Professions of faith: Hindu nationalism, television and the avatars of capital.
Dasgupta, S.M.

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Introduction

To comprehend a thing itself, not just to fit and register it in its system of reference, is nothing but to perceive the individual moment in its immanent connection with others.¹

Contemporary forms of economic, social and political globalization have complicated the modes and dimensions through which identities are continually made and remade, with particularly important consequences for postcolonial nation-states. The mass media provide one powerful dimension in the construction of discourses and practices of culture and in their present globalized mode of operation complicate processes of identity-formation. Further, the nation-state is undergoing important transformations in relation to harnessing the support of its citizens toward the formation of a national culture. In this endeavour, the privatised and global mass media like television have had considerable impact in diluting the power of the state. These particular developments are part of a broader process which has been described by Kevin Robbins and David Morley thus:

Globalization is transforming our apprehension of the world: it is provoking a new experience of orientation and disorientation, new senses of placed and placeless identity. The global-local nexus is associated with new relations between space and time, fixity and mobility, centre and periphery, ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ space, ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, frontier and territory. This, inevitably, has implications for both individual and collective identities and for the meaning and coherence of community.²

The question of identity, and the competing discourses that struggle over the formulation of “national cultures” thus acquire a more urgent character given periods of flux. The “space” of identity, having fractured and dispersed under contemporary globalization thus makes the question of belonging quite central during periods of temporal and spatial flux. Zygmunt Bauman’s comment that “One thinks of identity whenever one is not sure of where one belongs” captures well the relationship between periods of social flux and the anxieties over cultural identity.³

In India, since 1991 there has been an increasing presence of global television, particularly satellite broadcasting from outside the country. This development, which coincided with the deregulation of the Indian economy has provoked impassioned debate about the role of mass media in relation to India’s cultural distinctiveness. The present situation in India provides an important historical conjuncture in which the relationship between cultural nationalism, transnational television and global capitalism can be studied. This relationship between global television and debates around national culture have taken many forms, from an open embrace of foreign channels and better technology to defensive rhetoric about the destruction of “Indian culture.”

For example, in 1996, STAR TV cancelled its prime-time talk show Nikki Tonight after a guest called Gandhi, the “Father of the Nation” a “banniya bastard.”⁴ The pub-

lic outcry precipitated by the remark included a lawsuit against NewsCorp. by Gandhi's grand-nephew, and calls in parliament for banning the network. Explaining the program's cancellation, STAR TV (owned by Australian media magnate Rupert Murdoch) chief executive Gary Davey said “We make every possible effort to allow our viewers to dictate what appears on our channels. Our decision to suspend the program reflects that determination.” The rhetoric of public sensitivity and “giving people what they want” displaced the complex political and economic negotiations between private media corporations and state power. As Madhu Jain, media analyst, India Today emphasized, Murdoch's eagerness to tap the huge Indian market as it opened up to foreign companies was crucial to the banning of the program, although the reason for STAR's action was characterized in terms of “audience respect.” By broadening the particular Nikki Tonight controversy, and placing it in the context of this economic and media landscape, I am foregrounding that this particular media event, in all its political and economic ramifications, cannot be understood as an isolated event, as yet another hysterical “Third World” response to “westernisation.” Rather, a closer look at the articulation of television to political developments and economic shifts in the Indian context reveals some profound shifts in how exactly the term “India” and indeed the West must be rethought. The changing media situation in the country, which was partly influenced by other changes in the field of economics and politics, was intimately related to an increasingly complex global cultural economy, as delineated by Arjun Appadurai. He characterizes the media scene in such a situation as “the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations and film production studios), which are now available to a growing number of private and public interests throughout the world, and to the images of the world created by these media.” The production and distribution of images within this global landscape are thus embedded in complex temporal and spatial dimensions and the substantial emergence of private interests also results in shifts in the kinds of programming and modes of address of television. Further, the emergence of private commercial interests in media production entails ongoing negotiation between them and the state, given that TV programming mediates conceptions of the world and can have important political consequences.

The “national honour” that was being defended in Parliament was somewhat different from how the “nation” as an imaginary identification was to be hegemonically constructed a few years later. The decades long rule by the Congress-I party had come to an end and the growing predominance of the Hindu-Rightist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was leading to an increasingly religious dimension in the articulation of “national culture”. This development necessarily had a strong impact on the modalities through which the nation was to be, and continues to be understood. If the “fron-
Tier discourse" deployed during the Nikki Tonight controversy posited the "nation's honour" in decidedly non-Hindu terms, the discourse of nationalism undertaken by the Hindu Right took a decidedly aggrieved, aggressive and religious tone. Launching their "Hindu agenda" in January 1997, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), or World Hindu Council condemned television programs for making "a mockery of Hindu values and traditions."  

In early 1996, the Delhi High Court rebuked foreign television networks for their "vulgar" programming, singling out Santa Barbara, Dynasty and Baywatch. While the specific complaints brought against these networks focused on violence and sexual content, in delivering their judgment one justice queried the counsel for foreign networks "Do you want to bring in the American culture or retain Indian culture through such programmes?" One might ask what comprises "American culture," or "Indian culture" for that matter, where violence and sexual excess is attributed to the "West" and against which "Indian" purity is defined. Further, the only available discourse through which foreign programming is perceived by the justices is that of "culture", as if the foreign networks conceive of their primary purpose to be that of exporting "American cultural values." The economic dimension of targeting specific programming to middle-class audiences cannot be acknowledged in this culturalist discourse, which hypostasizes notions of culture and erases the broader socio-economic and political relations within which it circulates. This relationship between economic changes in the country and the growing vociferousness of cultural panics thus has a decidedly religious dimension to it in that reflecting on the shifts in one arena necessarily illuminates some of the important characteristics of the other fields.

The ongoing cultural controversies around the nation's self-image, articulated by different and interested parties has made television one of the central locations for an ongoing cultural politics. These discursive panics around the state of the nation and its culture, are symptoms and indicators of profound shifts in the country's media landscape, and related to changes in political power that has seen the rise of the Hindu nationalist movement as a powerful player in the political, cultural and economic fortunes of the country. Further, the responses of different power blocs within India to foreign television has not just been of panic. Indeed, quite often the nation-state, particularly under the tutelage of the Hindu Right, has actively accommodated and promoted the changes in the global media scene through legislation, and a willingness to promote a more global form of popular culture. Hence, the different forms of the relationship between TV, the economy and Hindu nationalism become an increasingly interesting and complex object of study, particularly in relation to existing discourses of globalization, cultural nationalism, tradition and modernity.

**ARTICULATING CULTURE**

The media are increasingly central in the profound shifts taking place in the fields of

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11 HC issues notice to STAR, Zee TV over 'vulgar programmes', *Times of India*, January 13, 1996.
cultural politics, political struggle and economic liberalization. Television provides one site where the nation screens its dramas, its crises over its identity, and projects an image of itself to itself and to the “outside world.” As a prime symptom of the current, electronically-mediated “postmodern” condition of belonging, television thus refracts and channels other discourses around questions of nationalism, culture and politics, while these latter often take recourse to, or cite changes in television as an integral part of the ongoing reconfiguration of social relations.

For the purpose of this project, television is not understood as a monolithic institution, scrupulously following its singular logic. Rather, television is understood as an assemblage of loosely related broadcasting networks, each with their own particular logics (geared for example, towards certain niche audience markets) that, while partly overlapping are nevertheless distinct. Such an understanding of television necessitates a further recognition that shifts in the functioning of television institutions, with regard to ownership, funding and programming decisions, are not unrelated to broader power relations with and above the state, particular political power blocs, advertisers and the like. A closer examination of television thus necessitates a corresponding recognition that television is linked to other social centres of power, to the state, to the market, its audiences as well as internally to the different, often competing networks vying for success.

Similarly, the Hindu Nationalist movement, as well as its political spearhead, the BJP, does not possess a unitary character that, despite many protestations, follows a clear, distinct and unchanging political philosophy or mobilization programme. As an internally-differentiated group or power bloc, constructed through years of organization, the Hindu Nationalist movement speaks in different voices to its different audiences (depending, for example on grassroots groups and elite organizations), and is itself subject to pressures from other forces and changes in other fields such as economics, cultural politics, legal shifts, etc. Since coming to hegemony in the Indian social formation, it has also had to negotiate on an ongoing basis with the shifts in the media scene, particularly television, which has always been seen as a crucial political resource for those in power.

This historical, internally differentiated character of both television and the Hindu Nationalist movement (whose particular historical and ideological trajectories will be traced in subsequent chapters) highlights one of the central theoretical frames through which the different elements (television, Hindu Nationalism, the economy) will be related. Most early analysis and theorization of questions of mass media such as television, and its relation to the larger social formation, itself comprising different levels, has relied on a traditional base-superstructure understanding of the role of media in the production of consent and the reproduction of the ideological conditions necessary for the maintenance of the social status quo. Recent postmodernist work on the other hand, sometimes relying on notions of “audience resistance” or the sheer complexity and suffusion of televisual imagery, the discourse of simulacra and simulations, has tended to give up the question of macro-level and relational analysis of the media and its place in the social formation.

The theory of articulation guides my analysis of the relationship between cultural...
politics, global media and liberalization.\textsuperscript{13} Articulation as a theory and methodology is relevant for such an analysis since it is interested in tracing the relationship between different elements in a social formation, is concerned with questions of discourse and ideology, and relationships of domination and subordination.\textsuperscript{14} All of these aspects impinge on my analysis. The social formation as a structural whole of complex economic, social, political, cultural and ideological levels; discourse in terms of the rhetoric of Hindutva, and Indian culture; domination and subordination in that the discursive and material processes of contemporary Indian society, particular in relation to Hindu Nationalism, are linked to unequal power-relations, in terms of religious conflict and political movements that characterize the centre and periphery.

Eschewing both the determinist model of “orthodox marxism” and the postmodern abdication of a cognitive mapping of media-ted society, the project stresses the importance of articulation as a guiding concept-metaphor for analyzing the relationship between these three elements. To argue for an articulated understanding of the relationship between television, Hindu nationalism and the economy is first to refute the following:

1) The mass media, and television in particular function to reproduce capitalist society through the ideological indoctrination of certain values.

Rather, while it is indeed true that private television emphasizes the values of consumerism, the particular themes and subject-matter through which the discourse of consumerism as a desired goal are expressed do not have determined effects that are foreseeable a priori. The proliferation of certain genres such as talk-shows and political programmes for example, have broadened the scope of topics on the airwaves, and while necessarily tied to market considerations such as audience size and advertising support, cannot be seen as neatly overlapping in the interests of capital. The social discourses around family, nation, gender and culture for example, that are triggered around changing programming and kinds of content cannot be easily mapped onto the “interests of capital.”

2) Television is either a single institution or a complex of institutions who share a singular logic and are either impervious to changes in the political or economic field, or completely overlap with the latter in their interests.

Such a view fails to take into account that different bodies within the state media apparatus for example, compete with each other depending on whether they are subject to market or political pressures. Similarly, within and between private networks intense competition and mutual complementarity mark their functioning in terms of attracting advertisers, negotiating with political groups, responding to pressures from civil society around controversies and the like. Thus, the internal differentiation that marks the character of both the state and private TV networks are part of a broader web of social relations.

3) Society is a unified whole that follows a unitary logic that parades under the name of a particular discourse of culture or economics.

Rather, the social formation is itself an articulated structure in that it comprises different levels such as the economic, the political, the legal and the social dimensions. Each level has its own internal specificity, comprising different power blocs (such as competition between political parties, or media bureaucrats), its particular temporal-


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ity, and is also linked crucially to other levels of the social formation. Thus, as a complex unity in difference, the social formation is not reducible to a homogenous entity, so that one can speak in the singular about Indian society or culture.

No analysis of the relationship between TV, the economy and Hindu nationalism can thus proceed by first isolating each of the three elements, outside their relationship to the other two, and then ascribing a singular essence, philosophy or unitary logic to them. A theory of articulation thus negates a mechanical reductionism that sees the mass media as the handmaiden of the state and the political bloc which dominates the latter. It further refuses to search for essence through depth understandings of the “true character” of television, the economy or Hindu nationalism. Rather, if any essence is to be found, it is to be understood as a contingent, historically-specific character that is a function of both the internal configuration of power-relations at a particular period (such as the ascendancy of market logic in TV after 1990) and the external relations through which and by which each of these three elements operate at a particular historical conjuncture. For example, the particular mode of address of early state television in India, was determined not simply by the kind of economic development plans drawn up by the state, the consensus by certain elites on a general objective for television, and the necessary infrastructure, but also by the history of the country in terms of colonialism and its aftermath, the particular conglomeration of power-blocs that gained ascendancy after it, the level of scientific development among the educated classes, etc.

Articulation is to be understood as a “linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time.” Thus, the articulation between TV, Hindu Nationalism and economic change must be understood as a historically-specific relationship. Further, it is not determined in the sense of one particular element, such as the economy, determining the precise character of the other two and binding them into a unified structure which has the same logic (such as that of a capitalist, Hindu consumerist notion of Indian culture). Rather, India as a complexly structured social formation is understood as a “structure in which things are related, as much through their similarities as through their differences.” A theory of articulation recognizes the dimension of difference as structuring the social formation at its different levels – “the recognition that there are different social contradictions with different origins; that the contradictions which drive the historical process forward do not always appear in the same place, and will not always have the same effects.” The articulations between media, the state, and the economy thus have a historically-specific and differential logic. As Hall argues “We have to think about the articulation between different contradictions; about the different specificities and temporal durations through which they operate, about the different modalities through which they function.” For example, the shifts in the field of Indian television, away from a state-controlled and supported institution, to a more market-oriented entertainment medium was linked to emerging contradictions in the economic health of the nation, to the need for greater audiences as well as to internal struggles between different sectors of the state’s media machinery. Contradictions and shifts in all of these reverberated throughout the field.

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18 Ibid. p.92.
INTRODUCTION

of television, each had their own temporality and specific modality (for example, appeal to paternalistic education on the one hand, and populist market discourses of giving the audiences what they wanted on the other), these had to find political and bureaucratic support from important players, were linked to emerging power blocs in the political sphere, and to general crises in the country that further affected how the role of television was to be formulated.

A theory of articulation is premised on such a relational, historically-specific understanding of the network of power relations through which different levels of the social formation work. A historical understanding is understood in a two-fold way here. Historical analyses are sensitive to particular changes that take place over time in the functioning of institutions, political movements and the like and eschew ahistorical understandings of the essential nature of this or that organization. At the same time, historical understandings and analyses also emphasize the sedimented character of power-relations, the historical consolidation of certain forms of power-blocs, of received and hence commonsensical notions of “culture”, the nation, its place in the world etc.

Historical analyses, besides isolating and studying particular configurations and relationships, also understands the latter as having a history – a history that continues to play a part in how these relationships might evolve, in what directions overlapping or contradictory relationships are set up between the state, media and political groups. The stress on difference in understanding the theory of articulation is not based on a notion of absolute difference, on the endless deferral of meaning, a continual slippage in attempts to comprehend and analyze different levels of the social formation. A strong reading of the notion of difference in a theory of articulation is thus still committed to the possibility of understanding how certain relationships evolve, dissolve and recombine rather than simply intensifying the complexity of the social formation to such an extent where it becomes impossible to understand a social formation in its admittedly contradictory and uneven character. Such a conclusion would make it impossible to trace the relationship between television, politics and the economy because it would refuse any attempt to characterize the particular complex and uneven operations and logic of each.

In other words, one needs to keep the dialectical tension between difference and unity, part and whole, historical evolution and temporary consolidations while employing a theory of articulation. This is the difference between saying that there is necessarily no correspondence between the different levels of the social formation (in this case, media, politics and the economy) and saying there is no necessary correspondence. A theory of articulation would hold strongly onto the latter view. To say there is no necessary correspondence, no easy fit between shifts in the economy, television and politics is to move away from a determinist paradigm of mass media research, yet not go through to the other end and assert that therefore there is necessarily no correspondence, no fit, no overlapping of interests, practices and discourses between the three fields. Thinking about articulation for the present project therefore involves understanding “difference in complex unity, without becoming a hostage to the privileging of difference as such.”

That is to say, a theory of articulation does not assert that TV, political movements and economic changes can be related in any sort of way to each other. Rather, a historical analysis analyzes the shifts in all three, the reasons for them, the prevailing and

19 Ibid. p. 93.
countervailing pressures which structure and yet provide fluidity to the evolving relations between the postcolonial Indian nation state, global television and Hindu Nationalism. For example, the discourse of Gandhian socialism that has become part of the ideological platform of the Hindu Right is not the effect of some chance articulation or connection between Hindu nationalism and the thought of Gandhi – rather, this articulation becomes possible for certain historical reasons such as the cynicism generated by the corruption of the Congress(I), the chief spokesperson for Gandhian thought, a calculated nativist response to the increasing proliferation of foreign commodities and the historically sedimented yet ideologically flexible resources of Hindu Right philosophical thought. A historical analysis thus recognizes the weight of the past, the legitimacy of earlier regimes of thought and action, while analyzing the present evolving articulation of these past resources to the contemporary construction of hegemony.

Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of “field” is particularly relevant for the above discussion of an articulated understanding of the relationship between TV, Hindu Nationalism and economic change. The importance of Bourdieu’s notion of the field is particularly relevant in this analysis because it insists on the necessity to think relationally since the notion of field draws and explores the changing relations between the elements within a particular field and its relations with other fields. Bourdieu describes a field as “a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents in institutions, by their present and potential situation(situs) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology etc.).” The internal relationality of the field, defined by different actors or agents, each with their particular interests and positions of lesser or greater power, and the external linkage between fields is highlighted in this understanding. The positions within a field that its occupants inhabit are never determined a priori and for all time, but shift depending on the distribution and kind of capital that circulates within a field. For example, in the state-controlled media like television, certain kinds of TV producers had greater access and power; this situation changed dramatically when the field of TV succumbed to market pressures, and different players with different positions of power in relation to funding and access to the government emerged.

Further, the relationship between different fields and within them are understood by Bourdieu not through a direct relationship of a causal uni-directional nature, but as mediated through the specific logics within the fields and the arrangements existing at a historical moment between them (for example, the mode of funding state media affects the kinds of programming of media). Bourdieu argues that “the external determinations that bear on agents situated in a given field never apply to them directly, but affect them only through the specific mediation of the specific forms and forces of the field, after having undergone a restructuring that is all the more important the more autonomous the field, that is, the more it is capable of imposing its specific logic, the cumulative product of its particular history.” This description of the determinations that impinge on the agents within a field point to the complexity of

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21 Ibid. p. 97
22 Ibid. p. 105.
how the restructuring of the Indian economy affects and is affected by the specific logic of cultural producers including writers, actors, directors, publicity agents etc. The field of culture is marked by its insistence on separating itself from baser economic concerns. Yet, during periods of change such as the emergence of private TV networks, producers of programming responded in the language and according to the logic of their particular field. For example, those who saw their power being eroded complained about the downgrading of "culture" while private producers indebted to advertising revenue claimed they were giving audiences what they wanted.

Bourdieu argues "The specific ideological function of the field of cultural production is performed quasi-automatically on the basis of the homology of structure between the field of cultural production, organized around the opposition between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, and the field of struggle between classes, for the maintenance or subversion of the symbolic order... The homology between the two fields causes the struggles for the specific objectives at stake in the autonomous field to produce euphemized forms of the ideological struggles between the classes." Cultural producers do not intentionally operate in the interests of the ruling class; rather, their objective position within a field that is homologous to the economic field and the structure of social space (or class structure) determines the stance they will adopt - "the space of positions tends to command the space of position-takings (or stances)." The notion of fields and the relationship between them is further, not just internally-differentiated and mediated by their specific logics but is also one of struggle. Bourdieu insists that "the notion of field excludes functionalism and organicism...the field is the locus of relations of force...and of struggles aimed at transforming it, and therefore of endless change. The coherence that may be observed in a given state of the field, its apparent orientation toward a common function...are born of conflict and competition, not some kind of immanent self-development of the structure." It is precisely for this reason that a theory of articulation in analyzing the relationship between television, economic change and Hindu nationalism is most suited. By understanding these three elements of analysis as fields, as places of struggle that do not have a unitary, ahistorical, self-immanent structure, an articulated understanding using Bourdieu’s notion of fields inserts the question of change, struggle, history and difference to the centre of the theoretical investigation.

A notion of the social formation as comprising different fields each comprised of their own specific historically-specific interests and logics in continual struggle over scarce resources for power in politics, economics and social fields thus is central to an understanding of how media studies approaches questions of television, power and cultural politics. In such a situation, power is not understood as the sole property of particular institutions who then exact the “proper behaviour” from other agents and groups in the social formation (such as the base-superstructure paradigm). Thus, Michel Foucault's point is well taken that “Power's condition of possibility...must not be thought in the primary existence of a central point, in a unique source of sovereignty from which secondary and descendent forms would emanate; it is the moving substrate of force relations which, by virtue of their inequality, constantly engender states of power, but the latter are always local and unstable.” Hence, the question of unequal power relations as an essential feature of the social formation is not based on

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24 Bourdieu and Wacquant, Invitation, p. 105.
25 Bourdieu and Wacquant, Invitation, p. 103-4.
a singular originating and determining point. For example, the state, or post-1990, the market cannot be seen as the sole determinant of the possible political consequences of changes in television in India. Rather, the constant, historically-shifting "states of power", at different levels of the social formation affect how questions of change, whether cultural, social or economic are negotiated. Foucault's formulation also draws attention to the historically-changeable situation of power relations, as a "moving sub­strate" rather than the "base" that is fixed and immobile. Indeed, capitalist social rela­tions are themselves always on the move, as contemporary globalization indicates, and its effects in different realms are unpredictable.

MEDIA STUDIES AND THE DISCOURSE OF CULTURE

The field of media research has a long history and comprises different strands of thought with their own particular theoretical and philosophical suppositions and corre­sponding methodologies. In relation to the above mentioned theory of articulation, and the importance of a historical and conjunctural analysis of the empirically iden­tifiable relationship between television, politics and the economy, not all fields of media research are directly relevant. Approaches which recognize the complexity of the social formation and the dialectical relationship between media and society are most pertinent for the present concerns.

Media like television cannot be characterized, as its articulated structure elaborated above shows, in a mimetic relation to society. That is, television for example does not merely reflect the reality of the social formation but mediates it. TV is thus not outside nor completely inside the power relations that characterize a social formation – as a field of cultural production it has its own relative specificity, its particular modalities of operation and practice, yet, particularly at the present conjuncture, in its highly capital­ized form, it is integrally linked to shifts in the political and economic field. Thus, rather than conceive of "society" and "media" as two separate entities, their mutual imbrication must be acknowledged at the start. The different power blocs, particularly in the field of political practice recognize the crucial importance of the mass media particularly television, while the latter must negotiate with evolving political centres as they struggle to assert their hegemony over the social formation.

The incestuous relationship between social power relations and projections on the small screen can be approached through Walter Benjamin's celebrated and often misread essay Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit. Benjamin's complex, dialectically constructed argument cannot be engaged with here in all its detail. However, a few points made in that piece are particularly relevant for

27 Translated by Harry Zohn as The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction the subtlety of Benjamin's formulation, and the substance of his argument has been seriously degraded, particularly within contemporary cultural studies. While exigencies of space preclude me from engaging with the details lost in the English translation, it is worth sig­naling here that Reproduzierbarkeit should be under­stood in English as "Reproducibility" and not "Reproduction." The sloppy translation has resulted in celebratory accounts in contemporary cultural criticism of the popular and populist possibilities of mass media, without recognizing that the protensive potentiality with which the word "Reproducibility" is marked implies the two-edged sword of either Fascism or Revolution, for Benjamin. When this potential of the mass media being turned either way is ignored, and democratic and political liberation announced as the necessary effect of technological innovation, Benjamin's subtle dialectical argument gets lost. See Walter Benjamin, Illuminations: Essays and Reflections, translated by Harry Zohn, New York: Schocken Books 1968, pp. 217-252. For both ver­sions of the original essay in German, written in 1935 and revised in 1939, see Gesammelte Schriften (from now on GS) 1.2., edited by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhauser, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1972, pp. 431-69 and 219-53.
my analysis. Firstly, Benjamin insists that technical reproducibility degrades the aura of traditional art, in the sense that the specific time and place of the appreciation of an art piece, concretized through first ritual and then religion, is lost at present, given that “that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art...the technique of production detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition...And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object produced.”

This short quote is dense in its suggestions – firstly, tradition, located for Benjamin in ritual and religion loses its hold in time and place on the work of art. Here, it must be stated immediately that tradition is not, for Benjamin, some fixed static object. As he puts it – “The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being embedded in the fabric of tradition. This tradition is thoroughly alive and extremely changeable.”

The work of art however, when dis-embedded from its place in a changeable tradition (the relevance for religious media are evident) is not left to free-float outside the grasp of the aura. It is re-embedded in “the particular situation” of its reception, and in the process it is “re-activated.” This last point is crucial. The re-activation of the aura of the work of art in mass-mediated society is not the same aura as in antiquity or the classical age, yet it is not devoid of its auratic dimension. However, this dimension is reinvigorated, not by its proximity to a fixed time and place, but by its relationship to the particular power-relations within which it is re-embedded. And here lies the crux of Benjamin’s argument. It would be a mistake to assume that the aura vanishes with technological mediation – rather, its character changes given its displacement from the time and space of tradition in ritual and religion, to the mobile and fragmented temporality and spatiality of modern experience (Erfahrung). In the final version of his Theses on the Philosophy of History, written a year later, Benjamin reminds us that a materialist history separates out “a specific work out of the lifework” and as a result the “lifework is preserved in this work and at the same time cancelled.”

For our discussion, the aura does not disappear then, the power of authority and tradition is not erased, but a historical analysis seeks out its trace in the present, a trace that is both canceled and preserved (aufgehoben). The populist readings of his earlier essay must be situated within this argument, where the aura is cancelled and preserved, to re-surface again, re-activated in a different form and toward different ends. However, the ends toward which it may be reactivated cannot be calculated before-hand, but depend on the particular constellation within which it emerges. It is worth remarking that Benjamin closes the essay with a reminder that the auratic potential of film, photography and radio can annihilate the past by monumentalizing it, while a historical-materialist reading of mass media registers and rescues the potentialities of the past extinguished by the instrumentalization of art through technological innovation in the service of authoritarianism.

The change in the aura, in the case of our present discussion cannot be understood outside of the “particular situation” in which it is re-activated. And that particular sit-

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28 Ibid, p. 211. 
29 Ibid. p. 223. 
30 Experience as Erfahrung is to be distinguished from Erlebnis. The latter is related to a punctuated encounter in time and space, such as the viewing of a painting or the sight of a car-crash, while the former should be understood as the unfolding through time of a continuous narrative which has a past, present and future. The structure of the classical Bildungsroman is an example of Erfahrung while the shock of viewing a fleeting image projected on a screen occupies the temporality of Erlebnis. 
uation is that of the rise of religious nationalism in India, and the New Economic Policy inaugurated in 1990 (Benjamin had already inaugurated his own characteristic analysis of the link between capitalist liberalisation and the degradation of modern experience in the 1920s with “Imperial Panorama: A Tour of German Inflation”). Hence, this project is undertaken within an understanding that mass media like global television do not continue the annihilation of the aura through technical reproduction, but re-activate the aura of images within the specific time-space dimensions of their production and reception at a particular historical moment. The “aura” of course, takes on a double-meaning here, since the analysis that follows relates directly to religion. That is, if contemporary media are understood as degrading the auratic appeal of religion, how might the projection of religious images and their location within Hindu Nationalism be related to Benjamin’s argument? It is here precisely, that the above discussion becomes particularly relevant. As we have seen, the power and authority of the image does not diminish with mediation; rather, it gets transfigured within another time-place nexus. Further, in our case, it is indeed both religious imagery and religious nationalism that are being “resurrected” through television. Does the same auratic appeal of “tradition” obtain once more? Benjamin’s, and our answer, would have to be “No”. For the religious auratic authority of the image and religion generally, cannot now be dis-embedded from its location within modernity, in particular the technological mediations which have radically re-configured time and space as the dimensions through which religious identity is imagined and lived.

Hence, Benjamin’s argument gains a double saliency here. It directly addresses both the degradation and reactivation of the aura in mass media, and inserts this phenomenon within the emplaced modernity of contemporary globalization. Further, the work of art (as in Arbeit), cannot be understood outside its potentiality for going both ways – of either stimulating the sort of adoring contemplation that results in Fascism, triggering a reading of the past from the “Time of the Now” (Zeitgeist) for a future amidst proclamations of the end of history and the death of man. This active transactional history between present, past and future, reminiscent of Benjamin’s reading of Paul Klee’s Angelus Novus, underwrites this project, so as to both situate the present claims of capitalist globalization, religious nationalism and global television, and locate renditions of the past and the utopic future which undergird all three discourses. It is only when cultural difference, manifested in global television, and social power-relations are read against the grain, that a properly relational and mediated understanding of the work of redemption in the age of technological innovation can be understood.

TV programming is not a self-evident series of texts and meanings which can be simplistically read off the screen. That is, an approach which simply sees TV as a stimulus source which influences audiences must be refused because it fails to acknowledge that the “reality” offered on television is not transparent. Rather, the “real” is always mediated. On the side of production, different forms of professional techniques, pressures and modes of operation govern what can be shown on television and

32 The piece was later to be published in Einbahnstrasse (One-Way street), GS IV.1 (1972 -).
34 Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History”.  
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in what manner. Thus, if television offers up its own language through which reality is represented, it does not offer a faithful reflection of the world. As Shaun Moores argues, it is “dependent upon the operation of a code – for example, conventions of selection and combination...a television news broadcast [for example]...has to be made to mean and is therefore encoded in particular ways.” On the consumption side, audiences are differentiated and occupy diverse positions vis-a-vis the programming that is broadcast. There is further, a plurality of kinds of programming, modes of address and maps of meaning on offer on TV.

The global character of TV broadcasting has a correspondingly long history of academic inquiry accompanying it. Earlier studies of global mass media provided valuable empirical data on the trajectory of global media expansion, particularly in terms of ownership, finance and general economic concerns. Such studies were also crucial in highlighting the political dimensions of global media expansion, in relation to certain nation-states such as the U.S. By focusing on the role of mass media in relation to the integration of “less-developed countries” (LDCs) into the circuits of capital, theorists like Herbert Schiller, Armand Matellart and others provide a historically-sensitive framework within which the relationship between “culture and capitalism” can be understood.

Schiller argued that “the concept of cultural imperialism today best describes the sum of the processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote the values and structures of the dominating center of the system.”

Cultural homogenization subtends the process of capitalist expansion, according to this view, where “the imagery and cultural perspectives of this ruling sector [specifically the U.S.] in the center ... shape and structure consciousness throughout the system at large.” This notion of homogeneity assumes that the global reproduction of capitalist economic relations entails the “deliberate management of the sphere of consciousness.”

This view came in for criticism from many quarters and caution was expressed about some of the assumptions of the cultural imperialism thesis, recognizing the complexity of both global configurations of media power, and the internally-differentiated character of “national cultures” under threat.

The criticisms of the media imperialism theses such as Schiller’s are thus well taken. Criticism also arose in a different field of communications studies that focussed on audience reception and the variability in the modes of interaction between specific audiences and global TV programmes. For example Elihu Katz and Tamar Liebes showed through ethnographic research how audiences in Israel did not passively consume U.S. programmes like Dallas, but interpreted them according to the web of social

39 Schiller, Communication, p. 9.
40 Ibid. p. 17.
41 Ibid. p. 19.
42 Ibid. p. 17.
meanings and relations that they occupied in their everyday life.\textsuperscript{44} While the present study is not directly concerned with audience readings of global programming on TV, it is worth sign-posting here that audience ethnographies did provide another vantage point from which to problematize the assumption that cultural homogenization is the necessary effect of global television's expansion. However, a recognition of the modalities of reception need not necessitate one to overestimate the power of the audience or to engage in a populist argument of the radically political character of alternative readings of TV texts.\textsuperscript{45} The debates have ranged around what precisely constitutes the "politics" of alternative readings of audiences with regard to broader macro-analyses of the production of news and entertainment. While the present study is not directly connected with the question of how spaces are opened up for political struggle in a global media landscape, the debates do call attention to the different levels and processes through which media production, dissemination and reception occur. They thus do address the uneven, inter-related character of the contemporary media scene.

Cees Hamelink has recently highlighted that the global expansion of media networks is not a one-dimensional process. Thus, Hamelink argues that although there is a much broader expansion of consumerist values through media like television, and the marketing of certain primarily U.S lifestyles, these are tailored for local audiences. It is necessary here then to differentiate between cultural homogenization, understood as the eradication of cultural specificity, and cultural globalization as the transnational dissemination of certain consumerist values. The crucial question becomes whether consumerism is fuelled in the dialect of western lifestyles and mores or whether they are mediated through local specificities. For example, Hamelink points out about 20 per cent of MTV's Asian programming is tailored to specific audiences such as "the promotion of Thai and Chinese pop stars, as well as Mando-Rock music in Mandarin."\textsuperscript{46} Hence, no a priori assumption will be made that economic changes fuel ideological shifts in a unidirectional manner and thus threaten the specificity of certain national cultures. Indeed, given that culture is not understood as an autonomous and uniform domain, and given that global media in India are not all western-directed and controlled, such a conclusion would be empirically implausible.

For the purpose of this project, I will not rely on "resisting audience" studies to trace the historically-changing and complex articulation of television to politics. Rather, I will focus on how cultural difference is produced through different programming genres as well as through the patterns of ownership of the networks themselves, while continually drawing attention to the complex negotiation and accommodation that characterizes programming decisions and public panics, such as the ones mentioned above. Further, television is understood here in its linkage to questions of technology, state power and political contest. Hence, rather than engaging in detailed semiotic readings of particular texts, the analysis will focus at certain macro-level characteristics such as shifts in forms of ownership, differentiations and emergence of plural programming genres, debates around technology and political power. Further, television will be framed in its intimate relationship to questions of politics, in partic-


ular to the policies of political parties such as the BJP, their engagement with policy and technology as well as legal matters. The market logic of the Indian economy will also be traced in relation to TV, particularly in terms of the kinds of programming produced, the pressures of advertisers and how these are couched in the language of culture and community.

Television as an object of study for this project will be conceptualized in terms of the shift in ownership and control of the medium, broad changes in programming, and purpose of programming. The analysis of television will proceed along the following broad lines:

- the patterns of ownership and control of television from its inception to the present
- the specific purpose of television in relation to notions of Indian “culture.”
- shifts in programming, particularly after 1991.

Television here is not conceptualized at the level of distinguishable programs, which will then be analyzed using textual analysis. Rather, the above shifts in television will be studied in relation to the discourse of a “national culture”, in those instances where this discourse took television as its principal target.

The proliferation of media technologies and mediated images of social reality, their increasing complexity as well as their recomposition of space and time need not necessitate falling back on certain forms of technological determinism or media centrism. As Graham Murdoch has argued, it must be asserted that “the history of communications is not a history of machines but a history of the way new media help to reconfigure systems of power and networks of social relations.” Raymond Williams has convincingly argued, in relation to satellite broadcasting that these developments cannot be adequately or accurately understood without taking into consideration the social, political and cultural consequences of the introduction of new technologies. He rightly points out, like early analysts of global media, to the marketing and economic pressures that have fuelled the viability of satellite broadcasting. Further, the technology allows certain corporations to bypass control of nation-states as well as certain cultural boundaries. Lastly, it has important political implications in terms of the impact on existing arrangements of power within nation-states, making them much more permeable to outside pressure through publicity – witness the consequences of the filming of the Tianenmen demonstrations, the recent events in Serbia, etc. It is precisely here that a theory of articulation allows for a more comprehensive, relational and historically specific understanding of the relationships between mass media like television, religious nationalism and economic change. Such a relational understanding also distances itself from a technological determinism that often ends up summoning up elitist notions of high culture which are predicted to wither away under the onslaught of a global media landscape of “trash culture.” Williams argues that such a defensive reaction is both politically suspect and empirically shaky. Characterizing the concerns of such defensive positions as “identifying the new technologies with the corporations which control them, and both with a new and disastrous phase of “para-national hyper-capitalism...[leads to] a tacit alliance with the

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defenders of old privileged and paternalist institutions, or worse, with the fading ideas of the old cultural argument: a high culture to be preserved and by education and access extended to the whole people."  

His argument is particularly relevant for the present project given that such a reactive and defensive argument is put forward in certain circles among state bureaucrats and ideologues who hark back to the golden age of Indian television where the market was excluded and the state decided what could be shown on the country's TV screens. Technology such as satellite broadcasting is seen as a threat since it threatens the state's power to control the media. An articulated understanding of TV, politics and economics would preclude such temptations by investigating precisely what interests of power obtain within these fields and through what discourses of culture they are maintained. Hence by broadening the field of analysis outside purely technological or high cultural discourse, the analysis takes seriously Williams' insistence on an articulated, multi-dimensional understanding of the shifts rendered in the social formation by global satellite broadcasting.

CULTURE, SOCIAL RELATIONS AND REPRODUCTION

The field of media studies, in particular the early work of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, has been centrally concerned with questions of power relations, the relationship between mass media and the reproduction of social relations and questions of ideology. Media studies breaks with paradigms of research which assume uni-directional effects of mass media on passive audiences, it analyzes the ideological orientation of mediated conceptions of social reality and brings to the fore the complex inter-relationship between media and the social formation in all its different levels. As such it provides a more comprehensive and macro-level mode of analysis of the relationships studied in this project, in comparison to either solely semiotic or textual approaches to television, or purely political economy approaches. While the former have provided sophisticated accounts of semiotic dimensions to mass media, interpellation, the positioning of audiences and the construction of subjectivities, they have tended to ignore organizational, historical and economic dimensions of the media landscape. The latter, on the other hand, while providing very valuable material on the consolidation and dissemination of media power have tended to fall short when it comes to attending to the specifically cultural dimensions of media. For the purpose of this project neither textual nor institutional analyses are ignored. Rather, they are thought together and in relation to the historically-shifting conditions of the mass media scene, as well as their relationship to and articulation with political power and economic change.

Culture is understood here not as a static thing, an entity that is possessed as the property of nations or groups, but as the historically-specific product of struggles between different groups that comprise the social formation. Culture is also not simply the epiphenomenal superstructure of the economic base but a "constitutive social process, creating specific and different 'ways of life'." This understanding by

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49 Ibid. p.129.
Williams has important implications for an articulated understanding of the relationship between television, Hindu nationalism and economic change. By arguing for the constitutive specificity of cultural practices, Williams highlights that cultural discourses and practices also construct important maps of meaning that serve as guides for the negotiation of everyday life as well as for imagining the sense of place that individuals and groups hold, however contingently. This constitutive character of culture is also complemented by its own specificity, since cultural practices cannot be a priori understood as mere reflexes of deep underlying economic interests.

Further, culture is not a product but a historically evolving process, as Williams points out, and thus should be understood as articulated to shifts both within groups struggling to define what a national culture is, as well as to shifts outside the field of culture such as economics, politics etc. Hence, for a media studies understanding of culture, the processual, conflictual, relatively specific logic of cultural politics is taken as the starting point for analysis, rather than an essentialist, a priori understanding of culture as a set of unchanging norms, values and worldviews. By centralizing the question of power, a media studies understanding also understands the social formation not as a pluralist, consensual body but as an unequally organized, conflictual and dynamic complex of social relations. The struggle over the definition of “national culture” is understood as the necessary upshot of a complex social formation where competing interests battle over the particular form and character through which the nation can be represented. As Lawrence Grossberg argues, “[C]ulture is the site of struggle to define how life is lived and experienced, a struggle carried out in the discursive forms available to us. Cultural practices articulate the meanings of particular social practices and events; they define the ways we make sense of them, how they are experienced and lived.”

A media studies approach in the present project then situates culture as a process, as possessing its own specificity and most importantly, as the terrain on which different groups within the social formation struggle to conceive of and intervene in the processes of meaning-making which make their lives comprehensible. This notion of culture as the terrain of struggle rests on the internally-differentiated and plural character of the social formation that is riven with power struggles. Hence, the reason culture cannot be understood as uniformly possessing the same content within a society or a nation-state rests on the multiplicity of modes of meaning-making related to different groups. As Antonio Gramsci argued, “[E]very social stratum has its own ‘common sense’ and its own ‘good sense’, which are basically the most widespread conception of life and of men(sic). Every philosophical current leaves behind a sedimentation of ‘common sense’: this is the document of its historical effectiveness. Common sense is not something rigid and immobile, but is continually transforming itself, enriching itself with scientific ideas and with philosophical opinions which have entered ordinary life...Common sense creates the folklore of the future, that is as a relatively rigid phase of popular knowledge at a given place and time.”

Society is thus understood as comprised of different groups that have their own shifting discourses and scripts of their place in the larger whole, their belonging to particular larger totalities. The terms “discourse” is indebted to Michel Foucault, who in

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“Politics and the Study of Discourse” (1991) lays out some of the elements of his understanding. Discourse analysis studies what is said (enoncés), attempts to discover what strategies are used and what forms are assumed for statements, how these statements evolve over time, which are retained over time, which undergo transformation and which are destined to disappear, and what kind of access different groups have to particular discourses. In this project, for example, I will study the particular elements of the notion of “Hindutva”, how these discourses circulate (speeches, mass media, etc.), what forms they take (appeal to “scienticity”, mythology, history), the evolution of the notion of “Hindutva” (e.g. from criticizing secularism to emulating its precepts), which aspects disappear and which reappear as this notion of “culture” is continuously reformulated, and how this discourse is accessed by different groups (what notion of “culture” is used by grass-roots group like the RSS branches, and how does it compare with those of the BJP).

Further, the term “discourse” does not refer solely to the analysis of texts but places texts within the particular social relations through which they appear and circulate. That is, unlike Foucault, this analysis does not remain purely at the level of surface textual analysis. It explores how notions of “Indian culture” are related to historical shifts and power struggles in the field of politics, media and economics. In that sense, the terms “discourse” is indebted to Foucault but expands it to investigate the complex social formation in relation to which these discourses circulate. Hall has argued that while Foucault’s notion of discourse usefully avoids economic reductionism and enables a study of the relationship between power and discourse (“knowledge-production”), his refusal to engage with the social formation ultimately gives up the difficult task of theorizing society as “structured in dominance” by refusing to theorize the fluid, contradictory evolution of power-relations within it. Hall elaborates: “If Foucault is to prevent the regime of truth from collapsing into a synonym for the dominant ideology, he has to recognize that there are different regimes of truth in the social formation. And these are not simply ‘plural’ – they define an ideological field of force... In other words, as soon as you begin to look at a discursive formation... as a formation, you have to talk about the relations of power which structure the inter-discursivity, or the inter-textuality, of the field of knowledge.”

A media studies approach places the role of the media in the reproduction of social relations rather than sequester it only within the domain of texts, audiences or organizations. It explores the complex character of the social formation and recognizes that the media have a crucial part to play in how the field of struggle over the definition of culture is structured. Hall argues that “the more one accepts that how people act depend in part on how the situations in which they act are defined... the less one can assume either a natural meaning to everything or a universal consensus on what things mean.” The “definition of the situation” during a period of transition such as that post-1990 in India, where economic liberalization began, the rise of the Hindu Nationalist movement was strongly felt and television went global, thus becomes a central issue. A media studies approach in this project will analyze how this definition

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of the situation was engaged with through a triadic relationship between TV, Hindu nationalism and the economy.

RELIGION, CAPITALISM AND THE PROJECTION OF FAITH

This project is framed between the problems posed by the above two paradigms for theorizing the relationship between capitalism and culture. The dogged relationship between capitalism and culture, argued for by the “cultural imperialism” thesis, and the micro-level emphasis of media ethnographies of audiences leave two important questions for media theory unanswered:

1) What precise relationship obtains between highly-capitalized profit-driven global media enterprises and the cultural specificities (however hybrid) of LDCs?
2) How could analysis explore the relationship between cultural manifestations in the social formation and broader socioeconomic and political changes?

The central arguments and underlying assumptions of this project include:

- The reconceptualization of “cultural analysis” to look at the relationship between the discursive and material practices that go into the construction of “national identity” on the one hand, and the economic and cultural dimensions of global TV against which this discourse is articulated. No assumption is made that a particular stage of capitalist expansion (including the role of mass media in it) has its own specific form of cultural politics of identity. Part of this argument rests on a theoretical understanding i.e. one cannot isolate “objects” like mass media, “culture”, “economy”, and then map uni-directional cause-effect relations between them. These elements cannot be thought of separately from each other. A historical-materialist analysis must map the precise relationship between them, at the same time that it recognizes the specificity of these fields. Hence, this is not an argument for simply collapsing all these fields into each other; rather, it traces their imbrication with each other at a particular historical period, at the same time that it recognizes the specificity of each field.

- By combining a discursive analysis of the public statements of Hindu cultural nationalism with a historical-materialist analysis of the conjuncture within which and on which they operate, the project is located at the intersection of the micro- and macro-level. For example, the articulation of a certain discourse of “Hindu culture” by political groups will be situated within a particular historical conjuncture and related to the actual policy shifts and engagement with global television in order to embed and stress the different pressures and force-fields within which certain discourses circulate and have their effectivity. Hence, this project involves both a reconceptualization of concepts like “culture”, “television” and “economy” and a conjunctural analysis of their precise inter- and intra-relationships.

The reconceptualization of culture within a conjunctural understanding of the relationship between global television, capitalism and Hindu Nationalism directly addresses the various avatars through which these three elements announce themselves at present. The Sanskrit word “avatar” can be roughly translated as “incarnation.” This term signals a particular “form of appearance” through which a deity descends and embodies itself at different times and places. In Capital: Volume I, Marx addresses this very question of the “form of appearance” of value in money, and asks why it is that value must take this particular form (of exchange-value through money) at this particular point in history (generalized commodity-production). He evinces no interest in the “metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties” of the “nature” of
the commodity or of value, shorn off concrete determinations. Rather, his answer, which he worked out over the ensuing decades, immediately got caught up in the question of politics. To ask why particular objects re-appear, and incarnate themselves at particular times in particular forms (of appearance) is to refuse both an ahistorical and essentialist understanding of the “nature” of television, capital or religion, and a historicist explanation of the teleological unfolding of the (Holy?) Spirit into the dead-end of redemption. The analysis that follows is directed precisely at this politics of re-presentation where capitalist globalization, Hindu nationalism and television are incarnated at the present conjuncture. The vision of redemption offered by the Holy Trinity of Capital, Religion and Television screens off its stained past and conflict-ridden present while projecting its Faith on a questionable future. Television at present literally announces itself as the harbinger of pluralism, democracy and the vox populi. Contemporary capitalism announces the final victory of liberalism, free choice and the sacred temple of the market. Hindu Nationalism in its present avatar, as we shall see, announces the profane sacrality of high-tech mediation, humanism and modernity. The burden of this project will be to track the particular transfer, the passage, through which these three elements “appear” and reveal themselves at this moment in time. For in this tracking of the displacement and emergence of the Gods of Progress, Reason and Revelation become manifest the politics of history and the history of religious nationalism.

57 Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, translated by Ben Fowkes, New York: Vintage Books, 1976, especially pp.125-63. Interestingly, for our discussion, throughout this section of the book, Marx makes repeated references to religion in order to understand the significance of the form of appearance of value – for example, the simultaneous outbreak of the Taiping revolt in China in the 1850 and the craze for spiritualism among the upper-classes in Germany (p.164). Most relevant for our interest, he eschews positivist theories of either economy or religion. To understand the particular, historically-specific form of appearance of value in the commodity, he argues that we need “to find an analogy... into the misty realm of religion. There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own...”. p.165. This “fetishism” that marks, not religion as much as those seeking to understand it, is reproduced by economists who fetishize commodities without addressing the historical social-relations through which both capitalism and religion are concretized and produced. The “autonomous figures” of capital and religion, for our present discussion, can be concretized only when their fetishistic character is articulated to the particular political, economic and affective modalities through which they are experienced and practiced.