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# Notes on Postcolonial Visual Culture

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## Keywords

Postcolonial visual culture, India, violence, media, split public

Analysts of visual culture have only recently begun to reckon with the complexity of postcolonial visual culture, acknowledging that it presents discontinuous temporalities and complex aesthetic forms that challenge routine ways of relating the history of media form to conventional historical processes.<sup>1</sup> For example, visual realism appears as only among a range of options utilized by cultural producers in South, South-East or East Asia, to mention a few regional examples, despite extensive and sophisticated communications industries in those regions. Technological sophistication does not always lead to the annihilation of older aesthetic forms, but may instead provoke their renewal, whether of martial arts film and their link to Peking opera traditions, or mythological epic traditions and their transformation in India and many South-East Asian countries.

For scholarship on earlier periods, by comparison, arguably, a greater scholarly consensus prevails about the protocols of research and argument, and there exist more accessible archives. Or else scholars have focused on specific crafts and technologies of visual culture such as painting, print or film, deferring broader questions about the institutionalization of visual practices across media and that socialize audiences into new habits of perception. Image making in postcolonial society is now so extensive and multifarious however, and the questions they pose are so unpredictable, that the guidelines for inquiry available from nationalist historiography, art and cultural criticism, or from postcolonial social sciences, are manifestly inadequate. The proposal by *BioScope's* editors to stimulate reflection on screen studies of South Asia is therefore to be welcomed for what it can offer to the study of postcolonial visual cultures.<sup>2</sup>

With the proliferation of media technology and the inter-animation of media forms across print, cinema, television, mobile telephones, and the Internet, South Asia seems to have arrived at a communicative modernity in the space of hardly two decades, or from the first Gulf War onwards, when satellite television was launched in the region. Globally, South Asia's communicative modernity signaled a post-Cold War period defined by intensification of securocratic regimes of visual surveillance, and geopolitical alignments organized around "Islamic terror" instead of the spectre of Communism.<sup>3</sup> In India alone, the past two decades have witnessed a compressed series of developments. The long-delayed market prominence of indigenous language media in relation to English was closely followed by the ascendancy of an aggressive strain of Hindu nationalism in its wake, which has taken on a new intensity with the growth

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of privately owned media. On the other hand, the dense spread of television news coverage provides greater visibility to a host of actors and events, with diverse political agenda, from terrorists in Mumbai who use the media as surveillance aids, to a growing Maoist campaign in defense of tribal land rights that is gaining public sympathy.<sup>4</sup> Hence, to simply associate increasing media density with growing support for any specific postcolonial ideology would be misleading. However, the larger context of India's new economy within which both of the above problems have emerged, suggests the need to historically situate questions of media visibility and density, and explore ways to produce multi-causal, or contingent models of explanation.

In South Asia, greater communication has neither seen the reduction of violence, nor an increase in political transparency in any simple sense. Investigative journalism, including the release of "sting" videos, confirms the existence of institutionalized corruption and secrecy but appears powerless to affect it. Hindu militant groups can paralyze the entire country, such as around the anticipation of violence over a court ruling on the demolition of a historic mosque. And when the culprits are rewarded rather than punished, sober media commentators celebrate the verdict for having thwarted further violence.<sup>5</sup>

Clearly, visibility does not always work in the ways Enlightenment thinkers assumed.<sup>6</sup> Greater visibility in public does not ensure more rationality, nor does a greater density of information flow assure less violence or more democratization. On the one hand, there are those who assert the demystifying gaze of the modern imagination, according to which "seeing is believing." On the other hand, we can observe the enchantment or glamor in what millions behold, for which the opposite may be true, i.e., "believing is seeing." A postcolonial vision for screen studies would need to acknowledge both of these possibilities, while specifying what happens to each term in this reversible proposition, in an age of digital reproduction. South Asia provides a useful site for such discussion given its manifestly heterogeneous visual practices alongside a growing homogenization of screen culture that introduces new regimes of surveillance and regulation.<sup>7</sup> The question this article will pose is whether postcolonial visual culture itself displays regularities over time that can illuminate the modes of political performance, while avoiding both historicism (which would presume that context determines media and meaning both) and technological determinism.

## Media as/and a History of the Senses

I take it for granted that the senses are interconnected, and that their separation occurs through technological means. Technologically mediated forms of sense perception recombine and acquire a prosthetic character with the growth of the apparatuses of communication. For instance, when sound and light from audio-visual media impinge on the observer, they convey or imply the sense of touch at the same time. Here I draw on Marshall McLuhan, who theorized the media as the interface between the body and technology, correlating communication technologies with changing ratios of sense perception (McLuhan, 1964). McLuhan argued that audio-visual media require to be read not so much on the register of visual and auditory perceptions, as on that of tactility. Hence the immediate apperception from mass media, McLuhan argued, was one of intimacy rather than remoteness. The result was that rules of social distance reflecting understandings of hierarchy or potency, for example, *vis-à-vis* class and gender differences, appeared to shift or erode due to media impact.

McLuhan provided an ingenious argument about the power of media, linking concerns about social order and the fear of the crowd, and latent apprehensions about the power of Communist ideology, with the possibility of utopian transcendence. If the medium was the message, it implied that propaganda, the feared weapon of the East Bloc, would be neutralized by the character of modern media, which might in fact serve as silent allies of the West in the Cold War. The “global village” fashioned from the expansion of communications could be a friendly and intimate space, he suggested, in a distinctly North American conception of community.

McLuhan also provided a genealogy of the West that defined backwardness in terms of media literacy, but without overt condescension. Electric media, McLuhan argued, “re-tribalized” Western man, and allowed him to overcome inherited, print-dominated forms of rationality. Modern media, he claimed, enabled forms of communication that were both more individualized and more communal, both “hot” and “cool.” The argument was difficult to follow, and perhaps ultimately incoherent, but it served an important purpose. It insisted that technology was not other to human beings, but altered their capacities in ways that quickly “became” them, although human beings might fail to recognize it. And technology could be used to order world history in a cumulative sequence of developments while acknowledging then-prevalent trends of cultural auto-critique. If mass media were the problem, more media, intelligently applied, could be the cure. The dominance of the West was thus simultaneously acknowledged, criticized, and offered again as a possible overcoming of its previous limitations, provided the appropriate steps were taken.

McLuhan’s broad schema provided little room for sensory histories that were discrepant with his teleological argument, except to relegate them as “old media.” New media, in this view, provide the form of all media; they defined the sense ratio of older media, until supplanted by newer media. He did not consider how uneven technological impact might result in highly contingent forms of individual and collective action that were not predicted by his schema. Despite the global ambition of his theories, McLuhan’s imagination was itself more parochial, and showed the limits of its Western origins.

## Media as Totality?

The assumption that the media could create a level playing field where society can effectively be unified, gained enormous prestige, and was promoted by US-based think tanks and philanthropic foundations during the Cold War. A version of this assumption can be seen in Daniel Lerner’s *The Passing of Traditional Society* (1958), where mass media, from print to radio, are believed to stimulate empathy for modernization, in an account that anticipates some elements of McLuhan. Such assumptions align media with a normative conception of state power, and hence their importance for projects of planned development across the world.

Yet, in contexts where the link between development and modernization was understood variously, the spread of technological communication was known to have unpredictable outcomes. Modern apparatuses of communication are argued to have transformed social interaction and its conception, from the hierarchical cosmologies of the medieval age to the anonymous, horizontal sodalities of print capitalism, in a rationalizing effect that is tacitly presumed to be ongoing. The underlying modernist conceit is that social interactions can be redrawn through the intervention of communications technology, and that there is, for all practical purposes, no “outside”: the media and society, it is held, map congruently

onto one another. The deeper underlying supposition is that of knowability or predictability. The growth of mass media can, in this understanding, be likened to the spread of light across a terrain, leading to the ability to cognitively apprehend and potentially control what occurs within it.

And yet, the growth of mass media has manifestly not had such an effect. The joint presence of older and more recent forms of fetishistic thinking, such as the alliance between devotional and ritualistic forms of worship with commodity culture for example, or the ideals of modernization as embodied, initially, in racial difference, and later in technological expertise, points to the creation of new and more complex communicational environments. If the practice of vision in South Asia enfolded a tension between sight as a privileged access to divine truth, and everyday life as profane, unimportant or unreal, such understandings were consecrated in a visual culture that sharply distinguished between what was worthy of being seen, and what ought not to be revealed.<sup>8</sup>

As a result, visibility does not always equate with acceptance or popularity, while invisibility may signal secrecy rather than irrelevance in such contexts.<sup>9</sup> Recall the silence in India attending the partition for decades after 1947, and the unexpected rupture of this silence with the so-called “angry Hindu” in the late 1980s, or the 1984 massacre and rape of Sikhs that still awaits its moment of public reckoning and redressal. The implausibility of the notion that the truth will set you free, or that power can be transparent, in these contexts of violence and silence, point to a densely layered, agonistic polity, the majority of whose members are excluded from the privileges of civil society (Chatterjee, 2004).<sup>10</sup>

Some of the mediatic underpinnings of this complexity are indicated by the continued growth of the press even as television expands, and the relegation of the English language media to a minority share of the market even while it commands the highest advertising revenues. Vernacular media, meanwhile, increase their audiences at historically high rates. There exists a multilingual market both at regional and national levels. English language media never question their status as the more global segment, however, thereby confirming their insularity *vis-à-vis* vernacular media, though the latter is the site where social relations are being changed most rapidly and powerfully.<sup>11</sup>

New mass media are invariably accompanied by the utopian expectation that they can help re-imagine the world as unfettered and inclusive (Rajagopal, 2005). Radio, television, and digital media have each been accompanied by similar, heady expectations that are unlikely to be realized. After all, each medium enters a space already dense with pre-existing media forms and sedimented communicational practices that seek to define or domesticate new media rather than succumb to them. As a result, new media re-activate earlier media forms in unexpected ways, rather than erase or supplant them. The greater visibility of epic and mythological imagery successively with print, cinema, and television, provides a convenient example of the way in which older image repertoires and symbol systems have been the vehicle for new communication technologies. For example, Indian cinema and television gave the appearance, temporarily, of bringing audiences together across a public that the state split into more and less modern parts, for the purpose of development. However, the same division could appear with its polarity reversed due to the experience of nationalist mobilization, in terms of less versus more culturally authentic parts. This reversible formation, which indicates both the dynamism and instability of cultural formation in postcolonial contexts, such as South Asia, can be explained by the concept of a *split public*, wherein the provisions for the unification of the different components of the public are variously understood across its divisions. That is to say, *the expansion of the media was not greater social unity so much as a greater visibility of existing social divisions*.<sup>12</sup>

A postcolonial analytic of these emergent communication circuits and the synthetic forms they take can also make visible how such differences work across different domains in society. Such an argument challenges the Habermasian model of the public sphere where ideals of equality are realized in a model of communication based on the contract, while power differences are bracketed by the exercise of tact.<sup>13</sup> Such a model of communication is inadequate for addressing the deep divisions in postcolonial societies. Any adequate account of the public sphere must accommodate not only rational-critical discourse, but also contentious counter-discourse and political silences, acknowledging that *the protocols of agreement are not in fact shared*. In other words, publicity has to be understood as a site for asserting power, and for power to be visualized.

## Postcolonial Visuality

Now, in conventional accounts of modern society, power is invisible, contained in capabilities and in modes of discipline, in rules and institutions such as the bureaucracy and the market, rather than in persons, classes, or things. Such an account was made possible by making invisible those acts that, in their very operation, demonstrated power, for example, the punishment of criminals. One of the ways in which the present age understands itself as modern, we now know, is by relegating such activities out of sight to the public, and making them secret (van der Veer, 2010).<sup>14</sup>

At the same time, however, modern modes of seeing presuppose a disembodied gaze, a view “from nowhere” that produces data whose validity does not depend on the person who sees. This is because the mechanisms of sight can be technologically reproduced in the absence of a physical observer. Seeing in modernity, therefore, has a distinct socio-technical character. It implies knowing what to see and what not to see, and absorbing the rules by which the prevailing threshold of visibility operates, that is socially prescribed and technically reproduced.

In contrast, non-Western forms of power tend to be signaled by concrete symbols, objects, persons, and rituals. They exist to be seen, and in the case of Hindu religious objects and persons, they are also, conventionally, bestowed with the capacity to see. Forms of vision in this context, confirm who is seeing and who is seen, in what has been called an “embodied gaze” (Pinney, 2004). Rather than providing a view from nowhere, the embodied gaze validates existing rules of social space rather than disrupts them, because the sense of space is not empty, homogeneous, or infinite; rather it corresponds to the presumption of a bounded, known universe.<sup>15</sup>

The contrast between these two ways of seeing could be read as the difference between, say, science and popular culture, or between secular and religious life. And the meeting of these different modes of perception could be described as an encounter of knowledgeable and naïve ways of seeing, but since this also reflects a social hierarchy, a more complete description should include the so-called naïve view of the powerful. I do not have the space to explore this problem in detail here, but clearly, anti-colonial nationalism sought to incorporate this difference through charismatic and culturalist forms of mobilization, while also offering a program for modern economic development.

Communication associated with the former became relegated in nationalist history to the popular level, or was accorded the status of a vanishing mediator, while the latter was understood to belong to official nationalism.<sup>16</sup> And in postcolonial society, while communicational circuits are initially largely

top-down, for developmental policy implementation for example, the growth of media, especially Indian language print and electronic media, introduces the possibility of bottom-up forms of communication on a hitherto unprecedented scale.

What postcolonial society brings to collective awareness is the existence of plural ways of seeing, and a form of sovereignty that is not singular but divided. With the emergence of a visual regime that cuts across different media platforms, the battle for hegemony between different modes of perception is itself a public one, and any attempt to erect one form of seeing as dominant cannot be tacit, rendered invisible, or relegated to the corridors of power. This, I suggest, is a crucial aspect of the vibrancy of Indian democracy.

## The Postcolonial Split Public

The category of the postcolonial remains relevant to mark the agonistic relationship with Western media forms, whose developmental narrative operates as the standard measure against which the specificity of postcolonial media must be situated. The former are typically ordered on the model of technological developments such as print, radio, cinema, and television, of Euro-American provenance. The result is to relegate theory-generative phenomena outside the West to phenomena of interest to area specialists and intelligence experts at best. However, postcolonial modernity is inaugurated not only by submitting to the West but as well and crucially, by selectively resisting modernization (Rajagopal, 2008a, pp. 4–8).

A well-known argument has it that, to forge unity across their internal divisions against colonial power, anti-colonial nationalists established their claim to sovereignty in the cultural domain, and demarcated it as a distinct arena from that of the external world, where the superiority of colonial power was undeniable at least for the moment. This result of a nationalist compromise which arrived at the end of the nineteenth century, we are told, endures into the postcolonial period.<sup>17</sup>

The great insight in this argument is the development of a bipartite rather than a unitary model of sovereignty in anti-colonial nationalism. Such a model has effectively relegated religion and spirituality to a private realm, and matters of political economy to the public realm. But each of these spaces is characterized by communicative acts that both reify and challenge a structural dichotomy between private and public life. As such, we could think of each of these realms as, in fact, a “public.” And a communicative public is by definition something that is in a process of *becoming*, rather than a static element in a model.

The rules in these different publics (“religious” and “political”) diverge, but presume each other. For example, colonial power claimed to be a modernizing influence but relied on force. Meanwhile, indigenous society, with the growth of nationalism, claimed cultural authenticity as the real seat of legitimacy. This split public, held together by coercion as well as consent, was one in which neither segment of the public was transparent to the other. Each believed that its claims trumped those of the other’s, but the contest was not one that could be adjudicated in rational terms. Postcolonial development extended this dynamic, by virtue of the demands of modernization, with the difference that voters could now elect who would govern them. The idea of a split public grasps this process of productive misrecognition as a key dialectic shaping and reshaping these agonistic spaces (Rajagopal, 2001).

## Spectacle, Commodity, and the Labor of Seeing

We have seen that the teleological thrust of most varieties of media studies order themselves by technology (print, radio, cinema, television, etc). In this section, I speculate on what media, both as perceptual ensemble, and as furthering market logics, i.e., as both technology and commodity, might reveal about emergent postcolonial political forms.

A noteworthy critical argument that theorized the shift in the character of visuality in late capitalism is Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, a text that continues to resonate more than a half century after it was written. Debord argued that everyday life had dissolved into a series of spectacles that claimed to unify the world through their representation of it. The spectacle was an extension of the commodity, he wrote, and as such was an expression of the alienation of expressive from productive life, and of capital's domination over living labor. However, the distinguishing feature of the society of the spectacle, as Debord defined it, was that the commodity had succeeded in completely colonizing social life, so that commodification was coterminous with the known world (Debord, 1967, Chapter 2, Para 42).

Debord's argument linked knowledge and power as they manifested in the domain of perception. The spectacle claimed a fullness of representation, offering a transparent window onto the world. What the spectacle made visible was real, and what was invisible in the spectacle was either not real or not salient. The power of the spectacle was in fact that of regulating perception, of distinguishing between what was worth seeing, and what could be ignored. Where the logic of commodification had extended to every sphere of life, what was excluded from the spectacle became insignificant, in this argument.

Debord's argument embedded visual perception (which in the Renaissance conception of seeing, presumed agency as a component), with a fairly durable epistemic regime where the scope for intervention was limited at best.<sup>18</sup> This was because, according to Debord, extensive socio-technical apparatuses of communication already encoded the place of individual observers within them, and anticipated their response. Truth or accuracy of depiction were less relevant criteria of perception than the extent to which existing circuits of communication "recognized" what was sought to be circulated, and assisted in the propagation of those elements that enhanced capital accumulation and reinforced "the spectacle."

*The Society of the Spectacle* is a polemical rather than a dispassionate text. It presents an analysis whose totalizing force is more provocative than it is precise. It responded to a context, namely post-World War II Europe, which Debord saw as pacified by Americanization following the Allied victory and the ensuing Marshall Plan. In this sense it was an early critical response to media globalization from within the West.

A significant portion of the world's population, however, lives outside a fully commoditized market economy, and relies, for its sustenance, on other sources such as land, or on non-market relations of charity, servitude, welfare, and so forth. This is not to say that they are therefore altogether insulated from the modern world, and from what Debord calls the spectacle. The extensive reach of government agencies through a range of service and surveillance functions (including welfare), and the profusion of both state and non-state communicational programs, leave few if any untouched. In such contexts, the range in visual form and syntax is extensive from cell phones to the cinema, television, and video, to say nothing of billboards, periodicals, and posters (Rajagopal, 2010a, pp. 209–28).

The spectacle in such contexts is not so much an extension of commodity logic, as a site where heterogeneous factors are brought together to enhance the marketability of the commodity. Here, the spectacle itself cannot adjudicate the contest between its constituent elements. The power of these elements

*vis-à-vis* each other is decided externally, for example, by frames of perception inculcated over time that separate what requires notice from what can be ignored, and through contingencies attending the image's passage across society. Just as the circulation of commodities emphasizes exchange value over use value, and abstract labor over real labor, the circulation of the commodity image appears to absorb the real labor of seeing into the abstraction of consumers whose viewing time generates value.<sup>19</sup> As we know, however, the reproduction of capital can be assumed, but that does not insulate it from the contingencies of history and politics, which in fact provide no guaranteed outcome.

It is helpful here to disarticulate issues of perception and its effects from the political economic context, which for Debord is the relatively undifferentiated milieu of late capitalism. These topics are conflated in Debord's expansive use of his concept of the spectacle.

Wolfgang Haug's concept of the commodity image suits the purpose, signaling the interconnections between perception and political economy, but allowing them to be considered separately. In his argument, the commodity image is designed to enhance the commodity in an expressive space that is contiguous with the economic but not reducible to it. While Haug posits a relation between commodity and image that is functional to capitalism, his concept of "commodity aesthetics" points to a cultural domain in which rules of the economy apply, but not exclusively. Debord's argument about the spectacle aims to provide an account of late capitalism's dynamics as secured through its governing mode of perception. As such, the term serves not only to index this theory, but also works as a concept applying to different levels of abstraction, for example, specific images or scenes, and ideological frames sutured together by visibility.<sup>20</sup> However, where images form an aspect of a still-emergent public sphere, where the meaning of "publicness" is uncertain, they may provide a domain where the rules about what it is to see, and what there is to see, are worked out.<sup>21</sup> In Marxian terms, the labor of seeing and the value placed on visibility in an emergent market economy are not apparent at the start, but are negotiated over time, in ways that it would be necessary to trace.

In that sense, it is worth asking precisely what is foreclosed by Marx's understanding of commodity fetishism as the resignification of religious aura or affect. Marx argued, it will be recalled, that with the commodity taking on a life of its own, akin to a celestial being, human beings failed to realize that the economy was subject to human control, but instead granted it power over themselves (Marx, 1867, Chapter 1, Section 4). Let us look, however, to a different context, where religious imagery and the commodity form together secure value for the product, as the commodity-image is itself interpellated into places of commerce and worship both. This is important because, in the subcontinent, religious imagery, commodity form, and public performance have long been allied.

The first images to be circulated on a large scale in South Asia were god pictures, in advertisements for goods and services such as in calendar art.<sup>22</sup> When there were protests against the use of religious imagery, these were dismissed on the grounds that trade would suffer without the use of such representations (Bombay Chamber of Commerce, 1916, pp. 67–68; Masselos, 2006, pp. 148–49). Such portraits did not document the external world, nor in themselves depict goods and services being sold. Rather, they appeared as religious fetishes with an auratic power that helped sell products. Such aura added value to the commodity but also served to mystify it and by so doing, *visualized the commodity fetish*. The spread of the commodity economy might have been eroding communal forms of production, but the commodity image was, at the same time, able to call up its prehistory, and in the process, media technologies themselves acquired a magical aspect.

What this meant was that these technologies might have been seen as modernizing, but they were also imagined as providing access to the past, and valorizing a history that if not already gone, was being erased as its idea was summoned and broadcast anew. The rapid growth of television in India following the telecast of Hindu epics on Doordarshan is perhaps the most dramatic recent example of this tendency, followed, as we know, by widespread attacks on Muslims, and the ascendancy of overt Hindu majoritarianism, albeit with internal contradictions (Rajagopal, 2001). Something very different from the Foucauldian account of the modern optical regime occurs here. *Communicative modernity is announced in the South Asian context not by the withdrawal of violence but by its greater visibility.*

In contrast to the kind of arguments Jonathan Crary has made about the emergence of both expert and popular practices that helped socialize the destabilization of visual perception, and the way professional and managerial discussions sought to contain the effects of this crisis, elsewhere such destabilization tends to reverberate upwards and downwards, yoking the existential together with the national-political (Crary, 2001). The most crucial distinction to be marked here is the context Crary focuses on, the consolidation of Western nation-states and the governmentalization of their populations is accomplished by the early twentieth century, at least in relation to the rest of the world, which remained under colonial rule during the period he focuses on (mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century). Elsewhere, changes in perception and in politics tend more directly to be read through each other. As a result, the crisis of the perceiving subject, in the different ways it is experienced outside the West, telescopes into more generalized crises of self-making and nation-building, which reverberate with and compound each other. It is in the partial depiction and propulsion of this turbulence that any regularities of postcolonial visual culture must be found.

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### Notes

1. Jain (2007), Pinney (2004), Ramaswamy (2010), and Vasudevan (2010), are important volumes in this connection.
2. See in this context the opening essay by Vasudevan, Thomas, Majumdar, and Biswas (2010).
3. The term “securocratic regime” is from Viera, Martin, and Wallerstein (1992, p. 205). For a discussion of some of the cultural dynamics attendant on such a context, see Appadurai (2006).
4. On the Mumbai terror attacks, see Rajagopal (2008b). For the most authoritative recent survey of the Maoist issue, see Dandekar and Choudhury (2010).
5. The reference is to the September 30, 2010 Allahabad High Court judgment on the Ayodhya dispute, which made no mention of the demolition of the Babri Masjid by Hindu militants, and awarded Hindu groups a third of the property that had belonged to Muslims.
6. Hal Foster distinguishes vision from visuality in the following terms—that while the former refers to the mechanism of sight and the datum of vision, the latter refers to its historical techniques and discursive determinations. See Foster (1988, p. ix).
7. On the most significant visual surveillance initiative in recent times, see Unique Identification Authority of India (2010).
8. The internal differences among South Asian ways of seeing is not as yet something about which a great deal has been written. For one of the few recent essays addressing the subject and exploring the question in relation to Muslims, see Freitag (2007).

9. For an argument about the pervasiveness of secrecy at the heart of publicity in relation to state-sponsored violence in Indonesia, see Siegel (1998).
10. Chatterjee does not explore relationship between civil and political society, and thus ignores the existence of the many forms of connection, including media circuits that cut across the divide he argues for.
11. See in this connection the interview of the poet Arun Kolatkar in Ramnarayan (2004).
12. I have made this argument *vis-à-vis* television in *Politics after television: Hindu nationalism and the reshaping of the public in India*. See Rajagopal (2001).
13. Whereas the contractual agent engages in exchange out of interest, and is not personally modified by the act of exchange, the communicative act transforms the person engaging in discourse over time. Habermas responds to this problem by arguing that personally transforming communication is intimate and remains in the private sphere, unlike rational-critical communication (Habermas, 1991).
14. For a shift in the domain of etiquette corresponding to the new secrecy of punishment, see Norbert Elias on the growth of shame attending the display of hitherto “public” practices that began to be considered private in the early modern era (Elias, 1978).
15. Note that the difference between the claims of modernist vision and its uneven instantiation in the colonies is the outcome of the culturalization of colonial politics, as well as of the resulting politicization of the culture concept. What I am describing here are practices that willy-nilly, created the effect of a temporal and developmental divide between a society organized around a particular politics of vision, and one that was fractured by diverse visual practices.
16. See Calhoun (2007) for an incisive analysis of the failures of nationalist universalism.
17. I refer to Partha Chatterjee’s seminal argument, outlined in its initial version in Chatterjee (1986).
18. For an argument about the relevance of the Renaissance in making the conditions of modern visuality possible, see Nelson (2000, pp. 1–21).
19. See in this context, Dipesh Chakrabarty’s distinction between real and abstract labor in Chakrabarty (2007, pp. 47–71).
20. On the commodity image and commodity aesthetics, see Haug (1986, p. 8).
21. Bruno Latour defines a new visual culture in terms of understanding “what it is to see, and what there is to see” (Latour, 1986).
22. See Rajagopal (2010b). The same article is forthcoming in Brosius, Ramaswamy and Saeed’s book. The appearance of religious imagery appears to be prior to that of non-religious imagery in advertising and packaging. See Masselos (2006, pp. 146–51).

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