

VISUALIZING THE CITY: PHOTOGRAPHY, MODERNITY, CALCUTTA (1850-1950)

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THESIS ABSTRACT

The project proposes to interrogate the ways in which the topography of colonial Calcutta – and the landmark city-spaces - was visualised in photography. This straightforward premise may be divided into two discursive domains. First, taking Calcutta as the locus of enquiry, the project proposes a critique of the methods of reproducing an archetypal colonial city. Two, this reproduction is not any form of cultural viewing of foundational colonial spaces but a specific act of seeing *through* the camera and its attendant *frames, regimes* and principles. Photography, the project argues, not only brings the emergent colonial city-space under a series of optic templates but also empowers that space with the possibility of (re)producing a spatial modernity of its own. Hence, this project is about the visual remembrance and representation of Calcutta's *spatiality* and the construction of a cultural memory that this act of remembrance brings to the fore. To that end, the project locates itself as an inquiry into the construction of Calcutta as a *photographic* city. The *photographic* city is not only how a city lends itself to image-making but also how the reproduced modes of visibility mobilises a cultural idiom of its own. The key term in this project is hence *encounter - encounter* between the camera and the city, between the optics of seeing and the architectonics of modernity; and between photography *as* documentation and photography *as* witness.