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Seeing, being seen, and the semiotics of perspective

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Abstract

Building upon work in visual studies and art history on symbolic perspective, film studies on structures of looking, and linguistic anthropology on entextualization and ideology, this article explores the semiotics of vision/visibility and perspective. In particular, I focus on ethnographic data from the cinema of Tamil Nadu, India, wherein (being seen) seeing a film image and being seen in a film image emerge as pragmatically problematic for those party to the image. In doing so, the article asks: what does it mean and do to *see* and *be seen by*, *look away from* and be *effaced by* the film image and, further, *see* or *be seen* vis-à-vis the above (seeing someone being seen in a film image, be seen looking away, etc.)?

> "It is the explanation that opens our eyes."
>
> —Marcel Proust, cited by Harvey Sacks, (1964–1965) 1989, 340–41

> "In the look that takes in the other one reveals oneself; with the same act, in which the subject seeks to know its object, it surrenders itself to the object. One cannot take with the eye without at the same time giving."
>
> —Georg Simmel (1908) 2009, 571

INTRODUCTION

This article considers the proposition that seeing and being seen are context-bound and context-breaching pragmatic acts whose social (performative) consequentialities are shaped by their semiotic (metapragmatic) mediation. It explores this proposition in two registers.

The first register is theoretical, linking works in film studies, visual studies, and linguistic anthropology to ask after the *semiotics of perspective*; at issue here is the question of how a semiotics of perspective necessarily informs any inquiry into the pragmatics—the social actness—of seeing and being seen (Chalfen, 2020). Here, I am particularly concerned with theorizing the mediation of visibility and vision by what linguistic anthropologists call *entextualization* (Silverstein and Urban, 1996), those evenemential processes of social interaction wherein sign activity of various kinds gel together as "texts-in-context," that is, take on

sensible, intelligible, and pragmatically forceful form in the events of their happening. Visibility and vision, I suggest, are constituted by processes of entextualization, and this because both turn on the question of *perspective*. To entextualize is to take a perspective, and to take a perspective is to open a world as a horizon of sensibility (for sighted creatures, visibility), intelligibility, and action. This discussion, by engaging questions of visual form (and its contemplation in fields like art history, film studies, and visual studies), expands linguistic anthropology's aperture to consider discursive interaction in its complex multimediality, in particular as concern interaction's "discursive cameras," as I term them. In doing so, it also leverages advances in linguistic anthropology in the study of discourse to theorize the meaningfulness and force of vision and visibility (and perspective more broadly).

The second register is ethnographic; it explores questions of seeing and being seen in the cinema of South India. Here, I'm interested in events wherein (being seen) seeing a film image and being seen in a film image emerge as pragmatically problematic—even stigmatizing—for those involved (in particular, women in the context of sexualizing imagery). What does it mean and do to *see* and *be seen by*, *look away from* and *efface oneself* before the film image and, further, *see* or *be seen* vis-à-vis the above (seeing someone being seen in a film image, be seen looking away, etc.)? While this ethnographic analysis is directly informed by discussion in the first section, some readers, less concerned with semiotic questions, may skip this section, referring back to key concepts developed there that inform the analysis (e.g., entextualization; image-text, interactional text, and denotational text; perspective; and [discursive] camera).

In the conclusion of the article, I reflect on the play of presencing and absencing as revealing the work of perspective to open up horizons of visibility and invisibility, and thus, the necessary possibility for acts of exposure and effacement (Russell, 2020).

THE EVENTNESS OF VISIBILITY

In her study of interactions between adult caregivers and toddlers in an American daycare, Mardi Kidwell observes that "*Being looked at* is a complex communicative matter" (2005, 443, emphasis in original). Kidwell shows how 1- to 2.5-year-old children's—and mutatis mutandis, everyone's—capacity to differentiate whether another (e.g., a caregiver) is merely attending to a field of visibility or *looking at* something (e.g., at them because of their mischievous conduct) is a function of multiple signs (e.g., gaze duration, fixedness on some "target," co-occurring activity, its cessation) distributed across multiple individuals. Such signs emerge in real-time, in and as patterns of communication whose time-bound semiotic form poetically figurates and thus enacts relations of looking and being looked at. How might we conceptually connect this way of framing the issue of looking and visibility—familiar to those working in interactionalist fields (Streeck, 2017; Goodwin, 2017)—with how scholars working on artworks, films, and other images approach questions of vision and visibility?

Consider a famous example provided by Erwin Panofsky in his "Introductory" to his seminal *Studies in Iconology* ([1939] 1955; see also Panofsky, [1932] 2012, 478–79). The example is designed to "define the distinction between subject matter or meaning on the one hand [the concern of iconography], and form on the other" ([1939] 1955, 26), a distinction that he goes on to transfer "from everyday life to a world of art" (28):

> When an acquaintance greets me on the street by lifting his hat, what I see from a formal point of view is nothing but the change of certain details with a configuration forming part of the general pattern of color, lines and volumes which constitutes my world of vision. When I identify, as I automatically do, this configuration as an object (gentleman), and the change of detail as an event (hat-lifting), I have already overstepped the limits of purely formal perception and entered a first sphere of subject matter or meaning . . . However, my realization that the lifting of the hat stands for a greeting belongs in an altogether different realm of interpretation. This form of salute is peculiar to the Western world and is a residue of mediaeval chivalry . . . And finally: besides constituting a natural event in space and time,

> besides naturally indicating moods or feelings, besides conveying a conventional greeting, the action of my acquaintance can reveal to an experienced observer all that goes to make up his "personality." . . . The meaning thus discovered may be called the intrinsic meaning or content; . . . It may be defined as a unifying principle which underlies and explains both the visible event and its intelligible significance, and which determines even the form in which the visible event takes shape. (26–28)[1]

Here, Panofsky suggests that relations of meaning—from those "intrinsic" to an epoch or culture to those that allow us to recognize particular objects, persons (and personalities), acts, and events—condition and reach down into, indeed give form to, the intelligibility of the world (as made of social types of persons, acts, objects) and its very perception (qua colors, lines, volumes, and so on), even as it is they (the colors, lines, volumes; the objects and persons) that comprise such "meaning." It is, thus, in this dialectical relation that interpretation lies, both for participants in social life and for analysts of it. This example provides a striking bridge between a long tradition of linguistic anthropological analysis of interaction-as-semiotic-event and art historical analysis of visual art.

Indeed, consider Panofsky's example in relationship to Michael Silverstein's (1979) and Richard Bauman's (1981) discussions of the acts of "doffing the hat" and using address terms (in particular, second-person pronouns) among Quakers and non-Quakers in seventeenth-century England. A 1671 text, which Bauman (1981, 3) quotes, indicates that

> when [Quakers] have occasion to speak to any man, they speak unto him whether it be on the way, or in the street, or upon the market or in any other convenient place; but to salute men in a complimentary way, by doffing their hats unto them, and bowing before them, and giving them flattering titles [and using plural second-person pronouns] . . . that they are not free to do.

They are not free to do so because, for the Friends, all men are equal before God and subservient only to Him; deference entitlement and the acts of honorification that presuppose and entail them (such as doffing the hat or plural-second-person pronouns for singular referents), thus, were vainglorious and impious, an arrogance when man should be humble. Exemplifying this ideological (metapragmatic) conceptualization of interaction, Bauman (1981, 5) recounts the following event of greeting, which we can compare to Panofsky's:

> George Fox records in his journal a dramatic encounter between himself and a Major Ceely the keeper of the prison at Launceston Castle when Fox was a prisoner there in l656. While walking on the castle green, Fox encountered the Major, who doffed his hat to him and said, "How do you, Mr. Fox? Your servant, Sir," to which Fox replied, "Major Ceely, take heed of hypocrisy and a rotten heart, for when came I to be thy master and thee my servant? Do servants use to cast their masters into prison?"

In line with, but much complexifying, Panofsky's example, note how this "form of salute" and "the more-than-practical world of customs and cultural traditions peculiar to a certain civilization" (Panofsky [1939] 1955, 27) becomes the object of ideological contestation—a clash of "intrinsic meanings," a *dis*-unifying principle, as it were—that shaped "the visible event and . . . intelligible significance" (28) of the greeting ritual and gave an insight into the "personalities" of all involved (as indexes of religious identity, among other things).

But while Panofsky was concerned about the analyst's act of interpreting works of art based on their "strata" of meaning (and intuiting their "intrinsic meaning" as a kind of "fundamental attitude towards the world" embodied in the act/art; Panofsky, [1932] 2012, 479), there are further features of Panofsky's example that Panofsky too easily glosses over but which the comparison with the linguistic anthropological analysis of Quaker–non-Quaker interaction illuminates. These we may also transfer over to visual media

more generally, as was Panofsky's aim (even if he himself does not do so). Let me discuss one in particular that Panofsky does not emphasize: the emergent, time-bound poetic structure of semiosis.[2]

An act like doffing the hat—like an act of seeing or being seen (seeing) a work of art such as a painting or a film, as I discuss below—is phenomenally experienced (visually or otherwise) and made sense of in and as an event in time. We don't simply or directly recognize social acts as standing for predetermined conventional meanings. Rather, an act like doffing the hat has a temporal unfolding and emergence as an interpretation and social fact that is the cumulative effect of the contingent interplay between a number of co-occurrent semiotic phenomena (recall Kidwell's kiddies getting looked at) at multiple scales. These include, for example, the location of the act; the bodily and sartorial movement of the participants; their co-occurring speech; gaze patterns; indexes of participant identities (e.g., clothing, grooming, phonetic style); previous interdiscursive connections with this and other individuals; and so on. The "meaning" of such an act *as* an act of deference is, indeed, a "unifying principle"[3] of the phenomenal form of our experience (e.g., lines, colors, sounds) and the objects they trace (e.g., persons, hats, body parts, words); but if so, this is not because such a "meaning," such an act, is pregiven in its actness or its meaning. Rather, such a meaning is itself emergent out of such intersecting, co-occurring semiotic orders—co-text, we can call them—as they gel together as part of a thereby by-degrees coherent social act, what we could call, after Silverstein and Urban (1996), a *text* (in Panofsky's example, lexicalized with metapragmatic verb phrases like "to greet" and "to salute"). Or, we should say, the actness and meaningfulness of the social act is located between these two semiotic vectors: a "text" allows us to construe heterogeneous assemblages of signs *as* coherent parts of a whole (doffing a hat) as much as it emerges out of such assemblages-in-time. How does this happen?

Attending to the temporal structure of such an act in its context is critical here, not simply at the historical/epochal level (which is what Panofsky is primarily interested in) but also at the level of the text's real-time emergence. Indeed, what Panofsky doesn't tell us, but what interactionalist studies of greetings and the Quaker example show, is that to even doff the hat successfully requires a temporal ordering of various signs: for example, that the parties have caught each other's eye, oriented their bodies to intersubjectively constitute an encounter, come within the right range and distance to greet, sized each other up as to who might greet first and who might then reciprocate and how (such uptake differentiating in the Fox example between a friendly greeting and a perceived act of hypocrisy), and so on. Panofsky focuses on one form, one act, one meaning (hat-tipping, greeting, politeness) and on all the formal and cultural presuppositions that make *that* particular sign a sign to be construed relative to those presuppositions, as having *that* form, with *that* meaning. But what of all the signs that come before and after and alongside the tipped hat, which make it possible for the hat to be seen, for the act to be reckoned and carried off in whatever way it is? That is, what of the poetic texture of co-occurring signs with which such lines, volumes, and colors find their place as such? Indeed, to see that hat as part of that act is for that event/act of seeing, and what it sees, to have become part of a text, an interpretive conjecture (or abduction) from the flux of semiosis that converges on opening up a horizon of visibility and a focus of vision, both of which, as I discuss more in the next section, situate a *perspective* on the world captured by a *discursive camera*. A perspective, as I suggest below, is the precondition and effect of the visible (and invisible, as we'll see), and thus enables acts (or "texts") of vision and being seen, be it of greetings on the street, works of art in a museum, or films in the theater.

This dialectical process of evenemential unfolding of textures and their constitution-as-text is what linguistic anthropologists call *entextualization* (Silverstein and Urban, 1996), the cohering of various temporally emergent signs such that they are, through their metapragmatic mediation (co-textual, interdiscursive, and ideological), construed *as* some de-/re-contextualizable text (i.e., some cohering whole). Acts of seeing and being seen are experienceable, meaningful, and pragmatically forceful under conditions of entextualization, that is, as multimodal texts (in the technical sense above).

Linguistic anthropologists have generally discussed two kinds of text, with particular focus on verbal discourse: denotational text (coherence of symbolic signs vis-à-vis what is being narrated or predicated about) and interactional text (coherence of indexical signs vis-à-vis what is done in and by their happening). The upshot of this distinction is that one cannot fully account for a denotational text independent

of the interactional text relative to which it occurs, and vice versa (Silverstein, 1993). In addition to denotational and interactional text, we also need distinguish what I call *image-texts*: the cohering of qualia of various sorts—"the general pattern of color, lines and volumes which constitutes my world of vision" (Panofsky, [1939] 1955, 26; Panofsky's "phenomenal meaning") and perception more generally (images are not limited to the visual, of course; Nakassis, 2019)—into coherences of iconic signs (vis-à-vis what is aesthetically *formed*). Below, I offer a way to understand the projection of such diagrammatic image-texts into interactional texts, that is, the question of how images—and in this article in particular, acts of seeing film images or being seen seeing/in film images—performatively do things.

In sum, Panofsky's example shows how the visually apprehendable world—its visibility—is always already mediated, down to the phenomenological construability of the qualia and to the recognizability of the objects themselves (a man, a hat); and further, this takes place in an evenemential and interactional process of entextualization, which is to say, relative to a metasemiotically mediated "unifying principle"—really, a *process*—"which underlies and explains both the visible event and its intelligible significance, and which determines even the form in which the visible event takes shape" (Panofsky, [1939] 1953, 28; see also Eisenstein, 1945, 37). Moreover, Panofsky's example, when properly framed, shows that every such image-text, every such visible scene, every such world upon which we gaze, and every such event of seeing and being seen is always already implicated in an interactional doing, a temporal, interactional happening with pragmatic effects that implicate interpersonal and ideological relationalities of various kinds. In short, to see and be seen, to recall Kidwell's observation, is the accomplishment of complex (meta)pragmatic processes. But it is more: it is to be positioned *as* seeing/seen and in a particular way, in particular role relationalities, and with particular pragmatic and political effects.[4] That is, vision and visibility depend on perspective, semiotically understood.

In the second section of the article, I consider these processes by which seeing and being seen (seeing) involve such consequentiality and positioning; but before turning to such examples, let us consider in more detail the question of perspective, beginning again with Panofsky.

Entextualization and perspective

More than a decade before his 1939 "Introductory," Panofsky argued in an equally famous essay, *Perspective as Symbolic Form* ([1927] 1991), that vision in the arts—in particular, the putatively objective and realist linear perspective in painting—is conditioned by a particular conception of space. Such a conception, or worldview ("intrinsic meaning" in the 1932 essay), Panofsky suggests, is historically contingent and relative.[5] Here, Panofsky moves us from the question of vision—as an organ-specific form of "natural" perception—to perspective as a thoroughly "symbolic"—what we are calling *semiotic*—relation bathed and conditioned by ideology (in this case, painterly habit and philosophical conceptualization) and, we would add from our discussion of Panofsky's earlier example, immanent to and emergent from processes of entextualization.

How are we to characterize this semiotics of perspective? This is a complex, multifaceted problem. To advance the answer begun in the previous section, here I draw together Panofsky's work with Susan Gal and Judith Irvine's (2019) theorization of language ideology and Edward Branigan's (1984, 2006) notion of a camera.

Gal and Irvine (2019) use the visual metaphor of perspective to describe the work of language ideologies in mediating discourse; in doing so, they delineate a non-medium- and non-modality-specific set of relations and processes that can help us better characterize vision and visibility. They define a perspective as a semiotic bundle of what Peirce called *abductions*, conjectures that serve as a metapragmatics (in Peirce's terms, *interpretants*) that constitute a semiotic ground by construing it; such conjectures allow us to "see" a sign *as* a sign and, moreover, as a particular kind of sign relation (a "ground") between a representamen and its object. It is this being-taken-as-a-particular-kind-of-sign-relation(-and-not-some-other) that makes semiosis perspectival. A perspective on this account is the bundling together of such conjectures in and across events of semiosis in ways that cohere as "vantages on social life," making the world

FIGURE 1 A series of shots in *Kaadhal* (2004, dir. Balaji Sakthivel) entextualizing the looks ("point of view") of its characters. Left: the heroine's husband looks down at the heroine in a shot that is no character's point of view (though it is by-degrees, and proleptically, subjectivized as hers, as revealed in later shots; note how she is out of focus); middle: the heroine, in focus, looking, by degrees entextualized as the husband's look (note the angle which is reciprocal vis-à-vis the previous shot, over his [out-of-focus] shoulder); right: the heroine's look at her husband in a more tightly framed shot that poetically echoes the first shot in angle and profilmic content but with her looking body effaced (thus constituting *her* spatial perspective through the substitution of the physical camera for the character's body). Here, thus, we see *as* her. *Source*: Screengrabs from *Kaadhal* (2004, dir. Balaji Sakthivel). [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

visible and come alive semiotically (Gal and Irvine, 2019, 88). Such vantages are "partial, conventional, and positioned" (88). Put otherwise, perspectives historically and interactionally accumulate through the way intra- and inter-discursively regular conjectures come together in various configurations that take by-degrees perdurability (and may even be linked to conventionalized types of personhood). Such socially and contextually regular abductions, and their co-ordination in and as perspectives, are precisely what Panofsky outlines as conditions on the intelligibility and pragmatics of hat-doffing or of an artwork: the entextualization of a text-in-context presupposes (because it requires) and entails (because it figurates) a perspective on and in that very text-in-context—be it bourgeois European views of proper public sociality or mathematized conceptions of homogeneous space in post-Renaissance painting. In short, entextualization and perspective mutually imply each other, for to entextualize is to take a position on and in semiosis (indeed, on and in events of entextualization) in some way or other.[6] But as we saw with Quaker disputes over the significance of hat-doffing, insofar as entextualization is ideologically mediated, perspectives on social life (and the acts and events that comprise them) are multiple, contentious, and subject to reanalysis and transformation/reproduction through contextualized semiotic activity.

Gal and Irvine, of course, aren't primarily concerned with light-based, retinally encoded qualia or imagistic media, just as Panofsky isn't concerned primarily to make sense of discursively mediated social interaction. But Gal and Irvine's observations about discourse can be extended—or returned, insofar as their analytic of perspective is vested in a visual fashion of speaking—to light-based imagistic modes of semiosis like works of visual art (as per Panofsky) or, as concerns the second half of this article, film.

In film studies, the question of perspective has been largely discussed through the notion of point of view, in particular, the point-of-view shot, a ubiquitous trope in narrative cinema wherein the spectator is invited to see with/as a diegetic character. The prototypic point-of-view shot is composed of a ("third-person, objective") shot of someone looking, then a cut to a ("first-person, subjective") shot which, by its indexical contiguity/juxtaposition and iconic resonances with the first shot, is entextualized not simply *as* the object of vision of the first shot's pictured subject but as from their spatial position (Figure 1).

Entextualizing a point-of-view shot turns on any number of signs: typically, as in Figure 1, iconism between the angle of a subsequent shot and the deictic vector of eyes in the previous shot (so-called eyeline match) and continuity between their mise-en-scène (such that they are taken to depict the same spatial relations and objects). Point of view in the cinema, in short, is the accomplishment of a semiotic array whose partials—as parts of a textual whole—figurate a perspective, a continuity between disparate but contiguous conjectures (or abductions) that characterize some object as seen by some situated, narrative subjectivity (e.g., a character). Note how this process and set of relations is directly analogous to Kidwell's discussion of the inscription of looking-at and seeing-as, but here entextualized within a filmic world, that is, as a representation—an image- and denotational-text of looking—that we, as viewers, look at. (As viewers, of course, we may take up any number of perspectives of such a depicted perspective, ranging anywhere from aligning, or "identifying," with the look to rejecting it, ignoring it, and so on.)

As Branigan (1984, 2006) points out, however, the range of ways in which a perspective can be entextualized in cinema is vast; it need not involve exactitude of eyeline and camera-angle, nor—as with voicing effects in narrative or interaction (Bakhtin, 1981; Agha, 2007)—need it clearly entextualize a single point of view, as with free-indirect voicing or free-indirect point-of-view shots (Pasolini, 1988). Rather, any range of signs can be entextualized as indexically entailing a perspective on some scene of visibility (as attributed to some [quasi-]subjectivity). The colored tint of the image as a qualisign of a character's affect; the image's blurriness as a character's impaired vision or affected mental state; the image's movement (e.g., shakiness, tilting, spinning) as an iconic indexical of a scene's anxious atmosphere or as a sign of its evidential status (e.g., as realist, as a dreamscape); and so on—these and many other signs can be used, in concert with others signs, to perspectivize an image.

Further, as Branigan notes, none of these perspectival effects are purely devolvable back to the technological fact that a camera—and mutatis mutandis, a head with a pair of eyes—occupies a spatial position within the deictic field that its lens captures as its horizon of visibility. Instead, point of view is the effect of interacting (bundled) indexical signs, each projecting/constituted-by some perspective (i.e., a conjecture in Gal and Irvine's terms), that cohere together in a way that cumulatively figurates an origo/subjectivity in some relationship to what is seen. A camera, thus, is not a technological apparatus (made of glass, metal, etc.) but the outcome of the entextualization of perspective, be it in film or otherwise.[7] Indeed, everyday social interaction (doffing a hat, playing at day care), just like interacting with an artwork or film, is constituted, in its meaningfulness, sensibility, and pragmatics, through discursive cameras of various kinds, via the entextualization of perspectives as they play out in multimodal and multimedial events of semiosis.

Such congeries don't simply cohere interactionally. They also have cross-event (inter-discursive) continuities, even regularities, "ways of seeing" (Berger, 1972) that are, as Gal and Irvine and Panofsky point out, conventionalized (and transformable) through forms of ideological mediation and political labor. Just as we speak with others' mouths/voices (Bakhtin, 1981), we see with others' eyes/cameras (Chumley, 2016; Babcock, 2022). Thus, perspective is not simply the constituting of a spatial or social position *from which* seeing "happens," as if what is seen is a stable point, relative to which there may be multiple vantages. Rather, it presupposes the already-seen-ness of what is visible or construable *as* an object for sight; that is, the phenomenal world, as Panofsky notes, must be already organized, recognized, and apperceived *as* something to be (pre)seen in some way or other in order for it to become visible. This already-seen-ness is the perduring residue of semiosis, past in present pushing into future perspectival acts (e.g., of seeing and being seen).[8]

Below, I think through the above discussion with two ethnographic examples. Both examples deal with the question of the entextualization of perspective with respect to how the presence to/of what is seen implicates the seeing/seen subject in a scene of visibility. In both cases, my aim is to outline the discursive cameras that mediate, by emerging as, the texture of acts of vision and visibility. The questions raised by these examples are, first, what does it mean and do to be seen by and be seen seeing an image? And second, what does it mean to be an object of cinematically mediated vision, to be seen in a film image?

SEEING AND BEING SEEN SEEING AN IMAGE

Early in my dissertation fieldwork I would screen, and then hold discussions about, Tamil films for those college students with whom I was conducting research. In February 2008, I screened *7/G Rainbow Colony* (2004, dir. Selvaraghavan) at a women's college in the city of Madurai. *7/G* was a popular youth film, already several years old, which many of the young women had seen before (and about which I'd already done research with Melanie Dean; Nakassis and Dean, 2007).[9] I already knew a few of the women, though not most. Watching the film in a screening room in one of the college's academic centers, the viewing was going smoothly until the critical juncture of the narrative. The heroine, Anitha, her marriage to another looming in the near future, takes Kathir, her lover, to a lodge in a mountain resort-town. There she explicitly explains her love for him, and more importantly, her desire to have sex with him. For the first time while watching, an absolute quiet descended. The laughs and side conversations that had peppered the viewing

FIGURE 2 Cutting from diegesis (left) to item number (right). *Source*: Screengrabs from *7/G Rainbow Colony* (2004, dir. Selvaraghavan). [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

until then went completely silent, a shift in spectatorship indicating a seriousness and engaged attention accorded to a scene of consequence. As the dialogues transitioned into an erotic song-and-dance sequence representing the sex act, an exodus began. About half the crowd left the room, standing outside of the door waiting for the song to finish, at which point they returned. Those who remained in the room reoriented their eyes away from the screen. They turned to their college papers in their laps or to each other. (By contrast, when I screened the film in the all-male Madurai college hostel in which I lived, my hostel-mates turned the television volume all the way up, the song-and-dance affording a ludic and raucous fraternity of heterosexual, homophilic desire.) As became clear from speaking with some male and female friends about the incident later, it wasn't the sexualized images per se that the young women couldn't bear, even if they may have made the women uncomfortable. Indeed, some of them had already seen the film. Rather, it was also me, an older, unrelated, unmarried man watching those images with them in a semi-public space amidst a crowd of peers, all in the same situation. On a later screening with a different group, I made sure to leave the room before the scene, which kept attendance much higher. To see such filmic images entailed being seen seeing them; it meant bringing the corporeal imagery onscreen too close to our bodies on *this* side of the screen. In copresence with me and each other, caught in the screen's and each other's sight lines—indeed, discursive cameras—our mutual orientation to the sex act and sexual display onscreen became uncomfortable for these women, implicating them in both. In response, these women effaced themselves/the image from the scene of vision and visibility, attenuating copresence with the image by looking down, turning away, leaving the room (Russell, 2020).

What are we to make of this cinematic event? We might begin with the being-seen of the screen, the moving image as the provocation for the young women's exodus. After Anitha thoroughly explains and justifies her sexual desire for Kathir, Kathir puts his head on her lap, and says in Tamil, "It's all like a dream, Anitha, I can't believe any of it." From this position of maternal comfort, Anitha grabs him by the scruff of the neck and pulls him up, out of his dream and into the reality of her desire (Figure 2, left). The shot then abruptly cuts to the first image of the song-and-dance sequence, "January Madham" ("The Month of January"; Figure 2, right) in a radical discontinuity of space (we shift from the lodge to a night club), color (from browns and white to reds and blues), and angle of address (from a third-person shot of the protagonists' backs to a frontal shot of anonymous dancers). These shifts entextualize a boundary within the film text, between the narrative diegetic space and the extra-diegetic space of what is called in India an "item number" (an erotic, female-danced and often completely stand-alone song sequence). It is this boundary that served as the young women's cue to exit or look away.

Unlike other typical item numbers that don't integrate the item number and the narrative but keep them completely apart, this song sequence is linked to the unfolding of the story, with cuts between the nightclub—comprising a slew of semi-clad women ("items") gyrating in unison on the wet stage, and a pistol-brandishing man and accompanying male dancers (Figures 3–6)—and Anitha performing her own seductive dance for Kathir (Figures 4–5).

With the first image of the club, music kicks in, with electronic drums and later distorted rock guitars and synthesizers, as the lyrics of the song—visually voiced by the dancers and not by the characters Anitha or Kathir—describe the pleasures and ambivalences of the sex act (that Kathir and Anitha are engaging

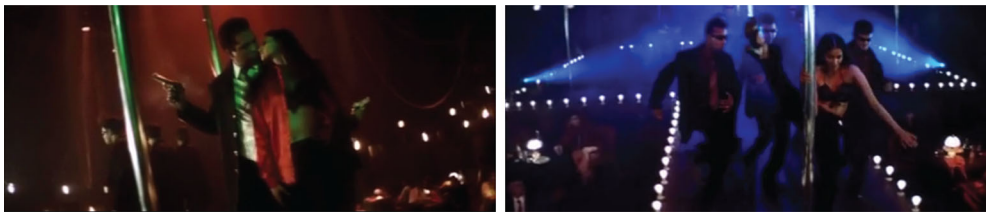

FIGURE 3 Item dancers in the nightclub. *Source*: Screengrabs from *7/G Rainbow Colony* (2004, dir. Selvaraghavan). [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

FIGURE 4 The opening of Anitha's dance for a gazing Kathir. *Source*: Screengrabs from *7/G Rainbow Colony* (2004, dir. Selvaraghavan). [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

in).[10] The nightclub item number, thus, serves as a metatext for the dance sequence with Kathir and Anitha, framing and regimenting it even as it also, in certain ways, substitutes for it.

In the first shots of Anitha's dance for Kathir, the camera follows Anitha walking in profile behind a set of windows (Figure 4, top), at which point she opens them (Figure 4, middle) in a frontal shot exposing her torso. This is followed by a cutaway to an awestruck Kathir in close-up (Figure 4, bottom).

After a cut back to the dancers in the night club, Anitha begins her dance for Kathir. The looking structure, amenable to Laura Mulvey's ([1975] 2009) formative analysis of classical Hollywood cinema, juxtaposes shots of a "to-be-looked-at" Anitha with shots of Kathir's gaze (Figure 4), and shots of Kathir looking at Anitha with both in the same frame (Figure 5). Through these co-textual juxtapositions, Anitha's frontal exhibition for Kathir is anchored in the diegesis, set into its voyeuristic frame as a point-of-view shot of Kathir's look.

While Anitha's dance for Kathir entextualizes a voyeuristic perspective anchored to the diegesis (looking at/as him looking at her), the club sequence entextualizes a different perspective: a full-tilt, direct (i.e.,

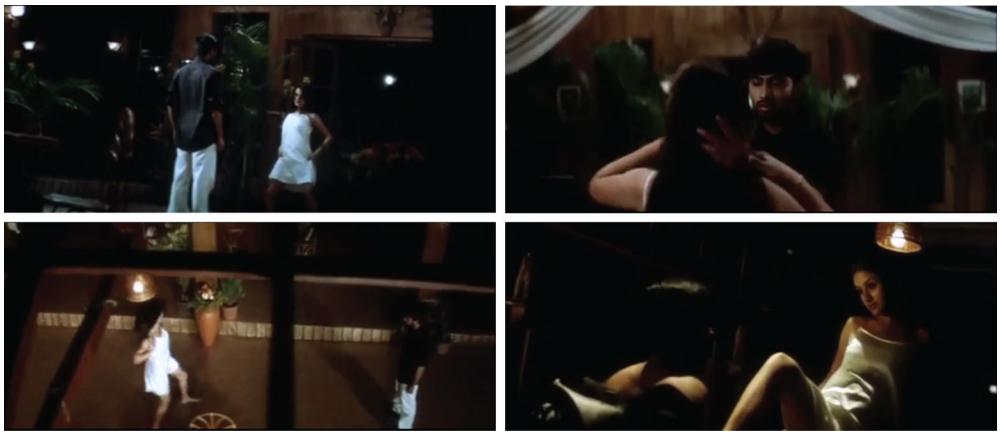

FIGURE 5 Anitha dancing for Kathir; voyeurs (note the rafters between us and them in the bottom-left), we see him looking at her, as we see her as seen by him, looking at him in turn. *Source*: Screengrabs from *7/G Rainbow Colony* (2004, dir. Selvaraghavan). [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

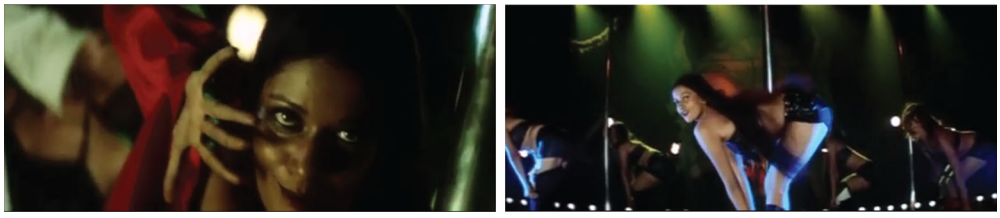

FIGURE 6 Frontal address by the item dancers, looking at us as we look at them. *Source*: Screengrabs from *7/G Rainbow Colony* (2004, dir. Selvaraghavan). [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

unshifted "deictic") frontal address by the female dancers in the nightclub (Casetti, [1986] 1999). The item dancers often look right at the viewer as they sing and dance (Figure 6). Without any consistent or clear spatiotemporal relationship to the diegesis of the narrative, their dance is, overall, marked as for and addressing of the spectator—indeed, they often seem to *see* us and engage our sight of them—just as Anitha dances for and sees Kathir, whose look is the spectator's only through the voyeuristic relay of looks communicated by the camera (Williams, 1984, 83). The former perspective interpellates the (masculinized) spectator through frontal address while the latter opens up a space of identification with both characters in the diegesis, though with particular focus initially on Kathir, himself interpellated and addressed by Anitha.[11]

As the song progresses, and the item dancers in the club become more undressed, the parallel cuts to the diegesis show Anitha and Kathir under the covers in sexual activity (also increasingly undressed but their bodies increasingly hidden). The intercutting between the two halves of the song sequence accelerates as the sex act nears completion, the poetics of the editing speed mirroring the intensity of the scene's affect and the transgressiveness of the act denoted by it. The scene ends with the lovers' hands intertwined, palms pressed flat against a steamed window.

Of interest is how this scene entextualizes two contrastive perspectives and modes of vision of, and participation in, the image-text, that is, two kinds of cameras. The first is a quasi-realist, voyeuristic looking in-and-as where we are sutured into the text on the other side of a fourth wall, in which we see but are not seen (Metz, [1975] 1982). This camera anchors the denotational text of the film, its narrative and diegetic timespace, through a set of image-texts that interactionally interpellate us as spectators of a particular sort (voyeuristically "identifying" with the camera/characters). The second kind of camera also entextualizes an

intersubjective looking-at-and-being-looked-at by the dancers, who deictically face the audience, breaking the fourth wall (and the narrative diegesis) and, in some measure, interactionally presence themselves on the other side of the screen. If the first perspective on the image and diegesis qua representation seems to inscribe our distance from our object of vision (as a fiction) precisely by drawing us intimately into the film text—thus collapsing any such distance (such that we look-as-the-other)—the latter effaces that distance by projecting itself outside of the text into the interactional space of viewing, thus instating that very distance as the space of scopic confrontation (such that we look-at-and-are-seen-by-the-other).[12]

The juxtaposition and movement between these perspectives, however, is not simply contrastive and contiguous; their montage figurates a single, if internally split, audiovisual experience where each half plays off of the pragmatics and entailed affect of the other. This, however, presupposes a certain amount of cultural knowledge about film in the Tamil context (Panofsky's "second order" of meaning); importantly, that item numbers, while considered vulgar and, to some conservative audiences, obscene, are also conventionalized and rather common in commercial Tamil cinema. Arguably, then, if the film simply had an item number that was not juxtaposed with the narrative diegesis, the effect of this song sequence would have been less transgressive (if still obscene).[13] A straight diegetic sex scene, in short, was an impossibility in this context (as it would have certainly been censored by the state, effaced from public visibility), such that the item number mitigated the problematic pragmatics of representing sex in the diegesis. What was transgressive (the voyeuristic representation of sex), thus, was clothed by the banalization of transgression (the exhibitionist item dance). At the same time, note that the (ordinary) vulgarity of a presencing deictic image that looks at us, implicates us, sees us seeing it (the item number) was bracketed and justified by the logic of the narrative (i.e., the film's denotational text), which motivated the sequence that, in its own (ironical) way, euphemized it. And yet, it was through the presencing relay of the item number and its deictic address to the viewer that the film's narrative representation of sexuality was also projected *into* the viewing context and brought uncomfortably close to its viewers, just as the diegetic context and motivation of the item number made it more than just another conventional song. That is, both perspectives, through their dialogic interaction and metapragmatic framing of each other, diminished *and* amplified the other's affective effect. And they did so through the way in which denotational text (the narrative and diegetic world, what is *represented* in the film), interactional text (what is *enacted* in the here and now of the event of screening/viewing), and image-text (the aesthetic qualia *pictured* on the screen) were complexly configured and, in fact, blurred into and contrasted with each other (as I discuss in more detail below).

Things are more complicated, however, since this analysis suggests that the two perspectives on the image are seamlessly stitched together like two eyes in stereoscopic vision. Instead, these two perspectives sat uneasily contiguous and cross-eyed in the film text, and even opposed at the level of filmmaking. Selvaraghavan, *7/G*'s director, for example, considered himself a director who made story-driven, realist "class" (serious, high-brow, classy) films, in opposition to "mass" films dominated by "commercial" elements pandering to the eponymous masses. Like many such directors, he viewed item numbers as impositions upon his auteurial vision/voice, as concessions to a male, subaltern audience—the "pissing men," as William Mazzarella (2013) has dubbed them—or at least to producers who imagine that items appeal to such men. In his framing, the item appeared as an alien presence to his text, inscribing a look and mode of vision that was not his own; indeed, Selvaraghavan disavowed the item, saying in an interview with me that, if he could, he wouldn't have had any such song sequence. Weaving together the narrative diegesis with the non-diegetic item number, thus, partially recuperated a position for the director in and out of the text, entextualizing his vision as a serious, "class" director just as it offered a certain kind of spectatorial position of distinction for a "mature" viewer who isn't offended or titillated by images of sexuality (if they are justified and motivated by higher aims: art, realism, narrative).

The terms *class* and *mass*, of course, project socioeconomic (and age and caste) differences; indeed, they project particular perspectives enregistered to (that is, conventionally associated with) particular subjectivities: on the one hand, the elite spectator that stands apart from what they see (or refuse to see) and, on the other hand, the subaltern, male spectator, who comes too close to the image. Thus, part of the discomfort, and pleasure, in this sequence is not in how these two enregistered (or personified) perspectives are seamlessly integrated, but how the sequence invites us to see *as* others and be seen seeing thusly. That is,

part of the pleasure and discomfort is how the sequence—and the social field in which these perspectives are contrasted—force other eyes onto our eyes, to which we must willy-nilly take a stance in the event of viewing (this necessity thereby entextualizing our own act of looking as an interactional text of some sort or other). As such, this sequence entextualizes the viewer's vision via a perspective that should not quite be their own, insofar as these two modes of vision are ideologically contrasted as opposed. Recall, on the one hand, Panofsky's point that artistic images, like social life, are enacted in events of interaction only insofar as the phenomenality of such events is enlivened by cultural worlds of meaning and, on the other hand, the Quaker example that complicates Panofsky's analysis by pointing up how such events (such images, such phenomenality, such interactions, such cultural worlds) are shot through with contestation, social differentiation, and ideological contrast; with this ethnographic case, we see how artistic images in social life, in events of interaction and transaction with the screen, may themselves be (in fact, perhaps are always) internally constituted in their meaningfulness by their internal staging of this contrast, differentiation, and contestation. Such contrast, differentiation, and contestation are all exemplified in the moment of effacement of the women watching (and being watched as they watched) the song sequence from *7/G Rainbow Colony*.

Hit by *sight*

But what, in fact, are the modes of vision at issue in the "January Madham" song sequence? Can we say more about what it means to *see* such an image and have it, or parts of it (characters, actors), also seemingly see us? If both kinds of vision discussed above hold out a form of sexualized spectatorship—whether it be of the voyeur or the pissing man, or both—is there a common warp between them through which the weft, the poetic parallelism of Anitha's and the dancers' item numbers, threads?

As suggested above, both looks entextualized by *7/G*'s song sequence presuppose a masculinized and sexualized gaze objectifying its female target, even as, at the same time, the song sequence is premised on the intersubjectivity of the looking dancer (Anitha, the item dancers) and the looking spectator (Kathir, the viewer), thereby ratifying and constituting subject and object as, simultaneously, object and subject. This filmic vision is akin to what Tamil youth during the time of my fieldwork referred to as *sight aṭikkiṟatu*. This slang phrase combines the English word *sight* with the Tamil verb *aṭi*, which on its own means to hit or beat and, as a verbalizer, connotes both a relation of pejoration and inappropriateness and haptic contact (Schiffman, 1999, 110); together, the phrase evokes the tactility and literal physical violability of this mode of seeing.

While women may and certainly do *sight aṭi*, the prototypical seeing subject is male, its object female. *Sight aṭikkiṟatu* denotes a quality, a scene, an intent of masculinized heterosexual vision, of publicly if furtively ogling young women. Such a discursive camera, however, does not aim to simply be one way, purely voyeuristic. It demands and projects its own forms of uptake (from the male looking subject's perspective at least). This includes a normatively "proper" mode of female response (the refusal of a return look, a look away); a transgressive second pair-part (a ratifying look back); something in between—a sideways look or a furtive glance followed by its redirection and a blush or a smile; or an angry curse, a smack, or an indifferent or contemptuous look.

Critical to our discussion here is that this mode, and politics, of vision is carried over into the cinema. Indeed, as many young men noted matter-of-factly, and as many female and older filmgoers conceded in lament (echoing Mulvey), today, actresses are simply there to be looked at. Indeed, *sight aṭikkiṟatu* was one of the main attractions of the cinema for many of its eager male pupils. As an older male friend, and former assistant director, explained, reminiscing on his school days, the transgressive thrill of the cinema was/is that you can see women in a way that's difficult, if not impossible, outside cinema. (Difficult because, offscreen, women—and their friends and family—don't just look but may hit back as well!)

But if *sight aṭikkiṟatu* describes a semiotics of tactile visuality (Pinney, 2004), what does it mean and do to be *sighted*, to be "hit" by such a mode of vision? As scholars of South Asia have pointed out, to appear in public is a particular kind of act, one that is conditioned by class, caste, and gender (Dean,

2013; Dickey, 2013). For young women in particular, to appear in public always risks a certain set of ideological assumptions about their moral and sexual impropriety. Such assumptions turn on a familiar, sexist circularity: namely, that knowing the pragmatics of appearing—of the possibility of *sight*, of the existence of onlooking pissing men—what kind of woman would appear in public? To appear, within this ideological enclosure, is thus to presumably invite, perhaps even desire, the public gaze of anonymous others, and thus is construable as an agentive act of "bold" transgression, indeed, as the first pair-part to which *sight aṭikkiṟatu* is the seemingly naturalized response.

I say "presumably," "as if," and "seemingly" because each of these presumptions are just that. For while in the Tamil context, acts of public appearance and ostentatious visibility are part of male respectability (Mines, 1994)—indeed, they are claims on a certain status and recognition—such acts are transgressive of patriarchal, upper-caste/middle-class norms about respectable femininity. This is because, as we see below, upper-caste male respectability and honor themselves turn on men's control of "their" women's sexuality. Visibility and the perceived desire to be seen, thus, risk a woman's chastity and reputation and a man's (and larger kin group's) honor. This conservative ideology of spectatorship, in short, (pre-)entextualizes appearance as a morally implicating interactional text—in fact, as two twinned acts: of appearing and of desiring to be seen. And such an ideology is a condition, indeed, is a perspective on the entextualization of vision and visibility (it also pre-entextualizes the female act of looking [back]), in the cinema or otherwise. Such an ideology mediates what it is to see and be seen, who is seen, how, and with what effects. And it does so through the various conjectures on the meaningfulness of visibility that have been at issue in our discussion above as they accumulate into so many perspectives on vision, what and who we see, what and who we become in so seeing, and what it means and does to be seen (so seeing what/who we see).

The interactional text of *sight*

Given this, how are we to understand the young women's response at the screening of *7/G* to the scene of their seeing? Here, the question is how a narrative (denotational) text of sexuality and an image-text of vision (internally split between a diegetic voyeurism and a non-diegetic deictic presencing) relate to the event of their conjoined happening, the event in which these text-partials are themselves seen. How does the filmic text (a term here used for the denotational and image-text onscreen) project into the interactional text of viewing offscreen? And what, indeed, is that interactional text? What is effectuated in and by this cinematic encounter?

The contrast between the all-women's college and the all-male hostel is instructive: while the women looked away from the screen, or left the room, attenuating their presence in the event and effacing themselves relative to the screen, my hostel-mates excitedly engaged the image and each other, returning the dancers' gaze. For the same filmic text, thus, were two different interactional texts: one of embarrassment, one of raucous heterosexual homosociality; one of refusing to see and be seen seeing (and thus inviting being seen not-seeing), one of embracing the space of intersubjective visibility and ostentatiously seeing. (And both such interactional texts, of course, had higher-order indexicalities that pointed to the seeing subject as a particular kind—sociologically speaking—of subject.)

Just as critical as seeing and being seen *by* the image/subject-of-sight—or refusing to look—is the theater of vision and discursive camera within/through which such visibility was disclosed, the actual and virtual overseers whose look revealed the vulnerability of being seen seeing: in this instance, the fact that I was sitting toward the back of the dark room watching alongside them, able to watch them watch an image that invited their gaze and looked back at them. And, moreover, that they could see each other in such a relation of visibility. (Recall that on other screenings my absence, and the absence of my gaze, decreased the young women's flight from visibility.) While I knew some of the young women at the screening, many were strangers to me and some to each other; by contrast, I intimately knew the young men in the hostel, all of us having been living in the same close quarters over the course of the year. In short, the space of visibility and its discursive cameras are constituted in part by the social relations between those looking and being seen, and vice versa.

Equally important was the space of exhibition: recall that in the women's college, we watched in a quasi-public institutional space, a screening room in one of its academic centers; in the men's college, we watched in the quasi-private space of the hostel's television room. I was not, thus, the only surveilling presence in the room at either screening. These young women and men were also, crucially, observers for each other, situated, moreover, within enclosing institutional structures of sociality and visibility (and potential surveillance) that conditioned the aperture of the discursive camera and the theater of vision within which each was seen to (not) look.

It is in these contexts that the image-text and denotational text of the song sequence represented and presenced the sexuality of the screen in the event of screening. The deictic looks of the dancers invited our *sight*, making us complicit in the image, not simply as co-lookers but as participants in its representational and exhibitionist structure. Here, the poetic differences and confluences of the item's and Anitha's dances for Kathir and us—where each is projected onto the other—is itself projected in the public space of reception, putting those party to it in presence with the sex act by enlisting them in the act of looking; casting us in the light of the film, this sequence exposed these young women, as looking subjects, to the looks of others, either quite literally me, an unmarried male anthropologist, present in the room with them and observing them, or the virtually present pissing man, that enregistered male spectator figurated by the sequence itself (as whom I was, perhaps, also cast).

Here, Simmel's ([1908] 2009, 571–72; my emphasis) comments on looking are illuminating:

> In the look that takes in the other one reveals oneself; with the same act, in which the subject seeks to know its object, it surrenders itself to the object. One cannot take with the eye without at the same time giving. The eye unveils to the other the soul that seeks to unveil the other. . . . Hence it becomes really quite understandable why shame leads us to look to the ground to avoid the gaze of the other. Certainly not only for the purpose of keeping us spared of being perceptibly detected from observation by the other in such a painful and confusing situation; *but the deeper reason is that lowering my gaze deprives the other somehow of the possibility of detecting me . . . whoever does not look at the other actually eludes being seen to some degree. The person is not entirely quite there for the other* should the other notice one, unless the first should also return the look of the other.

It is in relationship to the presence of the image—the way it pressed its denotational and image-text upon us, the way it acted on and interacted with us and we with it—that these young women responded by not looking. To not look was to refuse this lamination of filmic vision onto these women's own eyes. To not look was to defease the performative presencing of the screen, and the thereness of our bodies, visible to anyone who could see us seeing, being seen. Many of the women removed themselves, blocked their presence to the image, to me, and to each other, just as I came to as well, to short-circuit this theater of visibility, to shutter this discursive camera, by absenting myself from their presence in the presence of the image, to refuse to see them seeing an image seeing us. We effaced ourselves, for "whoever does not look . . . actually eludes being seen to some degree."

Visibility, effacement, and being stitched into a chain of entextualizations

While the dynamics discussed in this article are general, having nothing in particular to do with the cinema or with Tamil Nadu, they find a potent and relatively clear—indeed, cultivated and institutionalized—expression in Tamil cinema. The vulnerabilities, stigma, and sexualization inscribed on public female bodies in Tamil Nadu should lead us not to be surprised, then, that the actress is often taken as the prototypically public, visible woman, both as an intensely desired object of love, desire, and valorization and, at the same time (and for the same reasons), debased, repugnant, and denounced (Paik, 2022). In my discussions with industry insiders and everyday filmgoers, typically (but not always) male, the actress was often likened to a prostitute, a comparison that is as old as Indian cinema (Nakassis, 2015). This is not

simply because the actress appears in the all-male space of her workplace, nor even in the private space of the imagined, and perhaps real but most often fantastical, casting couch. Most damning is that she appears *onscreen*, for the eyes of anonymous viewers, of any caste and any class, who may "hit" her with their *sight* and that she, on occasion, may look back and (presumably) invite just that gaze.

From this ideological fact, and from our discussion above, we can extract a particular generality: that the cinema is an institution and technology of entextualizing a kind of presence that can then travel interdiscursively. Cinema broadcasts visibility (Panofsky's lower "strata" of meanings) and sets off chains of further entextualizations that restage anew the scene of looking (in Tamil Nadu, *sight aṭikkiṟatu*) and thus communicates the pragmatics of visibility (here, stigma) again and again as they rigidly return, hit, and stick to the subject/object so entextualized (e.g., actresses). But also vice versa. Not only entextualizing visibility and presence and circulating its pragmatic effects across social timespace, the cinema is also a technology and institution that brings to bear histories of seeing and being seen onto particular moments of seeing/being seen, illuminating them by projecting the past pragmatic effects of other events of seeing/being seen onto them. (In this dialectic is an account of the semiotic reality of Panofsky's "unifying principle.")

To explore this further, consider a second, brief example. This example comes from research I did on the 2010 film *Goa* (dir. Venkat Prabhu). During the first schedule of shooting, the crew and I were in a small village in Theni, an agricultural district west of Madurai. The assistant directors—of which I was nominally one—were looking for a couple of extras for a particular shot that needed village women. They asked the woman whose house we were using for one of the indoor locations if she'd like to be in the scene (a non-speaking, background role, as I recall). In her early thirties, married, with two small children, she seemed interested, though was reticent and equivocated. Her husband, who came minutes later, spoke for her: No, she wouldn't be appearing before the camera. The other assistant directors, seeming to understand immediately, dropped the issue, wandering off to find someone else. I persisted, though, and asked, why not let her appear in the film? He responded, tersely, by motioning to the dubious morality of acting. Thinking he was talking about stereotypes about sexual misconduct on sets, I countered: but you'll be here the whole time. You'd know that she hadn't done anything wrong. He responded, indicating I misunderstood him: it wasn't proper because she'd be seen onscreen, in a theater, by an open-ended but not-quite-anonymous set of audiences. And this was enough to trigger local gossip that would impugn not just her but his honor as well: hers, as a woman whose chastity would be spoiled by the *sight* of others hitting her, and his, as a man virtually cuckolded by the image. This was conditioned by who she was, of course (and who she was to him); it mattered that she was a middle-class woman, still of reproductive age, his wife. Before we parted ways, the husband noted that men, babies, and old women can act onscreen and no one will gossip about them.

Here, we see from the other side of the screen what it means to be entextualized as an object of visibility standing on the "open edge of mass publicity" (Mazzarella, 2013), not simply to copresent others (the assistant directors, myself, other actors) but to a film camera (the recording technology made of a lens, mirror, and inscriptional surface) and through it, and the image's projection, to any number of audience members who might *see* that she had appeared for an image. In anticipation of that future image, conditioning its becoming, thus, was a discursive camera that came before and encompassed that future image and its uptake. In fact, there was a relay of such discursive cameras: one that was actual, and unfolded in the interaction between the assistant directors, the wife, and her husband; and another that was anticipated by the former and that projected shadows of virtual images and viewers on the edge of mass visibility. This latter discursive camera turned on a perspective (queried and anticipated in the former discursive camera) that opened up a horizon of visibility and exposure. Yet this horizon did not primarily chart out a field of visibility in the here and now of our interaction (for it was not a problem that any of us on the set could see this woman, though in comparison to the professional actress on set, she was more constrained and perhaps uncomfortable amidst the all-male crew). Rather, this latter discursive camera opened out into an imagined moment, a future image-text projected into a possible interactional text of theatrical *sight*. To refuse to appear, then, was to refuse to be inscribed into the image, to be seen in and through it. It too, like the college girls' looking away, was an effacement. The assistant directors, who understood immediately

the perspective that was at stake for the woman and her husband, moved on precisely when the horizon for such visibility was foreclosed and passed into impossibility.

But these are not the only such discursive cameras, for the foreclosure of this entextualizing process—with the resultant interactional text of her nonappearance—itself already presupposed and entailed another scene of visibility within which was entextualized an image of respectable femininity. Her invisibility to the film camera, produced by the perspective of a particular kind of discursive camera, entextualized an image of her chastity—and her husband's respectability—as the cloak of conspicuous semiotic invisibility in the event of our interaction.

Moreover, it is not only the machinic sight of the film camera and the anonymous *sight*, the discursive camera, of the pissing men that her husband worried about. As my discussion with him afterwards also elicited, it was also the way that being entextualized as a figure on a screen given over to the sexualized *sight* of others, and broadcast indiscriminately through every event of screening, always potentially returned to her, and thus to him, as a kind of infamy. That is, such an iterable act of presence and appearance could be stitched into a chain of entextualizations beyond the filmic image, captured and projected by gossip and other forms of discourse. Such talk would disseminate her act of appearance just as widely as—in fact, more widely and more intensely locally than—the cinematic apparatus could. Built upon and relayed by the cameras noted above (the film camera; the film text it inscribes; its exhibition in the theater), it is this other discursive camera—that surveils the (in)visibility of moral objects in the social world—that ultimately had to be turned away from.

In the presence of the image (actual or virtual), visibility, here and in the first example, entails not only being seen but also the ideological assumption that one chose or allowed oneself to be exposed to the vision of others; that is, to have returned the gaze as Simmel discusses, be it literally in the look back or in the disclosing of the phenomenal self to view. To be so entextualized in an image is to enter a chamber of optical and discursive mirrors and relays (on a set, in a theater, and beyond) that do not disperse the pragmatics of visibility through the circulation of one's image but concentrate them so as to return them back to that very object (McElgunn, 2021). This semiotic intensification, this chaining of entextualizations, moves through an interdiscursive circuit of camera lenses, celluloid and digital inscriptions, projectors, and seating (and social) arrangements in contexts of exhibition, but also gossip and other forms of talk. If the cinema is an amplifier, multiplier, and mold of vision (in that it figurates a perspective which it invites us to take up), it is also a broadcast device of seeing/being seen, which includes cameras with glass lenses, but also, and more importantly, mouths and ears and any other medium —in a word, discursive cameras—that might offer up perspectives that propel, or stifle, the (meta)pragmatics of appearance and presence.

CONCLUSION

In these examples from the Tamil cinema are exhibited the semiotics theorized in the first section of this article. Through them I've shown how vision and visibility are entextualized as pragmatic acts (interactional texts) borne by image-texts and emplotted in denotational texts of various sorts; and further, how discursive cameras and perspectives emerge from and mediate events of seeing and being seen. As these ethnographic examples show, and as we also noted in our discussions of seeing another doffing the hat (Panofsky, Bauman, Silverstein) and young children being looked at (Kidwell), vision and visibility are the outcomes of events of sign activity in and across interactional contexts organized by perspectives (Gal and Irvine). In each of these cases, the entextualization of a perspective makes visible a world to be captured by a discursive camera.

But such discursive cameras also entail invisibility; they efface worlds or aspects of them. Invisibility too is an outcome of semiosis, of acts of turning away, refusing to appear, or otherwise effacing oneself from the scene of visibility and vision and the presence of the image.[14]

Yet if this is so, to be not-seen is to be semiotically available already, pre-seen and yet obscured in precisely those ways in which one might like (not) to be seen ([not] looking, [not] being seen, and so on). Effacement, then, is perhaps precisely the condition of possibility of visibility (and vice versa), the medium

through which a gradience of (in)visibility is worked and warped. To efface is to take away one's face, and thus eyes, from visibility (Nozawa, 2016)—it is to look away (*ex-, face*), to refuse the look of another. It is to walk out of a screening, to look down, to refuse to appear before a film camera, to scratch out one's eyes/image or the eyes/image of another and thus, also, to be absolved from the act of appearing, of being present-to. To efface—to cover over, dis-appear, not-appear, hide, deflect, erase—is a way of managing presence, the seeing touch of the other, the engagement with the phenomenal world and the stake in it that one makes. To efface is to enter into entextualization in some way or other, to face the necessary possibility that one will always be stitched into a chain of entextualization, from some perspective or other, captured by some kind of camera or another. It is, thus, a way to be a subject, of a particular kind, with a particular claim on (in)visibility.

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ENDNOTES

[1] The example is derived from an anecdote of Karl Mannheim (Elsner and Lorenz, 2012, 495n28), in which somewhat more sociological, relational, and interactional context is provided: "I am walking down the street with a friend; a beggar stands at a corner; my friend gives him an alms." For comparison of the 1932, 1939, and 1955 versions of this essay, see Elsner and Lorenz, 2012.

[2] Others to note: for example, Panofsky doesn't consider the positionality of the analyst in interpreting an act or work of art. Rather, Panofsky highlights the immanent points of view on that event by participants to it; in the instance, the person to whom the act of honorification (hat-doffing) is performed and construable as: a physical occurrence with a particular form/texture (zero-order indexicality, as it were), an act of deference to the hat-doffee (1st-order indexical act), a 2nd-order index of the hat-doffer as a type of person (as non-Quaker, as deferential, as vainglorious, etc.). Panofsky's move here is analogous to that of ethnomethodology and linguistic anthropology to dialectically ground hermeneutic interpretation by situating it relative to the interpretative practices of those party to the events/processes one is striving to understand, committing analysis to a circular, or encompassed, relationship to what it analyzes (Viola, 2012, §51). In Panofsky's 1932 essay ([1932] 2012, 482) this "objective corrective" is couched as a response to the Heideggerian challenge to the potentially arbitrary violence of interpretation given, as Panofsky argues, its historical relativism. Analysis of things like greetings and politeness or buildings and architecture, thus, cannot proceed independently of their contextual situatedness vis-à-vis those party to them; that is, analysis must proceed empirically—ethnographically and historically. Yet what must be added to this is an account of the analyst's own situatedness, both within such events (as parties to them) and in their own contexts of analysis.

[3] Such a unifying principle (i.e., metapragmatics) is not necessarily an epochal one, though it is ideological. We might adequate Panofsky's unifying principle, or intrinsic meaning, as epochal worldview to the anthropologist's culture concept; if so, then we might follow linguistic anthropological critiques of the culture concept (and by extension, intrinsic meaning, worldview) and the turn to the concept of (language) ideology (Woolard, 1998; Gal and Irvine, 2019). On a similar move/critique within visual studies, see Mitchell, 1986.

[4] This is not to say that vision doesn't have a biophysical set of correlates that we can independently describe—it surely does! But rather, and this is a point Panofsky is at pains to make in the context of the describability of art (and all visible forms), a description of vision at this level is technically meaningless and does not capture the experience of vision as always already meaningful. But if perception is, at its core, experiential and inferential (i.e., semiotic), then the penetration of meaning works itself dialectically to the most basic facts of perception (see Peirce, 1906). As Peirce (1931–1935, vol. 5, §221) notes, any singular experience of the qualia of a surface is a function of the *movement* of a hand across its surface, and is thus a projection, an abduction, across a number of discrete moments in time of which the experience is but the whole vis-à-vis its parts.

[5] Though see Christopher Wood (1991, 22–23) on Panofsky's ambivalent position on this point.

[6] As Panofsky's remarks indicate, such a perspective-on is both particular to the event of interpretation in question—it is a token-perspective—and a more general habitus sedimented over historical time—a perspective-type. The latter is an effect of the regularization and typification (the de-contextualization) of the former (Gal and Irvine, 2019), even as every perspective-type must always be embodied (re-contextualized) in some particular token-perspective.

[7] Similarly, subjectivity is not primarily the seat of a person (or its fictionalization, i.e., a character) but a congeries of perspectives (or voices) personified (and often lived), put together into a discernible (even identifiable and nameable) "figure of personhood," to use Agha's (2007) phrase, that can be enacted and inhabited by various semiotic agents.

[8] The world as a semiotic process in becoming is itself an unfolding perspective on itself.

[9] For more discussion, see Nakassis and Weidman, 2018; Nakassis, 2023, 66–110.

[10] For example, the female voice sings in Tamil, "eyes collide and womanhood transforms," and the male voice, "we don't need a bed, if I touch you with my eyes, you're not a virgin." Both lyrics, of course, echo the chronotope and pragmatics of *sight aṭikkiṟatu* discussed in the next section.

[11] This isn't to say that viewers, male or female, may not also identify with Anitha, the female dancers, the gangster, or all or in some combination. There are many possible perspectives a viewer might take to all such scenes. Consider that the parallelism in this song-sequence itself turns on the fact that a woman (here, Anitha) can take a stance to her lover that is precisely the stance that the item dancers take to the audience, suggesting that she too has seen/identified with the figure of the item (in other events); and if we identify with the heroine, and she with the item, then why not we too with the item (in the presentist, reflexive framing)? Thanks to Susan Gal for pushing me to clarify this.

[12] There is a distinct implicatedness in the image implied by the way distance is differently expanded-and-collapsed in these two modes; thus, the difference at issue here is not of more or less distance but how distance and closeness operate together to different effect. Thanks to Kristina Wirtz and Susan Gal for pushing me to articulate this.

[13] And indeed, rather than its metaphorical depiction of sex by the literal depiction of gyrating bodies, it was the explicit visual and linguistic representation of frank, agentive, female sexual desire that was considered by viewers that I spoke with about the film—male and female—to be transgressive and controversial. See Nakassis, 2023, 66–110 for more discussion.

[14] We should preface this statement "for sighted subjects," since the point holds for any sensing, thus semiotic, agent, extendable to all sense modalities and their combinations.

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