Kajri Jain

GODS IN THE
TIME OF DEMOCRACY

GODS IN THE TIME OF DEMOCRACY

BUY

GODS
in the
TIME
of
DEMOCRACY

Kajri Jain

Illustrations by Prasad Khanolkar

Cover art: Kashinath, 65-ft. seated Shiva at Kids Kemp department
store, also known as Kemp Fort, Old Airport Road, Bengaluru,
inaugurated in 1995. Photograph by Kajri Jain, 2007.

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Contents

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One of the most difficult and the most joyful things about what academics do is the inextricability of work and pleasure, the professional and the personal. If so far my scales have consistently tipped on the joyful side, surely it is because for me this has been a family business from the start: my anthropologist parents, Shobhita and Ravindra Jain, showed me how it was done. They have been constant interlocutors, exemplars, and supports. They encouraged

me to make the visit in my opening anecdote, with which this project began, and came along, too. In this and many other ways, my work is theirs. Another deep well of well-being, similarly both intellectual and otherwise, has been the fictive extended family in Toronto into which my daughter and I have been so happily enfolded. Alok, Aparna, Radhika, Shubhra, and Terry, I cannot thank you enough for your unhesitating, unconditional, abundant care for both of us over all these years. Amitav, Ilan, Rishabh, Rosa, and Sumana, it is such a delight to watch you lovely beings grow.

And then, of course, there is the dear bright sun around which my life has revolved throughout the writing of this book, keeping me warm, laughing, and vital, steadying my orbit, making it all worthwhile. This book is for Ira.

STATUE OF LIBERTY

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600 **1000** **1500** **1900** **1950** **1960** **1970** **1980** **1990** **1995**

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2000 **2005**

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2010 **2012**

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2014 **2016** **2018**

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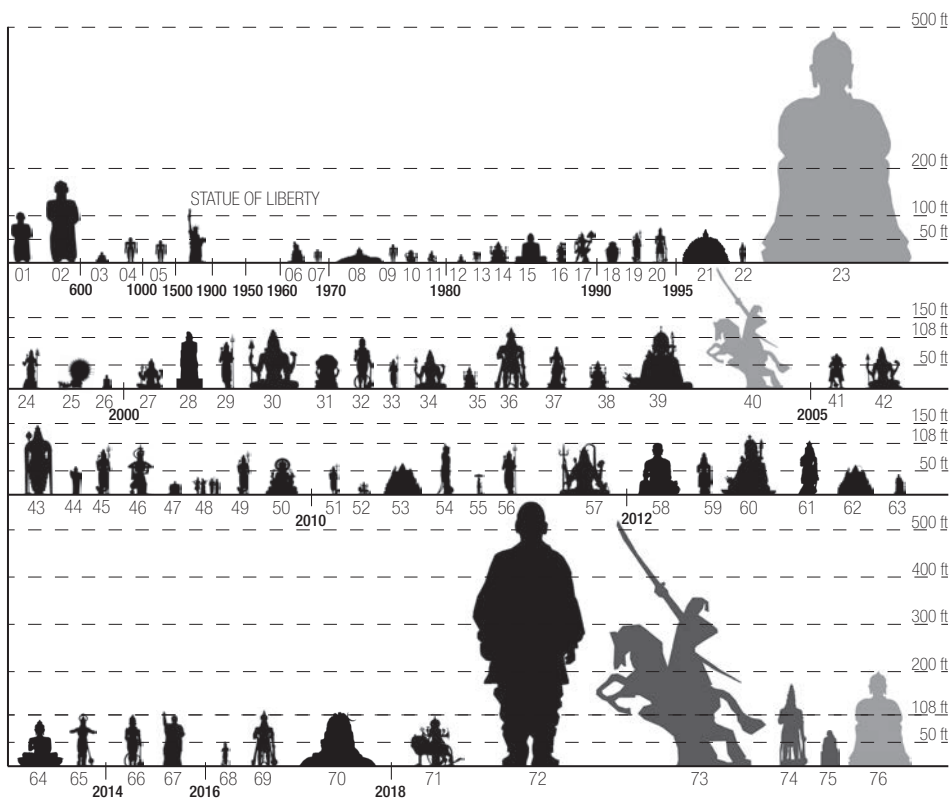
FIGURE FM.1   Time line of statues mentioned in the book (not exhaustive; scales are approximate). As of 2018, statues in lightest gray were proposed; those in medium gray were in progress. See Table FM.1 for key to time line and map of statues.

TORONTO, CANADA 68
37
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71
BATU CAVES, MALAYSIA
CARAPICHAIMA, TRINDAD
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CHATSWORTH, SOUTH AFRICA
GANGA TALAO, MAURITIUS

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KABUL
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ISLAMABAD
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SIDHBARI 23
32 SHIMLA 33 BADRINATH
LAHORE 19 HRISHIKESH
46 48 16 HARIDWAR
DELHI 76
72 12 24 56
49 51 NOIDA 57 64 39
13 53 GURUGRAM 65
PILANI 47 KATHMANDU NAMCHI SOLOPHOK
JAIPUR LUCKNOW KOHIMA
06 KUSHINAGAR SHILLONG
KARACHI 62 34 15 63 DHAKA
27 SAGAR 75 PATNA 22
DWARKA 29 BHOPAL 66 JABALPUR 26 KOLKATA
VADODARA BODH GAYA
NARMADA DAM 20
61 ROURKELA
50 58 69 BHUBANESHWAR
MUMBAI 44 74 36 PURI
07 42
31 HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA
30 67
05 56 17 CHENNAI
10 59 35
MURUDESHWAR 09 41
40 04 38 21 14 25 19 BANGALORE
MYSORE COIMBATORE
73 KOCHI 70 RAMESHWARAM
28 08
COLOMBO

● Char Dham shrines

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FIGURE FM.2 (*facing page*)   Map of
statues as of 2018 (not exhaustive;
scales and locations are approximate).
See Table FM.1 for key to time line and
map of statues.

TABLE FM.1   Key to time line and map of statues (FM.1, FM.2).

	DATE	NAME	CITY/STATE/ COUNTRY	SCULPTOR	HEIGHT (FEET)	MATERIAL	PATRON
1	ca. 507	Buddha (standing)	Bamiyan Valley, Afghanistan		115	Sedimentary rock	
2	ca. 554	Buddha (standing)	Bamiyan Valley, Afghanistan		174	Sedimentary rock	
3	ca. 700	Buddha (seated)	Swat Valley, Pakistan		22	Granite	
4	ca. 938/981	Bahubali/ Gommateshwara (standing monolith)	Shravanabelagola, Karnataka		57	Granite	Chavundaraya
5	1432	Bahubali/ Gommateshwara	Karkala, Karnataka		42	Granite	Veera Pandya
6	1962	Chambal Devi	Gandhi Sagar Dam, Madhya Pradesh	Ram Sutar	45		Government of India
7	1963	Bahubali	Kumbhoj, Maharashtra		28	Marble	
8	1970	Vivekananda (standing)	Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu	Narayanrao Sonawadekar	12	Bronze	Vivekananda Rock Memorial Trust
9	1975	Bahubali/ Gommateshwara (standing monolith)	Dharmasthala, Karnataka	Renjala Gopalakrishna Shenoy	39	Granite	Veerendra Heggade (temple trustee)

	DATE	NAME	CITY/STATE/COUNTRY	SCULPTOR	HEIGHT (FEET)	MATERIAL	PATRON
10	1979	Ganesha (for festival)	Shimoga, Karnataka	Kashinath	29	Clay	
11	1980	Hanuman (kneeling)	Sidhbhari, Himachal Pradesh	Kashinath	25	Concrete	Chinmaya Mission
12	1985	Mahavir (seated)	Mehrauli-Gurgaon Road, Delhi	Shamaraya Acharya	13.5	Granite	P. C. Jain (watches)
13	1987	Hanuman (standing)	Panchavati Park, Pilani, Rajasthan	Matu Ram Varma	21	Concrete	L. N. Birla (businessman)
14	1989	Ganesha (seated)	Kolar, Karnataka	Kashinath	45	Concrete	Chinmaya Mission
15	1989	Buddha (seated)	Bodhgaya, Bihar	V. Ganapati Sthapati	64	Chunar sandstone	Daijokyo, Japan
16	1990	Hanuman	Basant Gaon, New Delhi		45	Granite	Prabhudutt Brahmachari
17	1990	Hanuman	Puttaparthi		70	Concrete	Sathya Sai Baba
18	1992	Krishna	Vishwa Shanti Ashram, Bangalore-Tumkur Rd, Karnataka	Kashinath	45	Concrete	Sadguru Sant Keshavadas, Temple of Cosmic Religion
19	1994	Shiva (standing) "Mangal Mahadev"	Birla Kanan, New Delhi	Matu Ram Varma	85	Concrete	B. K. Birla (businessman)
20	1994	Hanuman (standing)	Rourkela, Orissa	Laxman Swamy	75	Concrete	Jai Hanuman Trust
21	1995	Shiva (seated)	Kemp Fort, Bangalore	Kashinath	65	Concrete	Ravi Melwani (department stores)
22	1995	Krishna (standing) "Mangal Madhav"	Calcutta	M. Muthia Sthapati	45	Granite	B. K. Birla

	DATE	NAME	CITY/STATE/ COUNTRY	SCULPTOR	HEIGHT (FEET)	MATERIAL	PATRON
23	(1997)	Maitreya (proposed)	Kushinagar, Uttar Pradesh		(500)	Concrete	Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition
24	1998	Shiva (standing)	Film City, Noida, Uttar Pradesh	Matu Ram Varma		Concrete	Gulshan Kumar, T-Series
25	1999	Surya (standing)	Eagleton Golf Resort, near Bangalore	Sridhar	65	Concrete	M. Ashok Kumar, Sri Chamundesh-wari Developers
26	1999	Maitreya	Bodhgaya, Bihar		24		Lama Zopa Rinpoche
27	2000	Shiva (sitting)	Nageshwar temple, Dwarka, Gujarat	Kashinath	65	Concrete	Gulshan Kumar
28	2000	Thiruvalluvar (standing)	Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu	V. Ganapati Sthapati	133	Granite	Govt. of Tamil Nadu (M. Karu-nanidhi, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam)
29	2002	Shiva (standing) "Sarveswhar Mahadev"	Sursagar Lake, Vadodara, Gujarat	Matu Ram Varma	111	Concrete	Yogesh Patel (Bharatiya Janata Party)
30	2002	Shiva (seated)	Murudeshwar, Karnataka	Kashinath	123	Concrete	R. N. Shetty (builder, businessman)
31	2002	Ganesha (seated)	Kolhapur, Maharashtra	Kashinath	75	Concrete	Chinmaya Mission
32	2002	Hanuman (standing)	Chattarpur, New Delhi	Matu Ram Varma	101	Concrete	Anonymous (for Baba Sant Nagpal)
33	2003	Shiva (standing)	Haridwar, Uttarakhand	Kashinath and Sridhar	75	Concrete	Gulshan Kumar
34	2003	Shiva (seated)	Kachnar City, Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh	Sridhar	81	Concrete	Arun Tiwari (builder, Kachnar City)

	DATE	NAME	CITY/STATE/COUNTRY	SCULPTOR	HEIGHT (FEET)	MATERIAL	PATRON
35	2003	Ganesha (seated)	Kanakapura Road, Bangalore	Sridhar	45	Concrete	Vishranthi Dhama Health Club and Spa
36	2003	Hanuman (standing)	Paritala, near Vijaywada, Andhra Pradesh		135	Concrete	Paritala Anjaneya Temple
37	2003	Hanuman (standing)	Carapichaima, Trindad	Thangam Subramanian	85	Concrete	Avadhoota Datta Peetham
38	2003	Ganesha (seated)	Bangalore	Sridhar	32		
39	2004	Guru Rimpoche/ Padmasambhava (seated)	Namchi, Sikkim	Naresh Kumar Varma (initial design)	135	Concrete	Government of Sikkim (Pawan Chamling, Sikkim Democratic Front)
40	(2004)	Shivaji (proposed)	Mumbai, Maharashtra	Ram Sutar	(309)		Government of Maharashtra (Congress Party)
41	2005	Hanuman (standing)	Tumkur, Karnataka	Kashinath and Sridhar	75	Concrete	Kote Anjaneya Swamy temple
42	2006	Shiva (seated)	Bijapur, Karnataka	Sridhar (initial design)	70	Concrete	Basant Kumar Patil (Kannada film producer)
43	2006	Murugan (standing)	Batu Caves, Malaysia		140		Sri Subramaniar temple
44	1992–2006	Buddha (standing)	Hussain Sagar Lake, Hyderabad	S. M. Ganapathi Sthapati	58	Granite	Government of Andhra Pradesh (N. T. Rama Rao, Telugu Desam)
45	2007	Shiva (standing)	Ganga Talao, Mauritius	Naresh Kumar Varma	108	Concrete	Government of Mauritius (Anil Bachoo)
46	1994–2007	Hanuman (standing)	Karol Bagh, New Delhi		108	Concrete	Brahmaleen Nagababa Shri Sevagiri Ji Maharaj

	DATE	NAME	CITY/STATE/COUNTRY	SCULPTOR	HEIGHT (FEET)	MATERIAL	PATRON
47	2008	Ambedkar (seated)	Ambedkar Memorial, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh	Ram Sutar	27	Bronze	Government of Uttar Pradesh (Kumari Mayawati, Bahujan Samaj Party)
48	2009	Ram, Sita, Radha, Krishna	Birla Kanan, New Delhi	Naresh Kumar Varma	31	Concrete	B. K. Birla
49	2009	Shiva (standing)	Pilani, Rajasthan	Matu Ram Art Centre	80	Concrete	S. K. Birla (businessman)
50	2009	Ganesha (seated) "Mangal Murti Morya"	Talegaon, Maharashtra	Naresh Kumar Varma	72	Concrete	B. K. Birla
51	2010	Shiva (standing)	Palam Vihar, Gurgaon, Haryana	Naresh Kumar Varma	65	Concrete	Balkrishna Saini (real estate, automobile service station)
52	2010	Durga (standing)	Ballari, Karnataka	Sridhar	26	Concrete	B. Sriramulu (Bharatiya Janata Party)
53	2010	Shiva (seated)	Bishangarh, Jalore, Rajasthan	Sridhar	65	Concrete	Bhawarlal Khivesra, Maharaja Build Tech Ltd. (construction)
54	2010	Hanuman (standing)	Shimla, Himachal Pradesh	Naresh Kumar Varma	108	Concrete	H. C. Nanda Trust (Nikhil Nanda, Escorts Ltd., engineering and manufacturing)
55	2010	Hanuman (standing)	Chatsworth, Durban, South Africa		40	Concrete	Shri Vishnu Temple Society
56	2011	Shiva (standing)	Sanga, near Kathmandu, Nepal	Naresh Kumar Varma	108	Concrete	Kamal Jain, Hilltake (water tanks)
57	2011	Shiva (seated)	Solophok, Namchi, Sikkim	Sridhar (initial design)	108	Concrete	Government of Sikkim (Pawan Chamling, Sikkim Democratic Front)

	DATE	NAME	CITY/STATE/COUNTRY	SCULPTOR	HEIGHT (FEET)	MATERIAL	PATRON
58	2012	Basaveshwara (seated)	Basavakalyan, Bidar, Karnataka	Sridhar	108	Concrete	Mate Mahadevi, Basava Dharma Peetha
59	2012	Hanuman (standing)	Mysore, Karnataka		70	Granite	Avadhoota Datta Peetham
60	2012	Guru Rimpoche/ Padmasambhava (seated)	Tso Pema, Rewalsar, Himachal Pradesh	Drupa Kunzang (Bhutan)	123	Concrete	Lama Wangdor Rinpoche
61	2012	Hanuman (standing)	Nandura, Maharashtra		105	Concrete	
62	2013	Shiva (seated)	Sagar, Madhya Pradesh	Sridhar	61	Concrete	Shivmandir Development Trust, Sindhunagar Colony, Sagar (developers)
63	2013	Gandhi (standing)	Patna	Ram Sutar	40	Bronze	Government of Bihar (Nitish Kumar, Janata Dal)
64	2013	Sakyamuni (seated)	Ravangla, Sikkim	Sakya Brothers	95	Concrete	Government of Sikkim (D. D. Bhutia, Sikkim Democratic Front)
65	2013	Hanuman (standing)	Shahjahanpur, Uttar Pradesh	Veerendra Shekhawat	104	Concrete	
66	2014	Hanuman (standing)	Chhindwara, Madhya Pradesh	Naresh Kumar Varma	101	Concrete	Anonymous (constituency of Kamal Nath, Congress Party)
67	2015	Basaveshwara (standing)	Gadag, Karnataka	Sridhar	111	Concrete	Karnataka Tourism Development Corporation, Government of Karnataka
68	2016	Hanuman (standing)	Toronto, Canada	Naresh Kumar Varma	50	Concrete	Richmond Hill Vishnu Mandir

	DATE	NAME	CITY/STATE/ COUNTRY	SCULPTOR	HEIGHT (FEET)	MATERIAL	PATRON
69	2017	Hanuman (standing)	Damanjodi, near Koraput, Odisha		108	Concrete	National Alumin-ium Company, Abhaya Anjaneya Parichalana Samiti
70	2017	Shiva (bust) "Adiyogi"	Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu		112	Steel	Jaggi Vasudev, Isha Foundation
71	2018	Durga (standing)	Ganga Talao, Mauritius	Naresh Kumar Varma	108	Concrete	Government of Mauritius (Anil Bachoo)
72	2018	Vallabhai Patel (standing) "Statue of Unity"	Kevadiya, Gujarat	Ram Sutar	597	Concrete	Government of Gujarat, Govern-ment of India (Narendra Modi, Bharatiya Janata Party)
73	(Stayed by court, 2019)	Shivaji (equestrian)	Mumbai	Ram Sutar	(690)	Concrete	Government of Maharashtra
74	(In progress, 2019)	Hanuman (standing)	Srikakulam, Andhra Pradesh	Shankar (structural engineer)	(176)	Concrete	Sri Ram Bhaktha Hanuman Seva Samithi Trust
75	(In progress, 2019)	Saibaba (seated)	Shahdol, Madhya Pradesh	Sridhar	72	Concrete	Virat Sai Dham Seva Samiti
76	(Proposed)	Maitreya (seated)	Kushinagar, Uttar Pradesh		200		Lama Zopa Rinpoche

EMERGENCE

Here is a list of top 10 tallest Hindu God Murtis (Statue or idols) in the World. . . . As per Hindu tradition, the Supreme Truth (Brahman) is beyond imagination. But human beings need a form to worship and we modern day people are obsessed with size and height. So we are constantly increasing the size of Hindu Murtis. Therefore this list will be constantly updated.

—ABHILASH RAJENDRAN

The history of images is a history of objects that are temporally impure, complex, overdetermined. It is therefore a history of polychronistic, heterochronistic, or anachronistic objects. . . . Is it not to say . . . that the history of art is itself an anachronistic discipline, for better or for worse?

—GEORGES DIDI-HUBERMAN

The transition from the first kind of artistic reception [cult value] to the second [exhibition value] characterizes the history of artistic reception in general. Apart from that, a certain oscillation between these two polar modes of reception can be demonstrated for each work of art.

—WALTER BENJAMIN

MONUMENTAL STATUES

On January 9, 2003, the front page of the *New York Times* carried a picture of a 108-ft. concrete statue of the god Krishna that fell as it neared completion at the peri-urban village of Narsinghpur near Gurgaon, on the outskirts of New Delhi, killing at least one person and injuring several others. The Associated Press report on the incident claimed that "the village and people from the surrounding district had raised $417,000 to build the statue," shoring up

the stereotype of Indian villagers as gullible and god-fearing, with dubious priorities. The local priest was quoted as calling the incident a "bad omen" (despite the statue's numerologically auspicious height of 108 ft.). A more in-depth piece in an engineering journal put the cost of the statue at $200,000.[1] It provided the scientific explanation, interviewing an architect who blamed the absence of soil testing (the statue was situated in a dried-up pond) and the imbalance created by a pose with the worst possible center of gravity, in which Krishna's massive concrete arms held his flute off to one side of his head. It also noted that the sculptor of the statue was a traditional *murtikar* (icon maker), with no formal training in architecture or engineering, who had earlier suc-cessfully built an 80-ft. Shiva and a 60-ft. Hanuman.

And, indeed, although this statue fell, dozens of other giant icons have been springing up, and staying up, all over India and amid the Indian dias-pora since the late 1980s—that is, in tandem with the rollout of economic reforms and the resurgence of Hindu nationalist politics. (For a map, time-line, and list, see figures FM.1, FM.2, TABLE FM.1.) Initially emerging in stone and concrete, with heights of around 20–30 ft., they had reached 140 ft. by 2006 and continued to grow, breaking the world record for the tallest statue in 2018 with a 597-ft. figure of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, India's first home minister and deputy prime minister.[2] While this is a secular figure, most of these colossi are Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain icons. They are usually freestand-ing, unlike the colossal rock-cut images of earlier South Asian traditions, such as the second-century Swat Valley and sixth-century Bamiyan Buddhas and the medieval Jain statues of Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh. Many of them are situated in theme parks (another mushrooming feature of India's post-liberalization landscape), featuring religion, culture, leisure/entertainment, political memorials, commerce, environmentalism, or some combination of these. Most notably, they have been increasingly deployed in "statue wars" in which politicians seek to outdo one another in building spectacular stat-ues for their electoral constituencies (known in India as vote banks), despite inevitable public criticism for squandering limited state resources on such symbolic projects. These controversies predate, and differ from, the intensi-fied protests from 2015 onward against Confederate memorials in the United States and statues of Cecil Rhodes in South Africa and elsewhere, which are struggles over historical memory and the ongoing legacies of slavery, colo-nialism, and racism. The Indian statues are a form of monument that is not necessarily subsumed within the secular frame of memory. However, as this book will argue, as embodiments of public presence they ultimately have very similar political stakes.

In December 2006, I went to Narsinghpur to find out more about the fallen Krishna statue, driven by curiosity—tinged with suspicion—about the story I had read. There I gleaned that the story about the villagers' funding the statue had likely been fed to the media to deflect attention from the statue's effective patron, whose nearby factory manufactured seats for cars and multiplex cinemas, again both key features of the postreform landscape. The company's website described itself as a "365 million dollar conglomerate." I was told that a charitable trust in the name of this entrepreneur's mother had acquired land next to the village temple, perhaps including the pond. It is not clear whether this was wasteland, the village commons, or both; in any event, the pond had dried up and turned into a waste dump as Gurgaon's industrial and housing development pushed down the water table. The trust had built an orphanage with a dispensary and ran occasional "women's empowerment" programs.

The role of the seat baron came as no surprise to me, given that my earlier work on printed bazaar icons emphasized the role of vernacular capitalists in the twentieth-century production and distribution of religious images (more on vernacular capitalism later).[3] But I did not anticipate how quickly the big statue genre would lead me beyond this anonymous domestic capitalist—and others featured more explicitly in this book—to a host of powerful political players: members of state legislative assemblies, cabinet ministers, a panoply of chief ministers, the vice prime minister of Mauritius, the prime minister of India. As I followed the big statue trail over the decade following that 2006 visit to Narsinghpur, I learned that the same industrialist had earlier funded another statue for a large temple complex on the (then) outskirts of Delhi. He was also associated with a later 101-ft. Hanuman in Chhindwara, Madhya Pradesh, the constituency of Kamal Nath, who had served in the United Progressive Alliance government as cabinet minister for commerce and industry, for road transport and highways, and for urban development. So much for the cliché of the god-fearing "common man" as the primary locus and driver of religiosity.

The Chhindwara statue was inaugurated in the run-up to the national elections in 2014, as other politicians scrambled to initiate similar projects for their vote banks. Akhilesh Yadav, then chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, laid the foundation stone for a 200-ft. statue of Maitreya in Kushinagar, reviving a plan for a 500-ft. Maitreya that had earlier been abandoned by his predecessor Kumari Mayawati in the face of resistance from farmers (backed by the Congress Party), whose land was being appropriated for the project. Chief Minister J. Jayalalithaa of Tamil Nadu announced plans for a "mega

statue" of Thamizh Thaai (Mother Tamil) in a theme park on Tamil ideas of landscape. The Maharashtra government revived plans for a 300-ft. monument to the Maratha king Shivaji on an island off Mumbai in response to the Statue of Unity, a 597-ft. statue of Sardar Patel (twice the size of the Statue of Liberty) that was to become the world's tallest statue, being erected by Narendra Modi, then the chief minister of Gujarat. On October 31, 2018, after his election as prime minister, Modi inaugurated the Statue of Unity; by that time, the proposal for the Shivaji statue had been scaled up to surpass it at 695 ft. That inauguration also unleashed a further spate of proposals for politically motivated colossi all over India, as did the 2019 elections, when Uttar Pradesh's Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's proposed 823-ft. (251-meter) statue of the god Ram at the controversial site of Ayodhya joined the fray, vying to surpass the world record.

There is a continuum here between secular and religious figures, which can be seen as part of the same genre. As I describe in chapter 1, not only do they use the same technology and often the same sculptors, but they also, importantly, are incorporated into a similar structure of political patronage, albeit one in which the patronage of religious figures tends to be more at arm's length. Religious icons feed into secular power, while secular figures partake of iconic efficacy and animation. I use the term *icon* to address this spectrum without adjudicating between the contested categories of the religious and the secular, while also taking into account their discursive force.[4] The icon here simply becomes a figurative image that is treated as somehow efficacious. I adopt the term *iconopraxis* (elaborated later) to describe practices of engagement with images within a frame that treats the devotional and the aesthetic as both overlapping and distinct.

This book traces the emergence of the monumental statue genre on the Indian religious and political landscape during the economic reforms of the 1990s and describes the complexly layered forms of aesthetic, political, social, commercial, and religious efficacy in which it participates and that it helps bring into being.[5] It is not enough to simply ascribe this phenomenon to Hindu nationalism, or Hindutva—as though that was a monolithic entity with stable characteristics—or to large scale as a universal expression of power and dominance, for neither "explanation" illuminates the significance of this form in its novelty: as an index of emergence. What distributions and redistributions of the sensible unfold in the appearance of this new form?[6] What is it that becomes otherwise?

This pursuit of emergence—the very newness of the new and its relations with the systems from which it arises—is in the spirit of Walter Benjamin's

legendary artwork essay, which, like this book, is centrally concerned with the politics of new image technologies at a moment of increasingly authoritarian right-wing populism.[7] Emergence takes on a twofold aspect in my account: it refers both to the (re)appearance of the monumental statue form in time and to the literal coming out of religious icons from temples into public space. Outdoor location has been a condition of possibility for the growing size of deities, their publicness giving the colossus form a political charge that was subsequently harnessed by secular icons. This spatial emergence is central to the political stakes here, for the sequestration of icons in the *sancta sanctorum* of temples has been a key element of the priestly power of Brahmins as mediators between mortals and gods, in a sensorium of caste in which the community now self-identifying as Dalit (oppressed)—known during the colonial period as Untouchable—was once forbidden to enter caste Hindu temples. What made it possible to supplement priestly mediation of the gods with this new form, extending beyond caste Hindus to a heterogeneous democratic public that must reckon with the palpable presence of Dalits and non-Hindus? How might this relate to the intensification of caste-based politics that was also a crucial force of transformation in the 1990s, alongside economic liberalization and a resurgent Hindu nationalism?

Examining what monumental icons add to existing devotional practices and how, this book asks what this tells us about the pressure politics exerts on religion. It also asks the reverse: how did these colossi come to be added to a material vocabulary of political and social power that could have contented itself with spectacular infrastructure projects such as dams or with the related and similarly viral mushrooming of temple complexes (of which the global Akshardhams are only the best-known instance)?[8] After all, canonical features of temples such as *gopurams* (entrance towers) and *shikharas* (towers over the central shrine) can—and, as we will see, do—achieve similar heights. In short, these new incarnations of the gods in the time of democracy are a material entry point into tracking the co-constitution of religion and politics. The description of how these intimacies articulate with technological, social, and governmental processes, including economic liberalization, is also necessarily a reflection on time that confronts secular narratives of development and periodization in art history with the uneven, temporally layered modernity and contemporaneity of religion. In the process, it revisits core concepts of the image such as cult value and exhibition value, scale, spectacle, and *darshan* (a key term for describing the devotional engagement with icons in South Asia), as well as their relation to the political valences of publicness and, hence, to the aesthetics of democracy.

In this introduction, I identify the book's presuppositions, stakes, methods, and interventions; its scope; and its limits. In doing so, I briefly gloss some of its informing concepts: sensible infrastructures, iconopraxis, emergence, assemblages, circuits, layered temporalities, and vernacular capitalism.

SENSIBLE INFRASTRUCTURES OF CASTE

A central theoretical presupposition of this account is that the aesthetic is not an epiphenomenon or secondary effect of politics or economy but the very ground on which politics unfolds: that images, what they do with people, and what people do with them, are elements of what I call, as a polemical shorthand, "the sensible infrastructures" of politics. Like other recent work on political images, the book draws on Jacques Rancière's compelling insistence on the centrality of aesthetics to politics, where politics itself is formulated as a redistribution of the sensible arising via dissensus.[9] While Rancière's elaboration remains firmly within the European tradition, I selectively hijack his ideas to the service of nonmetropolitan sites and contemporary public icons—that is, to images that bear a tenuous and contested relation to the domain of "art" and to secular, anthropocentric formulations of the sensible or the aesthetic.[10]

Those familiar with South Asia will recognize the relevance of Rancière's thought to the aesthetics of caste and the sensible regime of untouchability, which I posit as key to the emergence—in both senses—of monumental statues. Central to the relationship between aesthetics and politics for Rancière is the idea of *partage*, an allocation of proper places that entails both separation and sharing within the signifying logic of a given regime. This constitution and classification of roles and status within the polity—as with the occupational hierarchy of caste (as well as gender, race, religion, ethnicity, ability, and so on)—is at the same time also a distribution of the sensible, where "sense" is both knowing and embodied sensing. "Distribution," therefore, also pertains to the relationship between these two forms of sense: how we understand sense experience and how the senses inform knowledge (e.g., the privileged link between knowledge and vision is a particular historical formation). A regime's prevailing aesthetico-political consensus or common sense unfolds via what presents itself to the senses and what is made sense of: who or what can be heard, seen, or—key to caste and untouchability—touched; what is intelligible; what is understood as speech or silenced as noise; who is admitted and who is cast out or outcaste, rendered abject.[11]

This excluded element of the polity is what Rancière calls the "part without a part"; its exclusion plays a defining part in the polity, although this is not

recognized (think here of gendered domestic labor). The caste schema con-
signs Dalit labor to realms of social activity that are essential but nonetheless
considered polluted, such as working with dead bodies (animal and human)
or waste. The "part without a part" is not present to the dominant regime of
the sensible; its absence is actively enforced through the distributions that in-
form governance or social practices (such as exclusion from temples, schools,
housing, or wells). For Rancière, this is not a preconstituted political subject,
a "people" with given characteristics. It *emerges* as a political subject in the
process of staking claims, as Dalits did through the Temple Entry Movement
in the 1920s–30s, among others. Politics here is the necessarily violent (both
symbolic and physical) dissensus through which the claims of the "part with-
out a part" break through a given distribution of the sensible to be heard and
seen, to occupy space, to become intelligible, enabling the cognition that is a
precondition for recognition.

What Rancière neglects in his emphasis on the radicality of dissensus, but
is central to my account, is the ongoing and mutating nature of these strug-
gles and the messy, often violent reterritorializing responses to them as the
prevailing order undergoes upheavals and reconfigurations. In the case of
caste, one flashpoint for such violence was the announcement in 1990 of plans
to implement public service job reservations for "Other Backward Classes"
(OBCs) recommended by the report of the Socially and Educationally Back-
ward Classes Commission, known as the Mandal Commission. This was met
with widespread protests—notably, a spate of self-immolations by upper-caste
students—and followed by the rise of OBC and Dalit parties in Uttar Pradesh,
India's most populous state, in which public statues played a key role. But there
is also a far longer history of attacks (termed "caste atrocities") on Dalit homes
and bodies, both human and iconic, as well as of counterassertions in the aes-
thetic domain such as monumental statues. Such counterassertions by the
prevailing regime are comparable to the spikes in the building of Confederate
statues in the United States at times of heightened civil rights tensions (1900s
and 1950s).[12]

Crucially, the aesthetic here is not restricted to images or to art. Rather, it
extends to a far more broadly construed domain of sensation, perception, and
intelligibility and the relations between them that Rancière calls a "primary
aesthetics."[13] As he puts it, "Aesthetics can be understood in a Kantian sense—
re-examined perhaps by Foucault—as the system of *a priori* forms determin-
ing what presents itself to sense experience. It is a delimitation of spaces and
times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously
determines the place and stakes of politics as a form of experience."[14] Aesthetics

describes historical (yet functionally a priori) regimes of sense experience; politics hinges on *aesthetic* experiences of matter, form, space, and time. Emergent material forms that constitute an upheaval in an entrenched order, such as public supplements to temple worship (monumental deities, printed icons, outdoor processions, and shrines), are therefore a key element of politics, for this emergence indicates a reconfigured distribution of the sensible.

Given this insistence on the a priori nature of the sensible, the aesthetic or the symbolic cannot be understood merely as the superstructure on a primarily economic base.[15] As I describe in chapter 2, the ubiquitous journalistic critiques of Indian monumental statues that decry the misdirection of public funds to the "merely" symbolic politics of recognition fail to reckon with the value and force of recognition in the prevailing distribution of the sensible. It is against this tendency to think of the aesthetic as *super*structure that I posit "primary aesthetics" as *infra*structure: as the sensible and material infrastructure that enables a given aesthetico-political regime to function.[16] The embodied practices that constitute the infrastructure of caste enact a primary aesthetics in which sense experience and concepts commingle: as spatial exclusion, untouchability, invisibility, illiteracy, silencing, manual labor, and polluting substances for Dalits. Conversely, for Brahmins this regime entails privileged access to and control over icons, sacred texts, writing, scholarship in general, and purifying substances. This is the sensible infrastructure informing my genealogy of public icons (in assemblage with other infrastructures, as the next section elaborates). In keeping with this infrastructural quality, however, caste does not constitute the primary thematic focus here, except in chapter 2. Instead, it runs through the entirety of this account as an omnipresent but relatively subterranean thread, surfacing periodically to show how the ruling order of the sensible has been pervaded by the primary aesthetics of caste.

If the sensible underpins political exclusions that are fundamentally embodied, experiential, and aesthetic, this has implications for its theoretical analysis. The sensible infrastructure of the political first makes itself evident through the claims of the "part without a part"; it does not emerge from prognostic or activist analyses by others. Rather than proceeding, like Plato's philosopher kings, from an avant-garde position of theoretical knowledge to awaken oppressed political subjects or predict the workings of a system, critical analysis by others is, precisely the other way around, a *response* to dissensus. Its challenge is not to lead the struggle but to *sense* it, to be *affected* by it, in order to declare, enact, and strengthen solidarity. So the description of the present here is also necessarily a revisionary and speculative genealogy that attempts in hindsight to retool the sense of sense to see and hear what was

always there, hidden in plain sight: the aesthetico-political terms of a consensus that is indubitably crumbling yet still wields force as a sensible infrastructure of oppression—in this case, that of caste.

BEYOND CIRCULATION: A PROCESSUAL ART HISTORY

The responsive mode called for by an aesthetic understanding of politics is well served by art history's method of working from descriptions of objects or spaces and anthropology's close ethnographic observation of practices. Images as objects with value, power, and efficacy are at the heart of art history; anthropology also knows such beings well. If art history is nonetheless embracing methods and terms from the "new materialisms," it is doing so in order to describe the networks and systems in which objects or forms participate in richer and more complex ways, moving beyond the immediate historical and geographical contexts of their creation to address their deeper genealogies and their ongoing social and material lives.[17]

This was already underway in part in the strong disciplinary push to decenter Euro-American art history through histories of circulation and "intercultural" or "transcultural" exchange. However, these approaches have run into structural problems. Those arguing for a "global" or "world" art history based on studies of circulation, such as Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, face the charge of Eurocentric universalism, while others arguing for a recognition of the incommensurability of cultures, such as Michael Ann Holly and Keith Moxey, fail to take into account the *production* of cultures as entities via "culture" as a category.[18] Negotiating between universalism and the hypostatization of "culture" as discrete "cultures," others, such as Barry Flood and Monica Juneja, have used the anthropological term *transculturation* to signal that cultures are not fixed or bounded but always in formation.[19] Ultimately, however, Juneja is dissatisfied with such models centered on cultural flows, arguing that cultural "incommensurability and commensurability . . . are better grasped as processes rather than reified or static attributes," such that "different grades of the commensurable and incommensurable [are produced] in specific historical conjunctures and local contexts."[20]

Here commensurable and incommensurable modes of encounter are *processes*. They are historically *produced* and paradoxically *coexist*. It is Juneja's critical postcolonial perspective—including, I would suggest, a lived sense of postcolonial unevenness and its paradoxes—that leads her to identify the limits to circulation studies' negotiation of "cultural difference" (with its echoes of civilizational narratives). Instead, she calls for a change in register to address

the complexities of taking art history beyond its European roots. The para-
doxes attendant on the category of culture—and hence, on questions of uni-
versality and incommensurability—also apply to other key analytical catego-
ries, such as art, nation, and modernity. These categories emerged in and for
Europe in the context of colonial encounters, alongside the development and
spread of capitalism as a unified and unifying network, mediated by nation-
states, that *both* is driven by powerful universalizing master narratives *and* mo-
bilizes zones of exception.[21] The zones of exception include ideas of the human
that rendered certain people inadequate—or, at best, aspiring—to a normative,
"civilized" humanity (slaves, women, colonized "natives," Indigenous peoples,
the "masses"). The "customary" modes of exploitation, social organization,
and symbolic systems of the colonized strategically left in place by colonial
rule are another exception; I describe one such instance later. The experience
of modern master categories for those inhabiting such (truly global) forms of
exception is therefore one of profound unevenness. It is simultaneously an
experience of the inadequacy or disjuncture of master categories *and* of the
continuing force with which they work in the world.

This book experiments with an art historical method that goes beyond
circulation to keep in play this epistemological unevenness, holding under era-
sure master concepts such as culture, art, nation, modernity, and—crucially
in this case—religion while *also* attending to their undeniable salience. It does
so by focusing on an obdurately *non*circulating form (massive statues, mostly
built in situ), but one that is nonetheless, like all images, also a temporally
moving target of analysis, still in the making. While I do address the global—
indeed, multiscalar—travels and exchanges of this genre, they are not my sole
focus, for if circulation posits objects as nodes in networks, "transcultural"
encounters are just one of many types of constitutive processes that course
through them in many different registers. Why, then, should we persist in
reading them primarily in terms of periods, nations, or "cultures"?

The approach I want to propose and test here reintensifies art history's
focus on the object, this time not just as a bounded and given entity that is a
node in networks of circulation, but as *itself* a bundle of multiple interlinked
processes unfolding stochastically, at varying speeds and intensities: an assem-
blage. Here, as with cultures and individual subjects, the object is seen not as
a stable totality but as a field of moving forces, a matter of becoming as much
as of being. In this disaggregation of putatively discrete phenomena—not least
enormous, static objects that seem to be all about their size and shape—into
clusters of processes, objects-events belong both to the moment and space of
these processes' convergence and to multiple other space-times.[22]

In a processual art history, then, works/objects (human-made or otherwise), styles, and genres take on the provisional coherence of assemblages at varying scales, as convergences of processes with varying logics and varying consistencies within those logics that draw their force from potentially vastly different moments. The analytical method is to tease out and describe certain strands of this complex, intrinsically mutable assemblage. The particular strands and scales of analysis that are chosen arise contingently from a particular encounter between the object and the researcher as a matter of investments, interests, capacities, affordances, and other affections. This approach obviates the impasse in art history between a formalism that engages objects in a moving phenomenological present and a contextualism that privileges the singular moment, location, and human agent of a work's production. It also accounts for objects' ability to inhabit multiple frames of value, efficacy, and understanding, such as art, visual culture, and religion.

It might help here to briefly gloss the concept of the assemblage in its technical sense to see how it might be useful for art history (i.e., without disappearing into the thickets of systems theory). For Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the assemblage is a conjuncture of material processes from heterogeneous systems (organic, inorganic, linguistic, ideational, etc.); it is a set of working links that takes on a certain consistency, coherence, and durability but does not form an organic whole or a closed structure and is open to making further linkages across systems.[23] Manuel DeLanda describes assemblages as wholes with emergent properties—that is, properties that are not present in their component parts taken alone but are produced by the interactions between them (to take a statue-related example, the properties of bronze are emergent because they are not reducible to those of copper and tin, its constituent elements).[24] Assemblages are not reducible to the properties of their individual components or to any particular level or scale at which these parts are specified. Further, unlike in a totality, these parts are not defined by their place within the whole. They are decomposable, available for redistributions and interactions with other assemblages that might activate capacities and tendencies in these parts that have not yet been exercised.

Despite this fluidity, emergence is not totally random. The origin and endurance of specific properties in an assemblage unfold in a "concrete space of possibilities within a definite structure" and can therefore be accounted for, albeit never once and for all as they are in a taxonomic or botanical categorization.[25] Crucially for my purposes, "The identity of an assemblage should always be conceived as a historical process, the process that brought its components together for the first time as well as the process that maintains its integrity

through a regular interaction among its parts."[26] If emergence brings elements of an assemblage together in a network, my account deploys the idea of circuits to signal one type of regular interaction between these elements. The terms *circuit* and *network* are related but not interchangeable: a circuit implies two-way movement in a (relatively) closed loop, whereas a network can be open-ended or one-way, so circuits are subsets of networks. The repetition and intensification of the network entailed in a circuit contribute to the coherence and durability of an assemblage. Circuits can be spatial, as with the scalar connections that statue patrons make between small towns or villages and cities, states, or nations; they can also be temporal, like the ritual cycles that make for both the persistence of religious traditions and their ongoing transformations.

In this account, then, emergence features in a theoretical sense that adds another layer to the empirical aspects of the term (temporal newness and coming out into public space). As part of the sensible ground of politics, emergence as the newness of aesthetic form materializes and activates unrealized potentials within the assemblage: the appearance of political subjects to the senses and to sense. Thinking political emergence via the assemblage is a corrective to the "social anthropologistic" centrality of human agency that Pheng Cheah identifies in Rancière's account of politics. If dissensus, as what Rancière terms the "verification of equality," is the activation of a capacity within the space of possibilities in an assemblage, this emergence of political subjects arises through interactions with the nonhuman components involved.[27] Political processes fundamentally depend on, but are not entirely reducible to, human will or intention. Framing these processes as part of assemblages also enables a richer description of the recapture of emergent elements, for assemblages can be highly resilient, often expansively reconfiguring the underlying logics of certain processes even as they radically interrupt them (again, something Rancière's formulation of dissensus tends to foreclose).[28]

The assemblage is a powerful concept for thinking about images because of its open-ended capacity to work historically across multiple registers of analysis that are not ultimately or exclusively a matter of human culture, spirit, or will, even as human intent remains crucial. Such analysis therefore remains attuned to unrealized potentials or emergences that may be activated through contingent encounters, with unpredictable results. (In this respect, the assemblage is akin to Benjamin's notion of the constellation.) Importantly, the assemblage is well suited to describing unevenness, because it depends not on logical consistency within a system but on material, machinic linkages.

Here I describe the big statue genre in terms of a vernacular capitalist-iconic-democratic-neoliberal-concrete-territorial-automotive assemblage. This

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assemblage brings together a postcolonial socioeconomic formation; a type of object/body/image; a political system; a dominant political ideology; a building material; relations to land; and a mode of transport tied to systems of manufacturing and infrastructure and, at another scale, to natural resources and geopolitics. As I describe, all of these processes, to varying degrees and in different ways, are involved in the distributions and redistributions of the sensorium of caste and its hierarchical social ordering. This concern is ultimately what guides the identification of parts and their scales in analyzing images and iconopraxis (explained shortly) as part of the sensible infrastructure of democracy. I describe this sensible ground across a range of sites: the temporal cycles of festivals and the intensifications of inaugurations; the material operations of commensuration, where different constituencies within the polity adopt the same novel medium of representation but in different numbers or sizes; the mimetic play of iconopraxis across these constituencies; similarly mimetic play between religious practices, governmentality, and industrial technologies; the resignification of land through the occupation of territory by spectacular forms; and the affects engendered by scale-making projects.

The properties of the big statue form are emergent in the technical sense in that they are not reducible to any of these component parts but embody their ongoing interaction; having emerged, the form also dynamically interacts with those parts. Each of these parts has multiple levels of organization within it, with their own potentials for plasticity, their own rhythms and speeds. In other words, the temporalities of emergence are heterogeneous and nonlinear. Emergence therefore demands nonlinear historiography and plastic, multi-level mapping. That is what I attempt in this book, which is why it will make for unusual reading, for it is not easily assimilable to a single overarching argument or central theme but instead offers a concatenating description of many processes, entailing multiple interventions in different registers. For the object here is both theoretical and empirical, virtual and actual, generic and singular: it is the monumental statue genre as assemblage, massive, physical, proliferating, changing, and, above all, growing.

ICONOPRAXIS AND LAYERED TEMPORALITIES

Media studies and anthropology have been working for some time with such processual ideas of media ecologies, image operations, and image complexes that track images in their interactions with other bodies and systems.[29] The film studies concept of genre similarly addresses novelty and dynamism from within a provisionally coherent structure. Art history's moves to decenter the

location and moment of an artwork's production—its putative origin—are conceivably headed in a similar direction, although this is in tension with the discipline's organization as an institutional practice. (Art history departments are carved up into expertise in historical periods and geographical areas.) In processual accounts, temporal and spatial parameters are not easily thought apart either from each other or from the object itself. If spatial circulation is one axis of decentering, another is a reassessment of linear temporality in the periodization of styles.

The Renaissance was central to the emergence of art history as a discipline, so it is fitting that scholars of that period have led the reassessment of periodization, using the terms *anachronistic* and *anachronic* for art histories and artworks untethered from what Georges Didi-Huberman calls the "euchronistic consonance" characterizing the historian's "canonical attitude."[30] This more recent work reanimates earlier art historical and critical thinking on the temporality of forms, such as that of Aby Warburg, Walter Benjamin, Henri Foçillon, and Foçillon's student George Kubler. It argues for layered, folded understandings of temporality that encompass the moment of artistic production, which draws on multiple pasts and imagined futures, as well as the ongoing sojourns of images through varying sites and frames of engagement, meaning, value, and technical remediation (the reworking of "old" media forms by new ones).[31]

Similarly, writing on ancient and medieval South Asian temple sculpture—and therefore more squarely within the frame of religious ritual—Michael Meister advocates a move from a "canonical linearity" in the scholarship on India's past to a recognition of "layered traditions" and "anti-canons."[32] Here he introduces the term *iconopraxis* as a crucial supplement to art history's methods of iconography and iconology that explicitly goes beyond the picture frame and the static, intact, finished work to attend to embodied and processual relations with the image. Meister refers to "the fluidity and multiplicity of practice" that both responds to and generates what he calls "iconoplasty," or "the semantic fluidity of forms at times of ritual definition and the transformational characteristics of meanings attached to forms in the same period by different users synchronically and over longer durations (diachronically)."[33] Again, however, this is a view of iconopraxis and iconoplasty primarily as a matter of human meaning. The frame of the assemblage supplements this with other techno-material processes, so I use these terms in that more expansive sense.

It is no coincidence that art historians dealing with religious and ritualistic images (whether in Renaissance Europe or in medieval India) should be the

ones calling out the "canonical" nature of the discipline's temporal euchronicity and linearity, for they are confronting a humanist notion of the aesthetic whose secularizing movement is at art history's very core. This influential idea of the aesthetic, arising from Romanticism, sublimated the sacred into nature as the work of God, with art as a human endeavor whose privileged relationship to nature and insight into the essence of the world sprang from natural or God-given genius.[34] Art history does not just assume secularization; it runs deeper than that: secularization has been its raison d'être. The putative supersession of ritual by art for a secular age was plotted along a linear-*cum*-cyclical timeline, where an organicist model of the rise and fall of civilizations and period styles came to be ranged along a Hegelian telos of the evolving movement of Spirit's incarnation in increasingly dematerialized forms. Thus, while pre-Renaissance art can be placed within the frame of religious ritual, the Renaissance is a secularizing bridge between religion and art such that modern art becomes "normatively secular."[35] Although this situation is changing, the relegation of religion to the past or to a dematerialized spiritual or unworldly realm still implicitly informs art history and media studies in many ways. (I discuss an instance of the former in chapter 3 and of the latter later in this chapter.)

This book asks—and performs—what happens to art history and theory of the modern and contemporary period when, rather than assuming a linear narrative of religion's secularizing sublimation into art, they must also contend with religion as *part* of the modern and contemporary. Simply bracketing contemporary religious images as visual/material culture, popular culture, or kitsch rather than art evades the deeper issues underlying the temporality of images that art historians looking at art "proper" have raised and that are further complicated on the uneven terrain of postcoloniality. It is not just that yesterday's religious icons or everyday objects of material culture have become today's art, and vice versa (mass-reproduced art on mugs and T-shirts becomes visual culture). Such distinctions also hinge on, and reinstate, a historically specific regime of image value tied to the role of taste in performing social distinction in bourgeois Western Europe.[36] This regime of taste is arguably not as hegemonic now as it once was; nor is it easily transplanted to the former colonies. In contemporary India, knowledge and patronage of religion carries far more social weight than that of art; at the same time, however, the discourse of taste is not absent and, indeed, comes into assemblage with other forms of distinction, such as caste and class. Artists, too, work across and between artistic taste and religious value: some monumental statue sculptors, like calendar artists, have attended art schools and bring that training to their iconic images.

In such a situation, and as my use of the term *icon* indicates, the images I deal with here are most usefully understood not as definitively religious, secular, or artistic but, following Talal Asad, as frontiers in the ongoing boundary work that constitutes the very categories of religious, secular, and art.[37] I therefore deploy "iconopraxis" to refer to the force of images in general in and on the world, including religious images that are not reducible to art but are not fully separable from it, either. Describing iconopraxis entails analyzing the terms on which images move between frames of value and social distinction, *both* inscribing differences between these frames *and* forming circuits between them.

In its interest in frames of valuing images, and in their spatial and temporal emergence, this account is an extended meditation on the single footnote from the third version of Benjamin's artwork essay from which the chapter's third epigraph is taken. It tarries with the "oscillation" between cult value and exhibition value—that is, between the cultic efficacy of sequestered religious images and the exhibitionary force of implicitly secular images meant for public viewing (an oscillation that, as I will show, inscribes circuits informing the work of both religious and secular icons). But I do not see this oscillation as fully "apart from" the powerful narratives of historical "transition" to which cult value and exhibition value are often harnessed. Rather than *choosing* between modernity's linear telos and what Keith Moxey calls "heterochronic" forms of temporality, I want to think these *together*, in their frictional, uneven coexistence.[38] I therefore describe the resonances and interferences that the oscillations between cult and exhibition value create in processes and narratives of progress, development, and transition—particularly the "transition" to the secular.

This account is thus situated in the spatiotemporal blind spot created by narratives of linear transition that elide the layered contemporaneity of religion and its emergent forms. It also brings to religion media archaeology's insight that technologies do not necessarily replace one another in linear succession (while acknowledging the pervasive hegemony of that habit), for new configurations exist in parallel to, link with, reactivate, and remediate existing ones.[39] For instance, as I show in chapter 3, the new monumental public statues do not *replace* the smaller icons sequestered in temples or that appear by the roadside, even as their emergence might affect those icons in ways that produce further assemblages such as temples-*cum*-theme parks.

Similarly, heterogeneous temporality is rarely a matter of parallel and distinct strands of heterochronicity pegged to discrete cultures in multicultural multiplicities or multiple modernities. There are complex, layered, productive

interactions between them.[40] The critique of linear temporality does not mean doing away with the force of modernity's progress narrative, which has material effects even if not in forms that it anticipates or recognizes (such as monumental concrete statues of Asian deities). The universalism of the development narrative entails a promise to, and uptake by, *all* those who desire progress, including—indeed, especially—those who are not "yet" enjoying its fruits.[41] Universals, Anna Tsing observes, hold promise for "both the powerful and the powerless . . . elite and excluded alike."[42] As we will see, the imaginative potentials unleashed by the quantifying operations of commensuration and scaling are part and parcel of this promise. But because universals spreading with capitalist expansion gain traction (or not) through encounters—Tsing calls them "frictions"—with varying specificities or incommensurabilities that are not simply reducible to cultural differences, these "engaged universals are never fully successful in being everywhere the same."[43]

Tsing dispenses with the problem of choosing between singular and multiple modernities, for modernity, however putatively singular (or freshly singularized for sale to others), unfolds via multiple, heterogeneous actualizations.[44] In the chapter's first epigraph, the "Hindu blog" author Abhilash Rajendran effects one such actualization when he writes, "We modern day people are obsessed with size and height." Here he (re)formats Hindu worshipers like himself as belonging to a universal "modern day," maintaining modernity's association with periodization, quantification, and measurement even as he simultaneously invokes a "Supreme Truth" that is "beyond imagination" (and presumably beyond the "modern day"). Religion here is not antithetical to or replaced by a secular modernity; it is better understood as a manifestation of a "postsecular" condition in which the "post" does not signal the demise of secularisms but their presence as possible horizons. My account contains several similar instances of how putatively heterochronic notions of time are inhabited, and remixed, *by the same subjects and in the same objects*, demonstrating that even if we can speak of different cultures, they are not easily mapped onto particular subjects, objects, or locations.

More broadly, too, apart from this methodological intervention into art historical temporality, the attempt throughout is to think of emergence through the complex layering and assemblage of systems and processes rather than choosing between them: persistences *as well as* transformations; circuits and networks *as well as* linearity; contingency *as well as* systematicity; boundary work *as well as* the force of delineated concepts and structures. Trying to hold open becoming while describing being means that the binary force of either–or *coexists with* the rhizomatic "and . . . and . . . and."[45] In the service of a rigorous nonbinarism

(where binarism is itself not subject to binarism), I therefore often deploy a seemingly contradictory and paradoxical "both–and" formulation. This is necessary to describe the concurrence of universalizing forces and the exceptionalities that make their spread possible, as I now describe for the "vernacular capitalist" ethos of the bazaar and its production as an arena of difference. This historical background is also key to understanding the epistemological and institutional frames in which modern religious imagery in India took shape, as vernacular capitalist producers and patrons were produced as cultural subjects in the late colonial period.

VERNACULAR CAPITALISM AS "CULTURAL CONTEXT"

The question with which I started this investigation is a conventional one: why does this form appear in India at this moment? In the processual mode I am advocating, however, these spatial and temporal terms in which the question is posed start to disintegrate, for location and period, like culture, are, precisely, conventional: conceptual artifacts that acquire force through institutional and discursive formations. Further, given the frame of uneven co-constitution, what might initially seem highly context- or location-specific in this account can also illuminate phenomena elsewhere (as I suggest in my discussions of spectacle, scale, and what I call iconic exhibition value).

In spatial terms, I treat my nation-based locus, India, as a fuzzy, permeable category, whose borders are differently configured and loom in and out of focus and efficacy depending on the processes being described: pre- or post-Partition; as the "South Asia" of Cold War area studies; extending, or not, to the diaspora. My method, in this and previous work, has been to start with the practitioners of a form—artists, in this case sculptors—and follow their networks with what Bruno Latour describes as a moronic, literal, ant-like myopia, looking up every once in a while to see what this was doing to my "big picture" concepts.[46] Here I trace the statues' rhizomatic encounters with other human and nonhuman entities—patrons, viewers, fabricators, administrators, critics, priests, deities, materials, other images, weather events, landforms, all manner of re- and deanimators, gatekeepers, whoever and whatever enters my moving frame—until I find I have strayed too far.[47] Thus, the array of sites drawn into this story at varying scales and levels of detail very quickly extended from Delhi and Bangalore to Shimoga, Shimla, Dwarka, Shahdol, Pilani, Lucknow, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Mauritius, Trinidad, Hong Kong, Kamakura, Durban, and Toronto, to name just a few.

The recent spate of monumental statue building is not confined to India. Modi's Statue of Unity was part of a global race for statue supremacy. One observer, the photographer Fabrice Fouillet, dates this phenomenon from the 1990s and calls it "statuomania," redeploying the term used for the statue-building craze of the Third Republic in Paris just over a century earlier, soon after the dedication of the Statue of Liberty.[48] He remarks that the majority of the more recent colossi are Buddhas located in Asia (according to Wikipedia's "List of Tallest Statues" in 2020, most of the largest statues were in China, India, Japan, Myanmar, and Taiwan).[49] Given my emphasis on emergence, I make no attempt to take into account all of these sites or provide an over-arching universal logic for this phenomenon. At the same time, however, as the resonances with late nineteenth-century French statuomania, the parallels with Confederate statuary, and the Statue of Unity's retake on the Statue of Liberty and its use of Chinese technology suggest, I retain a sense of the interconnections and patterns across locations and periods that might provide a meaningful basis for a broader conversation.

In temporal terms, accounts of India's postliberalization landscape tend to be dominated by the radical transformations, particularly evident in the megacities, wrought by the political and technological developments of the "long 1980s."[50] In tracing the emergence of monumental postliberalization icons, however, I again take a less euchronistic, more temporally and spatially expansive view of the processes at work in these transformations. This means situating these icons within longer genealogies of changing iconography, iconopraxis, and patronage unfolding in an emergent arena of custom or culture marked by an uneasy relationship to the colonial and then the post-independence state. These genealogies show how the specificity of the "Indian context" is not simply a matter of the anachronistic *persistence* of heterochronic precolonial cultural practices but also of the reconfiguration and resignification of these practices, first by colonialism and then by the ongoing global production of "culture" as a site of essentializing difference.

In the Indian case, religious iconopraxis has been a particularly recalcitrant site for the essentialism that dogs cultural difference. At a material level, this is so because religion entails cyclical, repetitive rituals and other performances that make its forms particularly sticky, as it were (i.e., these are particularly persistent and coherent assemblages). This is exacerbated by the primordialist discourses of religious nationalism, but those discourses, in turn, mobilize identitarian categories codified by colonial law. As chapter 1 describes, the monumental icons and the religious theme parks in which they are often situated emerged, in part (like the calendar art and film industries), from the arena

of what I call vernacular capitalism. In my previous work, I have traced how the colonial genealogy of the "bazaar"—as the domain of "native" commerce was known—helps to explain the semiformal, quasi-legitimate character of the postindependence vernacular culture industries and the interpenetration of commerce, religion, and sociality that continues to inform not just the culture industries but the conduct of business and politics more broadly.[51] The historian Ritu Birla has also usefully described how this arena took shape through colonial law and governance.[52] Here I want to briefly recap those elements of the bazaar that are relevant to the postliberalization resurgence of religious patronage as a capacious site of social mobility and political power.

Vernacular capitalists emerged from a comprador class of mercantile and moneylending communities in India (such as the Banias and Marwaris in the north and east, the Parsis and Lohanas in the west, and the Chettiars in the south), whose extensive community- and kin-based networks were key elements of colonial expansion. These communities acted as translators and intermediaries between the agrarian economy and colonial administration and trade. Profiting from this trade, as well as from speculation in the colonial economy, they entered manufacturing. This included the vernacular culture industries—printed images including calendars and magazines; novels, plays, and pamphlets; and eventually the cinema—in which they were producers and distributors, as well as consumers. These industries became sites for assertions of identity vis-à-vis other vernacular constituencies and particularly influenced the material forms of anticolonial nationalism by giving them a Hindu-hegemonic inflection.

Vernacular capitalists also became involved in philanthropy and religious patronage. Prime exemplars of this are the Birlas, one of India's leading business families, who feature prominently in this account as the pioneering patrons of a landmark temple, an early religious theme park, and a much-copied giant Shiva statue.[53] Religious and charitable giving is part of the interpenetration of commerce, religion, and sociality in an ethos in which capital has typically been kept within the family and the circulation of goods and credit traditionally depended on social relations rather than being underwritten by formal legal institutions. Here commercial creditworthiness is part of a network of trust shored up by family and caste alliances, religious merit, and social standing. Since the late nineteenth century, the means of acquiring merit have included, on a sliding scale of importance, patronage of temples and *dharamshalas* (pilgrim guesthouses); sponsorship of shrines for annual festivals; the display and worship of printed icons; and giving printed calendar icons as gifts, which also serves to annually lubricate social-*cum*-commercial networks. The

status acquired through giving and tribute in these networks has also enabled the negotiation of relative autonomy from sovereign power to assert nonstate dominance at various scales.[54]

However, as Weber insisted, *contra* Marx, the acquisition of religious merit, wealth, social power, and territorial control cannot be reduced to serving a primarily economic or political self-interest.[55] Against the economic or ideological determinism that tends to afflict critique, I suggest that all of these must be recognized as powerful ends in themselves—or, rather, that in practice the distinctions between them are operationalized to varying extents in different contexts. This is a contested field: charitable giving is normatively noninstrumental in this ethos but is therefore also prone to popular accusations of being undertaken to relieve the guilt of possessing material wealth, or of being used cynically for political or economic ends, as evinced in the idea of temple or statue building as "land grabbing" (discussed in chapter 4). However, even as it often plays a part in "accumulation by dispossession," religious patronage need not be construed in terms of bad faith.[56]

The entanglement of capitalism with kin and community networks or social power and status shored up by religiosity and philanthropy is not specific to the Indian, Asian, or former colonial context. What has marked the Indian case, though, is colonial law's explicit naming and framing of this in terms of cultural exceptionalism.[57] The colonial Indian Companies Act of 1882 placed family-based firms of the bazaar not under corporate law but under Hindu and Muslim personal law, thus producing and institutionalizing a zone of difference that was specified in terms of "custom" (a precursor of the more capacious "culture") rather than "economy."[58] Thus, colonial law designated as separate and preexisting what was in fact an integral element of the colonial economy, operationalizing it as a constitutive outside that perpetuated existing structures of exploitation. The state's market governance, based on corporate laws and formal banking, was thus co-constituted with the business ethos of the bazaar, characterized by informal credit systems and fluid exchanges between commerce, kinship, religion, and social power—or, rather, by the absence of clear epistemological and operational distinctions between these categories.

This coexistence was marked, however, by a frictional legal interface, particularly around the regulation of charitable and religious giving, which, in turn, was mapped onto a fraught distinction between public and private.[59] Merchants resisted the regulation of potentially self-interested private (family-based) religious gifts but did so in the name of religio-cultural autonomy. In the process, as Birla observes, this very acceptance and deployment of culturalist terms and the public-private distinction "rendered the ethico-political

currencies of their market practices negotiable with modernity."[60] Thus, in the period leading up to and beyond independence, new pathways opened up for existing systems in the bazaar to form assemblages with market governance, nationalism, democracy, and social reforms. Indian capitalists' combination of economic subjecthood and performance of community gave them recourse to *both* the legal frameworks of the market *and* to a discourse on custom or culture that perpetuated the kin and caste networks so integral to their success. The discourse of culture and community also became the basis of demands for political equality and then independence as they aligned themselves with anticolonial nationalism in the 1930s and '40s. The identitarian logic of these demands was accompanied and enabled by the commensurative and mimetic work of iconic images (discussed in chapter 2).

In this way, Indian commerce, including the vernacular culture industries, was fundamentally shaped by the legal and epistemological conditions of a semiformal, familial, culturalized sphere, with varying degrees of interface with the formal, state-regulated market, on the one hand, and outright illegal practices, on the other. After independence, as state enterprise dominated the formal economy during the era of Nehruvian quasi-socialism, the vernacular culture industries continued to operate on a bazaar-style basis. For instance, printed icons were produced by family firms using casual labor and multiple semiformal, small-scale, ancillary services and circulated through seasonal networks of mobile agents. A more extreme case is the popular cinema, with its informal, if not illegal, sources of financing that range from family businesses to transnational crime syndicates.[61]

In other words, then, what media scholars describe as the "porous legalities" (Lawrence Liang) or "pirate modernity" (Ravi Sundaram) characterizing India's globalizing cities in the late twentieth century may be radically new developments in certain respects, as Sundaram suggests, but these features also trace their genealogy to the earlier globalizing moment of British colonialism.[62] This deeper genealogy illuminates the form and character of media technologies in the vernacular capitalist milieu: their speed of proliferation, organizational flexibility and informality, spatial fluidity, and rampant piracy of content. It also reveals how these features have mobilized certain *kinds* of content and practices—notably, those associated with religion and other avenues of building merit and status, gaining social mobility and social power, and expanding resource networks. In India, religion has arguably been the most responsive arena for new media technologies of all kinds from the nineteenth century onward: oil painting, chromolithography, the proscenium stage, photography, cinema, radio, the gramophone, offset printing, audiocassettes,

television, video, CDs, DVDs, mobile phones, animation, animatronics, IMAX, vinyl banners, and, of course, digital media. (Facebook and WhatsApp thrive on images of deities.) Piracy and informality were rife from the start in most of these media, except gramophone records and state-controlled radio and television broadcasting. So while the latter were a key feature of the Nehruvian era, so were the black market; cinema; calendar prints; mobile photo studios; painted signs; billboards and cut-outs; and ephemeral forms of images, such as notebook covers, pendants, and wallet cards, all forging their own, nonstate compacts with nationalism and with what Partha Chatterjee calls a broader "political society."[63]

Placing post-1980s media technologies on a continuum with these older forms of the bazaar makes the changes wrought by liberalization appear more as an intensification and layered expansion than a fundamental transformation. This framing also adds crucial context to Liang's claim that "porous legalities are often the only modes through which people can access and create avenues of participation in the new economy."[64] While this may be the case for participation in the economy per se, a central concern in my account is the convertibility between economic wealth and *social* power, something achievable through religious patronage but that for centuries has been denied to those at the bottom of the caste hierarchy. The aspiration for participation (as opposed to survival) is never just economic; nor is the means of achieving it. That religious patronage is still one such means is lost in the blind spot where contemporary religiosity sits, for media studies as much as for art history.

For instance, both Liang and Sundaram discuss the case of the (now deceased) audio and film magnate Gulshan Kumar to illustrate how piracy enables successful entry into the formal market. Famously starting out as a roadside juice vendor, Kumar made his fortune in the cassette industry via a combination of piracy, covers, and legal loopholes (ironically, his company, T-Series, now a major player in the music and film industries, fervently safeguards its own copyrights).[65] Neither account, however, mentions the key role of a highly visible—indeed, spectacular—religiosity in Kumar's social mobility. Before he was assassinated while coming out of a Shiva temple in Bombay (allegedly by gangsters linked to the film industry) he had created a huge new market for devotional music and videos; a worshiping Kumar appeared on the covers of all of T-Series's devotional music releases, often in its pilgrimage videos, and in the 1993 film *Shiv Mahima*. His production studio in Delhi features two temples and a giant Shiva statue, unsurprisingly pirated from (or, we might say, a cover version of) one built by the Birlas. He also financed several new temples and another gigantic Shiva at the important Hindu pilgrimage

center of Dwarka, in Gujarat, and was involved in the proposal for an 85-ft. Shiva in Mauritius.

Temple building is a well-established ("old" but recently reintensified) means by which wealth—or the ability to commandeer resources—translates into social standing, then back into economic and political clout. Devotional audiotapes, CDs, videos, and gigantic statues are newer, more visible forms of a similar process—similar, but also crucially different in their publicness or what I call their iconic exhibition value (see chapter 3). My attempt here (most explicitly in chapter 2) is to outline the significance of that different publicness and the conditions of its emergence, both of which hinge on how the interface between caste and democracy began to change the terms on which social mobility and transformation could occur. This is ultimately what is at stake here; *this* is why it is important to illuminate the current forms of globalization that fly under the radar of the modernist narrative of modernity and its functional separations, such as the cordoning off of religion as (private as opposed to public) "custom" or "culture" that colonial law attempted in India in the late nineteenth century.[66]

The gigantic icon indexes the vernacular capitalist combination of political, social, economic, and religious power and merit in a temporally layered, unanticipated, yet variously familiar form, its iconography drawing on twentieth-century calendar prints while its uses of scale and concrete draw on the poetics of infrastructure and the aura of historical colossi. Its changing spaces of iconopraxis are constantly resignified as primordial by iconodules and atavistic by secular-modern and other iconoclasts; the gigantic icon is caught, therefore, between anachronicity, or timelessness, and anachronism, or belatedness. The task of this book, however, is to make sense of its *presence* (i.e., its present-ness): to apprehend the contemporary aesthetic forms of religiosity and, through them, the everyday mechanics that operationalize politics as the distribution and redistribution of the sensible.

THIS ASSEMBLAGE

The linear sequence of chapters in a book is hardly the most appropriate form for describing an assemblage, with its multiple scales and rhythms, complex spatiotemporal circuits, networks, and processes whose rhizomatic openings can readily be followed in any direction. My solution is to approach each chapter as a set of processes, presented as if it were an optical filter over a lens or a layer of information on a map: a partial view that forges a certain coherence and sense on its own, but with the knowledge that it it is selective and needs

to be seen in conjunction with many other possible layers, of which these are just some. The themes of the chapters follow the heterogeneous logic of the assemblage, working in different registers to each make its own arguments. The temporal dimensions appear within the often but not always chronological narratives of each chapter, as well as via layerings and recursions across chapters. The photographs and diagrams are intended to help with visual recognition of the statues in relation to their location, chronology, and intertexts.

Chapter 1 sets the stage by sketching a techno-figural history of the monumental statue form—the artistic, architectural, and craft traditions it draws on—through four major teams of sculptors in India; their work; and their vernacular capitalist, religious, and political patrons. It introduces some of the form's more prominent objects, sites, materials, and actors, which reappear in subsequent chapters in relation to specific themes. It also provides a sense of the importance of religious patronage as a key element of legitimacy and status in an arena whose social, economic, and political aspects cannot be disentangled. In keeping with its function as a base layer of the map, or a set of core building blocks in the assemblage, the chapter is also a story about concrete: a privileged material not only for modernism, but also for monumental statues and other religious structures. Concrete, a lumpy, messy material trying to be smooth and even, appears here as a figure for modernity's disavowal of its unevenness—that is, of modernity's own processes of emergence.

Chapter 2 examines the relationships between statues, democracy, and publics in contemporary India: the "statue wars." Against the separation of the material and the symbolic that informs public critiques of statue building from left and right alike, it attends to the sensible infrastructures of democracy and their entanglements with iconopraxis. Focusing on the commensurate and mimetic force of new, noncanonical religious forms within the logic of democratic representation, I examine four moments, three of them linked to a particular configuration of the religio-political public explicitly named at the time as *sārvajanik*, or pertaining to "all the people" (*sarvajan*). They are the rise of public religious festivals such as Ganapati Puja as part of the anticolonial movement of the 1890s; the new temple form of Delhi's Birla Mandir, a response to the Temple Entry Movement and the Poona Pact in the 1930s; the postindependence emergence of memorials that further territorialized a (caste) Hindu-hegemonic nationalism, starting with the Vivekananda Rock Memorial in the 1960s; and, in the 1990s, Kumari Mayawati's Dalit monument-building program, which attempted to institute a Dalit-Bahujan vision of the sarvajan. New remediations of iconography and new vocabularies of iconopraxis that emerged at these moments offered ways to contend with,

and reformulate, the sensible ground of caste oppression. This genealogy of publicness takes the discussion of monumental statues beyond the given terms of public commentary—that is, their subjects, size, expense, and visibility as spectacles—and attends to their occupation of outdoor space that is the infrastructural precondition for monumentality.

Chapter 3 offers a detailed examination of the varying forms of iconopraxis at some of the main statue sites, with a view to specifying the circuits between new and canonical forms of images and iconopraxis, between the religious and the secular, and between cult value and exhibition value. The two-way traffic between state and religion continues here in the way the statues mobilize quantification, an idiom of legitimacy that neospiritual movements in particular have adopted from governmentality. Tracing the links between cultic or auratic and spectacular or enumerative forms of authority, I discuss instances in which cultic authority and aura are not superseded by iconic exhibition value but instead both authorize and benefit from it. This leads me to revisit Benjamin's artwork essay to propose the category of "iconic exhibition value" as an equivalent to what ought really to be specified as *artistic* exhibition value rather than exhibition value *tout court*.

Chapter 4 describes how giant statues dovetail with the postliberalization boom in the car industry, as well as in construction, real estate, tourism, and leisure. Infrastructure appears here not only as a heuristic category in relation to the sensible, to describe new visual regimes and resignifications of land, but also as an object of analysis: as a means of generating value and efficacy through its "politics and poetics."[67] Here I relate earlier discussions of space, iconopraxis, and iconic exhibition value to the theorization of spectacle, focusing not on its deterritorialized, mass-mediated aspects, as has been the tendency of media theory, but on the *physical* spectacle's integration into the boosterism of putting places "on the map" and legitimizing territorial enclosure. This territorialized spectacle speaks to its theorizations in terms of both sovereignty (Foucault) and capital (Debord), and to the articulation of the two via speculation in a global dispensation that constructs capital as highly fickle, volatile, and hypermobile—and, indeed, as the ultimate addressee of the spectacle.

The ensuing discussion of the spatial and scalar imaginaries of speculation segues into chapter 5, which finally tackles both the most obvious and the most opaque characteristic of the statues: their scale. As throughout, it looks at the sensible ground of scale not as a universal, given quality but as projects or processes of scal*ing* that make particular kinds of sense in a particular assemblage. It examines the scalar regimes of the neoliberal discourse of globality, where the vicissitudes of mobile capital are exacerbated by the

structural adjustment imperatives of fiscal devolution and decentralization. This distribution exhibits an intense plasticity and circuitry *between* scales and competition for resources at national, subnational, and transnational levels. This fosters boosterist infrastructure projects such as the giant statues, as well as the volatile populist politics and local and translocal identity projects that attempt—not always successfully—to harness their efficacy. Here I examine three big statue sites and the scalar circuits at work in their significations of territory, both beyond and within the nation. The first two are in the diaspora, in Trinidad and Mauritius; the third is Modi's Statue of Unity. Clearly, this last is a secular statue, but I hope that my account will show that it has a great deal in common with the far smaller and less ambitious religious icons that paved the way for it and that, like the proposed Ram statue in Ayodhya, hope to succeed it.

The Statue of Unity is a contingent end point for my description of this assemblage. The big statues and proposals for new ones continue to proliferate, despite snowballing opposition, so it is hard to predict whether the Statue of Unity and the statues of Shivaji and Ram represent the (literal and figurative) peak of this phenomenon. Nonetheless, it is fitting that I end with the Statue of Unity, for even though I started my research well before it was announced (and very likely even conceived), the two projects converged in their completion: the statue was inaugurated on October 31, 2018, Sardar Patel's birth anniversary, as I readied this book for submission. I hope that the assemblage of the big statues and the academy in this book is a joyful, generative encounter in Spinoza's sense of one that increases the capacities of the bodies involved. The big statues can intensify processes in the academy that engage the contemporaneity of religion, deepening our understanding of its aesthetics and politics and thereby expanding the scope, methods, and salience of art history as a discipline of images—that is, of objects-events-spaces, senses, and material imaginings. And conversely, if, as the book argues, the statues are a symptom of the ongoing verification of Dalit equality, it is not the further production of statues but this verification, proceeding apace *in spite of* the statues, that it seeks to recognize and amplify in its own modest measure.

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Notes

INTRODUCTION: EMERGENCE

Epigraph: Abhilash Rajendran, "Top 10 Tallest Hindu God Murtis," http://www
.hindu-blog.com/2010/11/top-10-tallest-hindu-god-murtis-statue.html. In fact, the
list was not updated—or, at least, not by the time this book was published.

Epigraph: Didi-Huberman, "Before the Image, before Time," 35. See also his
Confronting Images.

Epigraph: Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,"
238 fn. 8, emphasis added.

1   Ashok Sharma, "Giant Statue of Hindu God Falls in India," *Midland Daily News*,
    January 10, 2003, http://www.ourmidland.com/import/giant-statue-of-hindu-god
    -falls-in-india/article_cf5ec286-7604-5a10-9ca3-31e04a788f30.html?mode=story;
    Saibal Dasgupta, "Giant Statue Topples in India Just Days before Completion,"
    Engineering News-Record, January 20, 2003, accessed August 29, 2013, http://enr
    .construction.com/news/bizLabor/archives/030120.asp.
2   Most sculptors and patrons prefer to include the pedestal when specifying the
    height of a statue, since this makes for a larger number. I generally follow this
    convention.
3   Jain, *Gods in the Bazaar*.
4   The concept of religion has received sustained interrogation, particularly the
    narrative of its demise or waning with the rise of secularism and modernity, and
    the Judeo-Christian and Eurocentric assumptions—and colonial power relations—
    underlying its mobilization in disciplines such as anthropology and religious stud-
    ies. I do not therefore attempt a substantive definition of religion here but track its
    uses and limits as a category in relation to a certain assemblage. This follows Talal
    Asad's anthropological approach to the secular (and hence, religion), or Stanley
    Cavell's approach as described by Hent de Vries: "'Religion,' in Cavell's view, is
    what we are willing and able to take it to be. Its features and actual existence (for
    us) will depend on the stakes we are willing and able to grant them. Its import and
    'importance' can be found only in how we let it matter to us, in the ways we think
    and act, judge and feel. . . . [It is] *our call*, that is to say, nothing but (or beyond)
    what we claim, proclaim, or acclaim as its name and concept, its uses and abuses,
    its meaning and end." Asad, *Formations of the Secular*; Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*;
    de Vries, "Introduction," 31. J. Barton Scott and Brannon Ingram cogently sum up
    the status of religion as a category in South Asia scholarship. "This distinctively
    modern concept constrains our analysis of South Asian culture . . . by implying
    a clear distinction between the 'sacred' and the 'secular.' Consequently, scholars
    of early modern India have increasingly sought out alternate terms (e.g., 'ritual'),

which allow them to sidestep 'religion' in approaching topics like sacred kingship. For the colonial and post-colonial periods, however, the problem is more complicated: no longer a culturally foreign concept that we as scholars impose on South Asian materials, 'religion' becomes part of the conversation *in* South Asia, actively shaping modern cultural practice in significant ways." Scott and Ingram, "What Is a Public?," 360.

5   The scant existing scholarship on this genre has focused on specific deities or statues. An early piece centered on big Hanuman statues is Lutgendorf, "My Hanuman Is Bigger than Yours." On a proposed Maitreya statue in Uttar Pradesh, see Falcone, *Battling the Buddha of Love*; Falcone, "Maitreya or the Love of Buddhism." The Maitreya Project is also mentioned in Mathur and Singh, "Reincarnations of the Museum." Catherine Becker's *Shifting Stones, Shaping the Past* has an excellent chapter on Andhra Pradesh chief minister N. T. Rama Rao's 58-ft. granite Hussain Sagar Buddha, installed in 1992. Thanks to Becker's exhaustive treatment of this statue, and the emphasis I place on concrete as an emergent material, it appears in my discussion but is not central to it.

6   Rancière, *Dissensus*; Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*. A discussion of the "distribution of the sensible" follows shortly.

7   Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." All references to the essay in this volume are to the third, and final, version, published in *Illuminations*, the collection edited by Hannah Arendt, because it seems to have had the most widespread circulation and impact.

8   For an excellent account of Akshardham, see Singh, "Temple of Eternal Return."

9   Examples include Eder and Klonk, *Image Operators*; McLagan and McKee, *Sensible Politics*.

10 Jane Bennett and Pheng Cheah both challenge Rancière's emphasis on human agency, arguing for the inclusion of nonhuman actants in the political field: Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*; Cheah, "Emergence." (I thank Pheng Cheah and Dilip Gaonkar for sharing this essay.)

11 For a brilliant, far-reaching phenomenological account of touch as a sensible regime and ground of social distinction, see Jaaware, *Practicing Caste*. Unfortunately, this pathbreaking book appeared too late for me to engage its insights here, but they resonate strongly with my concerns and approach (albeit with some significant caveats).

12 "Whose Heritage? Public Symbols of the Confederacy," Southern Poverty Law Center, February 1, 2019, https://www.splcenter.org/20190201/whose-heritage-public-symbols-confederacy.

13 Rancière also uses "aesthetic" in another sense, which pertains to what he calls the "aesthetic regime" of art: one of three regimes within the European tradition (the others are the ethical regime, associated with the pedagogical role of images in Plato's ideal republic, and the poetic or representative regime, associated with an Aristotelian hierarchy of the arts). The aesthetic regime dates from around the French Revolution onward—that is, when the most influential modern concepts of the aesthetic were taking shape, as formulated theoretically by Schelling and Kant and in the modern novel by Balzac and Flaubert. Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*.

14 Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 13. The reference to Foucault tempers the Kantian a priori level of the aesthetic, rendering it historical rather than universal, essential, timeless, and transcendent. Pheng Cheah calls Rancière's schema "quasi-transcendental." Cheah, "Emergence."

15 This refutation of the base–superstructure opposition is a foundational view of cultural studies and the development of Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony by Marxist thinkers such as Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall. That tradition, however, is more concerned with representation and cultural forms as mediators of ideology than with the kind of a priori "primary aesthetics" described earlier. See, e.g., Williams, *Marxism and Literature*.

16 The term *infrastructure* is far from transparent; its use demands such an identification and declaration of commitments. Brian Larkin argues that infrastructure's usual definition as the invisible substrate of a system is not as straightforward as it seems, for it is hard to pin down precisely which elements constitute that substrate. Infrastructure is thus perhaps better understood as a means of establishing causality within a system or network. In this sense it is an analytic in itself, and the process of selecting what elements count as infrastructural—that is, primary or causal—entails particular "epistemological and political commitments." Larkin, "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure," 330.

17 The "new materialisms" are broadly concerned with the constitutive role of matter, its liveliness, force, and agency, though as Diana Coole and Samantha Frost point out, some advocates of the various distinct approaches under this umbrella see these as renewed rather than new materialisms (Coole and Frost, "Introducing the New Materialisms," 4). Emerging from science and technology studies, feminist and vitalist philosophies, and cultural theory, the new materialisms are seen as a reaction against the linguistic or cultural turn and social constructionism, the anthropocentric domination of nature implied in Cartesian-Newtonian scientific models, and the binary between nature and culture that both these strands uphold. Indeed, a feature of this return to matter is the attempt to think past such binaries in general: nature and culture, essentialism and constructionism, the mechanical and the organic, meaning and matter.

18 An excellent overview, which both performs and reflects on these debates, is Kaufmann et al., *Circulations in the Global History of Art*. See also Moxey, *Visual Time*; Kaufmann, *Toward a Geography of Art*. Failing to acknowledge the historicity and *relational production* of "cultural difference" runs the risk of positing it as primordial or essential, and enabling it to substitute for an analysis of capital's movements in search of its "spatial fix" (Harvey, "Globalization and the 'Spatial Fix'"). Fredric Jameson makes this point about the uses of "culture" in *A Singular Modernity*, 12.

19 Flood, *Objects of Translation*; Juneja, "Circulation and Beyond."

20 Juneja, "Circulation and Beyond," 62.

21 Partha Chatterjee describes the persistence of such colonial exceptionality in postindependence nation-states, having defined imperialism in terms of the ability to declare such exceptions. Thus, "Empire is immanent in modern nations." Chatterjee, "Empires, Nations, Peoples," 89.

22 Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage, as *agencement*, is a matter of becoming; in the Deleuzian–Bergsonian concept of *la durée*, as in the anthropological conception of Nancy Munn, space and time cannot be thought apart: see Hodges, "Rethinking Time's Arrow"; Phillips, "*Agencement*/Assemblage," 108. In many ways this echoes George Kubler's formulation of art-historical objects in terms of a "formal sequence" that "in cross section . . . shows a network, a mesh, or a cluster of subordinate traits; and in long section . . . has a fiber-like structure of temporal stages." However, the linearity in the idea of the "sequence" does not capture the circuits and rhizomatic networks I propose here: Kubler, *The Shape of Time*, 37–38.

23 DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society*; Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.

24 DeLanda, *Philosophy and Simulation*.

25 DeLanda, *Philosophy and Simulation*, 17.

26 DeLanda, *Philosophy and Simulation*, 185.

27 Cheah, "Emergence."

28 Again, Raymond Williams's exposition of dominant, residual, and emergent forms is a remarkable attempt to address the complexity and fluidity implied in the assemblage but also, unlike the assemblage, focuses on the human. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 121–27.

29 See, e.g., Eder and Klonk, *Image Operators*; Fuller, *Media Ecologies*; McLagan and McKee, *Sensible Politics*.

30 Didi-Huberman, "Before the Image, before Time," 35. *Anachronic* is used in Moxey, *Visual Time*; Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*.

31 The classic media studies text on remediation is Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*.

32 Meister, "Image Iconopraxis and Iconoplasty in South Asia," 15.

33 Meister, "Image Iconopraxis and Iconoplasty in South Asia," 15.

34 On the sublimation of the sacred into art via Romanticism, see Morgan, "Art and Religion in the Modern Age"; Schaeffer, *Art of the Modern Age*. This is why comparisons of the temple and the museum, or the displaced terminology of canonicity, have a sound historical basis. For such comparisons, see Alpers, "The Museum as a Way of Seeing"; Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*; Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*.

35 On modern and contemporary art as what Karin Zitzewitz, following Saba Mahmood, calls "normatively secular," see Zitzewitz, *The Art of Secularism*, 4. See also Elkins, *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art*.

36 Bourdieu, *Distinction*. Bourdieu's study did not account for unevenness *within* the postcolonial metropole either.

37 Asad, *Formations of the Secular*; Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*.

38 Keith Moxey argues for "an awareness of heterochrony, the sense that different cultures have distinct notions of time and that these are not easily related to one another. Heterochrony relativizes the significance attributed to Western history and encourages the creation of narratives that are contemporary but not synchronous" (Moxey, *Visual Time*, 173). Similarly, for Terry Smith, "Multiple temporalities are the rule these days, and their conceptions of historical development move in multifarious directions" (Smith, "Introduction," 5).

39 See, e.g., Acland, *Residual Media*.

40 There are at least three related frames through which heterogeneity is produced, accessed, and managed. One is the protean processes of capitalist expansion whose ultimate will to homogenization thrives on temporal and other heterogeneities, seeking them out or producing them in order to exploit them (whether as conditions of production or as markets made to occupy cosmetically diverse "niches"). Here anachronism becomes, as Harry Harootunian puts it, "not a residual anomaly . . . but an essential attribute of the present" (Harootunian, "'Memories of Underdevelopment' after Area Studies," 32). Another frame is a powerful universalism wedded to an ideology of progress and development that hierarchizes differences along a linear axis of evolutionary time. A third is the neoliberal program of multiculturalism that seeks to manage differences and contain frictions between them, not least through our institutional practices in the academy. Harootunian reminds us that uneven development and its heterogeneous temporalities are at the heart of the dominant global capitalist project, which in its neoliberal avatar is "indifferent to the older division of center and periphery and capable of reproducing new forms of untimeliness on a scale hitherto unimagined" (Harootunian, "'Memories of Underdevelopment' after Area Studies," 29–30). This suggests a need for accounts of difference and unevenness *within* the Western heartlands, as capital abandons certain of its sites (one type of Band-Aid solution for this, in which art and art writing are deeply enmeshed, is gentrification led by the culture industry and the "creative class"). One such account is Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies*, which describes how the unevenness within the metropoles gives rise to its own modalities of heterochrony. This is a salutary attempt to think together decolonization and modernization—although for Ross these heterogeneous temporalities are fated to disappear in the face of unilinear progress rather than subject to layering.

41 Thus, as Brian Larkin points out, those in developing countries are particularly taken with the "poetics of infrastructure" (Larkin, "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure," 332).

42 Tsing, *Friction*, 9.

43 Tsing, *Friction*, 9.

44 On the process of singularizing modernity, see Jameson, *A Singular Modernity*.

45 "A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb 'to be,' but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, 'and . . . and . . . and . . .' This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb 'to be.' Where are you going? Where are you coming from? What are you heading for? These are totally useless questions" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 25).

46 In invoking the ant, Latour is playing with the acronym for actor-network theory (ANT). "We have to behave like good ants and to be as moronic, as literalist, as positivist, as relativist as possible." Or again, "One must remain as myopic as an ant in order to carefully misconstrue what 'social' usually means" (Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 170–71). This project, however, has no pretensions to the systemic rigor of ANT, holding instead to the art historian's commitment to the inexhaustibility

of the image (a commitment that hinges on the aesthetic, given that inexhaustibility can also be built into a system).

47 That said, the enormous power or public profile of some of the actors in this story means that I am not always able to cite my informants or use what they have shared because of the possible consequences for them. In such cases, wherever possible I make the argument by other means while leaving out some things altogether. My approach here therefore differs from my previous work on calendar art, which drew heavily on close analyses of interviews with artists and publishers. While still starting from the actors (in this case, sculptors and patrons) as the central nodes in this genre's networks, this account is both more formalist and more synthetic or broad-brush. But it is only fitting that each project should adopt an approach that is responsive to its particular object.

48 Fabrice Fouillet, "Colossi in the Countryside," 2014, https://www.lensculture.com /articles/fabrice-fouillet-colossi-in-the-countryside. On "statuomania," see Michalski, "Democratic 'Statuomania' in Paris."

49 Wikipedia, "List of Tallest Statues," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_tallest _statues.

50 The "long 1980s" was a period of rapid transformation in India, roughly dating from Indira Gandhi's Emergency of 1975–77 that ended three decades of Congress Party hegemony in national politics, enabling the resurgence of Hindu nationalist parties. In 1980, Indira Gandhi's reelected Congress government borrowed $5 billion from the International Monetary Fund, followed by a gradual easing of import restrictions that spearheaded the demise of the quasi-socialist Nehruvian compact. India's economic liberalization is usually dated from the 1991 New Economic Policy in which Rajiv Gandhi's minority Congress government sought to address a crisis in the balance of payments through wide-ranging economic reforms.

51 Jain, *Gods in the Bazaar*; Jain, "Mass-Reproduction and the Art of the Bazaar."

52 Birla, *Stages of Capital*.

53 The Birlas, Marwari "trader-industrialists" from Pilani in Rajasthan, had moved to Calcutta and Bombay as middlemen and speculators in the colonial economy. After making substantial profits from opium during World War I they pushed into the jute export industry and other forms of manufacturing, emerging as one of postindependence India's richest business families (Ray, "Introduction," 58–59). (I should clarify that while the historian Ritu Birla is, in fact, related to this Birla family, by "the Birlas" I mean the industrialists and refer to the historian as "Birla.")

54 Birla, *Stages of Capital*, 25. See also Hansen, "Sovereigns beyond the State."

55 Weber, *Economy and Society*. See also Gane, *Max Weber and Contemporary Capitalism*.

56 Harvey, "The 'New' Imperialism."

57 My use of the term *vernacular* for this capitalist ethos specifies it not in terms of locality or language but in terms of this relationship of subordination and exceptionality (though the association with the local has proved hard to shake). For a discussion of the vernacular and its etymology in the Latin *verna*, a slave born in the master's house, see Jain, *Gods in the Bazaar*, 14–15.

58 Birla, *Stages of Capital*, 27, 199. Birla does not explicitly discuss the use of the term *culture*, deploying it as a given category even as she problematizes its constitution vis-à-vis "economy." For a discussion of the development of the culture concept in relation to colonialism, see Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History*.

59 The very categories of public and private first arose in late nineteenth-century commercial and financial law, underpinning the notion of "general public utility" which persists as the criterion for the legitimacy of charitable works (Birla, *Stages of Capital*).

60 Birla, *Stages of Capital*, 237.

61 Ashish Rajadhyaksha points out that popular cinema in India has been both indispensable to the state, because of its hegemonic role in constituting national subjects, and structurally excluded from it by its informal mode of production and its undesirable, antirealist antiaesthetics (Rajadhyaksha, *Indian Cinema in the Time of Celluloid*). The Indian film industry, which produces the largest number of films in the world, was granted official industry status only in 1998. But even as the industry takes on an increasingly formalized corporate aspect, its third and fourth generations of producers, stars, directors, and other personnel attest to the continuing importance of kinship.

62 Liang, "Porous Legalities and Avenues of Participation"; Sundaram, *Pirate Modernity*. Liang's account takes a less epochal tone than Sundaram's but nonetheless follows Sundaram's primary focus on post-1980s "media urbanism."

63 The scholarship on printed images in particular has highlighted their role in non-elite politics (see Jain, *Gods in the Bazaar*; Pinney, *"Photos of the Gods"*; Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation*). On the (contested) distinction between civil and political society, see Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed*.

64 Liang, "Porous Legalities and Avenues of Participation," 8.

65 See also Sundaram, "Uncanny Networks."

66 Bruno Latour describes these functional separations as part of what he calls the Modern Constitution (Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*).

67 Larkin, "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure."

CHAPTER 1: STATUES AND SCULPTORS

1 For concise overviews of these conceptions of time, see Hodges, "Rethinking Time's Arrow"; West-Pavlov, *Temporalities*.

2 Forty, *Concrete and Culture*. Forty's otherwise marvelously detailed, insightful, and generative account does not provide much of a sense of how concrete is understood in the Global South. His remains a view from the pukka side, primarily focusing on architecture and tending to think in terms of failures of modernity and cultural stereotypes. In keeping with my supplementary view from the kutcha, vernacular side, I often use the term *cement* rather than *concrete*, since *cement* is the term that sculptors and patrons usually use. This reflects the use of cement mixes with aggregates of varying grades, from the usual coarse gravel and crushed limestone for the main reinforced cement concrete structure to sand and marble powder for shaping forms and finishing.