "aesthetics" is hardly a rarified, "overcerebralized" neo-Kantian category, demarcated as a "Western" mode of representation or reception in India, as Pinney suggests.[21] Instead, it is what Pinney might call "figure," an embodied practice through which affective intensities are generated. Guha-Thakurta analyses the specific way in which aesthetics and aesthetic practices materialize in India through colonial politics. In colonial art historians, such as James Fergusson, the British taste for the picturesque operates "as a residual aesthetic, mediating the parallel drive for order and history" (13). With the authority of Fergusson established, aesthetics becomes a mode of containment, a scopic regime, produced discursively within colonial art history and used variously by different practitioners. Thus, for the colonizers, it provided a position of superior cultural value from which to signify the lack of artistic sensibility in their degenerate colonial subjects, a failure redeemed only in historical moments of India's contact with the West (such as the Grecian influence on art of the Mauryan dynasty or the Romanized art of the Gandhara region in the 2nd century). For the "native" art historians, colonial aesthetics provided a tool to evaluate artifacts that preceded any Western contact, thereby defining within colonial discourse a politics of authenticity relating to India's past. Guha-Thakurta's analysis of this politics may be extended to Pinney's Nathadwara artist B.G. Sharma, who describes his recent work as a mission in "high kala (art)," and an attempt to regain in his work an aesthetic "quality" of images belonging to a "lost age of perfection," which Sharma locates in the "Mughal times"

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[21] Pinney's application of a highly reduced Western "theory" of aesthetics to a non-Western "practice" is problematic. For one, such a slippage only incorporates the latter within the scholar's metropolitan site of interpretation, and the ruralizing eye he applies to India marks it away from Western practices themselves. Pinney is conscious of a simplistic difference between the universalism of Western aesthetics and the cultural specificity of India's local, Darshan-related, practices. But in order to claim that the rural Indian corpothetics of Darshan exists in a space that is "less than universal and more than local," Pinney integrates India into a series of non-Western practices at other anthropological sites, all of them equally marked away against Western universalism. Exception to this strain in Pinney is his extremely insightful discussion of magical realism, which points to a baroque sensibility in Europe, in India, as well as other parts of the world. Pinney 20–21. His observations on magical realism are more fully developed in "Indian Magical Realism: Notes on Popular Visual Culture," in *Subaltern Studies X: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, edited by Gautam Bhadra, Gyan Prakash and Susie Tharu, (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1999), 201–233.

(Pinney 150). Sharma's use of "Mughal" can be viewed as a "residual aesthetic" comparable to Fergusson's British picturesque tradition, except that "Mughal" is Sharma's own choice mediating his Western art school training and his success in the "low" industry of popular prints.

IV. Locality of Image and the Artifice of Visual History

Although, in many respects, these two books offer strikingly different, even inverted, interpretative categories and arguments, they share a fundamental plea: to recognize the rich materiality of modern Indian visual culture, and to discover in it what anthropologist Arjun Appadurai calls "the production of locality." Appadurai sees locality as a "complex phenomenological quality constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technology of interactivity, and the relativity of contexts."[22] This emphasis on the "relational and contextual rather than . . . spatial or scalar" removes the possibility of a binary between local and universal knowledge, and instead networks them into an integral, cultural economy. Both, Pinney and Guha-Thakurta analyze the production of locality by exploring the material density and diversity of visual culture that comes into being in modern India. Guha-Thakurta describes the role of circulation and consumption of printed books, photographs, plaster casts, exhibition catalogues, publicity posters, and other ephemera in generating the disciplinary authority and cultural value of ancient monuments and works of art. Pinney studies the productive inter-ocular space of popular image practices, including commercial film and theatre, as well as a vast image archives of paintings, diverse kinds of chromolithographs, art books, photographs, and sketches that his commercial artists use to generate newness each year from god pictures that are "already half-seen in advance." The circulation of god prints also brings into being a network of artists, publishers, distributors, traders, and end users who display the images in their myriad surroundings in rural and urban India. In Pinney's "corpothetics" and Guha-Thakurta's "bilinguality," we are given a

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[22] Arjun Appadurai, "The Production of Locality, in *Counterworks: Managing the Diversity of Knowledge*, edited by Richard Fardon (New York and London, Routledge, 1995), 204.

close look at the history of active production of the "phenomenological quality" of locality in India.

The authors' approaches to their historical subjects are bound up with their own sense of intellectual and cultural positionality. Both scholars write about the politics of locality with a sense of urgency, since contemporary, liberal scholarship seems to have lost grip of its history in modern India. Guha-Thakurta attributes this failure to both, the inertia of colonial institutions as they continue into the present and the appropriation and re-inscription by Hindu nationalist politics of scholarly modes of objectivity regarding historical artifacts. Pinney attributes the failure to elite "text-based histories and critical approaches" that had chosen to overlook the role of religion in India's modernity (202–203). Both scholars define their approaches and subject positions as methodological counterpoints to the current crisis in scholarship. Let me describe their differing historical methods separately in order to address in them the possibilities and limitations that currently exist in the studies on modern Indian visual culture.

Guha-Thakurta assumes an "intermediary" vantage point of a cultural historian looking into the institutional history of art history and archaeology: "In Indian art history, in particular, there is an urgent need for such an intermediary space that can span the outsider/insider divide, for the subject has remained largely unconcerned about the ways in which it has cast and created its objects of knowledge" (Guha-Thakurta, xxi–xxii). Guha-Thakurta is fascinated that "perhaps no other subject has borne as forcefully the imaginings of the nation as the history of Indian art." Her primary interest in the book is to investigate the materiality of these imaginings.

Her project is informed by a profound sense of unease, an acute awareness of the fact that the circulation of art books, posters, and exhibition catalogues does not erase the physical presence of historical artifacts, and indeed raises the more fundamental question of their status in modern culture. Stone sculptures, copper-plate inscriptions, and other fragments from India's past continue, with increasing intensity, to become permanently detached from their original locales and reconstituted as what colonial officers called "movable antiquities" hovering between contending claimants—native collectors, Euro-American market, archaeological departments—as well as entering a contested discourse on India's past established by colonial scholarship and museum culture. What concerns her most is the status of these artifacts within disciplinary discourse as well as popular culture. She is keen to point out, as she does in relation

to the legitimation of "sexualized female form" as an object of art historical analysis, "how sites and objects that belong to distant pasts become meaningful and effective in the present and how it is the new institutional and disciplinary tools of art history that makes for the intractable modernity of their existence" (253).

The "intractable modernity" of artifacts emerges as an important theme in Guha-Thakurta's analysis. While art books, close up photography, popular literature, and exhibition catalogues circulate around the world to create public desires to possess shining works of art or erotic images, the stone on which the culture of reproduction is based embodies a sense of irretrievable loss. After describing the "travels and travails" of the famous Didarganj Yakshi image, beginning with its dramatic discovery in the riverbed outside Patna in North India in 1917, followed by a vigorous art historical life, and international travel as a masterpiece of Indian sculpture, Guha-Thakurta mourns the sculpture, "which long ago became a lifeless work of art and still remains trapped in that designation, where the fossilized museum treasure seems to have lived out its life, leaving only image and copy to proliferate." (233). In other words, the Indian work of art is unable to fully live out its modern, capitalist life. Thus, unlike Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa (invoked briefly in Guha-Thakurta 227), which enters the marketplace through art books, posters, modernist art, theft, scandal of replication, and a recent novel, the Indian masterpiece languishes in a provincial museum. Already detached from an erased, anterior locale, the uneasy spectre of the original sculpture behind proliferating images and copies makes the history of Indian artifacts for Guha-Thakurta a form of mourning a double loss. What seems to be irretrievable is the sensuousness of these artifacts, the erotics of their social life, and gestures of zero-degree humanity expressed in them. Thus, while Pinney invokes the tangible, bodily relation between printed god pictures and popular culture as "corpothetics," Guha-Thakurta mourns the loss of that sensuous life in historical artifacts. What is embodied "presence" for him ultimately becomes a lingering "absence" for her.

It is worth clarifying here that Guha-Thakurta's idea of mourning should not be taken to indicate nostalgia for an artifact's lost, original, cultic context, but rather as recognition of intractability itself as a mode of its modern existence.[23] It is in this way that artifacts

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[23] See Michael Ann Holly, "Mourning and Method," Art Bulletin, volume LXXXIV, no. 4, December 2002, 660–669.

participate in the productive sphere of reproducibility, a process best represented for me by Guha-Thakurta's discussion of the "erotic art" of 10th–11th century temples at the famous monumental site of Khajuraho in Central India (chapter 8). The site provides a vivid case of visual and literary excess since the 1960s, when specialized knowledge about its dates, iconography, and symbolism not only creates a cadre of specialists but also begins to inform a popular corpus of tourist guides, booklets, pamphlets, and postcards. Seductively posed women and orgiastic sexual postures of couples are reproduced across multiple genres including art history writing in which "the eye of the camera is able to blow up the images and bring their erotic details into closer scrutiny than is ever possible in on-site observation" (239–241). It is through this overplay that "Khajuraho came into a new focus in Indian art history as a part of the discipline's growing sense of liberation from what it looked back on as 'the shame of the erotic'." A "Foucauldian theme of sexual repression and release" was played out as scholars used aesthetic evaluation to describe India's liberation from Victorian prudishness and embarrassment regarding sex. Instead, Khajuraho's erotic imagery now represented "a return to a fundamental philosophy of Hindu religion and aesthetics, which began in earliest Vedic times and reached its peak in the efflorescence of temple sculpture during 'the medieval Hindu renaissance'" (244). But Guha-Thakurta points out that while Khajuraho becomes an object of legitimate, and legitimating, art historical study, its erotic imagery also spills over into the realm of sexual desire and pornography, which the "aesthetic" discourse of art history must limit. Khajuraho thus becomes an example of what Guha-Thakurta, using art historian Lynda Nead's study of the female nude in Western art history, has called a "parergon" (Derrida's term), which is an intractable disciplinary object that remains both, central to a discipline while also revealing the limits of its founding premise (265).

Guha-Thakurta's enchantment with such intractable material artifacts and image archives of history is distributed over the entire book, but to my mind her method of retrieving their cultural imaginings comes most vividly and radically into focus in her essay "Compulsions of Visual Representation in Colonial India,"[24] on which her book's discussion of James Fergusson is based. In that essay,

[24] Tapati Guha-Thakurta, "Compulsions of Visual Representation in Colonial India," in Maria Antonella Pellizzari (ed.) *Traces of India: Photography, Architecture, and*

Fergusson emerges as an authoritative voice within the tangible reality of the author's own "national historical memory." Guha-Thakurta begins by evoking the way that memory took shape since her childhood through myriad personal encounters with images of ancient Indian monuments, first through postage stamps, miniaturized logos, school art history texts, maps, labels, coasters, railway time-tables, glossy tourist posters, cheap picture postcards, and later, as a scholar, through rare books with faded photographs. The tangible reality of this visual world forms the basis to imagine another world, that of the 19th century, equally suffused with different strands, in which the Scotsman develops his authorial voice when he writes the first book on India's architectural history and begins developing the image archives of photographs, on-site drawings, plaster casts, and so on that become a source not only for the disciplinary authority of art history and archaeology but also, more precisely, for the visual world in which the author finds herself tangled as "a middle-class educated Indian." We begin to get a sense that underneath the visual world of what Pinney would call "popular" consumption, there is a history of discursive evolution, of which the present visual culture is only a blurred trace— a history that remains inaccessible, trapped and left to wastage in the vast image archives of government institutions in India and Britain. At the end of the essay the author writes: "A century and a half later, it leaves me—an Indian scholar working out of India— battling to reclaim that disappeared image archive and mourning its destruction here as an irreparable 'national' loss."[25] Mourning thus becomes not only a mode of identification and owning her own subject position, but also a radical act of retrieving the complex and fragile strands of which history is made, and engaging a "bilingual" dialogue across the two registers of visual culture—popular and institutional— in which a politics of locality might once again become possible.

As opposed to Guha-Thakurta's identification with historical sub-jects through mourning, Pinney exercises his plea for locality through a rigorous othering of his subject. He writes a "bottom-up history" of visual images in order to argue against a "top-down historiography of nationalistic struggle that privileges literate elites, and the state as the rational projection of that elite." His choice of mass-produced god prints is intended to confront "The entire institutional art

world infrastructure of galleries, curators and historiography" that
has traditionally assumed "the high ground of Kantian disdain"
against popular art (206 and 22). Pinney is dismayed at scholars
who have seen the proliferation of religious imagery in a Hinduised
contemporary India as "a qualitatively different phase, some new
condition of post-modernity in which the density of images produces a
new kind of politics." By contrast, he not only demonstrates "powerful
continuities" between past and present but mobilizes an important
concept of "recursivity" in the image archives, through which images
always "exceed the present" and follow pathways of "wavy meaning"
across different times (205).

   In drawing attention to Pinney's othering, I mean to describe a
methodological strategy that continues to be transformative in the
social sciences, not to be confused with Orientalism. Michel de Certeau
has described the process of othering through a culinary analogy, a two-
step recipe of "cut out and turn over."[26] "Cut out" involves defining a
unit of investigation by separating it from the site of interpretation. De
Certeau also calls this "ethnologization," since the subject is chosen on
the basis of its difference, often located at remote sites, or appearing
strange to the discursive practices of interpretation and theory.[27] The
second procedure is to "turns over" the unit that is cut out so that
it reveals something hidden within theory itself. "At first obscure,
silent and remote, the unit is inverted to become the element that
illuminates the theory and sustains discourse," thus making "of that
nocturnal population the mirror in which the decisive element of their
discourse shines forth" (de Certeau, 62–63).

   The point is that in de Certeau's critical mode, which I believe is
Pinney's as well, "ethnologization" points sharply towards theory itself.
Unlike Orientalism's naively colonizing procedures, ethnologizing
practice requires self-reflexivity, an active and rigorous theoretical
engagement with the (othered) historical subject through which is
revealed the limitations of the analytical apparatus used by the
metropolitan scholar. Pinney explains the purpose of self-reflexivity

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[26] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translated by Steven Rendall (Los
Angeles, and London, The University of California Press, [1984], 1988), chapter 5
titled "The Arts of Theory," 62–76.
[27] De Certeau explains that in Michel Foucault, for instance, "procedures hidden
in the details of educational, military, or clinical control, micro-apparatuses without
discursive legitimacy, techniques foreign to the Enlightenment, become the reason
through which both the system of our society and that of the human sciences are
illuminated." De Certeau, 63.

most fully in an essay, entitled "The Indian Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," where his ethnography of the Bhatisuda village gives occasion for an intense reading of Walter Benjamin (after anthropologist Michael Taussig) and phenomenological philosophers Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Pinney sets up a deliberate "confrontation" of a non-Western practice and Western theoretical frames as his way of preparing "the ground on which a 'provincialization' of Euro-American discourse can be explored." It is in this way that his thesis on the "Indian Hindu scopic regimes" becomes nothing less than a "countertheory of Western visuality," and through it, a radical "counterhistory of visuality."[28]

The emphasis on "recursivity" in the image archives of commercial artists is a good indication of Pinney's method of othering popular practices. In studying these collections, he draws attention to the "accretive dynamics" of various networks within them, through which artists create new images each year using images that are "already half seen in advance." In his Epilogue, the politics of these archives as an "accretive" locality is aimed at liberal scholars such as Anuradha Kapur, whose 1993 essay "Diety to Crusader," pioneered an understanding of the role of popular prints in contemporary Hindu nationalism.[29] Kapur analyses a vast archive of literary, theatrical and pictorial descriptions of the Hindu god figure Rama dating back to at least the 16th century in order to point to a significant shift in chromolithographs of the 1990s from the iconography of a traditionally benign, even effeminate deity to a muscular, militant figure. Kapur relates this shift to the rise of Hindu militancy leading up to the destruction of an Islamic mosque in the city of Ayodhya in December 1992 by Hindu militants who regarded the structure as an imposition on Rama's mythical birthplace. In her essay published just after the destruction, Kapur calls these prints "posters from Ayodhya," with the place signifying what Guha-Thakurta has called

[28] See Christopher Pinney, "The Indian Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Or, What Happens When Peasants 'Get Hold' of Images," in *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*, edited by Faye D. Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughold, and Brian Larkin, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, University of California Press, 2002), 356, 359. The idea of "provincializing" Europe is from Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for 'Indian' Pasts?" *Representations* 37, 1992, 1–26. See also Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000).

[29] Anuradha Kapur, "Diety to Crusader," in Hindus and Others: *The Question of Identity in India Today*, edited by Gyanendra Pandey (New Delhi 1993), 74–109.

"the most combustible flash point on the nation's political map" (Guha-Thakurta, 298). For Pinney, Kapur's reference to Ayodhya denies the antecedents of a militarized Rama in earlier periods. In an art historical hairsplitting regarding "origins," Pinney cites examples beyond the Ayodhya incident to what he regards as the earliest depictions of the angry Rama in the 1980s, commissioned by Vishva Hindu Parishad (a major Hindu fundamentalist group) and painted by commercial artists such as Rajan Musle. The fact that these images were also commissioned by Hindu nationalist leaders seems unimportant, as long as the example proves the existence of "wavy meaning" beyond Ayodhya in Musle's "recursive archives." Musle's heroic images are most provocatively subject to "recursivity" in an image he made in 1994 of a strident, militant Maratha hero, Shivaji, framed by a flag and vanquishing his Muslim enemy Afzal Khan, which is closely based on a French image dating to 1825 (illustrations 162 and 163, pages 206–207). But Pinney takes us nowhere from here, explaining neither Musle's French source nor this complicated elision of contemporary politics into grand, revolutionary imagery. In his leap from the hotbed of contemporary politics in India to a remote time and place, an art historical obsession with origins and antecedents serves only to advance an argument for the utter otherness of the "recursive archives."

Pinney's invocation of Barthes' "recursivity" is a useful caveat for scholars of visual culture, urging them to avoid direct, symptomatic readings of images, to which iconographic analysis sometimes gets reduced in art history, and instead examine the unpredictable multiplicity that exists within image practices. But Barthes' idea was to destabilize the original, authorial voice in a text, for which he emphasizes its resonance in the minds of a reader/listener.[30] By contrast, Pinney loops back to the authority of "origins" and argues against Kapur's "posters from Ayodhya" only so that images could slip away from their contemporary "destination" into another time and place. His subjects recede into ahistory in Pinney's major conclusion for his study that: "The 'recursivity' of popular picture production, its refusal always to conform precisely to its own present, also reflects the producers' assessment that their consumers require images for tasks that remain relatively historically uninflected: the desire for

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[30] Barthes writes, "a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination." Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image Music Text*, selected and translated by Stephen Heath (New York, Hill and Wang, 1977), 148.

barkat endures and demands the broad repetition of an established iconography" (205). It is this final task that recursivity of god prints performs in the village of Bhatisuda.

V.   Visual History and Nation

In Guha-Thakurta and Pinney, identification and othering are effective scholarly strategies for approaching the recalcitrant, braided lives of human and material practices that are both embedded in the visual and textual archives of modern India and invisible in the heat and glare of current public and popular politics. However, they are strategies with limitations. The image and discursive practices the authors analyse become meaningful only when they reveal contests over the nation-space. It is significant to me that in mourning the loss of historical archives in her essay, "Compulsions of Visual Representation" discussed above, Guha-Thakurta identifies "an irreparable 'national' loss," thereby identifying herself as a "national" subject, not as a Bengali, or a woman, or a Cambridge-trained scholar of international reputation. Her Bengali art historians of the early-20th century also gain authority as they assimilate themselves within the larger narrative of the nationalizing of colonial disciplines, a process in which their other identities, including Hindu, are elided. In Pinney, the nation space is signaled when god pictures participate closely in anti-colonial and nationalistic politics. It is also signaled when widely dispersed, regional practices from Calcutta to Pune, and Nathadwara are integrated into a common chronology, evolving into a national idiom organized around "Indian Hindu scopic regimes" and the corpothetics of Darshan. In other words, it is precisely the evocation of nation that makes the approaches of the two scholars possible and meaningful.

"Nation" is productive in as much it means a networked inter-ocular space where image practices are, as Pinney has said, "less than universal and more than local" (193). But as a figure for characterizing the politics of locality in visual culture, the idea is limiting. Unfortunately, the pull of nation dominates much current scholarship of modern Indian visual culture, both in India and elsewhere.[31] The

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[31] Even studies of diasporic representations are developed through the figure of nation and its boundaries, thus inscribing the pull of nation in those distant locations as well as in diasporic scholar's own insider/outsider position in relation to Indian subjects. See, for instance, Purnima Mankekar's otherwise quite effective

power of a "Hindu" identity in the evolution of a subaltern "national" subject since the late-19th century interests both scholars, but they would be loathe to see this elision of Hindu and Indian as the "success" of India's modernity, since it is qualified by the state-sponsored, chauvinistic Hinduism that so beleaguers the two works. But the elision of nation with Hindu in their subjects is not fully critiqued in either book, and consequently the question of its hegemony over the diversity of image practices is occasionally invoked but never confronted.

In Guha-Thakurta's assessment of the national subject, for example, there is no reference to archaeological and museological practices relating to Islamic art and architecture. Yet, colonial archaeology attended not only to Buddhist and Hindu monuments in the late-19th century, but also to Islamic monuments in the early-20th century. This was especially the case after Lord Curzon's Ancient Monuments and Preservation Bill of 1903, and the view that "to us, the relics of Hindu or Mohammedan, of Buddhist, Brahmin, and Jain are ... equally interesting and equally sacred."[32] Of particular interest is Curzon's own obsession with the Mughal monument, the Taj Mahal in Agra, as well as the widespread British interest in "Indo-Saracenic" architecture for their own institutional buildings.

My point is not to ask Guha-Thakurta for comprehensive coverage, but rather to complicate the relation of locality to nationality in order to find both continuities and discontinuities with the present. In Guha-Thakurta's transition from colonial to nationalistic disciplinary enterprise, it would be interesting to ask if the intervention of colonial

idea of "bifocality" in her "Reflections on Diasporic Identities: A Prolegomenon to an Analysis of Political Bifocality," *Diaspora* 3 (3), 349–371. Also, her *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics: An Ethnography of Television, Womanhood, and Nation in Postcolonial India*, (Durham and London, Duke University Press 1999), 30–33. Pinney (164) offers an important counterexample to this in a Bengali goddess, Mansha Devi, who never achieves a national status while mutating into a West African water spirit, mami wata, illustrating the way "'rhizomatic' global patterns" might circumvent nation. But this is an exception in Pinney, by which I mean that it is difficult to imagine questions of transnationalism or diaspora unfolding in this example within the logical framework of his book.

[32] See *Lord Curzon in India, Being a Selection from his Speeches as Viceroy and Governor-General of India*, edited by Thomas Raleigh (London: MacMillan, 1906), 182–185, discussed in Thomas R. Metcalf, "Monuments and Memorials: Lord Curzon's Creation of a Past for the Raj," in Maria Antonella Pelizzari ed., *Traces of India: Photography, Architecture, and the Politics of Representation, 1850–1900*, 240–261. Also see Eugenia Herbert, "The Taj and the Raj: Garden Imperialism in India," unpublished manuscript.

archaeology, which she explains in chapter 9 as the legal demarcation of governmental versus community rights, allowed Islamic monuments such as the Taj Mahal to bypass the conflicts of locality and pass into the national imaginary as "secularized" representations (as seems to have occurred with some of Pinney's chromolithographs or the Mahabodhi temple at Bodh Gaya, which was subject to colonial archaeological intervention, and is today a living temple as well as a tourist site.) It would also be interesting to ask the other question implied by this formulation, namely, whether a lack of such a "colonial" transition into post-Independence India makes these kinds of monuments vulnerable to the deadly configuration of politics and religion embodied by the Hindutva, as is the case with Babari mosque in Ayodhya, which has been subject to archaeological attention only recently.

Pinney's "Indian Hindu scopic regimes" also eschews diversity in spite of the plural form of the phrase. Chromolithographs do not show internal contests or conflicts, only a coherence that emerges in their proliferation and variety, which Pinney marks by the slippage of "Indian" with "Hindu." The Islamicized word, *barkat*, with which Pinney's villagers describe the god's benefaction (chapter 8) or the presence of the Muslim artist H.R. Raja—in Pinney's estimation a "rare thing" in the popular print industry (chapter 7)—raise questions regarding the nature and parameters of the "Indian Hindu scopic regimes," and its hegemonic role over the diversity of image practices in India.[33]

Pinney includes Raja's imagery in a section of miscellaneous secular pictures, or what he calls "a public, exhortatory art that has many similarities produced elsewhere in the world," as distinct from images that demonstrate the "chameleon-like agility" of the Nathadwara idiom in the same period of post-Independence India (168 and 174–180). But a close look at such "secular" images as Raja's portrait of Indira Gandhi after her assassination in 1984 suggests a different

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[33] For Raja to change from his Muslim name Raza to a Sanskritized form "Raja," as so many well-known stars of the commercial Indian cinema have done, raises the wide-spread question of what Parama Roy has called in a slightly different context "impersonation" in the aftermath of Independence. See Parama Roy, *Indian Traffic: Identities in Question in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998, p. 4). Guha-Thakurta's discussion a modernist artist, M.F. Husain, who was hailed a national hero for most of his career and a "Muslim" whose image of Hindu gods were vandalized by Hindu activists in the 1990s, suggests that the sectarian identity of an image practitioners is unstable, and may not be important is one period but may become so in another. Guha-Thakurta, 245–253.

possibility (illustration 145, p. 180). The bust-length, portrait of the garlanded leader is "theatrical" and frontal, but it falls quite outside the sphere of the Darshanic aesthetic of Nathadwara and thus differs from many other images of the hero discussed by Pinney. But it is not sufficient to therefore categorize this image as secular, as Pinney does, as if secular is simply the other of Hindu.

Pinney's account of this image might be productively nuanced by the use of art historian Woodman Taylor's conception of a scopic regime named after an Arabic word, "Nazar," which also suggests a look or gaze.[34] Taylor describes the lineage of Nazar in the genre of Persian and Urdu romantic and erotic poetry known in India since at least the 13th century. His examples from popular literature and commercial films show Nazar to mean a physical, even aggressive operation of gaze between "singular" lovers, one that often has the effect of robbing the lovers of their possession. Nazar is also located in concrete, singular objects or acts, such as the love-cup from which one drinks, the sword or arrow with which lovers fight, or the gaze that disables and kills. Nazar, thus, does not automatically assume the force field of "mutuality" of seeing and being seen, or touching and being touched, or the philosophical discourse of knowledge and vision, or the expanding sphere of on-going benefaction implied by Darshan.[35] Within the visual regime of Nazar, the term Nazarana (a variant Taylor does not use) refers to a tangible, concrete thing that is offered in exchange for the privilege of looking, such as a gift or money offered in return for the privilege of inspecting the veiled face of a bride, or the sacrifice of one's life for a single glance of the lover, or the body laid at the lover's feet in romantic literature.

The discourse of Nazarana extends quite naturally to martyrdom, and I would suggest that Raja's Indira Gandhi posits a Nazarana-related scopic regime, which differs significantly from many other

[34] Woodman Taylor, "Penetrating gazes: The poetics of sight and visual display in popular Indian cinema," *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, vol. 36, nos. 1 and 2, January–August 2002 (special issue, "Beyond Appearances? Visual Practices and Ideologies in Modern India," edited by Sumathi Ramaswamy), 297–323.

[35] Pinney's eloquent explanation (194) of Darshan as tactile "double sensation" using Merleau Ponty's observation regarding the experience we have when our left hand touches our right hand as an "ambiguous set-up in which both hands can alternate the roles of 'touching and being 'touched'," does not obtain in the visual actions and interactions implied by Nazar. Nazar also does not include the expectation of an "on-going" expansion of one's visionary horizon discussed in Babb's ethnography of Darshan. See Laurence A. Babb, "Glancing: Visual Interaction in Hinduism," *Journal of Anthropological Research*, xxxvii, no. 4, 1981, 378–410.

images of Indira Gandhi and other national heroes illustrated by Pinney. Those images are designed to transport the nationalist hero into an expanding realm of mythical plenitude within a Nathadwara aesthetic. Pinney is correct in noting that Raza's images do not have the "fecund claustrophobia" of Nathadwara pictures, but he assigns no value to this lack. As I see it, the removal of Nathadwara-like plenitude gives Raza's Indira Gandhi a different physicality, that of a concrete Nazarana whose very objecthood is an offering. A bold Hindi inscription across the image, which translates "every drop of my blood will strengthen the nation," suggests a "theatricality" different from that of Darshan-images, one that I would locate within the scopic regime of Nazar. Raja gives the martyr's Nazarana further physicality in the vivid drops of blood, painted on the left of the picture plane in such a way as to indexically suggest trickles on glass, a strategy that concretizes the image as an offering located in the present rather than a "syntax opulent with tomorrows," as Pinney describes the desire for *barkat* or plenitude in Darshanic images (190, phrase is playwright Brian Friel's). To name this "theatricality" simply as part of a miscellany of secular images similar to those seen "elsewhere in the world" is a mistake. The point here is not to simply invoke an Islamic scopic regime in opposition to Pinney's Hindu one in any essentializing way, but to deepen Pinney's suggestion regarding the diversity of image practices by developing competing and even conflicting regimes of visuality within the demands for "theatrical" images in modern India.[36]

   In sum, both books examine visual regimes in ways that are important and stimulating for debates on modern Indian visual culture. Their insistence on the material density of image and textual archives, as opposed to singular works of art and texts, is radical, and their analysis of the archives as a whole for the way they organize visual regimes into local economies, generating diversity and interplay of images, discourses, and practitioners, is groundbreaking for scholarship on modern Indian visual culture. Their observation that all image practices, high and low, contain a destabilizing, popular dimension is in striking contrast to stable hierarchies and oppositions of modernist and modernizing practices still employed by many art critics and art historians. One can, of course, continue to debate the authors on whether the modernity of such image and discursive

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[36] One may note that Islamic imagery is missing from Pinney's study of chromolithographs.

practices must necessarily express itself through the nation space in non-Western countries such as India. But their careful tracing of a politics of locality in individual biographical threads offers a significant lead for scholars to explore India's visual culture not simply for expressions of personalities and psychologies, local or national, but for a visual network that unfolds across a variety of available realms, and the fluid and complicated arrangement of human desires within it.[37]

[37] For some recent examples that pursue biography as a way around and away from the question of nation in modern Indian visual culture, see essays on film in *Bollyworld: Popular Indian Cinema through a Transnational Lens*, edited by Raminder Kaur and Ajay J. Sinha (New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, London, Sage Publications, 2005).