2 The Spectral Coloniality of Calcutta's Ochterlony

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Abstract

Recent research on the cultural semiology of architecture has tried to initiate a new study of history through the complex and interdisciplinary project of unearthing *sites of memory*, leading to a substantial re-imagining of the modern metropolis. The city of Calcutta is a productive site for complex interrogations into nineteenth century modernity, colonial memory, and spatial critique of the post-colony. In a city of audacious British-era architecture, the Ochterlony Monument stands as one of Calcutta's most pregnant repositories of sustained cultural and visual imaginary. This early nineteenth-century edifice was a triumphant British War Memorial that was transformed, in the post-colonial era into the chief site of Calcutta's political spectacles and multitudinous congresses. Built in mixed traditions, this unique, erect form was also photographed and cited in endless visual reproductions. Drawing from visual and spatial theory, this chapter reimagines the representational politics of the Ochterlony as contingent upon the interplay of various 'visualisations' of the city's cultural pasts. In doing so, the paper asks whether the Ochterlony's unique trajectory as a *site of memory* foregrounds an effective critique of colonial metropolitanism itself, while also radically reimagining the history and scope of post-colonial visuality.

Keywords: Calcutta, Empire, Photography, Post-colonial, Visuality

> History's goal and ambition is not to exalt but to annihilate what has in reality taken place. A generalised critical history will no doubt preserve some museums, some medallions and monuments—that is to say the materials necessary for its work—but it would empty them of what, to us, would make them *lieux de mémoire.* (Nora 1989: 9)

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> Pictures are things that have been marked with all the stigmata of personhood: they exhibit both physical and virtual bodies; they speak to us, sometimes literally, sometimes figuratively. They present, not just a surface, but a *face* that faces the beholder. (Mitchell 1996: 72)

> First, monuments, like graves, are not only expressions of the dream of renewal; they are paradoxically expressions of the dream of containment: through the monument, the dead will be given a proper place and kept in this place. (Greenblatt 1996: 36)

2.1 The Octherlony as a Photographic Object

In his book, *Calcutta's Edifice: The Buildings of a Great City* (2004), the American architect Brian Paul Bach has rather poetically described the feeling of entering and climbing the stairs inside of a most visible Calcutta landmark[1]: the Ochterlony Monument. I am tempted to quote him in entirety:

> After entering the burial vault looking metal doors, one suddenly faces 215 whitewashed corkscrew steps, made of Chunar stone. Suddenly there is a deserty feel, rather like climbing the minar of an ancient arid fortress. For here at the bottom of the steps, is an instant remoteness from the city centre, tempered by the magic of the insulator Maidan. Poised at the base of the tube, a draft of air spirals upwards—the smokestack principle. Yet the perspiration flows in the closeness, adding to the utter, unexpected sensuality exuded at every angle, up, down, and out the tiny air/light perforations, which appear with far too little regularity on the way up. Light is also taken away far too soon, though the passage is small enough for one human body to feel its way onward by the sliding of palms, knees, elbows, shoulders, even cheeks, along the smooth and cooling walls. The effect is quite similar to the inside of the 'Iron' Pagoda in Kaifeng, China. There are audio tricks as well. Anyone talking inside the column's entrance can be clearly heard at the top of the stairwell so many metres above. Near the top, the stairs become ultra-narrow, which increases the urgency of the inevitable anticipation. Then, like

1 Since the paper covers the time before the renaming of Calcutta to Kolkata in 2001, I have preferred to call it the same. As it is, all the documents and sources referred to call the city Calcutta as that was the official name of the city until 2001.

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> the burst of freedom at the top of all such vertical tunnels, light, high Maidan ionosphere (it seems), *and altered realities present themselves, proving that we have arrived at a castle in the air.* (Bach 2006: 529-530; my italics)

If one can imagine a cinematic moment when a figure climbs this monument blindfolded and then, only when at the top, is allowed to 'oversee' the city of Calcutta below—*an altered reality*—which also happens to be that figure's first sighting of the city, one can get close to the idea that this paper is trying to foreground. In other words, the paper proposes to put forth a visualisation of the city from the heightened vantage point of one of its iconic monuments without dissociating itself from the cultural history of that monument itself and its complicated relationship to the spatial formations below.

There can be thousands of ways of looking at a city for the first time, both temporally and ontologically. However, not all of these vantages carry equal weight. Some ways of looking become institutionalised over time, mostly—if not only—through acts of representation/repetition of that particular vantage point. One can propose this problematic from the other end: over time and a range of cultural reproductions, a certain vantage point becomes more visible than others, having enjoyed the advantages of repetition through representation, and seems to stake a claim to being foundational. The Ochterlony Monument in Calcutta is one such prominent and pregnant repository of both cultural and visual imagination. The early nineteenth century edifice (built in 1828) was once a triumphant British war memorial; then the site of colonial visualization of the panorama of the city till it trespassed into the period of post-coloniality as the chief site of Calcutta's political spectacles and multitudinous congresses. Built of eastern architectural traditions, this unique, erect form was also at the same time a foundational symbol of metropolitan Calcutta, repeatedly photographed, mined, and cited in endless visual reproductions, both in the colonial period and since. Later, as an act of symbolic purging of this 'history', it was rebaptised as an Indian war memorial (called the Shaheed Minar or the 'Martyr's Tower') and co-opted as a tourist site, with a complex representational relationship with the urban spaces around it, while being available for all forms of impervious gazing at the downtown city-space.

Calcutta, the city-space below, is a rather complex formation in itself. Birthed, governed, administered, and sustained for over two and half centuries as an archetypal 'colonial' assembly, Calcutta *per se* was born *into* colonial modernity, was largely without a recorded history of the *premodern,* and was sustained by a colonial logic of administrative dispensation and

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governance. For most city historians, Calcutta is best dated to an August day in 1690, when thanks largely to the adventurism and industry of a cunning English trader called Jobus Charnock, was officially founded as a new trading post. Within a little more than a century, Calcutta assumed the explicit shape of a colonial metropolis, invested with the efficiency and industry of being the capital of a large empire. Growing at a rate that was unimaginable anywhere else in India, colonial Calcutta was not unused to spectres of violence and conflict; however, the surety of its energetic subsistence managed to prevail over the uncertainty of its anxieties. It grew faster than any other Indian city before or after, sustained by commercial energy, immigrant aspirations, and colonial instrumentality, first ushering in almost every mark of the *modern* Indian state within its own, fervent confines. Most things that Calcutta housed were to become fundamental to South Asia itself: the modern judiciary, civil services, postal service, railways and transportation, electricity, science and invention, telegraph and telecommunication, printing, radio and broadcasting,and later in the colonial period, social reforms, modern letters, photography, the stage, and cinema. No wonder early in its colonial life it came to be known as the Second City of the British Empire, the seat of both technocratic power and modern intellectual ambition, of settlers and immigrants from across the globe, of local enterprise and global trade, of mighty architectural monuments and great modern institutions of education and knowledge. In many ways, Calcutta was a spectacular, secular reimagination of a European city. Calcutta's becoming a visual site is intrinsic to its attractions as a primary site of colonial modernity in South Asia.[2]

Why it was able to become such a success is, however, a matter of deep disagreement. The swampy conditions of Calcutta's topography attracted virulent disapproval from the very early days, when in the 1760s Warren Hastings, buoyed by his victory over the local Nawab, planned to shift the the company's administration from the imperial city of Murshidabad to the emergent new urban dispensation downstream on the Hugli, which was by then known as Calcutta. To bypass the unfavourable conditions, writes Natasha Eaton, Hastings' supporters—in good Whig tradition—wanted to recast the city in mythic terms. If one part of this mythologising was the

2 The Calcutta High Court, designed by Walter Granville, was inspired by the Cloth House in Belgium's Ypres city, including the famous, 180 feet belfry. The Old Mint resembles the Temple of Minerva in Athens while the Kedlestone Hall in Derbyshire provided the inspiration for the Governor House. There are several buildings with Corinthian, Gothic revivalist, Ionic, Eton and Italian Doric influences. There are also several examples, from the late colonial era, of the Art Deco style.

creation of the Black Hole episode (Chatterjee 2012), the other concerned the spatial appropriation of the city's central districts. Eaton writes:

> In the development and codification of the modern city, public monuments, architecture, as well as maps and artistic and pathological topography (as a form of 'paper memory') performed a crucial role in the consecration and maintenance of history as colonialism's *lieux de mémoire*. Like early maps of the city, topographical views highlight the tiny colonial district between the Esplanade and the Town Square as being the most fashionable as well as political heart of the 'White Town'. (Eaton 2013: 68)

Eaton's critique helps us to relook at how a small trading outpost, competing with more established trading hubs upstream the Hugli, became the commercial epicentre of British India and a touchstone of colonial modernity. Drawing from Eaton, it won't be an exaggeration to say that the mythical projections of its early rulers were concomitant to how that space came to be visually imagined, mapped, reconstituted, and discursively disseminated. In other words, Calcutta's spatial and conceptual urbanity is ontologically a condition of its coloniality and should hence be understood within that historical and genealogical legacy. Further to its origins having been reimagined in hyperbolic projections, Calcutta's spatial legacy remains coupled to the conditions under which they came to the fore. As Swati Chattopadhyay writes in her book-length critique of the European instrumentality of establishing a historical vantage point for colonial cities:

> The complex multi-layered landscape of colonial Calcutta demands a multicentred approach. Instead of a fixed-point perspective from historian to artefact, we need to adopt a mobile perspective that describes the heterogeneous topography of power. Such a mobile perspective would help us recognise the historicity and ideological underpinnings of the knowledge we have inherited about the city, and the stories we perpetuate. (Chattopadhyay 2006: 10)

The Ochterlony should hence be seen as one of the sites in the multiple topographies of power that subsequently achieved a degree of mobility within its cultural representation. In the gradual transformation of its cultural, spatial, and conceptual value, the Ochterlony provides a significant archive of colonial memory-making. The Ochterlony's pre-eminence is further enhanced by it being an obvious site of activity from the earliest days

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of photography in Calcutta. Though it is difficult to assign a particular date to the arrival of photography in Calcutta, it is helpful to remember that the earliest existing records of the city's imaging show a considerable fondness for Ochterlony, both as an object of *looking into* as well as a site of *looking from*. More than one history of the city's photography refers to this prospect. In *The Coming of Photography in India*, Christopher Pinney writes:

> Daguerre's discovery [also] provoked three long articles on the subject in the *Bombay Times* in December of the same year (1839) and by January 1840, the Calcutta firm of Thacker, Spink & Co was advertising daguerreotype cameras for sale. By March 1840 the *Calcutta Courier* was able to record what was almost certainly the first daguerreotype produced in India. Reporting on a 'highly delighted' meeting at the Asiatic Society the *Courier* noted how 'Several [photographs] were exhibited to the meeting, *of the Esplanade and other parts of Calcutta*.' (Pinney 2008: 9; my italics)

There is no consensus as to who this first photographer might be. A surviving reproduction of a daguerreotype of the Sans Souci Theatre—a Parthenon-shaped theatre building on what is now Park Street—could be one of the photographs from this 'lost' period, since the theatre was partially destroyed by fire in mid-1840s and declined soon after. Siddhartha Ghosh, Calcutta's own historian of photography, mentions the photograph of the Sans Souci Theatre and dates it to about 1840, which is exceptionally early. He further writes, 'Calcutta was witness to battle between the photographers of Talbot's School of calotype and the Daguerrean artists, operating from photographic studios and the Daguerrean galleries respectively' (Ghosh 1990: 143). One of the early Daguerreans mentioned by Ghosh is Monsieur F.M. Montairo, who was advertising in the *Englishman* as early as July 1844. One Mr. Schranzhoffer is credited with opening the first full-fledged calotype studio in 1848.

Other than this, the earliest extant photography on Calcutta dates to the end of the 1840s at the latest. But the collection Pinney talks about consisted certainly of daguerreotypes. Given the heat and humidity of Calcutta and the price of glass negatives, it must have been a major challenge to reproduce a large panoramic city space on a daguerreotype. Hence most art historians associate the emergence of panoramic photography with the coming of the collodion process. So, it is interesting if not surprising that the first views of Calcutta's buildings were already being exhibited in the early 1840s.

The art historian Tapati Guha-Thakurta, whose work on India's colonial-era art is considered seminal, notes another series of photographs from the same period that could also stake claim to inaugurating Calcutta's

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long history of imaging. In the catalogue to an exhibition she co-curated, Guha-Thakurta writes:

> Little is known about the career of the amateur lithographer and photographer Frederick Fiebig who produced [these] images of Calcutta in the 1840s. He is in London in 1856 offering for sale to the East India Company a series of nearly 450 of his hand coloured salt prints of the 'the principal buildings and the other places of interest at Calcutta, Madras, the Coromandel Coast, Ceylon, Mauritius and the Cape of Good Hope.' Marking photography's inaugural history in the city [of Calcutta] Fiebig's works underline the close interface of the camera with pictorial and graphic arts of the period. *The fascination with panoramas and use of Calcutta's favourite landmark, the Ochterlony monument* (erected by public subscription in 1828) *for the taking of such views* is exemplified by a 1858 ten-part series by another little-known pioneer, Josiah Rowe. Over the next decades, the photography of the city's grand vitas and buildings took off with the arrival in the 1860s and 1870s of Samuel Bourne, Charles Shepherd and John Edward Sache, and the opening of studios across Calcutta, Bombay and the North Indian hill stations. (Guha-Thakurta 2011: 48-49; my italics)

Incidentally, Josiah Rowe had established a reputation for continuing to privilege the daguerreotype much into 1850s, even when it was already *de rigueur* to move to the calotype process. Rowe later had a career as an academic at Presidency College, Calcutta. Unlike Rowe, Fiebig was primarily a lithographer based in Calcutta, who took to photography in the late 1840s and produced close to 500 collotypes of the principal buildings and streets of Calcutta, Serampore, and Madras, and then later Singapore. Since the 1840s daguerreotypes mentioned by Pinney are not extant, we have little option but to consider Fiebig and Rowe as the first systematic photographic 'eyes' on Calcutta, and the Ochterlony could well be said to be already emerging as a foundational vantage point for photographing the city. Ghosh provides a more detailed account of the extant daguerreotypes of this very early period. He writes that:

> very few daguerreotypes have survived the hot and humid climate of Calcutta but there are notable exceptions. Two excellent views taken from the top of the Ochterlony Monument by an unknown artist, lie somewhat over-preserved, in an iron chest in the Victoria Memorial Hall. As far it is known, only one daguerreotype taken by (JW) Newland still survives in the competent custody of the Science Museum on London. (Ghosh 1990: 144)

Before I proceed to the photographs of the monument, we need to briefly look at the details of the monument itself. The Ochterlony Monument was erected in memory of the distinguished British general David Ochterlony, who led Britain to victory in the Anglo-Nepalese War (1814-1816). He was the first British soldier in colonial India to be awarded the Knight of the Grand Cross (GCB) for his services to the British military. A charismatic and influential military commander in his heyday, he fell afoul of the British Governor-General William Amherst and had to quit the army. By then he had converted to Islam and had settled into a lavish Persian life in Delhi with thirteen concubines and an army of servants and elephants. He later ran out of money and died penniless in Meerut in 1825.

Partly for architectural reasons and partly as a tribute to his colourful life, the Monument built in his name in Calcutta in 1828 to oversee the vast expanse of green known as the Maidan, was entirely of Middle-Eastern (or West Asian) design. It was built with about Rs. 35,000 raised through public inscription under the supervision of the architect J.P. Parker, who executed the design of Charles Knowles Robinson. It is 165 feet in height, about 40 feet less than the Christopher Wren-designed 202 feet London Monument to the Great Fire, built in 1677, to which the Ochterlony bears a not so surprising element of similarity. The Ochterlony's cube-shaped base or plinth is an example of Egyptian square-fluted architecture; the column that narrows up to two round-fenced balconies on top is Syrian, and the dome and metal cupola are typically Turkish. The foundation of the edifice is made of up to eighty two 20-foot-long teakwood logs that were pressed 2.4 metres into the soil. On them stand 2.4 metres of masonry built of chalk, burnt bricks, and stone chips. There are 215 (in some accounts, 218) steps inside the Monument that lead to the top. The steps were built as a spiral with one end of each step held together by cast iron while the other end secured into the brickwork.

It was a unique undertaking in Calcutta's history to dedicate such an expensive public monument to a soldier whose connections to Calcutta were, at best, tenuous. Most of Calcutta's other colonial buildings were dedicated to the offices of the colonial government or to emerging legal, economic, and educational initiatives. The rest were museums, cathedrals, theatres, or mansions for private use. The last bit of Calcutta's imperial public memorials—marble statues of the British royalty, governors-general, figureheads of the colony, and other functionaries—were common and adorned various public spaces in Calcutta for a long time.[3] But an erect, soaring edifice in the

3 There are two major exceptions to this catalogue. The first is the unmissable Victoria Memorial, which shares the mnemonic ambivalence of the Ochterlony by embodying the name

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heart of a city, to a figure who had forsaken both the Christian world—which as a Scot he was born into—and the colonial military service to whose highest ranks he had climbed, resists easy taxonomy.

Architecturally, the Ochterlony remains a unique structure whose spatial deportment and locational prominence has not only secured it from oblivion, but has in fact ensured for it a surprisingly vibrant afterlife as part of a wide range of political and cultural usages to which the images used in this paper attest. 'Afterlife' is here meant as a very specific concept, borrowed from a recent scholarly discussion. As Deborah Cherry writes:

> The term 'afterlives' is adopted here to suggest the restless multiplicity of coexisting versions, representations, imag(in)ings, and interactions taking place in widely distributed circuits of use, replication, and interpretation. Afterlives are constructed in the corporeal, mnemonic, and sensory engagements between people—individuals, groups, institutions—and sites, objects, texts, and images. (Cherry 2013: 3)

Taking the above observations as points of departure, this paper hopes to offer an alternative reading of Calcutta's emergence into a metropolitan identity by connecting a range of photographic practices over a period of 150 years with the singular figure of the Ochterlony at their centre, either as the optic fulcrum or as the optic object. By atypically juxtaposing pictorial images, this paper intends to interrogate the politics of representation that is contingent upon various 'visualisations' of cultural pasts through a complex interplay between real space and imaginary space. In other words, through a close and illustrated discussion of this magnificent monument and its reception in cultural forms, the paper proposes to foreground a identifiable, image-regime that is at play in visualising a site of foundational meaning-making in Calcutta. At the same time, this paper is not an attempt to historicise the photographs of one particular Indian colonial-era monument. Rather, it is an attempt to probe the underlying nature of the *photographic gaze* as it transported in its physical form from one moment in history to another. This question is more powerfully posited by Christopher Pinney in his most recent essay 'The Look of History: The Power of the Aesthetic', in which he foregrounds a method of writing history from a

of a sovereign whose real connections to the city remains problematic. The second example is the 'memorial' built to the 'white' victims of the so-called Black Hole tragedy—based on the accounts of John Holwell—in the form of a 50 ft. Egyptian obelisk by George Nathaniel Curzon, who was the Viceroy of India between 1899 and 1905.

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visual-materialist praxis rather than seeing the visual as a supplement to conventional historiography. He writes:

> We can approach this question through the following formulation: does the visual serve simply as an illustration of what we already know, or can history be written through the visual and material? Can we escape from the process Carlo Ginzburg describes in which 'the historian reads into images what he has already learned by other means'? (Pinney 2014: 119)

To that end, the paper proposes to ask, first, if a symptomatic reading of the various visual representations of this site can re-imagine a certain historical memory of the city; second, if the complex interplay of *gaze*(*s*) can provoke a rethinking of the history of the transformation of an ambivalent colonial site into an equally ambivalent post-coloniality; and third, if such a critical interrogation could lead towards understanding the Ochterlony as *lieu de mémoire* [site of memory].

2.2 The Contested Aesthetics of Colonial Photography

But the argument this paper tries to foreground remains half-uttered if we only look at Ochterlony's importance as a critical vantage point for imperial image-making. It is no less critical to understand how the monument attained such layered mimetic signification over time. To do so, one needs to look closely at recent debates in photography scholarship, which not only challenge simple connections between the object and the image but also those between the object and the conditions of its reproduction. This distinction is extremely crucial for understanding photography's complex role in the colonies, because, when applied to colonial photographic practices, recent scholarship reveals a good deal more than what is usually considered to be a visual compendium of a sweeping Orientalist project. As Sumathi Ramaswamy writes in her introduction to a recent anthology of writings on the politics of colonial visuality:

> We are interested not so much in making a case for the sovereignty of the image—that would be a futile, even undesirable exercise—as in arguing against treating it as merely an eye-catching accessory. At the very least, by placing the 'colonising' image (and its linked technologies and subjectivities) at the center of our thinking, theorising, and writing, we aim to expand and complicate the archive on the basis of which both

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> imperial histories and the histories of modern vision in the industrial age have been written so far. (Ramaswamy 2014: 3)

Extending Ramaswamy's claims to the case of the Ochterlony Monument, this section proposes an ontological shift from the established notions of colonial visual aesthetics in India towards a more complicated trajectory of colonial photography. More specifically, by 'complicating the archive' on the basis of new scholarship on both photography and colonialism, it is possible to interrogate whether and how the Ochterlony's repertoire in early Indian colonial photography goes well beyond the standard perception of seeing such sites only at the receiving end of the colonial optic.

Lately, there has been a proliferation of academic and popular writing, exhibitions and catalogues,[4] monographs and books on colonial photography in India. James R. Ryan's book on colonial photography, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire* (1998) and Christopher Pinney's *Camera Indica* (1998) are now considered to be older books. In recent years, Pinney (2008), Zahid Chaudhary (2012), and Malavika Karlekar (2005; 2013) have made important new contributions to the burgeoning field of enquiry into colonial photography in India. But we must start at the beginning and with Ryan's book. In his review of the book, Peter Hoffenberg sums up the politics of visuality that Ryan more generally, as well as others working in a specifically Indian context, have claimed were foregrounded by the Empire. Hoffenberg writes:

> Photography helped address the compelling Victorian obsession with cataloguing and measuring, making some sense out of the twin dilemmas of distance and variety. Common metaphors are important here. To contemporaries, the Empire brought 'light', as did photography; the Empire invaded privates pace, as did photography; the Empire penetrated 'darkness', as did photography. Both took advantage of distance and mystery to make things close and demystified. Both were allegedly accurate and scientific. (Hoffenberg 1999: 556-557)

The general critical consensus is that colonial photography came to be the chief tool among Empire's apparatuses of actual and desired control, and studies have highlighted many specific instances of how the new recording device was utilised for political mobilisation after 1857. Zahid R. Chaudhary, for example, has written persuasively on how the British Empire, once it assumed full administrative control of India after 1857, sought to launch an anthropological blitzkrieg across India, arming its

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envoys with the fresh technology of photography. In *Afterimage of Empire,* Chaudhary argues:

> Following the well-travelled rules of global capital, photography arrives in India not only as a technology of the colonial state but also as an instrument that extends and transforms sight for photographers and the body politics, British and Indian alike. Such perceptual transformations are congruent not only with the techno-material changes within photographic practice but also with transformations at the level of aesthetic forms. (Chaudhary 2012: 1)

In a related essay, 'Phantasmagoric Aesthetics: Colonial Violence and the Management of Perception' Chaudhary explores the work of Felice Beato in Lucknow after 1857 in which, he claims, a necro-politics (i.e., the skeletons of deceased Indian subjects were exhumed and arranged in front of bombarded ruins for photographic effect) was at work to create the requisite hype for the British victory in the 1857 Mutiny. Chaudhary is rightfully disgusted by the disposition on part of the British administration to concoct a triumphalist visual rhetoric through political uses of photographic evidence. Chaudhary's postcolonial imperative in perceiving photography as an apparatus of colonial control is obvious, and his outrage is understandable.

Drawing from Pinney's seminal work *Camera Indica*, Karlekar also stresses the imperial gaze of the years just before and after 1857. Like Chaudhury, she convincingly writes about the increasingly louder argument in the administrative-intellectual circles of British India about the imminent need to make the new-fangled discovery of photography a successful apparatus of control and governance. In the field of medical anthropology and criminology, photographic evidence, says Karlekar, had important import for the colonial state. Karlekar writes:

> As it moved into becoming a vital part of the colonial state's structures of surveillance and control, the camera was identified with veracity and truthful representation. This was clearly vital in a climate of growing distrust particularly after 1857, where the rulers felt that they had to embolden themselves with objective evidence and information about a people so different in race, temperament and inclinations. (Karlekar 2005: 39)

The use of photography to construct a new visual regime at the behest of the Empire is not immediately contestable. This is because there is critical consensus that the impetus of newfound 'realism' drew out photography's skewed anthropological importance more powerfully than anything else at

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the time. But this was by all means not the only picture, literally. Without underestimating the Empire's politics of manufacturing perception, one must also note that there was almost a two-decade gap between photography's arrival in India and its appropriation as part of the official apparatus of colonial management. To equate photography's arrival with its imperial uses would be, I argue, somewhat reductive. Moreover, Pinney, and especially Chaudhury and Karlekar, were looking at photographic material that was largely concerned with military symbolism, quarantined ethnicity, medical anthropology, and *carte-de-visite* portraiture. Much less attention has been paid to architectural and site-specific photography, particularly of more originary spaces like Calcutta, than to those of 'evidential' necessity.

This is not to claim that urban site-specific photography—of landscapes and monuments—was entirely innocent and hence benignly programmatic in their documentary intention. But it can well be argued that the colonial methods of whitewashing imperial design with photographic certitude, like the Lucknow of Beato or those of India's ethnic exotica, is much more immediately perceptible than, say, the idiomatic imagery of architectural sites. Such spaces, like Calcutta (and Bombay and Madras), involved a photographic practice that was without the impertinence of the *event.* Hence, the invisible design of photographing 'peacetime' architecture and urban spaces is pregnant with a much more complex interplay of vital possibilities than may always be accessible to the postcolonial critical apparatus. I would propose that considering all kinds of photography to be part of a grand colonial deportment—*which strengthens the postcolonial eye, but weakens a historiography of the visible*—risks foreclosure of at least four such possibilities, any or all of which could be at play in the constitution of colonial image-aesthetics in the first two decades after the unveiling of the daguerreotype in 1839. These four possibilities I denote as (a) technological ingenuity, (b) the 'being there' factor, (c) the metropolitan imaginary, and (d) commercial comportment.

To understand how new discoveries of photographic technology might have triggered a newer kind of visual imperative, it is important to look at a general history of photography. Ian Jeffrey (1981) argues that Frederick Scott Archer's wet collodion process, invented in 1851, inaugurated an age of 'instantaneous' photography, signalling a substantive improvement on the popular daguerreotype. One of the pioneers to make use of collodion was Dillwyn Llewelyn, whose Tenby photographs attracted significant attention in the *Exposition Universelle* in Paris in 1855. Jeffrey writes:

> These remarkable images of vapour and breaking waves survive. Yet even after many generations of instantaneous photography they still look

> unusual, largely because they allot such an inferior place to man. Dillwyn Llewelyn, intent on clouds and drifting steam, reduces human involvement to a minimum. Figures in the distance blend with the settings. The pictures, with their large open spaces, sea and sky, have distinctly fatalistic implications. (Jeffrey 1981: 33)

Exactly at the time Llewelyn was breaking new ground, one of the first images of Calcutta was being recorded from the heights of the Ochterlony. And the similarity of composition is unmistakable. Josiah Rowe's photographs show a distinct tendency to minimise human agency and instead capture the large vistas, open skies, and spatial alignments of the city's premier colonial settlements (the 'White Town'). And this was merely the beginning. That Rowe's ideation of the panorama is not accidental is attested by the fact that the Ochterlony served as a scopic vantage point repeatedly over the nextfew decades as more prominent photographic entourages arrived in the city, most notably the Frenchman Oscar Malitte and Englishman Samuel Bourne (see Figure 2.2 and 2.3). Further, during the Prince of Wales' tour of Calcutta in 1875 and in the first mapping of the city's topography done by Survey of India in the dying decades of the nineteenth century, Ochterlony continued to be used for the panoramic imaging of the city space below. This fact helps us to foreground a visual regime connected exclusively to the Ochterlony, to which the paper returns in the last section. But presently, one should note that, even if not for the entire repertoire, at least in the case of Rowe, Malitte, and Bourne, there was surely a technological imperative of eyeing the city from atop its heights. The fact that their work exists in Albumin prints attest to their familiarity with the collodion process—wet or dry—emboldened by which, like Llewelyn, they might have set out primarily to grasp in kaleidoscopic sweep the reach and scope of the photographic apparatus. As commercial photographers, it would only be natural for them to explore the depths of the imaging that collodion could produce.

Further in his discussion about the first generation of photographic practitioners, which also draws attention to my second proposed possibility, Jeffrey gives considerable space to Francis Frith. Frith set out to the 'east' a number of times—the earliest trip was to Egypt—to take photographs. What distinguished Frith from his immediate peers was that Frith's commentaries were less about the monuments and sights as eternal objects of contemplation, and more about the fact of his travelling as a witness to these remote places. Jeffrey writes:

> In Frith's photographs, the focuses become thresholds, opening into continuous spaces […] To some degree Frith photographed in this way in the late fifties because his medium allowed him to do so—the collodion process […] But it is also true that Frith worked with a new emphasis: above all he wanted to give the feel of things, to show just what it was like to be there, on those roads, among just those rocks. (Jeffrey 1981: 35)

Can we not underline a similar trajectory for Rowe, Mallitte, and Bourne? Or other early Indian photographers like Edward Sache, John Murray, Linnaeus Tripe, or Edmund Lyon? Calcutta may not have had the aura of a Cairo or Constantinople, but for many British and European citizens it embodied the Empire's most discernible achievements in the East. So it would not be erroneous to identify a sentiment similar to that of Frith at work here too, provoking among photographers the need *to be* in Calcutta and to be able to observe the new city from the vantage of its chief site of elevation. Also, many European photographers were travelling across Asia, strengthening the case for travelling photography that was focused on locations rather than pandering to structural surveillance on behalf of the Empire. In Calcutta, Oscar Mallitte was one such figure.

It should be noted that Frith is a special case as far as early Calcutta photography is concerned. There is no proof of that Francis Frithcame to India, but a large number of pictures of old Calcutta are incorrectly assigned to his name. This is because a group of photographers, of which Oscar Mallitte was the most prominent, had most likely sold their India collection to Frith's company in the late nineteenth century. It could be possible that having missed out on his India voyage, Frith quickly acquired a large collection and ascribed his name to them, to continue with his pronounced fascination to be at the scene himself. But many of these photos actually belong to the little-known Mallitte, who remains an intriguing figure in early photography in India.

Neither of these two possibilities—technology and locationality—entirely undermine a programmed politics of representation, but neither of them are the same as being at the beck and call of the Empire's controlling ministrations. The study of colonial photography should hence distance itself from exclusively referring to the photographs in terms like 'light and darkness', 'techno-materiality and perception', and 'surveillance and control'. Such photography also lends itself to a more visual vocabulary of looking and seeing, continuity and confrontation, engagement and enumeration, that reinforces a colonial scopic regime that is wider than the imperial lens.

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The third possibility is of a more complicated nature, whose import is much more historically nuanced than technological innovation or a travelling impetus. It concerns Calcutta's emergence as a visual motif, concomitant to its gaining of prominence as one of modernity's most effective metropolitan manifestations in the colonies. Somewhat like the European capitals of modernity—primarily Paris and London—but on a lower scale, Calcutta's burgeoning architectural and commercial flamboyance was unmistakable fodder for knowing, mapping, and recording, as much as for the photographic lens. In another context, the postcolonial scholar Neil Lazarus argues that the modernist scholarship that considers mid-nineteenth century metropolitan space as intrinsic to, not only a site of, modernity should extend naturally to other colonial cities. He writes:

> The radical transformation of the built space of the city, subject to creative destruction of capitalist development, in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, is not peculiar to London, Paris, Berlin, or New York. Strictly contemporary with developments in these cities—and linked precisely to them—*are analogous developments in St Petersburg, Calcutta, Buenos Aires, Shanghai, Istanbul and Cairo.* In the latter contexts, also, we can note the existence of crisis of representation—an attempt to register 'the shock of the new', as the forms of space consciousness and time consciousness demanded by life in urban contexts in which the commodity has become the dominant social form are counterpoised with inherited ways of seeing and knowing. (Lazarus 2011: 60; my italics)

In that sense, if early colonial photography of the city's spectacular new architecture were to establish a certain politics of visual determinism, it would nonetheless be true that that same politics could only be measured either against itself or against similar other metropolitan formations in Europe. Unlike Delhi, Cawnpur, or Lucknow, there was no template of urbanity that could be juxtaposed against the emerging, imperious control of the Empire. Since Calcutta's architectural and spatial landmarks were mounted on an imaginary, blank slate of memory (i.e., there was no identifiable inheritance and hence no violation of that memory), there is no way to understand the degree of colonial control of the visual space unless the objects in the picture refer back to themselves. To that end, my understanding is that the new possibility of early colonial photography in Calcutta cannot be said to have served the Empire's interests in any obvious way. If at all, it only sought to create a flattering portrait of a grand city-in-the-making, to the point of almost mimicking the emergence of the modern metropolis in Europe.

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The final possibility is factual. Many of the early photographers, as per the records and minutes of photographic societies—especially in Calcutta and Bombay—were primarily amateur photographers looking to establish businesses around the new invention, smelling great commercial opportunities. Most of them went on to set up shop in Calcutta with a dedicated customer base not only of the British elite, but also of a growing number of Westernised Indians. The most famous among these studios were Bourne and Shepherd (which shut down as late as 2016) and Johnston and Hoffman, but advertisements in *The Statesman*, the premier English-language daily newspaper, reveal, at least from 1875 onwards several establishments in and around the Chowringhee: Harrington and Norman, W. Newman and Co, John Blees, Stanley Oakes and Co, J. Murray and Co, F. Kapp and Co, Kodak, Bengal Photographers, Bathgate and Co, photo artists Captain Stretton and Raymond, and the pioneering Anglo-American Bioscope Company Pathé, which had its Indian headquarters in Bombay and dedicated agents in Calcutta's Great Eastern Company (1992). These establishments advertised a range of photographic services from outdoor photography to portraiture, and sold everything from camera and films to early cinema paraphernalia like animatographs and oxyliths. It would be not wrong to assume that a robust commercial culture in and around Calcutta's business districts grew out of photography's unique appeal, both personal and public, which expanded the cultural sphere around photography both as a recording tool and as a symbol of modernity. Either way, photography's popularity undercuts scholarly claims of the exclusive use of photography for colonial control.

2.3 Architectural Imperium as Colonial Memory

Having discussed the Ochterlony's significant claim as an architectural vantage point and the possibilities that could have informed the earliest extant photographic specimens in which it appears, we should turn to an ontological reading of the various likenesses of the object of enquiry. A materialist/historicist enquiry would doubtlessly look more closely at the conditions of the production of the images and the life of the imagists. But we should look at the images only as they exist, with less emphasis on the photographing subject or the photographic apparatus. This is partly to invoke a visual narrative of the Ochterlony's symptomatic dominance of the scene of enquiry, as well as to connect it ontologically to the city's founding—even if contested—claim as a site of colonial modernity. In other words, it would be helpful to compare photographs of the *same object*

Figure 2.1 Uncoloured lithograph of a panorama of Calcutta drawn after nature by Frederick Fiebig and printed by T. Black of Asiatic Lithographic Press in Calcutta in 1847

Courtesy of the India Office Library Collection, British Library, London, United Kingdom

Figure 2.2 Photograph from Samuel Bourne's seven-part series of the panoramic view of Calcutta from Ochterlony Monument, taken in the 1860s

Courtesy of the India Office Library Collection, British Library, London, United Kingdom

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Figure 2.3 Photograph by Oscar Malitte, dating to the 1870s, from an album entitled *Photographs of India and Overland Route*

Courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum, London, United Kingdom, from the collection acquired from F. Frith and Company

over time—partially invoking the idea of Barthes's 'community of images' (1982)—to interrogate whether they reveal Benjamin's idea of the 'optical unconscious' (2008a/1935). This idea is explored further in Benjamin's essay 'A Little History of Photography'(2008b/1931), where he claims that photographic object(s) that remain hidden to the unaided eye manage to phantasmagorise those same object(s) through recurrent fetishism. In other words, through repeated reproduction, photography ends up sequestering the object from the conditions of their actual existence, thereby inducing them with a sense of sacred or giving them a halo.

Let us turn to Figure 2.1 to 2.3, all of which display how the Ochterlony helped to *reproduce* the central governing district of the city. The photographs attest to the recurrent theme of using the Ochterlony as a vantage point from which to look at the burgeoning city from above. One could gain substantial height on reaching the top of the Ochterlony, and the panoramic view reinforces the sensation of lording over the scenery. All three images show the large expanse of the habitation on the upscale Chowringhee Road as it was taking shape in the mid-nineteenth century, when Calcutta's gains

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in commerce, art, and education were considerably higher than most other colonial cities. As clear as the sky that frames them, the photographs extol the spectacular spatial magnificence of the colonial metropolis emerging from what were originally large swathes of swamp on the eastern bank of the Hugli.

Figure 2.1, dated about 1847, shows a lithograph by Frederick Fiebig, whose salt prints are possibly the earliest existing photographs of Calcutta. He had done a substantial amount of lithographic work when based out of the city in the 1840s, before turning to calotype photography towards the end of that decade. Quite a few of his handprinted salt prints survive, but here we see an uncoloured lithograph of Calcutta's panorama that was 'drawn after nature' by Fiebig. This collection of lithographs was printed and published in 1847 by one T. Black, who owned the Asiatic Lithographic Press in Calcutta. It is of significance that the vantage point of *seeing* in this lithograph is almost exactly the same as Rowe's photographs taken in or about the mid-1850s. There is but one crucial difference: Fiebig's lithograph seems to be indicating that the river Hugli flowed behind the Governor's House, which would be toward the city's east, distorting the real movement of the river that flows north to south, with the House lying at some distance from its nearest point—a distance that Rowe's picture makes clear. It is most likely that Fiebig takes adequate liberty, not too unusual for a lithographer, to bring both the Governor's House and the river within the same scopic field while continuing to claim the image was 'drawn after nature'. Suffice it to say that, starting with Rowe, the amateur photographers also started to look for a similar kaleidoscope, albeit emboldened by the camera's realist prospect. Rowe's images show the expanse of the Maidan from the Ochterlony stretched—as it was—to the river on the horizon. Primarily a surveyor, Rowe was appointed a professor of drawing and surveying at Presidency College, Calcutta in 1856. A bit is known about him from John Falconer's *A Biographical Dictionary of Nineteenth Century Photographers in South and Southeast Asia*, which is an appendix to his seminal work on India's pioneering photographers (Falconer 2001: 140). At the same time, Rowe had exhibited five collotype views of different parts of Calcutta at the Photographic Society of Madras that were deemed to be 'clearly focused, well printed and of a good tone', as per the *Indian Journal of Art, Science and Manufacture* (1856, 2nd series, 1(4): 175)—although, ironic as it may seem, the journal also criticised Rowe for placing his horizon too high, arguing that 'the lines of perspective in consequence too sudden and angular in the foreground to be pleasing'. However, his five collodion views of Calcutta and 25 daguerreotypes (including a five-part panorama of the city) displayed

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at the Photographic Society of Bengal Exhibition of March 1857 received great acclaim. The Society meeting of 21 January 1857, cited in the *Journal of the Photographic Society of Bengal* (no. 3, 20 May 1857) commented: 'some daguerreotypes by Mr. Rowe, comprising a panoramic view from the top of the Ochterlony Monument. Nothing but a strong magnifying glass could do justice to the minute accuracy and beauty of these pictures'.

In Figure 2.2, Samuel Bourne virtually repeats the gaze of Rowe, except that Bourne highlights the Governor's House with unfailing acuity. This picture, taken in the late 1860s, exhibits unusual clarity, highlighting not just Bourne's image-sense but also his command over the dry-collodion process, which Rowe, a dedicated practitioner of the daguerreotype, lacked. Oscar Mallitte's lens in Figure 2.3 captures the belfry of what was then India's Supreme Court (and has since the shift of capital in 1911, become the High Court). The court is at a distance, visible in its Ypressian glory, which dates the picture to 1872 or after. Malitte was a French photographer working in Calcutta in the 1860s who taught photography at the School of Industrial Art. He is said to have sold most of his collection to Francis Frith's company in England; his photographs are available in several archives under the title *Photographs of India & Overland Route.* Samuel Bourne's life as a pioneering commercial photographer is well documented. The son of a Staffordshire farmer, Bourne bloomed early under the tutelage of the distinguished daguerreotypist Richard Beard. Having found fame in England as a landscape photographer, he came to Calcutta, looking for money and fame, in 1863. He was, by most accounts, full of conceit for his origins and bullying towards the natives but had a 'lunatic persistence in pursuit of his hazardous expeditions. Getty Images curator Sarah Macdonald (2005) and Xavier Guégan (2011) testifies to the same. He found Calcutta already flourishing with photographic business. He left for Kashmir and the Himalayas and came back only when his partnership with Colin Shepherd matured in 1867 as the studio 'Bourne and Shepherd'.[4]

It cannot be denied that the Monument makes it possible for the first time to view the city as an organic, spatial entity, if not in full at least in a substantial measure. Undeniably, within two decades of its completion this

4 'Drawn from Light: Early Photography and the Indian Subcontinent', IGNCA New Delhi, August 2014; 'An Eye on Empire: Photographs of Colonial India and Egypt', University of Michigan Museum of Art, 2014; 'The Colonial Eye: Early Portrait Photography in India', Berlin, Museum für Fotografie, 2012; 'Through the Colonial Lens: Photographs of 19th and 20th Century India', Pacific Asia Museum California, 2011; 'Traces of India: Photography, Architecture, and the Politics of Representation 1850-1900', Fowler Museum, UCLA, California, 2004; *India Through the Lens: Photography 1840-1911*, Dehejia, V. (ed.). Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2000.

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memorial to a special British military officer had come to serve a completely different purpose, as the panoptical apparatus through which the city could be semi-aerially considered for the first time. Calcutta one of Empire's most protracted metropolitan enterprises after London was now available in full view, under the overarching, omnipresent gaze of the photographic eye.

In a brief essay on panoramic photography in colonial Singapore, Jason Toh has highlighted the technical virtuosity that was needed to get the full benefit of the photographic device. According to Toh, panoramic photography was an arduous, technically meticulous process since each glass plate had to be prepared, exposed, and developed individually and even exposures had to be achieved to ensure a consistency of tone and definition. Such technical virtuosity was not possible without the dry-collodion method available since the mid-1850s, as the wet-collodion method necessitated the development of the glass negative on the spot after making the exposure (Toh 2008: 26).

Toh further discusses the privileged position that the commercial colonial photographer offers the viewer, providing unprecedented access to the gradual emergence of the colonial city of Singapore. Images 2.1 to 2.3 attest to almost the same conditions, to the extent that even the colonial governor's residence, seen here as central to the scope of the image, is replicated in the Singapore pictures too. Toh stresses the fact that panoramic photographs were popular across the colonial world because they made excellent commercial sense. The penchant for panoramic vistas go back well into the history of the British East India Company's painters and, in that sense, the new panoramic photography provides a continuity with older methods of envisioning the burgeoning city's magisterial edifices. On the other hand, photography arrived across the world with the completely unique claim of embodying properties that could provide unmistakable fidelity to nature, and hence evidence of documentation. In between this continuity and contestation lies the real nature of the genre of panorama.

On closer inspection, Rowe's and Malitte's photographs are also connected by the lonely equestrian statue of Henry Hardinge, Governor General of India from 1841 to 1848. With the advantage of its height, the Ochterlony Monument seems able to dwarf a leading colonial figure's imperial posture into near insignificance. Symbolically, the photographs generously embrace the city's open and large spaces and reduce the agency of its human architects to a bare minimum. Compared with earlier photographs, it is also interesting how new buildings have emerged at the background of the more recent photographs—homes of the colonial elite, department stores, missionary offices, and the institutions of education and instruction that still dot much

of Chowringhee Road. The optical measure of these photographs can be compared to aerial photography and the imagination of control that is intrinsic to such a spatial organisation of vision. On the other hand, the dwarfing of the Hardinge statue and the emergence of a series of buildings can also be read as a symptom of the coming of age of a metropolis—from a colonial outpost with specific outlets to service the commercial hunger of The East India Company,to a city on the full flight of modernity. It is the moment of Calcutta's coming into a full consciousness of its spatial deportment, a consciousness that is projected onto the viewer from the heights of the Ochterlony. Hence these pictures mark the historic moment when the city came to look at itself, through photography.

There are further theoretical issues that we need to consider.In her book *The View from Above: The Science of Social Space*, Jeanne Haffner (2013) discusses the new science of social space that gained currency in interwar France. Haffner writes:

> To illuminate the role of aerial photography—*a novel twentieth century technique of observation and representation* that was closely associated with the French colonial state and military—in the emergence of this new way of conceptualising socio-spatial relations. For (Marcel) Griaule, or for his student the ethnographer and urban sociologist Paul Henry Chombart de Lauwe [the main figure of this book], the view from the airplane was crucial for connecting the 'social' with the 'spatial'. Yet just a few decades later, proponents of the 'social space' concept—not least Henri Lefebvre—expressed much suspicion of the aerial perspective, calling it the 'space of state control'. (Haffner 2013: 3; my italics)

Haffner's main contention is that photography may be used to dictate social control through spatial control, but the *gaze* of aerial photography emerged long before that gaze could be understood as captive. A similar retroactive tendency helps us locate the essentialist streak in the kind of photographic critique that sees colonial aesthetics to be in service of a postcolonial reading of history that, to recall Pinney's observations, 'we already know'. According to this postcolonial reading, the ideology of the image as available to us is transferred back to the photographer, and thereby confirms its status as subservient to the wanton ministrations of the Empire. If we read the images outside of this imperative, as I have tried to do above, we can get dramatically different results.

My reading of the images further taps into what Rancière calls *studium.* In *The Future of the Image*, Rancière offers a critique of Barthes' main

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contentions in *Camera Lucida* (1982), which Rancière argues celebrates images for their *punctum*. Rancière takes the opportunity to develop the idea and put his weight behind the contrarian idea of the *studium*. He writes:

> [Barthes] wants to establish a direct relationship between the indexical nature of the photographic image and the material way it affects us: the *punctum*, the immediate pathetic effect that he contrasts with the *studium*, or the information transmitted by the photograph and the meanings it receives. The *studium* makes the photograph a material to be decoded and explained. (Rancière 2010: 10)

Further, Rancière insists that the photographic image confronts the *mythologist* in Barthes, but Barthes refuses to acknowledge it:

> What you are taking for visible selfevidence is in fact an encoded message whereby society or authority legitimates itself by naturalising itself, by rooting itself in the obviousness of the visible. Barthes bends his stick in the other direction by valorising, under the title of *punctum*, the utter selfevidence of the photograph, consigning the decoding messages to the platitude of the *studium*. (Rancière 2010: 10-11)

Unimpressed, Rancière wants to side with the *studium*. '[*Studium*] tells us that the image speaks to us precisely when it is silent, when it no longer transmits any message to us [... when it is] the abolition of all chatter' (Rancière 2010: 11). From this discussion, it can well be understood that the way colonial production of photography has been read foregrounds its immediate results, the *punctum*. But once we read the image by foregrounding the *studium*, the pictorial articulation of space continues to hold forth long after the Monument's relationship with its surroundings has changed. This is also the moment when the photographs given above graduate from being just recorded objects in the service of a greater imperial design into objects that solicit a language of their own, what Rancière calls 'the discourse encoding a history'. To that end, then, the veracity of the photograph's claims, whether justified or suspect, is not concurrent with its relationship with the governing order that was contemporary to its actual date of production. In other words, the Monument's relationship with the surrounding buildings, especially the Governor's House and Supreme Court, remains unchanged even when seen from the silence of the future, and is therefore always pregnant with a continuity that can be denied to an image that too readily lends itself to the probes of historicity of its production.

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2.4 The post-colonial Ochterlony

It is this sense of continuity that informs my reading of more recent—*post*colonial—representations of the Ochterlony. From the theoretical understanding of visuality, I argue that as the city developed well beyond the Ochterlony's panoramic gaze it was necessary for a more intimate aesthetics to evolve. The importance of the Ochterlony as a vantage point did not continue much beyond the early 1900s, not only because the romance of its elevation died down, but also because of the emergence of other, more fraught sites that embodied newer visual imaginations of the city. This could well parallel the narrative in Europe where, at least in topographic photography, the *flâneur* eye replaced panoptical sight in the late nineteenth century. Michel de Certeau's (1984) and George Simmel's (1950 [1903]) now-classic works on the metropolis stand at the cusp of this change. Such a narrative is usually denied to a city like Calcutta, not least because modernity and *post*-coloniality have come to be seen as complex modes of simultaneous—and discontinuous—habitation—a discontinuity that does not readily apply to the European cities. However, this discontinuity is far from total and irreconcilable. On the contrary, an image-aesthetic travelled well into the *post*-colonial period, even when a form of aggressive *decolonisation* often led to the purging of the colonial memory and symbolism of monuments. This is similar to Ashish Chadha's argument in an essay on the politics of heritage formation in the context of a colonial cemetery in Calcutta. Chadha writes:

> [In this paper] I argue that postcolonial ambivalence is to be found in the invisible hyphen between the post and colonial of the *postcolonial*. These monuments of colonial memories are signs of temporal ruptures, which disturb the dichotomy of the colonial and the postcolonial and reveal the discomfort of postcolonial ideology in dealing with its colonial past, a past, which spills over into its present. (Chadha 2006: 341)

The colonial Ochterlony, like the cemetery, can be similarly said to be infused with the possibility of both containment and remembrance, eventually reflecting each in the representations that it lends itself to. Given the proliferation of photography by the mid twentieth century, as signalled by the maturation of the newspaper industry, photojournalism, various amateur practices, and improvements in technology, one runs the risk of generalising what could be specific set of illustrations. For this reason, it would be helpful to remember that the next set of pictures has been chosen

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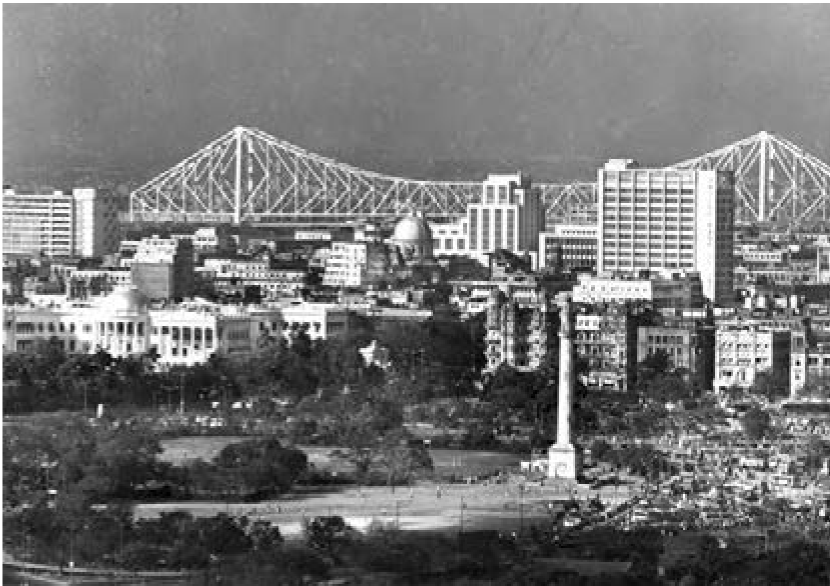
Figure 2.4 A congregation of people near the Monument on a monsoon day

Source: Google Archives of Life Magazine, 1951, Commons

Figure 2.5 Photograph taken by Ahmed Ali titled 'The Business Centre of Calcutta, 1960'



Courtesy of Hiteshranjan Sanyal Memorial Archive, CSSS, Calcutta, India

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Figure 2.6 A rally near the Monument in 1970

From the personal collection of photojournalist Aloke Mitra

for this paper symptomatically, but not metonymically. They provide clues to a visual regime, but do not necessarily represent generic undertakings in photography.

These four images of the *postcolonial* Ochterlony—each representing a different decade and photographic practice—show the Ochterlony in various figurative functions: spatial (Figure 2.4), topographical (Figure 2.5), congressional (Figure 2.6), and occupational (Figure 2.7).

Figure 2.7 A balancing game-show in progress near the Ochterlony; photograph by Santanu Mitra, dated 19 September 1981, from the series Occupations

Courtesy of Chitrabani, Calcutta and Hiteshranjan Sanyal Memorial Archive, CSSS, Calcutta, India

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Figure 2.4, which is dated 1951 and taken from *Life Magazine*, shows the Ochterlony on the right, overshadowed by the cloud and Whiteway, Laidlaw & Co.'s by-then-defunct luxury store in the distance. The two colonial era buildings and the Morris Minor taxis add a sense of obvious incongruity to the mass of people in between, scurrying under their umbrellas on a monsoon afternoon. This is an archetypal street-level view of the Maidan area in which the colonial-era buildings are deliberately poised as distanced and forlorn, as if to stress the city's *post*-colonial present. But it is those very buildings that deny any easy passage of time within the image. This is similar to the tensions inherent in Figure 2.5, dated 1960, where we see an assortment of buildings jostling for spatial prominence in the downtown areas of Chowringhree East and Dalhousie. In this picture by professional photographer Ahmed Ali, what catches the eye is of course the Howrah Bridge rising prominently above the skyline, unequivocally subverting the Monument's spatial claim to the city. In isolation, the diminutive Monument stands like a captive moment from the colonial past. The summit of the Monument, once preferred in the visual articulation of the colonial period, is now part of the figuration of a new visual vantage, to whose expansive gaze the once-mighty Monument is held captive. The panoramic imperative is obvious in the image and hence establishes a sense of continuity with the older images, while unmistakably highlighting the spatial relationship between the Governor's House and the Monument. Figure 2.6, taken *c.*1970, is crucial because it is equally symptomatic of the Monument's presence. This image was chosen carefully to highlight the Monument standing against the scene of a dispersing crowd after a political rally. It is important to note here that in August 1969, on the 22nd year of India's arrival into the *post*-colonial period, the Monument was renamed by the local government as the Shahid Minar—Martyr's Tower—an insistence that a dogged vernacular re-naming be forcefully imposed on erstwhile colonial monuments. Previously a Monument to the triumph of British colonial conquest, it was now to be *remembered* as a monument to the deceased martyrs of India's colonial struggle. While the Monument was being renamed, the political dispensation—consisting of various subgroups with belligerent ideological formations—were staking claim to governance. Bengal, as a constituent state of the independent Indian republic, was on the verge of a political collapse, having seen three elected governments dismissed in the short, turbulent period between 1967 and 1972. This picture attests to one of the many rallies that were convened during those days of unflinching turmoil. While this context is important to understand the full force of the photograph, its visual impact remains undiminished even when

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Figure 2.8 Publicity material announcing a rally, issued by the Communist Party of India (Marxist)

divorced from its newsworthiness. Spatially, the photograph attests to a congressional scenario in which the silhouetted Monument stands distanced from the overpopulated, hyper-occupied space around it. Contrary to Ahmed Ali's continuity, photojournalist Aloke Mitra's photograph establishes an immediately identifiable contrast with the colonial images of depopulated urban scenery. Moreover, with the people's backs to the Monument the towering memorial is reduced to being merely incidental to the scene, while also being the exclusive marker of this metropolitan space. The last photograph, Figure 2.7, brings us close to the present, when the site around the Monument has settled into a practiced insouciance. By the 1980s, when this photograph was taken, the Monument had become a visitor's touchpoint: a slapdash, touristy tedium. The picture shows a crowd in the background watching *Madarir Khela*—a kind of amateur, balancing-act version of trapeze. The crowd with its back to the imposing structure carries the full meaning of temporary habitation around the Ochterlony. Most of the crowd and performers here are daily visitors to the city, daily wage-labourers, whose relation to the city is merely transactional. The image transfers their unawareness of the Monument's immanent meaning into the imminence of the pleasure that they seek in transitory entertainment.

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Figure 2.9 Publicity poster for noted Bengali filmmaker Ritwik Ghatak's film *Bari Theke Paliye* (The Runaway Boy, 1958). The artwork is by theatre designer, painter, and illustrator Khaled Choudhury

Before concluding, I want to touch upon a final set of images that are not photographs, but make deft use of images of the Monument.

The image depicted in Figure 2.8 is an announcement for a rally of the leftist political parties at the Monument; Figure 2.9 is a publicity poster for the film *Bari Theke Paliye* (The Runaway Boy, 1958). Made by the noted Bengali auteur Ritwik Ghatak, the poster is a wonderfully cheeky illustration of a young boy's day out in the city: a jumble of objects and buildings dominated by the rotund form of the Ochterlony on the front left beside the traffic guard. In both of these images, the Monument is extrinsic to the declaration that occasions it pictorialised for the purpose of very different significations. During its days of political mobilisation and then as a governing order, the Leftist political conglomeration in Bengal claimed ownership of the site around the Monument. For it, the renamed Monument carries the right kind of spatial ethic to commemorate their long days as the oppositional political force in the 1960s and 1970s. The film poster, on the other hand, makes use of the Monument's easy identifiability with the city. Here the Ochterlony stands not as metonymy for the city, but for its easy familiarity and sense of mobility. In that sense, if the first stands for a call to symbolic political action, the other is a plea for popular approval. At one level, both the images tap into mass recollection of the site. Both images are in a headlong rush

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to retrieve the Monument from cultural memory to moderate their own authority. In doing so, they convert the sight of the monument, decoupled from its actual site, into a mobile sign.

2.5 Conclusion

In their co-authored introduction to the section titled 'The Imperial Optic' in *Empires of Vision*, Martin Jay and Sumati Ramaswamy (2014) highlight two interrelated concepts as critical to the understanding of colonial photography: interocularity, originally proposed by Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge as a constituent element of the cultural field; and intervisuality, as proposed by Nicolas Virzoeff. Interocularity takes note of how the different forms of media—from photography to theatre, from advertisement to chromolithography and film—were all working together and cross-referencing each other in the late colonial period. Intervisuality refers to 'interacting and interdependent modes of visuality' that make it possible for each visual illustration—from the odd postcard to grand paintings—to erupt with the possibility of something produced prior to it. In the imperial context, these two ideas are particularly useful, they write, in 'tracking how incoming "colonial" practices ally with or disrupt more established ones, trigger prior associations, catalyse submerged memories, render the unfamiliar recognisable and frequently reconfigure the recognisable' (Jay and Ramaswamy 2014: 29). My chief contention in this paper is to achieve something similar not only in the context of the colonial but *also* in the *post*-colonial. I have tried to challenge the existing critical reception of colonial photography, especially in the context of Calcutta, by juxtaposing a series of images that open a number of possibilities in the theoretical conceptualisation of visuality—as both a historical and an aesthetic practice—both as an inter-ocular object and an intervisual symptom. Photographic representations of the Ochterlony—itself a memorial of containment (to refer back to Greenblatt's 1996 essay)—are constant registers of the uncontainability of the city, first as a colonial metropolis exploring a compressed sense of progress and time, and then as a *post*-colonial conglomeration subject to wanton reorganisation of space, causing it to inhabit a permanent sense of ambiguity. To register this shift, as I have tried to do in the paper, one can look not just into the new regime ushered in by Calcutta's early photography, but also how that regime administered a compressed sense of time through the reorganisation of its public image into a charged photographic order. In the confrontation of that order—which encountered the colonial at the

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precise moment that it accosted the modern—lies the affect of colonial spectrality, the legitimate registry of the *site de mémoire.*

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