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Postindustrialism and the Long Arts And Crafts Movement: between Britain, India, and the United States Of America

Sria Chatterjee

Abstract

This article is part of the Objects in Motion series in *British Art Studies*, which is funded by the Terra Foundation for American Art. Projects in the series examine cross-cultural dialogues between Britain and the United States, and may focus on any aspect of visual and material culture produced before 1980. The aim of Objects in Motion is to explore the physical and material circumstances by which art is transmitted, displaced, and recontextualised, as well as the transatlantic processes that create new markets, audiences, and meanings.

Taking two journeys as its fulcrum, this essay traces how Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy (1877–1947) and his wife Ethel Mairet’s (1872–1952) photographs and studies of craft in India and Ceylon in the 1900s relate to Charles and Ray Eames’ India Report (1958), a photographic research journey through craft communities of India that sought to find form, function, and “Indianness” in a bid to exemplify the future of design in India in the 1950s. Unpacking the different contexts of the two moments, the essay analyses how international interventions on the “Indianness” of Indian design were forged in early and mid-twentieth-century India, particularly within what it posits as the “Long Arts and Crafts Movement” between Great Britain, India, and the United States of America. If the British Arts and Crafts Movement was a combination of progressive and conservative tendencies, this essay investigates how the vexed design historical continuum between the British Empire and the Cold War, Victorian socialism, Indian nationalism, and American development-oriented aid programmes played out in the space of the Indian village. Following the intellectual and design historical trajectories of “post-industrialism” (a term that Coomaraswamy introduced in 1914 when thinking about future anti-industrial societies) to think through the complex and moving parts of the Long Arts and Crafts Movement, the essay pursues the paradoxical nature of the term as it is mobilised in the Eameses’ mid-century America and routed back into the Indian village through American technocrats.

Authors

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Introduction

This essay draws inspiration from eco-socialist William Morris' (1834–1896) soft science fiction novel *News from Nowhere* (1891), set in the future and written directly in response to political activist Edward Bellamy's (1850–1898) *Looking Backward*, which took the United States of America by storm in 1888. In adopting a stance of looking backwards and forwards, and in the vein of Morris, combining design with politics, the essay charts an exploratory trajectory between the United Kingdom, colonial and post-colonial India, and the United States in the course of the twentieth century. It stresses that interrogations around the Long Arts and Crafts Movement were not only transnational but also trans-temporal. It is in the moving across imagined times (historical and speculative) that theories of design and reform are imagined in their particular contexts.

The first of two journeys that this essay focuses on was undertaken across Ceylon between 1903 and 1906, then still under British rule, by the British-Ceylonese geologist Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy (1877–1947) and his first wife Ethel Mary Partridge (later Ethel Mairet) (1872–1952). As the Director of the Mineralogical Survey of the island, Coomaraswamy made long trips by train and bullock cart with Ethel Mairet, on which they studied, collected, and photographed objects of art and craft and the people who produced them. During their time in Ceylon, the Coomaraswamys adopted ethnographic methods in taking copious notes on their subjects, their processes of making, their tools and craft objects, all with a particular focus on the fact that British colonial rule and processes of industrialisation threatened a complete deterioration of craft in Ceylon. The document that came about as a result of the tour was *Medieval Sinhalese Art* (1908), authored singly by Ananda Coomaraswamy. The second journey was the American designer duo Charles (1907–1978) and Ray Eames' (1912–1988) famous tour leading up to the *India Report* in 1958, which became the blueprint for the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad, India (NID). Almost a decade after India's independence in 1947, through a small but powerful network of diplomatic and design connections between the USA and India, Charles Eames was invited by the Ford Foundation to conduct a three-month study tour of India with the aim of recommending a design training programme that would aid small-scale industries, and "that would resist the present rapid deterioration in design and quality of consumer goods." ¹

Although the photographic surveys of craft of the Coomaraswamys and the Eameses were done more than fifty years apart, both journeys focus an ethnographic eye on the villages they surveyed, paying close attention to community structures, customs, and social habits, and the use and production of objects, searching for symbolic meaning in form and daily function. Both journeys take place at critical moments in India's political and

economic history, and more specifically, at perceived turning points in the histories of craft and design. The first section of this essay considers the role of the visual and how it was crucial to a certain kind of top-down Indigenism that both journeys produced. How, it asks, do the proto-ethnographic methods of the Coomaraswamys relate to Indian nationalism and the constructive Swadeshi movement on the one hand and Victorian socialism and Arts and Crafts ideals on the other? How, it further asks, do the rather similar proto-ethnographic methods of the Eameses relate to the Nehruvian ideal of a socialist state on the one hand and mid-century design and communications practices in the United States and US-led development programmes in India on the other hand?

Alongside its funding for the NID and US artists' visits to Ahmedabad, the Ford Foundation was funding research into rural India and chemical fertilisers in the lead up to the country's Green Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s. By the time the Eameses arrived in India, the Ford Foundation had already been there for six years. Agricultural development was highest on the agenda and the grants were directed to the Allahabad Agricultural Institute and other centres for training agricultural leaders.² There has been a lot of critical writing about the ways in which foreign aid and so-called knowledge transfers for economic and social "modernisation" in a newly independent India were merely "soft-power" initiatives for US diplomatic strategies in the hope of aligning Non-Aligned countries with their vision of a capitalist democracy versus a Soviet communism, especially the need for the USA to cultivate India as a democratic heavyweight to counterbalance China.³

The Coomaraswamys in Ceylon (1903-1906)

Born in Ceylon to a knighted Tamil lawyer and a British mother, Ananda Coomaraswamy moved to England at the age of two, following the premature death of his father. Educated at Wycliff Hall, he earned a degree in geology and botany from University College London in 1900 and met Ethel Mary Patridge (later Mairet) while on a mineralogical survey in Barnstaple in the south of England. They married in 1902 and set sail for Ceylon the year after. On their journeys across Ceylon, Ethel Mairet, who would later come to be known as a hand-weaver and artist of significant repute, took the majority of the photographs. Her journals became detailed inventories about the photographs they took and focused, as did the final document of the research, on process. Ethel Mairet closely photographed processes of craft-making and small-scale industries as well as objects. The Coomaraswamys collected objects on their travels and visited private collections. Ethel Mairet's first journal, for example, charts eight months of rapid exploration of the crafts and is almost exclusively a study of jewellery and metalwork. Later, there are extensive notes on spinning, weaving, embroidery, and vegetable dyeing processes, tools, raw materials, and interviews with

craftspeople who they invited to their home for demonstrations.⁴ By 30 November 1904, Ethel Mairet had taken 378 photographs, only a handful of which, alongside line drawings and commercial photographs of craftsmen engaged in artisanal activities, are published in *Medieval Sinhalese Art* (Fig. 1).⁵



Figure 1.

Untitled Slide, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy Papers (C0038), Manuscripts Division, Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Digital image courtesy of Princeton University Library (All rights reserved).

While the comprehensive and documentary style of close photographing (for example, some plates are devoted to specific types of objects such as lac work or embroidery, and others include an array of objects as well as close-up designs and patterns on different objects) is reminiscent of the geological survey, which was purportedly the purpose of their travels, the ethnographic quality of their Ceylon photographs performed a dual function (Fig. 2). First, they served as a precursor to Coomaraswamy's later interest in pictorialist

and photo-secessionist photography while in America, particularly the use of hands, feet, and gestures in Indian art and dance that allowed him to combine technologies of the body with the more abstract nature of Indian spiritual thought (Fig. 3).⁶ At the same time, however, the photographs of craftspersons pointed to the larger religious and social order in which these objects existed and were created. In particular, the photographs (and the detailed notes that the Coomaraswamys took on the tools and technologies used) served as a visual marker for the ways in which the body and the work came together so naturally in these particular crafting methods (Fig. 4).⁷ This continuity between body and traditional tools serves to emphasise an absent enemy: machine-led industrial processes, the invasive and disruptive quality of which is contrasted with the fluid movements and intimacy between body, labour, and object.



Figure 2.

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, Finger and toe postures in ancient and medieval Indian sculptures, undated, from Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "Hands and Feet in Indian Art", *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 24, no. 130 (1913): 204-207. Digital image courtesy of The Burlington Magazine (All rights reserved).

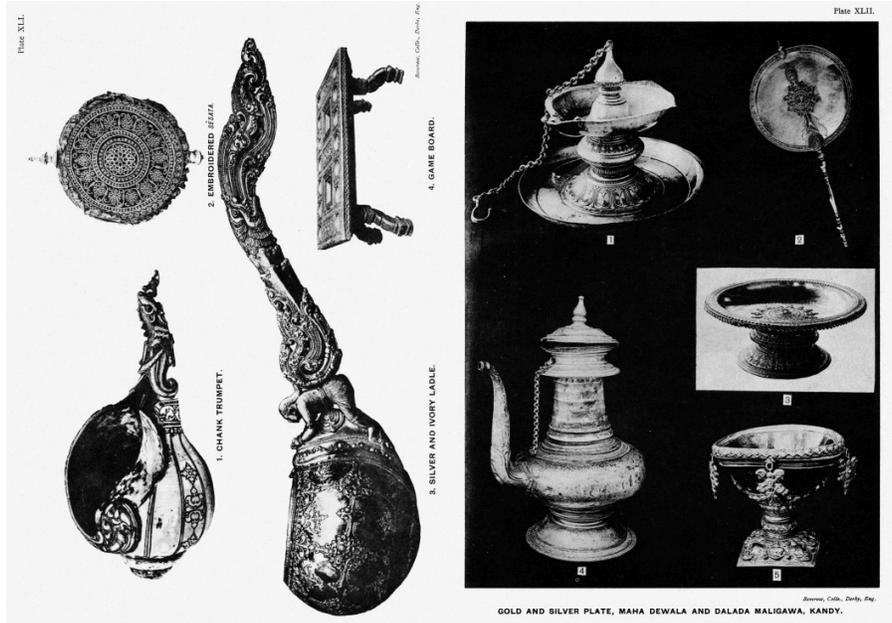


Figure 3.

Plates XLI and XLII: A spread from Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art*, 2nd edn (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956). Digital image courtesy of Pantheon Books (All rights reserved).

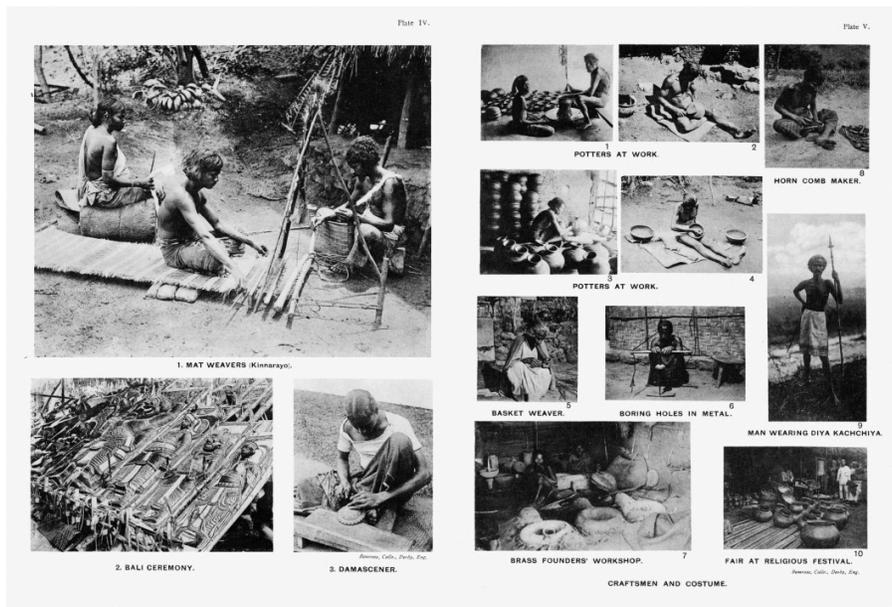


Figure 4.

Plates IV and V: A spread from Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art*, 2nd edn (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956). Digital image courtesy of Pantheon Books (All rights reserved).

There is a sense of gentle manipulation in the objects and processes they photographed. Although photographing contemporary craftsmen, the Coomaraswamys were careful to choose crafts that dated back to the earliest

possible traditions. By the early 1900s, the market would have contained a fair number of hybrid objects, produced in conjunction with newer technologies or using non-traditional materials. By obscuring these processes, their photographs created “medieval time” in twentieth-century Ceylon, producing village communities as reified local structures untouched by the colonial modern but at grave risk of contamination. Two photographs, both taken by Ethel Mairet, show potters at work (Fig. 5). The first shows a potter at his wheel, and a younger assistant seated on the floor surrounded by rows and rows of finished pots and bowls. The finished pieces are neatly stacked pots, upside down to the right and bowls on the left. The bearded potter is bare-bodied save a loincloth. He gazes downwards away from the wheel, taking a mini-break, his spine relaxed and curved and hands lightly resting on the wheel. His assistant seated cross-legged, his back upright, also looks away from the pots. Neither the potter nor his assistant looked directly at the camera. The slightly detached downward gaze is reminiscent in fact of more posed Victorian portrait photographs of Julia Margaret Cameron (1815–1879). For example, Margaret Cameron’s *The Rosebud Garden of Girls* (1886) is a highly staged photograph evincing a longing for a lost medieval past (Fig. 6). Four young women are framed directly in front of a tangle of branches and flowers, their aloof and other-worldly expressions heightened by the soft focus and elimination of perspective in the photograph. The title of this photograph, as well as many others, was inspired by the poet Alfred Tennyson (1809–1892). Margaret Cameron’s friendship with Tennyson and Pre-Raphaelite painters such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882) has been well documented.⁸ The soft, golden light that the photographic subjects are cloaked in asserts the search for a distant, temporal remove. It is in this aspiration for a space that is both allegorical and mythological and yet is made real by the accurate and documentary nature of the photograph that I place the link between Margaret Cameron’s methods and Ethel Mairet’s photographs in Ceylon. It is pertinent that Margaret Cameron lived in Ceylon (1875–1879) about two decades before the Coomaraswamys arrived there. Ethel Mairet may have been familiar with Margaret Cameron’s Ceylon photographs, which have, for the most part, been considered outside her canon of photographs.

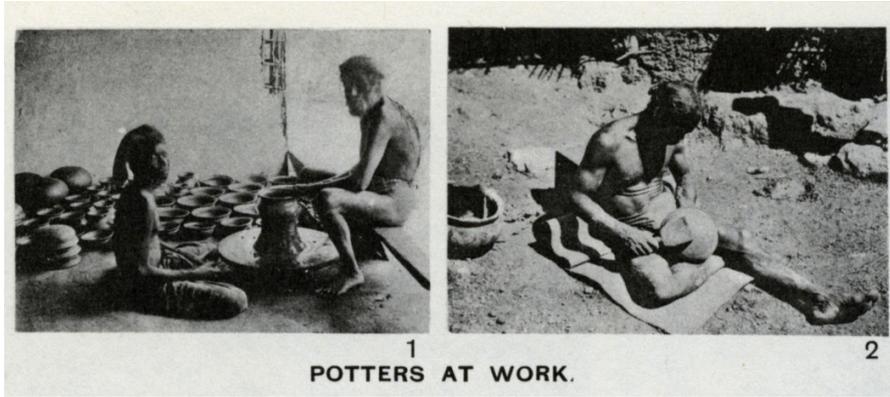


Figure 5.

Plate V (detail "Potters at Work"): from Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art*, 2nd edn (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956). Digital image courtesy of Pantheon Books (All rights reserved).



Figure 6.

Julia Margaret Cameron, *The Rosebud Garden of Girls*, June 1868, albumen silver print, 29.4 × 26.7 cm. Collection of The J. Paul Getty Museum (84.XM.443.66). Digital image courtesy of The J. Paul Getty Museum (Open Content Program).

In Ethel Mairet's photograph of the potters, the light catches the glistening of the wet clay and the bare skin of the potters. There is a softness of focus in the photograph which lends the potter's studio an ethereal quality, gliding over the textures of smooth clay in the unfinished and finished pots, but at the same time, the softness is subtle enough so as not to take away from the documentary quality of the photograph, which one sees repeated in Ethel Mairet's other Ceylon photographs. It is this quality, I suggest, that makes Ethel Mairet's photographs so effectively part of the Medieval Sinhalese Art project. It creates the temporal lapse between the contemporary craft and craftsperson and the pre-industrial craft and craftsperson that the Coomaraswamys idealised and sought a return to. Ethel Mairet's photographs in fact work overtime. They achieve both temporal distance and the documentary exactness with which the Coomaraswamys hoped to record processes and tools of making. For example, another photograph of a potter

taken outdoors in strong sunlight shows a man seated on a half rolled-out mat on a rough, earthy surface. The potter here is engrossed in smoothing out the bottom of a pot, one leg folded under him and one leg stretched out. The harsh sunlight blurs out the background, leaving only a slim section of shadows to suggest a thatched roof of some sort in the distance behind him. His shoulders and muscly arms glisten in full focus, however, and the folds on his loincloth and stomach can be discerned in full detail (Figs. 7, 8, and 9).

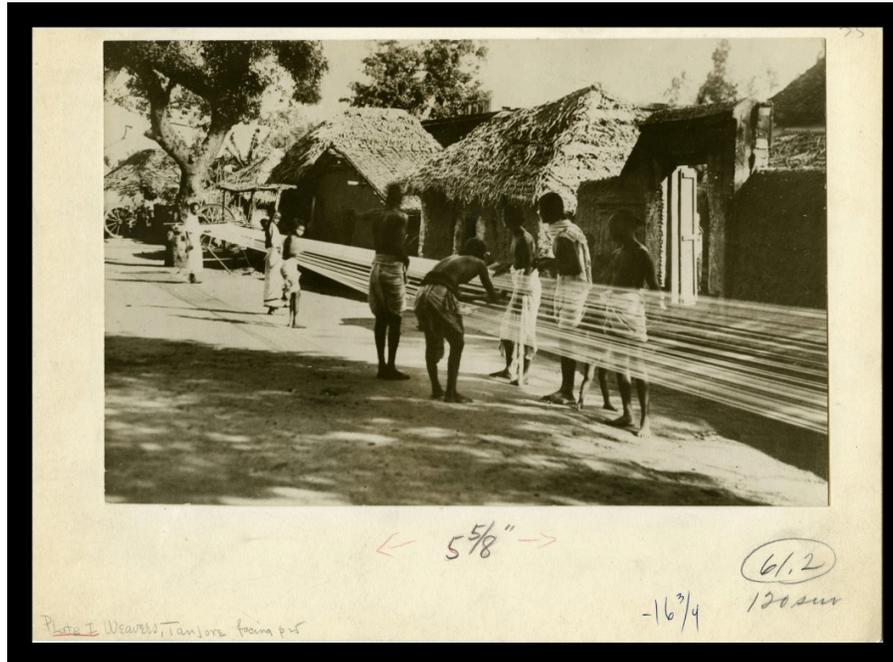


Figure 7.

Untitled Slide, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy Papers (C0038), Manuscripts Division, Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Digital image courtesy of Princeton University Library (All rights reserved).



Figure 8.

Untitled Slide, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy Papers (C0038), Manuscripts Division, Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Digital image courtesy of Princeton University Library (All rights reserved).



Figure 9.

Untitled Slide, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy Papers (C0038), Manuscripts Division, Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Digital image courtesy of Princeton University Library (All rights reserved).

The most practical reason for the photographs, line drawings, and notes on process was documentation to prevent the loss of knowledge that would salvage Ceylonese society and industry from the onset of British industrialisation. For Coomaraswamy, an interest in the object was inextricably tied to the community structures that produced it. In viewing the artisanal structures of the pre-colonial village as closest to the autonomous guilds of medieval Europe, Coomaraswamy—despite a possible blind spot to the complexities of caste and religious hierarchies and vagaries—saw the pre-colonial village as the perfect antidote to a burgeoning British industrialism.⁹ His reform-oriented hope was hinged on a return to a pre-colonial social order, which, following William Morris, would have had the advantages of a steady state economy, and the pleasure to be derived from useful work.

Coomaraswamy's 1907 essay "The Deeper Meaning of the Struggle", whose title was borrowed from a pamphlet by William Morris, agitated for a cultural nationalism that would renew the economic, social, and religious conditions of India's distinct identity as the only way to counter industrial capitalism.¹⁰ Morris' early lectures consistently argued for his position that the only way to ebb the decay of art and artisanship in the nineteenth century (as a result of British industry) was to transform the social conditions of Victorian work, and

reintegrate art and life, labour and pleasure. ¹¹ Ethel Mairet's own interest in the revival of many of these forms as a practising hand weaver and artist was tied to her background in the Arts and Crafts Movement, while Coomaraswamy's deep engagement with the movement in Britain was facilitated by Ethel Mairet and her connections. ¹² Ethel Mairet's brother was part of the co-operative Arts and Crafts Guild, founded by the English architect and designer C.R. Ashbee (1863–1942) in 1898. ¹³ The Coomaraswamys bought shares in Ashbee's guild, and on their return from Ceylon they settled briefly at Norman Chapel (refurbished for them by Ashbee) very close to where the guild met. Coomaraswamy also bought Morris' old printing press from Kelmscott, on which, rather symbolically, *Medieval Sinhalese Art* and many of his early publications were printed.

Although this essay does not follow the trajectory of Ethel Mairet's working life, her contributions to weaving, and the importance of the Ceylon trip to them, it is important to point out as an aside that Ethel Mairet and Ananda Coomaraswamy divorced in 1910, after which Ethel married the writer, designer, and organic farming enthusiast Philip Mairet in 1913, whom she met through the same Arts and Crafts circles. She flourished as a designer and expert of weaving and dyeing (with a handle on other cultural traditions, especially South Asian ones) and in an act of inventing Indianness from elsewhere, so common in the entangled relationships between colonialism and nationalism in early twentieth-century India, Gandhi visited Ethel Mairet to discuss ideas around weaving communities, which he would feed back into his famous *khadi* (home and hand-spun natural fibre cloth) movement and Swadeshi boycotting of foreign cloth. ¹⁴

First published in 1908, *Medieval Sinhalese Art*, as Coomaraswamy notes, "deals not with a period of great attainment in fine art but with a beautiful and dignified scheme of peasant decoration based upon the traditions of Indian art and craft." ¹⁵ Prefaced by a history of the Tamils before the British occupation of Kandy in 1815, the document was written "not as a work of scholarship but" ... "for the Sinhalese people, in memorial of a period, which at present they are not willing to understand." ¹⁶ This work, therefore, became not only a thorough documentation of craft and design, but more importantly a reminder of the social structures that pre-dated British Ceylon. A few years later, in *Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon*, published in London and Edinburgh in 1913, Coomaraswamy warns that "nearly every force at work and every tendency apparent in modern India is consciously or unconsciously directed towards the destruction of all skilful handicraft." "I wish," he writes, "that I could persuade these teachers that ... craftsmanship is a mode of thought." ¹⁷

The Eameses in India (1958)

In 1958, about fifty years after the Coomaraswamys had toured Ceylon, Charles and Ray Eames spent five months in India visiting villages and factory towns, meeting with artists, craftspeople, small rural communities, intellectuals, and government officials. Charles Eames and Ray Kaiser met at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan—an institution oft-described as the outcome of an Arts and Crafts vision to reform design in the interwar years, especially in the hands of its first head, the Finnish architect and designer Eliel Saarinen (1873–1950). Trained as an architect, Charles' time at Cranbrook intensified his interest in craft processes and he went on to become head of industrial design at the academy. Ray was trained as a painter and sculptor in New York before she moved to Cranbrook. They married in 1941, in the same year as the *Organic Design in Home Furnishings* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art that Charles and Eero Saarinen won the commission for and on which Ray worked, along with Harry Bertola and others.¹⁸ Charles and Ray continued to work together as a designer-filmmaker duo until Charles' death in 1978. As Pat Kirkham has shown, the Eameses time at Cranbrook was foundational in its consideration of the decorative arts, modern sculpture, and the Arts and Crafts as equally worthy and as important as architecture. While some Cranbrook students later embraced the “Machine Aesthetic” and some “Organic Modernism”, the Eameses embraced both.¹⁹ They bought fully into the Cranbrook ethic which, in the widely optimistic American post-war moment, went beyond style and focused more broadly on how to retain human values while experimenting with new materials and technologies to produce better living environments.²⁰

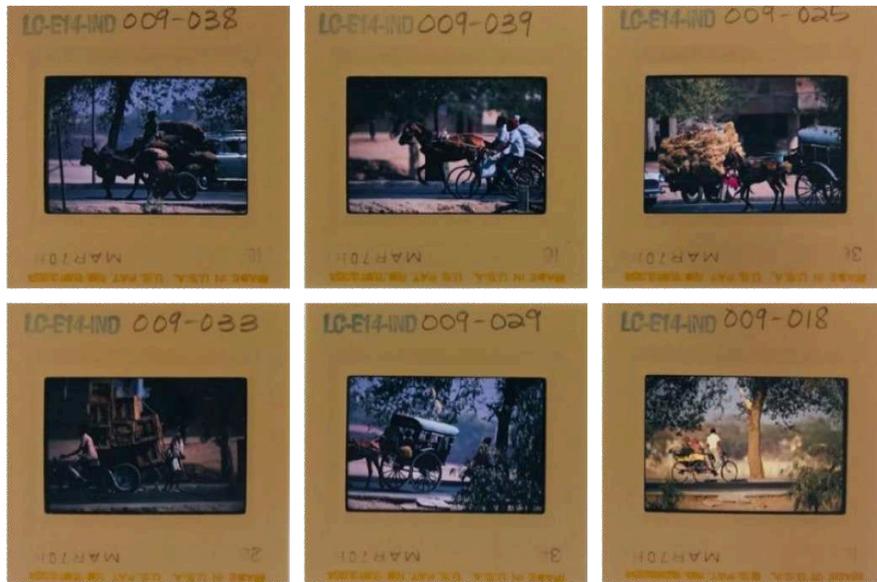
As Fred Turner has argued, the ideals of democratic psychology and democratic polity articulated by wartime social scientists hung in the air in these circles as the Cold War crept across America and Europe. In the United States in the 1930s, anthropologists such as Margaret Mead (1901–1978) and Gregory Bateson (1904–1980) and the psychologist Gordon Allport (1897–1967) showed through their ethnographic and interpretative research “how culture shaped the development of the psyche, particularly through interpersonal communication.”²¹ Anthropologists and artists gathered together, for example, at Black Mountain College where they trained a new generation of American artists “in the multidisciplinary, psychologically integrated techniques of the Bauhaus, and at the same time, the progressive political ideals that infused wartime campaigns for democratic models.”²² American economists and experts such as Walt Rostow described the post-colonial condition as one primarily of underdevelopment, thus characterising these societies as Third World and in need of American aid and techno-social support to modernise as a bulwark against communism.²³

The Eameses' aim in India was not far from these general principles. To be able to outline a programme of design for a population, they tried to try to understand how design had evolved over generations and how people used objects, and the ways in which design could improve standards of living. The Eameses came to India on the recommendation of Monroe Wheeler (1899–1988) at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), where with Alexander Girard (1907–1993), the Eameses had been involved in the *Textiles and Ornamental Arts of India* exhibition, which collected a vast number of textiles, crafts, and decorative objects from India and Indian collections around the world.²⁴ The Ford Foundation worked closely with the MoMA, drawing especially on MoMA's *Good Design* exhibitions in the 1950s, which defined and disseminated so-called "Good Design" in an attempt to shape post-war consumer culture through exhibitions at home and abroad.²⁵ This resonated with the Foundation's India representative Douglas Ensminger's (1910–1989) claim that one of the principal problems of mid-century Indian industry was its lack of "competence in design".²⁶ The Eameses spent five months travelling in India, photographing widely, to arrive at a sense of "those values and those qualities that Indians hold important to a good life."²⁷ Their photographs were less targeted at craft objects and persons than the Coomaraswamys' had been. Although an extant photograph from one of their India trips shows Charles with the camera, photographs also show Ray in India with a camera slung around her arm. Since their archives form a singular repository, it is impossible to know if it was Charles or Ray or both that wielded the camera during their extensive photographic journey. I will, therefore, use "they" as the agentive pronoun when referring to the India photographs.

Photographing objects and people had a longer history in both the burgeoning fields of art history and anthropology throughout the twentieth century. The relationship between anthropology and photography in the recording of ethnographic data is as old as the discipline of anthropology itself and the uses of photography have ranged from the purposes of scientific racism in the mid-nineteenth century to material culture surveys (such as ones undertaken in the twentieth century by the Anthropological Survey of India), and later Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson's well-known *Balinese Character* (1942) research project on still photography.²⁸ With the rise of photography as an art form in the nineteenth century, photographers documented natural landscapes as well as social settings and individuals. Photographers such as Peter Henry Emerson, who documented rural working-class life—activities such as fish processing or sail making and details of cottages and rural architectures—came to be seen as a precursor to documentary photography that would mobilise social movements and opinion in both Great Britain and the United States of America from the 1930s onwards.²⁹ This documentary tradition would take on a variety of

forms. For instance, in the 1930s, the American government's Farm Security Administration sponsored a decade-long photographic documentation of the American Depression and the effects of the New Deal. At the same time, reflecting contemporaneous Bauhaus thinking, the use of photographs in presentations and exhibitions in the United States worked to actively level the distinctions between fine and applied photography, by using astronomical images, X-rays, advertising illustrations, and press photos, works by the European "new vision" photographers and Herbert Matter's famous blow-ups.³⁰ Art historians too relied on photography and the photographic slide as a teaching and research device. The German art historian Aby Warburg's (1866–1929) so-called Mnemosyne pictorial atlas involved an attempt to continuously rearranged some 2,000 photographs on seventy-nine black cloth backdrops to tease out iconographic patterns and tensions among images without any textual interference. Commenting on his amassing of images and process of comparison, Warburg, in a 1929 journal entry, called his ever-changing photograph-based system, an "iconology of the in-between" ("Ikonologie des Zwischenraumes").³¹ By the 1920s, slide projection had become the standard for art history teaching, up to the 1950s, when the smaller celluloid slides replaced the glass plates.³² The use of photography by Ananda Coomaraswamy and Ethel Mairet and Charles and Ray Eames at different points in the twentieth century drew from a diverse range of traditions that use photographs and photographic slides to different ends.

The Eameses used the camera as an accumulative eye that created an abundance of images which they would then group together under rubrics such as transport, pottery, cooking, designs on earth, ornaments, and other accessories—how they were made and worn, ways of eating, vernacular architectures, and small-scale industries like block-printing, weaving, and kite-making (Figs. [10](#), [11](#), [12](#), and [13](#)). They photographed people of all kinds and turned their ethnographic eye on people, craft objects, landscapes, industries, habits and homes, zooming in on things like table settings, ornaments, and even hairstyles of government officials and friends such as Pupul Jayakar (1915–1997), the cultural Tsarina of mid-century India in an apparently democratic attempt to slice through at least some of the different strata of Indian society (Fig. [14](#)). This exercise embodies their approach to the photographic image and its crucial role in communication. Their 1976 film *Something About Photography*, in which Charles provides his insight into the individual choices and opportunities that one has in the making of each photograph, particularly stresses the democratic nature of photography, which tied up perfectly with Kodak's corporate message in the USA, in which the camera was essential to everybody's intimate everyday.³³



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Figure 10.

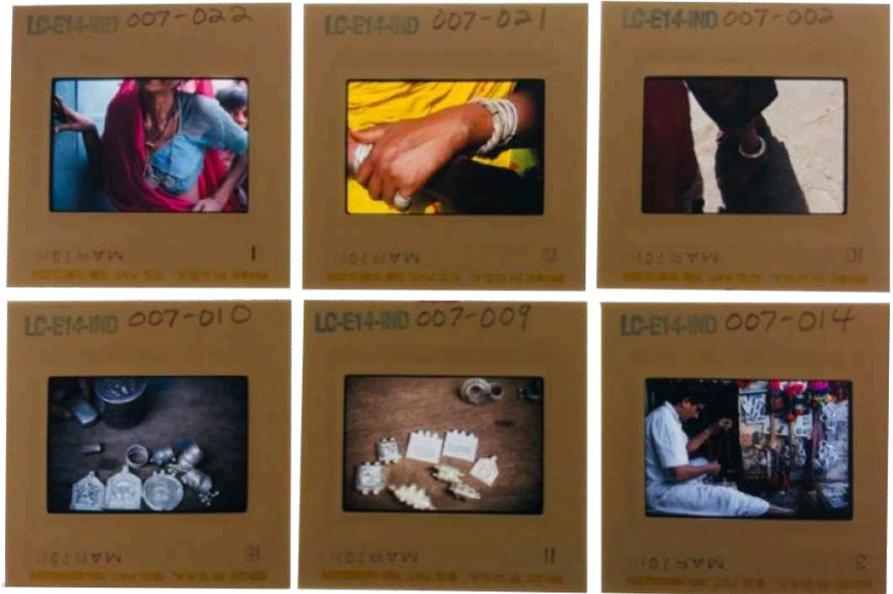
Untitled slides, collection of Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, The Work of Charles and Ray Eames. Digital image courtesy of Eames Office LLC (eamesoffice.com) / Photo: Sria Chatterjee (All rights reserved).



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Figure 11.

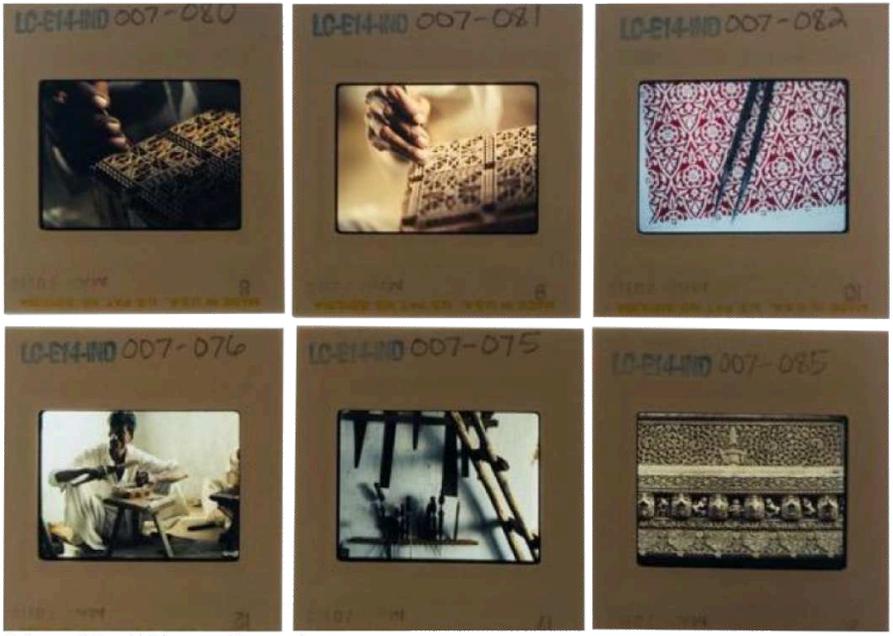
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Figure 12.

Untitled slides, collection of Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, The Work of Charles and Ray Eames. Digital image courtesy of Eames Office LLC (eamesoffice.com) / Photo: Sria Chatterjee (All rights reserved).



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Figure 13.

Untitled slides, collection of Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, The Work of Charles and Ray Eames. Digital image courtesy of Eames Office LLC (eamesoffice.com) (All rights reserved) | Photo: Sria Chatterjee



Figure 14.

Untitled slides, collection of Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, The Work of Charles and Ray Eames. Digital image courtesy of Eames Office LLC (eamesoffice.com) (All rights reserved) | Photo: Sri Chatterjee.

The final product of this photographic survey tour, the Eameses' *The India Report*, which started with a passage from the Bhagavad Gita, stressed that the role of design should lie in defining and elevating “standards of living” through everyday objects and services rather than through a focus on “industrial standardisation”. The Eameses emphasis on exploring “the evolving symbols of India” found its roots in their attempts to be culturally and functionally relevant. The *lota* (a rounded brass water pot) embodied the evolution of Indian design, having been designed collectively over generations to fit various needs. As Saloni Mathur points out, the Eameses’ obsessive elevation of the *lota* was not always shared in the field, where the *lota* was primarily seen as a toilet accessory, a water pot taken along to defecations (Figs. 15, 16, 17, and 18).³⁴ While aspiring to cultural specificity in *The India Report*, the Eameses saw objects as having a “timeless appropriateness”.³⁵ Their task at hand as designers was not to preserve this

“timelessness” but to use it, improve upon it, and make it viable for modern living. The focus of the Arts and Crafts Movement on the material culture of “simpler”, pre-industrial (and frequently pre-capitalist) societies, which promoted handicrafts as character-building as well as utilitarian, was key to the Eameses appreciation for Indian handicrafts.³⁶ After William Morris’ death in 1886, Arts and Crafts admiration for pre-industrial crafts was taken forward by the English architect and historian William Lethaby (1857–1931). Lethaby’s contention that “the best method of designing has been to improve on an existing model by bettering it a point at a time” and his fixation on objects of the everyday as both utilitarian and as art resonated with the Eameses.³⁷ Where Lethaby departed from the Morris tradition, and where the Eameses followed, was in the promotion of craft values in industrial design.³⁸ If the photographic surveys of the Coomaraswamys and the Eameses depended upon the fluidity produced by constructing a “craft time” in which the Indian village became a site for temporal manipulations, exemplified, for instance, by Coomaraswamy’s pre-industrial medievalism and the Eameses’ focus on the generational evolution of symbols in Indian craft, what role does this production of “craft time” play in the larger political history of the Long Arts and Crafts Movement between Great Britain, India, and the United States?



Figure 15.

The Lota, photograph from *The India Report*. Collection of Eames Office LLC. Digital image courtesy of Eames Office LLC (eamesoffice.com) (All rights reserved).

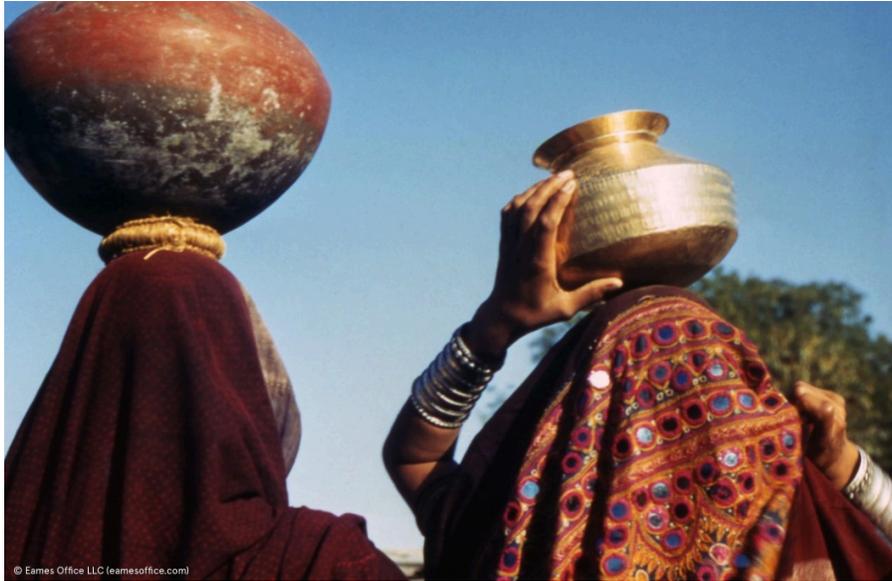


Figure 16.

The Lota, photograph from *The India Report*. Collection of Eames Office LLC. Digital image courtesy of Eames Office LLC (eamesoffice.com) (All rights reserved).



Figure 17.

The Lota, photograph from *The India Report*. Collection of Eames Office LLC. Digital image courtesy of Eames Office LLC (eamesoffice.com) (All rights reserved).



Figure 18.

The Lota, photograph from *The India Report*. Collection of Eames Office LLC. Digital image courtesy of Eames Office LLC (eamesoffice.com) (All rights reserved).

Postindustrialism, Constructive Socialism, and Constructive Swadeshi in the British Empire

Coomaraswamy's attention to Sinhalese craft, as this essay has already articulated, grew out of his familiarity and interest in William Morris' writings on craft and "constructive socialism".³⁹ For Morris, constructive socialism set his ideas apart from other contemporary socialist positions (such as Marxism) and involved providing a framework for future socialist worlds not only in his own speculative fictional account *News From Nowhere* (1890), but also in his lectures between 1884 and 1896.⁴⁰ In addition to Morris' projected future socialist societies, Coomaraswamy's fixation on the remembered traditions and fixed social structures of the pre-colonial village was closely linked to the "guild socialism" theorised by his friend and ally, the British architect Arthur Penty (1875–1937). Taking seriously the projection back and forth in time that the grasping for socialism's definitions seemed to involve in these networks,⁴¹ Coomaraswamy coined the term "post-industrialism" in 1914 to describe their programme of anti-industrial criticism within and around the Arts and Crafts Movement. Coomaraswamy, Penty, C.R. Ashbee (1863–1942), and others tried to mobilise "post-industrialism" as a reframing of the notion of "progress" as an industrial capitalist phenomenon spreading from the West to less civilised parts of the world into one in which the anti-industrial alternative that they advocated

would become an essential form of modernity, antithetical to European industrial capitalism, and with the potential to exceed it for renewed post-industrial forms of society.

Penty's preface to his *Post-Industrialism* (published in 1922) introduces a crucial element that ties them to Morris. "From one point of view," he writes, "Post-Industrialism connotes Medievalism, from another it could be defined as 'inverted Marxism'." Penty's "inverse Marxism" was directed broadly at the point that, unlike Marxism, which according to him did not adequately condemn the advent of machine-led industry, Guild Socialism focused on the regulation of machinery and the abolition of divisions of labour (so typical of industrial processes in which tasks originally performed by a single craftsman were split between both human and machine chains).⁴² "But in any case," Penty concludes,

[post-industrialism] means the state of society that will follow the break-up of Industrialism, and might therefore be used to cover the speculations of all who recognize Industrialism is doomed. The need of some such term sufficiently inclusive to cover the ideas of those who, while sympathizing with the ideals of the Socialists, yet differed with them in their attitude towards Industrialism, has long been felt, and the term Post-Industrialism, which I owe to Dr. A.K. Coomaraswamy, seems to me well suited to supply this want.

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For Coomaraswamy, post-industrialism meant "permanent revolution";⁴⁴ where communities of skilled artisans, drawing on their "intellectual and imaginative forces", would supersede industrial capitalism from within.⁴⁵ Craftsmen would implement, in his words, "individual autonomy", "a spontaneous anarchy", a "repudiation of the will to govern" in which case there is "nothing to prevent a recognition of common interests, or cooperation to achieve them."⁴⁶ They would be the masters, rather than slaves to their machines. While neither Penty nor Coomaraswamy advocated a full and literal return to medieval social structures in either Europe or India, their medievalism emphasised the ways in which spiritual values underwrote aspects of daily life and social organisation, in particular through art, as a model for future societies. Coomaraswamy writes,

We are able to recognize, in the theory of the Syndicalists, as well as in the caste organization of India, a very nearly ideal combination of duty and pleasure, compulsion and freedom; and

the words vocation or *dharma* imply this very identity. Individualism and socialism are united in the concept of function.

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In Coomaraswamy and Penty's 1914 edited volume, *Essays on Post-Industrialism: A Symposium of Prophecy Concerning the Future of Society*, Coomaraswamy's contribution was titled "The Religious Foundations of Art and Life".⁴⁸ Unlike Marx's strong aversion to religion, Coomaraswamy's post-industrial state depended on its religious foundations. "It is religion," Coomaraswamy claims, "that makes a community of one mind."⁴⁹ He acknowledges that contemporary religion is plagued by sectarianism but is adamantly optimistic about a future "universal culture—and the world draws too close together for any other to be possible—it must be based on a widely accepted view of the meaning of life."⁵⁰ While the Christian and Brahmanical feudal systems subject to an overarching priestly influence were successful in generating the communal over the individual, their time, Coomaraswamy concedes, is over. He resolves,

If democracy means that obedience, no longer physically or superstitiously compelled, is to become intelligent and willing we may well be right in recognizing in this present moment the dawn of a new age, founded upon religion, like every great culture of the past, and able also to express its vision in noble art.⁵¹

Coomaraswamy's idealisation of the caste system as well as the role of women in it accentuates his distance from daily Indian life and politics. His role in the elite intellectual Bengali Tagore circles is an essential and complex one.

Coomaraswamy's time in Ceylon and his many visits to India in the 1900s, when he took up his study of Indian arts, crafts, society, and philosophies, coincided with the Constructive Swadeshi movement in India, in which Rabindranath Tagore and other members of the Tagore household and intellectual circuits were amply involved, especially during 1905–1906. In these nascent nationalist circles, Coomaraswamy found like-minded Indian elites and international scholars and activists such as Sister Nivedita and Okakura Tenshin, all of whom were adequately committed to the cause of cultural nationalism and the search for an "Indianness" and Pan-Asian identity that ran counter to colonial pedagogic impositions under British rule.

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The Constructive Swadeshi movement emphasised self-reliance, seeking to bolster Indigenous enterprises, building up resources, as well as the self-esteem of the nation. “Self-development” and “self-expression” emerged as key terms of Swadeshi ideology in the cultural sphere in Bengal, not least in Coomaraswamy’s own contributions.⁵³ The Coomaraswamys’ soft political activism around the changing culture of British India started in 1905, when they helped found the Ceylon Social Reform Society and the journal *Ceylon National Review* in the hope of encouraging and initiating reform on social customs among the Ceylonese, and to “discourage the thoughtless imitation of unsuitable European customs and habits”.⁵⁴ However, it is important to register here that Coomaraswamy’s crusade for cultural nationalism did not directly translate into a quest for Indian political autonomy and *swadesh* (self-rule), which he saw as unnecessary violence.⁵⁵ In his last major speech before he left Ceylon in 1907, Coomaraswamy tried to explain to his audience that the nationalism he favoured, rather than “differences between men” that hindered “a realization of the brotherhood and unity of humanity”, in fact implied “internationalism”. This “nationalism” was “essentially altruistic”; it was a “people’s recognition of its own special function and place in the civilized world”. Without this “special culture-contribution” and “the recognition of the rights of others to their self-development”, the civilised world is “incomplete”.⁵⁶

Seen in the light of Ananda Coomaraswamy’s work, the relationships between Victorian socialism and Indian nationalism offer a crucial entry-point to the post-industrialism of the long twentieth century. Patrick Brantlinger has written extensively about the ironies of Gandhi’s attraction to the Victorian art critic John Ruskin, and similarly William Morris’ “Ruskin-inflected Marxism”. While Morris and Gandhi both valued the anti-industrialist, pre-capitalist, community ethic that Ruskin championed, Ruskin’s stance as a Tory imperialist with thoroughly Orientalist views on India and a general distaste of Indian art, ran contrary to Morris’ broadly critical stance on imperialism. Morris never actively advocated for Indian independence, nor did he fully escape from the vestiges of Orientalism, and while Coomaraswamy explicitly brought Morris’ aesthetic and political ideas into the Indian context, his bringing together of Constructive Socialism and Constructive Swadeshi pushed only for a permanent revolution of craft societies, not necessarily the independent India that Gandhi fought for in the years leading up to independence in 1947.⁵⁷

The Indian Village: Between the Colonial and the First World

The Indian village existed far beyond the lived experience and daily struggles of its inhabitants. It served as an imaginary in which the fluidity of craft time was performed, and which served as a focal point for discussions around

craft and community since early colonial rule. In the 1880s, for British anthropologists such as Henry Maine (1822–1888), the Indian village was not seen as a site of stagnation or decay, as suggested by J.S. Mill, but as a utopian version of an earlier pre-capitalist stage of Britain's own evolution to modernity. Scholars such as Saloni Mathur and Arindam Dutta have examined the Orientalist underpinnings of the ways in which Indian craft and craftspersons were imported and showcased in Britain in the nineteenth century.⁵⁸ In discussing the massive documentation process that took place after 1857, driven by what Bernard Cohn calls "investigative modalities", Abigail McGowan suggests that documentation efforts by the colonial government defined crafts via the culturally bound, ethnographically defined artisanal body, rooted in local practices, traditions, and communities as the gazetteers of the 1880s presented products defined by the distinctive features (marriage customs, gods, etc) of the caste and community that made them. Such studies, therefore, operated on the idea that production was intimately linked to culturally connected bodies, thus making the bodies central to craft production severed from industrial factories.⁵⁹ By 1902, the nationalist historian R.C. Dutt's *Economic History of India* (1902) had challenged such spectacles and the conditions of economic dependence that they concealed, while Indian economists such as Dadabhai Naoroji's drain theories used contemporary agricultural and industrial statistics to showcase processes of natural resource exploitation under the colonial regime.⁶⁰ Some British socialists too, such as Henry Mayers Hyndman (1842–1921), held explicit views on Britain's exploitation of its colonies. Borrowing and building on Naoroji's work among others, Hyndman's "The Bankruptcy of India" (1878) advocated for Indian home rule under the British Commonwealth framework. Although Hyndman was not an out-and-out Indian nationalist (only gradually letting go of his Tory Radical imperialism), his political stance on India was clearer than that of, for example, William Morris.

The aesthetic and craft reform arguments from philosophers and art historians such as Coomaraswamy, the administrator and naturalist George Birdwood (1832–1917), who wrote various catalogues of the industrial arts of India (that informed much of Morris' knowledge of Indian craft), and the arts reformer Ernest Binfield Havell, all celebrated the village as the embodiment of Indian life. For Birdwood, India, "where each community is a little republic," was "the only Aryan country which has maintained the continuity of its marvelous social, religious, and economical life ..."⁶¹ In accounts such as Birdwood's and Coomaraswamy's, the craftsperson and the village emerge as reified categories, a timeless, Hindu entity founded and functioning on underlying religious structures, despite the fact that a large number of communities that they were writing about would have been Muslim. I argue that over the course of the twentieth century, the Indian village did not simply emerge as a timeless entity but afforded a trans-temporal space for experiments in arts and crafts ideas as they transmuted

and coagulated in the exchanges between Britain, India, and the United States, adapting to and contingent on its political contexts. Indian craft would become the leitmotif of South Asian struggles for *swadesh* and *swaraj* (self-rule) through its reinvention by Gandhi.⁶² As Gyan Prakash writes, although the pre-industrial village “permitted the British to incorporate India in their evolutionary conception of history,” characterising village communities as a “stage before the modern state, the Indian nationalists fastened on precisely this symbol of village communities to signify the difference of India as a modern nation.”⁶³ An emphasis on the national, public importance of craft directly informed Gandhi’s famous campaign to encourage hand-spun clothes as a commitment to Swadeshi or Indian-made goods, and by the late nineteenth century, craft was no longer the private concern of artisans and merchants but a political act and preoccupation. Unlike Gandhi, who had great hopes for “*Gram Swaraj*”, a decentralised, non-exploitative form of village self-government through the *sarpanchas* and *panchas* (village councils), and who advocated for a “village-based political formation fostered by a stateless, classless society”, the Dalit politician and social reformer Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956) had a more realistic and perhaps more nuanced view of the village as a social and judicial structure, declaring them to be microcosms of caste inequality, prejudice, and communalism.⁶⁴

The first prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, had a more complicated relationship with the Indian village. After independence in 1947, Nehru’s optimistic and socialist frame for a new India hoped to transform it from a rural society into an urban state. Dedicated to conceptualising this framework, he also reached to pre-colonial ideals that would help shape this identity. As a letter from Nehru to Gandhi in 1945 shows, he saw the village as an intellectually and culturally backward environment and sought to develop programmes, the most important of which was the 1952 Community Development Program (the first of fifty-four), that prompted cooperation and community-building and aimed to raise the standards of living in the villages.⁶⁵ Dedicated symbolically to Gandhi’s memory (four years after his assassination), the programme followed a somewhat different route towards the emancipation of the village. It became the “method” through which the state sought to “bring about social and economic transformation in India’s villages”.⁶⁶ Nehru enlisted the Planning Commission to oversee it, while Douglas Ensminger (1910–1989) arrived from the United States as an official of the United States Economic and Technical Evaluation agency (the precursor to USAID), going on to become the India Representative to the largest private US philanthropic foundation of the Cold War era, the Ford Foundation, where he continued to shape Community Development policy. Gandhians joined the Planning Commission and many of their local organisations were mobilised towards the larger programme.⁶⁷ Nehru’s Industrial Policy Resolution of 1953 aimed to establish training and

development programmes that would accelerate the growth of small industries, which in turn would lead to a broader improvement of working and living conditions of the masses.

It was in this context of technocratic international development that the Eameses found their way to India, and the first steps towards a National Institute for Design were drafted. For the Eameses, the village became not only the site of possible social transformation but also the source of symbolic value, where everyday objects could be unravelled into mytho-historical continuums in which one could trace the evolution of design through generational adaptation. For example, as the Eameses almost obsessively photographed object types, such as utensils, or footwear, or transport, they moved (their camera) from villages to semi-rural spaces to cities. The data field that their visual repository created was ripe for searching, almost as algorithms would later do, for patterns that would emerge and point to nodes of evolutionary transformation across generations, to urbanisation and migration with an eye to the religious and cultural significance of the object within the changing social structures of the village.

The National Institute of Design and the Eameses

The National Institute of Design (NID), officially founded in Ahmedabad in 1961, grew variously out of an institution-building surge in the 1950s in newly independent India and a long history of debates and initiatives around industrial design initiated by the British in colonial India more than a century prior to independence. NID was enlisted under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, which in many ways followed the conception of industrial design in relation to rural reform already set up by the British.⁶⁸ The first Five Year Plan (launched by Jawaharlal Nehru in 1951), following up on the *Report of the Committee for Art Education* (1947), called for the setting up of Regional Design Centres in Bombay, Bangalore, and New Delhi. Based in Ahmedabad, a city dubbed the “Manchester of India” for its proliferating textile mills, and home to Mahatma Gandhi’s Sabarmati *ashram*, NID was spearheaded by heirs to the wealthy mill-owning Sarabhai family, or more specifically, the brother and sister duo of Gautam (1917–1995) and Gira Sarabhai (1924–present). Gautam had a PhD in mathematics and was, at the time, Chairman of Calico Textile Mills, while Gira had lived in New York and trained at Frank Lloyd Wright’s studio in Arizona.

Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, Ahmedabad, in the region of Gujarat (also known then as the “Gateway to the West”), was at the crossroads of various major trade routes where merchants carrying textiles, indigo, and saltpetre, among other things, would travel along the major river routes such as the Sabarmati. During the second half of the nineteenth century, soon after the British had introduced the latest technologies and

machinery to Bombay in 1854, Ahmedabad's cotton textile industry exploded into success. After independence, the mill owners, especially the Sarabhais, targeted their attentions on creating a new consumer market with global connections and thoroughly researched local labour and retail strategies that would replace the military-driven production that had been the mainstay during the war.⁶⁹ While Mahatma Gandhi led protests and strikes on behalf of the textile workers in Ahmedabad in the 1930s, he also shared a close relationship with the Sarabhais, who financially supported Gandhi's anti-British Swadeshi movement as well as his *ashram* in later years. The personal connections that the Sarabhais nurtured with nationalist thinkers such as Gandhi, Nehru, and Tagore fostered the contradictory ways in which the consumer-oriented nature of their enterprises sat with lofty nationalist and community-oriented goals.⁷⁰ Gandhi was particularly impassioned about Rabindranath Tagore's rural reconstruction experiment and its craft and design, which included community development and craft training schemes geared towards a self-sufficient design economy. Indeed, such was the influence that it served as the inspiration behind Gandhi's later Wardha and Sevagram *ashram* experiments. Ambalal Sarabhai (1890–1967), Gira and Gautam's father, hosted Rabindranath at his home during his visits to Ahmedabad; Gandhi tirelessly raised money for Tagore's school; and the Sarabhais became huge (financial and moral) proponents of Tagore's work and ideas around education, with Gira Sarabhai attending classes in the Santiniketan-Sriniketan school in the 1930s.⁷¹ This seemingly strange coexistence is a fitting starting point to think about newly independent India's design history as a constant negotiation between the tenets of sustainability and development.

Almost as if illustrating this tension, Gautam and Gira Sarabhai opened the Calico Museum of Textiles in 1949, motivated by their conversations with Ananda Coomaraswamy (by then the curator of Indian art at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston), who strongly recommended initiating a textile museum project in Ahmedabad to showcase its 5,000-year-old textile tradition. Emphasising the "interdependence of design and technology", the museum showcased the finest pieces of both hand-made and mass-produced textiles with the primary aim of educating the museum visitor about the integration of "form and materials" and "creating a wider understanding of the principles of organic design".⁷² In keeping more with the Lethaby strain of the Arts and Crafts movement, one section of the museum tried to show that "industrial design is not ... distinct from the process of machines production." Rather than seeing the artistic qualities of an object as simply "applied" to a manufactured object, it tried to frame mid-century Indian design as an integrative process which required an exhaustive knowledge of "technical and aesthetic implications".⁷³ In his review in Mulk Raj Anand's *Marg* magazine (another nationalist endeavour founded in 1946 and funded by

J.R.D. Tata (1904–1993) of the industrialist Tata family), the German Indologist Hermann Goetz (1898–1976) lauded the museum. “The Calico Museum of Textiles is modern because this survey of Indian textiles ... is undertaken not in the spirit of an antiquarian revivalism but as a substructure for the future edifice of a living and modern Indian.” ⁷⁴ The museum was one of multiple ventures that the Sarabhais initiated in the interest of creating a cultured and curious consumer for their products. This creation of the consumer, as the Sarabhais and their friends would have seen it, was not divorced from post-independence nationalist efforts. The ideal consumer citizen would, through their lifestyle choices, embrace a nationalist identity, and (eventually) display good taste and pride in both traditional Indian design and modernist innovation.

The Sarabhais worked astutely with both Gandhi’s hand-spun Swadeshi movement as well as independent India’s mass progress-oriented goals, at the time being formulated by another close friend of the Sarabhai family, Jawaharlal Nehru. Fuller, also a friend of the family, was interested in the possibility of having his geodesic domes manufactured in India. In 1964, he would give a special seminar at NID titled “Geodesic Structures”. ⁷⁵ The Sarabhais, as well as Nehru’s daughter, Indira Gandhi (1917–1984), who would also become prime minister in 1966, were great enthusiasts of Fuller’s philosophical discourse on the architecture of the universe, of doing more with less, of not trying to change humanity but changing the environment, and of bettering the human condition for all. ⁷⁶ Despite the universality that lent itself to his work, and which inevitably flattened political realities and social difference, ⁷⁷ Fuller claimed to have admired Mahatma Gandhi’s writings, having read him avidly over a period in the late 1920s, and in the 1960s would have perhaps embraced some of the ideas of Gandhian economist, J.C. Kumarappa (1892–1960), which postulated for a sustainable society, one that manages its economic growth so as to do no irreparable damage to its environment. ⁷⁸

Kumarappa’s views on the United States’ involvement in India were in fact not quite so rosy. In an article titled “The Noose”, in response to the Technical Cooperation Agreement that Nehru signed with the United States in 1952 (in which United States granted aid with the intent of “promoting and accelerating the integrated development of India”), ⁷⁹ Kumarappa cautioned against the tentacles of “the American speciality [of] financial imperialism”. ⁸⁰ This paradoxical positioning and negotiation between Gandhian ideals and technocratic development seeps through the story of mid-century India in various ways, as this essay shows.

The Paradox of Postindustrialism

The Eameses' blueprint for NID was drafted in India within a particular US post-war context. In 1953, for example, the American anthropologist Margaret Mead had been similarly funded by UNESCO's *Tension and Technology* series to edit *Cultural Patterns and Technical Change* (1953). She recognised that modernisation was inevitably a global phenomenon, but rather than railing at it, sought ways to make it more culturally sensitive. Critiques of Mead's *Culture and Personality* programme show how it identified ideal personality types for different cultures and apparently reduced entire nations to single stereotypes.⁸¹ The modernisation theory of the 1950s coalition of American social scientists who marshalled a new set of blueprints for the Third World, suggested that all "modern" societies were converging around a set of behaviours and forms of social organisation dictated by the needs of industrial society. If the needs could be met, peasant cultures would experience "take-off" and blossom into modern societies. For the economist Walt Rostow (1916–2003), the "head salesman" of this "modernization theory", and his colleagues, the point was, as Thomas Meaney writes, "to translate America's peculiar path to modernity into normative theory: they were to be the vanguard of technocratic social planners for young states in the Third World."⁸² While Mead was initially sympathetic to US-led modernisation, by the late 1950s, she had denounced all such modernisation theories for they threatened cultural integrity. For designers such as the Eameses, invited to work with and for the US government on overseas projects, the fall-outs were less focused on cultural difference and much more on the role of design as an agent of social change. The Eameses described the overlap between their office and various government agencies as mutual interests in the natural environment, the objects of everyday life, and "conversations with other nations". "Our work in education has," they said, "... provided a natural overlap to the interests of several government agencies."⁸³

They write in the *India Report*,

The change India is undergoing is not a change in *kind* but a change of degree. The medium that is producing this change is communication; not some influence of the West on the East. The phenomenon of communication is something that affects a world not a country.⁸⁴

The Eameses came to the India project predisposed to the efficacy of communication in design reform, first in the USA and thus, in effect, everywhere else. Their two-pronged approach to communication included a

broad range of experiments in their work as designers and exhibition designers, and also an attempt to participate in a broader conversation around communications theory. Their 1953 film, *A Communications Primer*, for example, tried to interpret and package ideas of communications theory to architects and planners to promote the pivotal role some of these ideas could play in planning and design. As Anthony Acciavatti argues in “Towards a Communication-Oriented Society: The Eameses India Report”, the Eameses envisioned the National Institute of Design as a kind of communications hub or national broadcast centre, where exhibitions, graphic design, photography, and film—all considered a part of information exchange—would be combined with research and training.⁸⁵ Indira Gandhi, who served as the Minister of Information and Broadcasting from 1964, also firmly believed in the power of communication in the direction of the masses, especially India’s vast rural populations.⁸⁶

The school was to become a conduit that could effectively “communicate” with the people, with itself, and with the government to form an action-driven plan for the future of Indian design. The Eameses’ proposition, beginning as it did, with a passage from the Gita that conflated the message of work (“You have the right to work but for the work’s sake only”)⁸⁷ with Morrisian ethics and a communications-cure for a stagnated mid-century India, was a practicable blueprint, adopted largely enthusiastically for the training of India’s new designers and design teachers in the arts of communication and design.⁸⁸ The Eameses’ *Communications Primer* was inspired by the 1949 book *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* by Claude Shannon, and the theory of signal processing, which it took as its basis, may be seen as an early beginning of the information revolution that would take the 1960s and 1970s by storm.

By the time the American sociologist Daniel Bell re-coined the term “post-industrialism” in Cold War America, Coomaraswamy’s socialist, religious, and craft-oriented notion was wildly out of fashion and context. In Bell’s 1973 book, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*, post-industrialism does not completely displace the industrial but emphasises significant changes to the structures of industrial society to warrant a new title. Bell had used the term as early as 1959, a year after the Eameses were in India, in a series of lectures in Salzburg to denote a society “which had passed from a goods-producing stage to a service society”. His 1962 unpublished paper at a forum on technology and social change focused on the role played by technology and science in social change.⁸⁹ Bell’s post-industrialism, unlike that of Coomaraswamy’s future-oriented harnessing of past value-systems, refers to a period of evolution of an already economically developed society, which is making a further leap of affluence away from the citizen as worker to citizen as consumer. This stage-theory oriented notion of a pregnant historical

turning point finds precedent in the writings of figures such as Walt Rostow, especially in his *Stages of Economic Development: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (1971). For Bell, the sector changes in the technocratic knowledge economy would, through “new relations between science and technology”, erase social distinctions and class conflict. Seen as a precursor to “communicative capitalism” (where communication is central not to democratic policy or deliberations between citizens but to forms and processes of late capitalism), Bell’s ideas were adjacent to the Eameses’ belief that even in the designing of goods towards development, it was not heavy industry but the role of communication, information, and services that would be key to a modern Indian society.⁹⁰

If the Long Arts and Crafts Movement’s manoeuvres through the transatlantic political landscapes of Victorian socialism and Cold War consumerism found its ideal trans-temporal lab in the Indian village, this essay shows how the top-down Indigenism and search for Indianness that characterised both endeavours in this period were caught up in a constantly shifting nexus of priorities, between a surge towards modernisation and development on the one hand and a burgeoning nationalism that promoted the pre-colonial Indian village as spaces of sustainable and pure rural economies on the other.

Footnotes

- 1 Charles Eames, *The India Report* (Ahmedabad: National Institute of Design, 2004), iii.
- 2 Eugene S. Staples, *Forty Years, a Learning Curve: The Ford Foundation Programs in India, 1952–1992* (New Delhi: Ford Foundation, 1992), 8–10.
- 3 For example, Inderjeet Parmar shows how the Carnegie and Rockefeller (including the Ford) Foundations were key to the “elite dominance of U.S. foreign affairs” and to “creating national and global networks of intellectuals committed to a Progressive-era state-building project for globalist ends”, see Inderjeet Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century: The Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller Foundations in the Rise of American Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); David Engerman shows how foreign aid as a Cold War tool for the superpowers unravelled domestic politics and policies in India. See David C. Engerman, *The Price of Aid: The Economic Cold War in India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018); see also Olivier Zunz, *Philanthropy in America: A History—Updated Edition*, rev. edn (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014); and Michael E. Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution: Modernization, Development, and U.S. Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).
- 4 Margot Coates, *A Weaver’s Life: Ethel Mairet 1872–1952: A Selection of Source Material* (London: Crafts Council in association with the Crafts Study Centre Bath, 1983), 19. On 4 November 1903, Ethel Mairet writes: “The weavers came from Uda Dumbara. They stayed till 29th. Gandeke Korale. Talagu village. Seven of them. 3 men and the others women, Sinhalese. The chief of them was an elderly woman, very stirring; and an interesting face. Her son also weaves, but she is evidently the moving spirit. (He made the mat we first bought from Katcheri which they recognised with great pride and a big grunt of satisfaction.)”
- 5 Coates, *A Weaver’s Life*, 21.
- 6 For an excellent account of Coomaswamy’s involvement with the Stieglitz circles and the ways in which he integrated his interest in photo-secessionist photography with his agenda of elevating South Asian aesthetic theory, see Nachiket Chanchani, “The Camera Work of Ananda Kentish Coomaswamy and Alfred Stieglitz”, *History of Photography* 37, no. 2 (May 2013): 204–220, doi:[10.1080/03087298.2012.711903](https://doi.org/10.1080/03087298.2012.711903).
- 7 Coates, *A Weaver’s Life*, 20. For example, Ethel Mairet duly spent eleven pages on a section titled “Process of putting up loom”; this was accompanied by drawings of each post and part: “comb”, “presser”, made of “dark bamboo”.
- 8 Sylvia Wolf (ed.), *Julia Margaret Cameron’s Women* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).
- 9 Ananda Kentish Coomaswamy, *The Indian Craftsman ... With a Foreword by C.R. Ashbee* [Probsthain’s Oriental Series, Vol. 1.] (London: Probsthain & Co, 1909).
- 10 Ananda Kentish Coomaswamy, *The Deeper Meaning of the Struggle* (London: Essex House Press, 1907).

- 11 William Morris, *Art and Society: Lectures and Essays* by William Morris (Chicago, IL: George M. Hill, 1993); for a discussion of these lectures, see Bradley J. Macdonald, *William Morris and the Aesthetic Constitution of Politics* (New York: Lexington Books, 1999).
- 12 A telling early observation, situates their combined project in this background, when, in Ceylon, one of Ethel Mairet's first finds are embroideries with "large, bold design worked in wools on a coarse white cotton ground—very Morris in feeling", see Coates, *A Weaver's Life*, 18.
- 13 Fiona MacCarthy, *The Simple Life: C.R. Ashbee in the Cotswolds* (London: Faber & Faber, 2012). In 1902, the guild moved to the countryside of Chipping Camden inspired by collaborator and supporter, the socialist poet and philosopher Edward Carpenter.
- 14 S. Durai Raja Singam, *Ananda Coomaraswamy, the Bridge Builder: A Study of a Scholar-Colossus* (Kuala Lumpur: Khee Meng Press, 1977), 39.
- 15 Coomaraswamy, *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art, Being a Monograph on Mediaeval Sinhalese Arts and Crafts, Mainly as Surviving in the Eighteenth Century, with an Account of the Structure of Society and the Status of the Craftsmen* (London: Essex House Press, 1908), v.
- 16 Coomaraswamy, *Mediaeval Sinhalese Art*, vi.
- 17 Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Arts & Crafts of India & Ceylon, by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy ... Containing Two Hundred & Twenty-Five Illustrations.*, The World of Art Series (Edinburgh: T.N. Foulis, 1913).
- 18 Arthur Drexler, *Charles Eames: Furniture from the Design Collection* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1973), 12.
- 19 See also Charles Eames, "Organic Design", *California Arts & Architecture*, December 1941, 16-17.
- 20 Pat Kirkham, *Charles and Ray Eames: Designers of the Twentieth Century*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 50; see also Rosemarie Haag Bletter et al., *Craft in the Machine Age 1920-1945: The History of Twentieth-Century American Craft*, edited by Janet Kardon (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995).
- 21 Fred Turner, *The Democratic Surround: Multimedia & American Liberalism from World War II to the Psychedelic Sixties* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 2.
- 22 Turner, *The Democratic Surround*, 4.
- 23 Walt Whitman Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960).
- 24 Saloni Mathur, "Charles and Ray Eames in India", *Art Journal* 70, no. 1 (2011): 40-42. Saloni Mathur describes the exhibition as an "imaginary bazar" and provides a fuller account of its conception and reception and the role of the Eameses in it.
- 25 Museum of Modern Art, "What Was Good Design? MoMA's Message, 1944-56 | MoMA", Press Release, Department of Communications, Museum of Modern Art, May 2009.
- 26 Claire Wintle, "Diplomacy and the Design School: The Ford Foundation and India's National Institute of Design", *Design and Culture* 9, no. 2 (4 May 2017): 211-212, doi:[10.1080/17547075.2017.1322876](https://doi.org/10.1080/17547075.2017.1322876).
- 27 Eames, *The India Report*, 2.
- 28 Christopher Pinney, *Photography and Anthropology* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011); Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead, *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis* (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1942); and Marcus Banks and Richard Vokes, "Introduction: Anthropology, Photography and the Archive", *History and Anthropology* 21, no. 4 (2010): 337-349, doi:[10.1080/02757206.2010.522375](https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2010.522375).
- 29 See Nancy Newhall, *PH. Emerson* (Millertown, NY: Aperture, 1975). See also Lili Corbus Bezner, *Photography and Politics in America: From the New Deal into the Cold War* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).
- 30 Douglas R. Nickel, "History of Photography: The State of Research", *The Art Bulletin* 83, no. 3 (2001): 548-558.
- 31 Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, trans. S. Hawkes (New York: Zone Books, 2004), 238-239. See also Geraldine Johnson, "'(Un)richtige Aufnahme': Renaissance Sculpture and the Visual Historiography of Art History", *Art History* 36, no. 1 (2013): 13-51; and Griselda Pollock, "Aby Warburg and Mnemosyne: Photography as Aide-Mémoire, Optical Unconscious and Philosophy", in Costanza Caraffa (ed.), *Archives and the Photographic Memory of Art History* (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2011), 73-97.
- 32 See Katsura Miyahara, "The Impact of the Lantern Slide on Art-History Lecturing in Britain", *British Art Journal* 8, no. 2 (2007): 67-71; and Trevor Fawcett, "Visual Facts and the 19th-Century Art Lecture", *Art History* 6 (1983): 442-460.
- 33 For a broader history of entanglements between post-war politics, corporations, and the visual cultures of the Cold War, see Fred Turner, "The Corporation and the Counterculture: Revisiting the Pepsi Pavilion and the Politics of Cold War Multimedia", *The Velvet Light Trap* 73 (March 2014): 66-78, doi:[10.7560/VLT7306](https://doi.org/10.7560/VLT7306).
- 34 Mathur, "Charles and Ray Eames in India".
- 35 Kirkham, *Charles and Ray Eames*, 175.
- 36 Kirkham, *Charles and Ray Eames*, 143.
- 37 William Lethaby, "Art and Workmanship", *Imprint* (January 1913). Reprinted in Glenn Adamson (ed.), *The Craft Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2010), 163.
- 38 Godfrey Rubens, *William Richard Lethaby: His Life and Work 1857-1931* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2014), 230.

- 39 This is a term Morris used to differentiate his work from other socialists of the time; see William Morris, "The Society of the Future", in Arthur Leslie Morton (ed.), *The Political Writings of William Morris* (New York: International Publishers, 1973), 190.
- 40 Bradley J. Macdonald, "William Morris and the Vision of Ecosocialism", *Contemporary Justice Review* 7, no. 3 (1 September 2004): 288, doi:[10.1080/1028258042000266013](https://doi.org/10.1080/1028258042000266013).
- 41 William Morris wrote *News from Nowhere* (1890) in direct response to the American socialist writer Edward Bellamy's utopian science fiction novel, *Looking Backward 2000-1887* (1888). For a recent account of late nineteenth-century transatlantic utopian socialisms and its networks, see Michael Robertson, *The Last Utopians: Four Late Nineteenth-Century Visionaries and Their Legacy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).
- 42 Arthur Joseph Penty, *Post-Industrialism* (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 49-50, 13, <http://archive.org/details/postindustriali00pentuoft>.
- 43 Penty, *Post-Industrialism*, 14.
- 44 Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, "The Purposes of Art", *Modern Review* no. 13 (June 1913): 606.
- 45 Coomaraswamy, *The Arts & Crafts of India & Ceylon*, 34.
- 46 Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Siva: Fourteen Indian Essays* (New York: The Sunwise Turn, 1918), 138-139.
- 47 Coomaraswamy, *The Dance of Siva*, 12.
- 48 Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and Arthur Penty (eds), *Essays on Post-Industrialism: A Symposium of Prophecy Concerning the Future of Society* (London: T.N Foulis, 1914).
- 49 Coomaraswamy and Penty, *Essays on Post-Industrialism*, 28.
- 50 Coomaraswamy and Penty, *Essays on Post-Industrialism*, 31.
- 51 Coomaraswamy and Penty, *Essays on Post-Industrialism*, 42.
- 52 For nuanced and extensive accounts of the relationships between colonialism, nationalism, art pedagogy, and institutions in Bengal, see Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922: Occidental Orientations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Partha Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism: India's Artists and the Avant-Garde, 1922-1947* (London: Reaktion, 2007); and Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Making of a New Indian Art: Artists, Aesthetics and Nationalism in Bengal, c.1850-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
- 53 Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, "The Present State of Indian Art", *Modern Review* 2, no. 2 (1907): 110. For a broader history of the Constructive Swadeshi movement, see Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-1908* (Ranikhet: Orient Black Swan, 2011).
- 54 Roger Lipsey, *Coomaraswamy: His Life and Work* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 22.
- 55 See Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922*.
- 56 Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, "India and Ceylon, Presidential Address to the Ceylon Reform Association", *Ceylon National Review* 2, no. 4 (1907): 15-22.
- 57 Patrick Brantlinger, "A Postindustrial Prelude to Postcolonialism: John Ruskin, William Morris, and Gandhism", *Critical Inquiry* 22, no. 3 (1996): 468.
- 58 Arindam Dutta, *The Bureaucracy of Beauty: Design in the Age of Its Global Reproducibility* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Saloni Mathur, *India by Design: Colonial History and Cultural Display* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007).
- 59 Abigail McGowan, *Crafting the Nation in Colonial India* (New York: AIAA, 2009).
- 60 Romesh Chunder Dutt, *The Economic History of British India; a Record of Agriculture and Land Settlements, Trade and Manufacturing Industries, Finance and Administration, from the Rise of the British Power in 1757 to the Accession of Queen Victoria in 1837* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd, 1902); Dadabhai Naoroji, *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1901).
- 61 George Christopher Molesworth Birdwood, *The Industrial Arts of India* (London: Reprint Press, 1971), 44-45.
- 62 See Rebecca Brown, *Gandhi's Spinning Wheel and the Making of India* (Oxford: Routledge, 2010); and Lisa N. Trivedi, *Clothing Gandhi's Nation: Homespun and Modern India* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007).
- 63 Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 184-185.
- 64 Granville A. Austin, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 29. Gandhi's proposal was, in fact, rejected by the Congress.
- 65 "Nehru's Reply to Gandhi, 9 October 1945", in M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*, edited by Anthony Parel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 152.
- 66 India Department of Community Development, *Community Development Programme in India, 1952-72* (Nilokheri: Government of India Press, 1973), 10.

- 67 Douglas Ensminger, *A Guide to Community Development* (Delhi: Ministry of Community Development & Co-Operation, Government of India, 1959). For a nuanced history of the Community Development Programmes and its relation to colonial and transnational histories, see Subir Sinha, "Lineages of the Developmentalist State: Transnationality and Village India, 1900-1965", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 50, no. 1 (January 2008): 57-90, doi:[10.1017/S0010417508000054](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417508000054).
- 68 The Department of Science and Art (DSA), for example, was set up by the British Government as early as the 1850s to introduce superior design and artisanal sensibility in industrial workers. Dutta's *The Bureaucracy of Beauty* shows how the DSA exerted a powerful influence on the growth of museums, design schools, as well as architecture throughout the British Empire.
- 69 For example, the Sarabhai hired A.K. Rice, whose work at the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in the UK on social systems they wanted to apply to understand and better the organisation of labour practices in their mills. See A.K. Rice, *Productivity and Social Organization: The Ahmedabad Experiment: Technical Innovation, Work Organization and Management* (New York: Routledge, 2013).
- 70 Partha Chatterjee, "The Indian Big Bourgeoisie: Comprador or National?" and "The Nehru Era", in *A Possible India: Essays in Political Criticism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997). As Chatterjee argues, the pursuit of foreign expertise and foreign markets and a class-based social structure was fundamental to big bourgeoisie interests. In the case of the Sarabhais, it straddled Nehru's general outlook for social betterment, his international Non-Alignment policies, and socialism on the national scale.
- 71 Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (ed.), *The Mahatma and the Poet: Letters and Debates Between Gandhi and Tagore 1915-41* (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2006). For a contemporary account of the relationships in the ideas and debates between Gandhi, Tagore, and Nehru, see Krishna Kripalani, *Gandhi, Tagore and Nehru* (New Delhi: Hind Kitabs, 1949).
- 72 A.N. Gulati, "The Calico Museum of Textiles, Ahmadabad", *Journal of Indian Museums; New Delhi* 5 (1 January 1949): 120.
- 73 Gulati, "The Calico Museum of Textiles, Ahmadabad", 120; See also Dashrath Patel, *Experiencing a Museum: A Photographic Essay by Dashrath Patel through the Galleries of the Calico Museum of Textiles and the Sarabhai Foundation, Ahmedabad* (Ahmedabad: The Sarabhai Foundation, 1998).
- 74 Hermann Goetz, "The Calico Museum of Textiles at Ahmedabad", *Marg: A Magazine of the Arts* 3, no. 4 (1949): 57-61.
- 75 National Institute of Design, *National Institute of Design: Documentation, 1964-69* (Ahmedabad: The Institute, 1969).
- 76 See Pupul Jayakar, *Indira Gandhi, a Biography* (New Delhi: Viking, 1992); and Jairam Ramesh, *Indira Gandhi: A Life in Nature* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017).
- 77 Meyer Schapiro, "Looking Forward to Looking Backward: A Dossier of Writings on Architecture from the 1930s", *Grey Room* (1 January 2002): 66-109, doi:[10.1162/152638102317406506](https://doi.org/10.1162/152638102317406506). Here, Schapiro critiques Fuller's work with the Structural Studies Associates on these grounds.
- 78 L. Steven Sieden, *Buckminster Fuller's Universe: His Life and Work* (Cambridge, MA: Basic Books, 2000), 93. More recently, Lorraine has provided a less rosy picture of Fuller's life, claiming that his self-construction as a utopian visionary was a carefully constructed image founded as much on his entrepreneurial skills as other things; see Loretta Lorraine, *Becoming Bucky Fuller* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009).
- 79 "Indo-US Technical Cooperation Agreement", reproduced as Appendix 1 in L. Natarajan, *American Shadow over India* (Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1952), 299-304.
- 80 J.C. Kumarappa, "The Noose", *Gram Udyog Patrika*, February 1952.
- 81 See Peter Mandler, *Return from the Natives: How Margaret Mead Won the Second World War and Lost the Cold War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).
- 82 Thomas Meaney, "The Swaddling Thesis", *London Review of Books*, 6 March 2014.
- 83 Helene Lipstadt, "Natural Overlap: Charles and Ray Eames and the Federal Government", in Donald Albrecht (ed.), *The Work of Charles and Ray Eames: A Legacy of Invention* (New York: Harry N. Abrams in association with the Library of Congress and the Vitra Design Museum, 1997), 151.
- 84 Eames, *The India Report*, 3.
- 85 Catherine Ince (ed.), *The World of Charles and Ray Eames* (New York: Rizzoli, 2016), 242.
- 86 Indira Gandhi, *Years of Challenge: Selected Speeches of Indira Gandhi 1966-1969*, rev. edn (Delhi: Orient Book Distributors, 1973), 283. In 1966, she claims, "I am convinced of the importance of information and mass communication in India. It is only in this way that we can communicate ideas to the general mass of the people and induce them or rather direct them in directions which are for their own good."
- 87 Eames, *The India Report*, 1.
- 88 For a nuanced account of the Eameses and the complicated history of the reception of their ideas in India, see Anthony Acciavatti, "Towards a Communication-Oriented Society: The India Report" in Catherine Ince (ed.), *The World of Charles and Ray Eames* (New York: Rizzoli, 2016).
- 89 Margaret A. Rose, *The Post-Modern and the Post-Industrial: A Critical Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 30. The paper was titled: "The Post-Industrial Society: A Speculative View of the United States in 1958 and Beyond".
- 90 See Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 51-74.

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