Architectural modernity in India
Sources and perspectives for research
An introduction

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This collection of architectural postcards and urban views of Indian metropolises between 1900 and 1970 was born out of the observation, by the European researcher that I am, of the acute lack of online visual sources for historians of architecture and 20th century cities who wish to immerse themselves in the architectural modernity of the Indian sub-continent. Despite the globalisation of exchanges between researchers and the stimulating perspectives offered by contemporary historical research—whether cross-cutting, comparative, connected or transnational—and despite the many projects for the digitisation of sources being carried out in parallel in Germany or the United States, India is still in the early stages of this process of digital preservation of archives, particularly with regard to making them available online. However, the threat posed by a general lack of interest in India's modern architectural heritage makes this need all the more pressing. This lack of interest is more marked than in Europe, for example, where initiatives for the documentation, preservation and transmission of this contemporary heritage are receiving some institutional attention, notably thanks to the activities of ICOMOS and of the DOCOMOMO chapters. But this historical and cultural heritage is also threatened by the tropical climate in some major urban centres—Mumbai and Kolkata—which has a direct impact on the conservation of the built environment and of the sources of architectural and urban history. Recent initiatives in several Indian

metropolises include the creation of the Mumbai Art Deco Society Trust[1] and the Kolkata Immersive Trails research group[2] in 2016, two private research institutes that are working for the recognition—on a local scale and by individual rather than institutional actors –, transmission and preservation of the 20th century heritage of Indian cities.

Fig. 1: Marine Drive Boulevard: Bombay's waterfront in the 1970s.

Twentieth century architecture in India experienced several movements and experimented with important stylistic transitions, comparable to those that swept across Western countries, although in a time frame that lagged slightly behind French, German or British architecture, particularly before 1947. Art Deco, which developed in France, and particularly in Paris, between the wars,[3] flourished in Bombay and Calcutta around 1937–1947 at the dawn of Indian independence, while European countries were engaged in air warfare that led to massive de-

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1   Art Deco Mumbai Trust (ADMT): https://www.artdecomumbai.com/ (02.02.2023).

2   Kolkata Immersive Trails: https://de.immersivetrails.com/ (02.02.2023).

3   Bréon, Emmanuel (ed.), *Art déco France-Amérique du Nord*, Paris, Norma, 2022.

struction.[4] Similarly, hygienist functionalism and its idea of the garden city, expressed in the Paris region from the 1910s-1920s, thanks in particular to the commitment of Henri Sellier, saw various local interpretations towards the end of the 1930s. This is illustrated by the buildings on Marine Drive in Bombay, with their inner courtyards and large bay windows, all promising access to modern comfort in a city marked by squalor. The post-1947 period saw the spread of the international style, adopting the forms of inter-war modernism. The production and use of reinforced concrete in construction became systematic, supported by economic nationalisation: this is a feature of architectural production worldwide, also found in this region of Southeast Asia.[5] Major figures in modern Indian architecture emerged: Charles Correa (1930–2015), Balkrishna Vithaldas Doshi (1927–2023) and Raj Rewal (1934) succeeded in transforming this modernity, with its forms and theories largely imported from Europe and the United States, into a local architecture inspired by Indian traditions and adapted to climatic constraints.[6] The environmental thinking that accompanied Indian architecture of the 1960s and 1970s was a singular and innovative development at global level. In the 1970s, the political rapprochement with the USSR accompanied the birth of new architectural forms steeped in the socialist idea. The frescoes and glass mosaics that adorned public buildings during this period (postcard from the Calcutta cultural centre) reflect these cultural exchanges with the Eastern Bloc.

But 20th century Indian architecture is fascinating in that it shows a surprising (even disconcerting) capacity to absorb trends, beyond the Cold War ideological divides that entrapped the Western world. Thus,

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4   Cohen, Jean-Louis, *Architecture in Uniform. Designing and Building for the Second World War*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2011.

5   Stierli, Martino (ed.), *The Project of Independence. Architectures of Decolonization in South Asia 1947–1985*, MoMa, New York, 2022.

6   Mehrotra, Rahul (ed.), *World Architecture 1900–2000 A critical mosaic: South Asia*, New York, Springer, 2000. The projects reproduced in this book give an overview of the international modernity also taking hold in this part of the world.

post-modern ideas and, in particular, the principles of architectural ci-
tation and collage of references, can be found in certain urban projects
of the 1970s. The Shalimar cinema (1979) in Bombay, with its film reels
unrolled on the façade, is a striking example.[7] Taken as a whole, this ar-
chitectural output (but also intellectual output, thanks to the publica-
tion of books and architectural magazines) constitutes a formidable ter-
rain for the historian. Whether it be train and bus stations, cinemas,
housing estates, foreign embassies, scientific research institutes, mu-
seums and art centres, or even international hotels, the forms and as-
pirations of the modern school of thought penetrated Indian territory
from the beginning of the 20th century and attest to powerful exchanges
and transfers between Europe, the United States and metropolitan In-
dia. This dynamic circulation of knowledge is driven by a dual flow of
exchanges: those developed by architects and artists trained in the West-
ern avant-garde and who chose, for economic, political or more personal
reasons, to build closer ties with India (the esoteric movement took off
in the enlightened circles of Germany in 1900 as part of the *Lebensreform*
movement), and those initiated by the Indian cultural elites who trained
in London, Berlin, Paris, New York or Chicago. The exchanges between
the spirit of Weimar Germany and modernist Bombay were brought to
light by the seminal works of historians such as Margit Franz,[8] Rachel
Lee,[9] and Kris Manjapra.[10] This approach to Indian modernity through
the prism of transfers between the West and India highlights exchanges

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7   But architectural citation was already present before 1947, particularly in
     cinema architecture. See Jean-Louis Cohen's lecture on citation in architecture
     at the Collège de France on 3 March 2021 : Cohen, Jean-Louis, « Le travail de la
     citation en architecture et en urbanisme », URL : https://www.college-de-fran
     ce.fr/agenda/cours/formes-urbaines-en-mouvement-architecture-de-interur
     banite/le-travail-de-la-citation-en-architecture-et-urbanisme (02.02.2023).

8   Franz, Margit, *Gateway India: Deutschsprachiges Exil in Indien zwischen britischer
     Kolonialherrschaft, Maharadschas und Gandhi*, Graz, CLIO, 2015.

9   Lee, Rachel, *OK INDIA: Otto Königsberger, Urban Visions and Architecture in India*,
     University of Liverpool, TAG Press, 2015.

10   Manjapra, Kris, *Age of Entanglement: German and Indian Intellectuals across Empire*,
     Cambridge, Harvard historical studies, Harvard University Press, 2014.

that were long ignored by research. But cultural modernity also pene-
trated India through other transnational and interdisciplinary channels:
the Pathé film company, present in India since the early 20th century,[11]
contributed to the development of this new leisure activity and of the In-
dian film industry,[12] which today ranks first in the world, ahead of Holly-
wood. The impact of foreign industries was decisive in the introduction
of new urban practices and shapes. The presence of Italian lifts of the
Stigler company in most of the modern buildings—including the Eros
cinema palace (1938)—of Bombay in the 1920s and 1930s is a reminder of
this.

*Fig. 2: Eros Cinema (1938): an Art Deco-style monu-
ment built by Indian architects but furnished with lifts
from Stigler (Italy).*

While the enlightened Europe of the intellectuals and artists of the
1900s projected its fantasies of parallel worlds onto the ancient tradi-
tions of India and its spiritual movements, Western artistic modernity

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11   Préval de, Jitka, *Camille Legrand. Un opérateur Pathé sur la route des Indes
      1895–1920*, Paris, Riveneuve, 2021.

12   For an approach to the diversity of Indian cinema, see: Weil, Ophélie, *Bollywood
      et les autres. Une histoire du cinéma* indien, Paris, Buchet Chastel, 2011; Rousseau,
      Julien; Kessous, Hélène (eds.), *Bollywood Superstars - A Short Story of Indian Cin-
      ema*, Dijon, Les presses du Réel, 2022.

penetrated Indian territory via several channels (first through philan-
thropists and the colonial administration[13] then, more individually,
through social relations between Western and Indian intellectuals),
Indian urban infrastructure was taking shape under the impact of un-
bridled industrialisation—a reflection of a colonial system that led to
the plundering of local resources.

> On this point, we should bear in mind the context in which these build-
> ings were constructed, which no doubt explains the lack of interest in
> this built heritage. We recall Samia Henni's statement in the catalogue
> of the 2021 Venice Architecture Biennale, which reads: "Histories, the-
> ories, and practices of architecture and urbanism are intimately inter-
> related to processes of colonization. The world's territories and peo-
> ple have been constantly and continuously disturbed and marked by
> violent activities of war, occupation, exploitation, dispossession, de-
> struction, and construction. Since the fifteenth century, Western Euro-
> pean architects, both civil and military, have been actively participat-
> ing in constructing empires and framing their representations. These
> designers were commissioned to imagine and realize various infras-
> tructures, public buildings, and private settlements across the mul-
> tiple territories of the empires they worked for. The vastness and di-
> versity of colonial spaces around the world that resulted from these
> conditions have been instrumental in settling in the colonized land,
> exploiting, and transporting resources, and representing an unevenly
> distributed power [...] Stories of globalization are an extension of his-
> tories of colonization. An effort to understand architecture, its histo-
> ries and theories, as an integral part of the dynamic of the world's or-
> der and disorder rather than simply as a passive spectator and sup-
> plier of space, is fundamental. [...] Architecture operates on a planetary
> scale and depends on accumulated and distributed capital."[14]

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13   Chopra, Preeti, *A Joint Enterprise. Indian Elites and the Making of British Bombay*,
Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

14   Essay by Henni, Samia, in: Sarkis, Hashim; Tannir, Ala (eds.), *Expansions. Re-
sponses to How will we live together?*, Venice Architecture Biennale 2021; p. 95–96.

For applied arts, as for architecture, sources remain scattered between public institutions (Asiatic Society of Mumbai, National Archives of India, for example), private institutes (MARG Foundation, Mumbai; Charles Correa Foundation, Panaji/Goa) and isolated individual collectors that need to be identified through in-depth search via the abundant data available on social networks. This dispersion of sources is combined with a tropical climate that makes it difficult to preserve the originals. The political turbulence in 20th century India—notably the Independence of 1947, the partition of India with Pakistan, the military tensions in Kashmir with China in the 1950s and 1960s, and then the creation of Bangladesh (1971)—redrew the Indian national boundaries several times in the second half of the 20th century, disrupting the political and social order and impacting the preservation of historical sources. In this sense, a digitization of the archives is an emergency of primary importance for international historical research on India.[15]

Fig. 3: "Bombay: Souvenirs de passage" (Memories of a Journey) and the Hamidiya Masjid (1880).

15   What the ongoing DFG research project "MIDA Das Moderne Indien in Deutschen Archiven 1706–1989" (Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin) is highlighting. https://www.projekt-mida.de/ (02.02.2023).

The European research project Metromod[16] has addressed this need by presenting digitised archival material on its website and is contributing to future research on modern Bombay in the years 1910–1940. With the necessary modesty implied by the stance of the historian as much as by the reality of this collection, limited to just 60 postcards, this book project aspires to partially fill this gap through its contribution to this field of research.

The postcard as a tool for architectural and urban research

Despite the limitations of the postcard medium as a historical source, these 60 cards offer a relatively complete and original overview of the European view of India in the 20th century. The postcard as a medium for the dissemination of modern architecture is still more rarely used in research than other media such as architects' archives, specialised magazines, and the cultural press. However, while the postcard is an integral component of the cultural practices of its time and produces a discourse on the city and architectural modernity in the 20th century, it also permeates the architectural culture of architects. Examples include the controversial postcard taken from a photomontage showing the "Weißenhofsiedlung" of 1927, which crystallises the debates on architectural functionalism in the interwar period; the collection of 2,000 annotated postcards that Le Corbusier accumulated during his career (including postcards of the city of New Delhi, then under construction in the 1950s, and of the Jantar Mantar observatory in Jaipur),[17] or the use of postcards by Rem Koolhaas to illustrate his essay *Delirious New York* (1978). Their potential has also fascinated writers: among others,

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16   METROMOD research project, LMU, Munich: https://metromod.net/project/ (02.02.2023).

17   The author thanks the archivist of the Le Corbusier Foundation, Arnaud Dercelles, for his valuable assistance. See also : Burriel Bielza, Luis, *Le Corbusier La passion des cartes*, Paris, Mardaga, 2013. On the postcard as an art history medium, see: Tillier, Bertrand, "The Postcard, a Documentary Multiple of the Masterpiece", *Perspective*, 2019/2; p. 239–48.

Georges Perec (series of texts entitled "243 real colour postcards", 1978) and Jacques Derrida with his satirical essay *The Post Card. From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* (1980). As symbols of imagery for the masses, products of a commercial strategy, postcards form an invaluable visual resource. And when they represent urban views or specific buildings, they actively train the viewer's eye and nurture the culture of architectural travel. While they reflect a vision—necessarily idealised, that being their primary function—of a building or a city (we send a postcard to tell our loved ones about a pleasantly exotic trip, generally reserving any accounts of bad experiences for our return), photographs attest to a given moment, a moment captured in the history of a building or the urbanisation of a metropolis and provide an archive of the city.

Fig. 4: Mumbai, View from Malabar Hill in the 1970s.

Postcards do not reflect the real state of the architecture, they do not give any information on the preparatory phase of the project, nor on the construction phase and the difficulties encountered. These photographs, designed to advertise a building or a city, highlight their aesthetic qualities (undeniable qualities for the *flâneur*), capture an ultimately fleeting moment in the history of an urban architecture. They celebrate the moment of the photographic shot rather than providing precise historical information to reconstruct a necessarily more complex architectural his-

tory, involving economic, political, and cultural reflections and a plunge into the controversies of an era. Thus, the postcard as a medium fits in with Siegfried Kracauer's definition of photography when he wrote: "Under the photograph of a human being, his history lies buried as under a blanket of snow."[18]

But viewed from the perspective of the architectural culture of an era, a culture of the people rather than the elite, these postcards allow us to trace the series of famous buildings that marked their time. Viewed in this light, these postcards provide a visual chronicle of a collective view of architecture, a chronicle captured in the present moment, not in the historian's reconstructed time. Far from the disturbing views of French seminarians teaching the language of the coloniser to the children of Pondicherry, or the countless views of the Taj Mahal mausoleum in Agra or the Mughal Fort in Old Delhi, these postcards have the common denominator of making 20th century architecture their central motif. It would undoubtedly be necessary to explore the companies that specialised in the production, printing and distribution of postcards in the colonial context, and to question the alliances underpinning this highly lucrative industry, especially since, in the case of these Indian cards, it is not unusual to find the words "Printed in Germany" on the back. Photographed in Bombay or Calcutta by professionals whose equipment was manufactured and imported from the West, then sometimes printed in Europe before being sent back to India where they were bought by travellers who in turn sent them to their families in Europe, these cards seem to have travelled further than their writers. Printed in series of millions of copies, the postcard embodies economic capitalism and the globalisation of trade, but also the democratisation of travel in the 20th century, previously the preserve of the privileged social classes to which the great explorers belonged (Alexander von Humboldt, Alexandra David-Neel, Paul-Emile Victor, for example). It is undoubtedly the mercantile and popular side of the picture postcard that led architectural historians to lose interest in them. However, the architectural postcard calls for

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18   Kracauer, Siegfried, "Photography", in: *L'Ornement de la masse. Essais sur la modernite weimarienne* (1963), Paris, La Découverte, 2008; p.39.

a critical analysis wherein lies its scientific value, as the historian Igor Marjanovic points out: "Postcard collections remove objects from their original context of consumer tourism into a world of subjective spatial and temporal narrative, replacing everyday consumption with the production of history."[19]

An original feature of this book is that it brings together authors who, in some cases, have an in-depth knowledge of the Indian terrain in its current state. Their texts reflect a profound gulf between the idealised urban visions of postcards and the reality of Indian megacities today.[20] As a collective work that aims to build bridges between the different disciplines and communities of researchers represented (art history,[21] architecture,[22] economics,[23] media sociology,[24] heritage studies[25]), this book intends to contribute to the scientific discussion on certain aspects of architectural modernity in India, rather than to provide a complete overview. It is guided by the desire to raise the profile of this rich Indian heritage in the humanities and in the history of architecture over the long 20th century. However, the postcard approach provides only a tiny glimpse into the possibilities open to a necessarily collective, preferably international, research undertaking, which will need to con-

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19   Marjanovic, Igor, "Postcards and the Making of Architectural History", 92nd ACSA Annual Meeting, 18–21.03.2004, https://www.acsa-arch.org/chapter/po stcards-and-the-making-of-architectural-history-the-case-of-the-alvin-boyar sky-and-rem-koolhaas/ (02.02.2023).

20   Bansal, Anupam, "Delhi Beyond its appearance".

21   Khan, Omar, "Building Postcards: Rössler's Calcutta 1896".

22   Sanyal, Saptarshi, "Framing Fragments. The Image, Modernity, and Architecture"; Muhidine, Eléonore, "The Taj Mahal Hotel, Imperial, Sun'n'Sand, Oberoi, and others: the Indian chapter of the 20th-century grand hotel".

23   Rault-Chodankar, Yves-Marie, "Before take-off: waiting for India's globalization at the Sahar International Airport in 1974".

24   Kaden, Ben, "Image, recto, verso, context. Approaching Deltiology as a method".

25   Chopra, Preeti, "Greetings from Bombay! Pictures of Colonial Complexity"; Bhatawadekar, Shraddha, "Transport and Communication as Symbols of Modernity in India: A Cultural Perspective".

front the problems of rapidly deteriorating physical sources and their geographical dispersion.

Modern architecture in India: a history of transfer over the long 20th century

Indian architectural modernity is complex and hybrid; its history has been shaped by national turning points and transnational transfers. This modernity is taken on board over the long 20th century and is nurtured by foreign influences that are imposed, but also projected and desired, by certain local backers. Indeed, while the colonial context imposed certain trends, notably a neo-Gothic style in the public buildings of Bombay 1880 (a style that can be found in London buildings of the same period[26]), openness to international trends claiming a simplicity of form and means—was also very marked within enlightened circles.

Fig. 5: Visweswaraiah Industrial and Technological Museum, Bangalore, 1962, architect: unknown.

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26   The similarities between the buildings of Farrington Road in London and those of the Fort district of Bombay are spectacular. The gothic revival fashion, of which Viollet-le-Duc was the spokesman in France and John Ruskin the theorist in England, was thus exported to the colonized countries, without any prior reflection on the specificities of the climate and its impact on architecture.

After 1947, the Indian architectural community was confronted with the need to define a modern aesthetic that was specifically Indian, marked by a reflection on function rather than on form. This gave rise, in the 1960s, to a school of environmental and sustainable architectural thought that was ahead of its time, and notably represented by the projects of Balkrishna Doshi (School of Architecture, CEPT, Ahmedabad, 1966–68) or of Laurie Baker (Loyola Graduate Women's Hostel, Trivandum, 1970).

In architecture, India received large projects that were sometimes modern, sometimes borne by a modernising ideal,[27] and which were to have an impact on the scale of the continent and of neighbouring countries, while also broadening the architectural vocabulary of smaller projects on a regional scale. The case of cinemas is still exemplary in this sense: the Bombay 1940 cinema palaces, designed to accommodate more than 3,000 people, were reproduced in series and on a smaller scale in the secondary towns of Maharashtra. In Calcutta, the same phenomenon occurred for the cinemas of Bengal, and in Delhi, for those of Uttar Pradesh. India is a complex territory, marked by modern projects that belong to a global history of modernity, involving major figures: Eckart Muthesius in Indore,[28] Otto Königsberger in Mysore and Bangalore, Le Corbusier in Ahmedabad and Chandigarh,[29] Balkrishna Vithaldas Doshi in Ahmedabad, Raj Rewal[30] in New Delhi, Charles Correa in Bombay, New Delhi and Kolkata. Less well known is the in-

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27 Stephens, Robert, *Bombay Imagined: An Illustrated History of the Unbuilt City*, Mumbai, Urbsindis, 2022.

28 Niggl, Reto, *Eckart Muthesius. Der Palast des Maharadschas in Indore. Architektur und Interieur*, Stuttgart, Arnold, 1996.

29 Moos, Stanislaus von, *Chandigarh 1956*, Zürich, Scheidegger & Spies, 2010; Högner, Bärbel, *Chandigarh nach Le Corbusier. Ethnografie einer postkolonialen Planstadt in Indien*, Berlin, Reimer, 2016.

30 Gill, Sandrine, *Raj Rewal, From Architecture to Cultural Landscape*, Marseille, Parenthèses, 2020.

volvement of Frei Otto in Ahmedabad in the 1970s (Prototype tent project for climate refugees).[31]

Beyond building projects, the European influence is reflected in Indian architectural journals, in particular in the magazine *MARG*[32] (founded in 1946) and in the *Journal of the Indian Institute of Architecture*, both published in Bombay. Theoretical texts by Erich Mendelsohn, Patrick Geddes, Andrew Boyd (a British architect who contributed to the spread of modernism in Ceylon in the 1940s)[33] were published in *MARG* under the impetus of progressive intellectuals, such as the writer and art critic Mulk Raj Anand (1905–2004), and Indian architects receptive to the idea of modernity as a project for reforming society.[34] Unquestionably, there are strong links between modern architectural thinking and the garden cities of England, the German art schools (Darmstadt, Bauhaus) and theatres (Piscator's theatre) of the avant-garde, the cinema palaces of Paris 1930 (the Grand Rex), and the modernist architecture of Bombay 1930–1940. The innovative character of this urban Indian modernity lies in a synthesis between functionalism, Art déco and traditional Indian decorative motifs. The bas-reliefs of the New India Assurance Building (1936), showing stylised Indian workers, are a major example. In Calcutta as in New Delhi, European influences, and resonances with the modern cultural metropolises of London, Paris, and Berlin[35] can also be retraced. Numerous studies have shown that architectural magazines, the main medium for reproduction of architectural images, were widely circulated during the 20th century. This was also the case in India, and

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31   The author would like to thank the archivist of the Frei Otto Archive, Martin Kunz, for his advice. (SAAI-Archive, KIT, Karlsruhe, Germany).

32   Lee, Rachel; James-Chakraborty, Kathleen, "Marg Magazine: A Tryst with Architectural Modernity", *ABE Journal*, 2012, http://journals.openedition.org/abe/623 (02.02.2023).

33   Dalvi, Mustansir (ed.), *20th Century Compulsions. Modern Indian Architecture from the Marg Archives*, Mumbai, Marg Foundation, 2016.

34   Notably Balkrishna V. Doshi, Durga Bajpai, Charles Correa.

35   Cohen, Jean-Louis, Cycle at the Collège de France, Paris, "Formes urbaines en mouvement: l'architecture de l'interurbanité", 2021.

circulation may even have been boosted by the British colonial presence in architecture schools and their university libraries.[36]

The collection (based, of course, on the limited resources available) comprises a total of 60 postcards, 41 in colour, representing the diversity of architectural forms in India between 1880 and 1970. Before we present it in more detail, it should be stressed that a collection is the fruit of several elements of chance: that of the search, fruitful or otherwise, of the choices made, necessarily subjective, and of the budget allocated to its expansion. The subjects represented reflect the places visited by Europeans travelling in India between the 1910s and 1980s, and not the centres of modern architecture in India. Thus, Ahmedabad, Madras, Lucknow and Chandigarh, which deserve to be included in this collection, are absent because no postcards of these cities sent to Europe could be found. In this sense, the collection presented is fragmentary. But this is a constant dimension of this project of collected essays and resonates with a definition of 20th century modernity and its spatial reproduction via an almost infinite range of major projects and secondary realisations.

The subjects have been deliberately chosen to represent the richness of this 20th century heritage. They are essentially photographs (with the exception of a model of the Taj Mahal Hotel and its counterpart, the Taj Mahal Tower) which can be classified under 6 thematic categories:

Communication and urban development

- Floral Fountain, Mumbai, 1864, architect Richard Norman Shaw (Fig.18; 24; 29; 32)
- Old pontoon Bridge, Kolkata (Fig.14)
- Victoria Station, Mumbai, 1888, architect Frederick William Stevens (Fig.21; 31)
- General Post Office, Mumbai, 1913, architect John Begg (Fig.30)
- New Railway Station, Howrah (Fig.33)

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36 Here, the involvement of the British architect, educator and author Claude Batley between 1923 and 1943 at the J. J. School of Architecture in Bombay should be mentioned (*Bombay's Houses and Homes*, 1949).

- Western Railway Office, Mumbai (Fig.35)
- Kennedy Sea-Face, Mumbai, 1920, planner unknown (Fig.17)
- View of Churchgate, Mumbai, 1940s, author unknown (Fig.56)
- Connaught Place, New Delhi, 1931, architect Robert Tor Russell (Fig.25)
- New Telephone Exchange, Kolkata, date and architect unknown (Fig.34)
- Hornby Road, Mumbai (Fig.40)
- Urban view around Churchgate, Mumbai (Fig.47)
- Marine Drive Promenade, Mumbai, 1930–1940;[37] several views including Kapur Mahal, Zaver Mahal, Keval Mahal and Soona Mahal (Fig.1; 55; 46; 49)
- Airport Terminal, Mumbai, Santacruz Building, 1948, architect unknown (Fig.36; 37)
- Brabourne Road, Kolkata (Tea Board India, 1954, architect unknown) (Fig.57)
- Mumbai suburbs, 1960s, large housing estates, architect unknown (Fig.38)

Economy

- Crawford Market, Mumbai, 1869, architect William Emerson (Fig.19)
- Petroleum House (Esso-Building), Mumbai, 1954, architect unknown (Fig.48)
- View of the Port, Panaji (Goa) in the 1960s (Fig.7)

Luxury hotels

- Taj Mahal, Mumbai, 1903, architects DN Mirza and Sitaram Khanderao Vaidya (565 rooms, 42 suites, 11 restaurants) (Fig.22)
- The Imperial, New Delhi, 1936, architect F. B. Blomfield and Edwin Lutyens (225 rooms, 44 suites, 6 restaurants, 2 bars) (Fig.44)

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37   This seafront avenue has an exceptional heritage and was added to the list of UNESCO world heritage sites in 2018.

- Clarks Shiraz, Agra, 1950s (Fig.60)
- The Ashok Hotel, New Delhi, 1956, architect E. B. Doctor (550 rooms) (Fig.41)
- Claridge's Hotel, New Delhi, 1955, architect unknown (Fig.61)
- Oberoi Inter Continental, New Delhi, 1965 (many foreign designers, including the American Joseph Grusczak, Irene D'Alessio, 350 rooms) (Fig.40; 43)
- Sun'n'Sand, Juhu Beach, Mumbai, 1962, architect unknown (Fig.42)
- Taj Mahal Tower, Mumbai, 1972, architect Melton Bekker, decorator Dale Keller (Fig.23)

Cultural spaces

- Kali Temple, Kolkata (Fig.9)
- 19th century hotel, Old Delhi (Fig.45)
- Hamidiya Masjid, Mumbai (Fig.3)
- Eros Cinema, Mumbai, 1938, architect Sorabji K. Bhedwar, decorator Fritz von Drieberg (Fig.2)
- View of Malabar Hill, Mumbai, 1970s (Fig.4; 39)
- All Air India, Radio House, New Delhi, 1940, architect unknown (Fig.27)
- Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai, 1952, architect Durga Bajpai (Fig.8)
- Rabindra Sadan, Kolkata, 1961, architect unknown (Fig.6)
- Visweswaraiah Industrial and Technological Museum, Bangalore, 1962, architect unknown (Fig.5)

Places of power

- Parliament House, New Delhi, 1927, architects Edwin Lutyens und Herbert Baker (Fig.26)
- National Physical Laboratory, New Delhi, 1950, architect unknown (Fig.53)
- German Embassy, New Delhi, 1962, architect Johannes Krahn (Fig.51)

Places of Modern Indian Memory

- Black Hole Memorial, Kolkata, 1901 (Fig.13)
- Mahatma Gandhi Memorial, Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Mumbai, 1969 (Fig.58)
- Valluvar Kottam (memorial to the poet Saint Thiruvalluvar), Chennai, 1976, architect V. Ganapati Sthapati (Fig.59)

Modern India through the eyes of European intellectuals

The backs of these postcards convey a wide variety of travel impressions, fragmentary messages, sometimes cryptic, often quite mundane. This section aims to compare these anonymous writings with those of famous European artists whose literary or cinematographic work was nurtured by their experiences and discoveries during their travels to India. The French intellectual André Malraux (1901–1976) met Jawaharlal Nehru for the first time in Switzerland in January 1936, after discovering India in 1930 on a private trip. Other visits followed, in 1958, 1965, 1973 and finally 1974. India was his last trip abroad, before his death in 1976. Despite this passion for India, reflected in his political engagement and in his essay, *Le Musée Imaginaire* (1947),[38] a seminal work in the history of art, Malraux never wrote a novel about India. In this essay, he quotes and reproduces photographs of sculptures from the caves of Elephanta, Ellora and Ajanta, creating parallels with the monumental Mexican sculpture of Teotihuacan, the Egyptian pyramids and Buddhist sculptures in China. With visionary genius, he proposes a world history of sculpted art, and invites the reader-viewer to compare these ancient works beyond their regional context alone. But Malraux's India is also one of cultural action deeply rooted in the modernisation of India in the 1950s. His internationalist spirit found affinities with Nehru's political project, and the two men met regularly in Paris (1936, 1960, 1961) and New Delhi (1958).

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38   Grasskamp, Walter, *André Malraux und das imaginäre Museum. Die Weltkunst im Salon*, Berlin, C. H. Beck, 2014; p. 232.

In a letter to Charles de Gaulle on 13 November 1958, he described his programme for the coming weeks:

"Then I would like to visit, not the universities of today, but rather the great centres of art or thought which, in India, play the role of our medieval universities: the Institutes of Indian Culture in Bangalore and Bombay, the Institute of Oriental Research in Poona, the Music Academy in Madras, the Bose Institute, Sanskrit College in Benares, etc. In each of these cities, I would gladly receive a number of visitors. (No doubt it would be agreeable to visit the new capital of Indian Punjab, Chandigarh, built by Le Corbusier and dominated by the 'Open Hand')".[39]

These words resonate with the collection presented here, which includes a physics research institute in New Delhi and a cultural centre in Kolkata. The cultural links between 1950s France and independent India were strong, with the great Chandigarh construction project headed by Le Corbusier (a Swiss who took French nationality in 1930) being the most important example.

Fig. 6: Kolkata, Rabindra Sadan Cultural Centre (1967).

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39   Perrier, Jean-Claude (ed.), *André Malraux et la Tentation de l'Inde*, Paris, Gallimard, 2004; p. 182.

A few years after the "Art Treasures of India" exhibition at the Petit Palais in Paris (1960) organised by André Malraux, it was the French filmmaker Louis Malle (1932–1995) who discovered Indian culture in 1968, when he was only 26 years old. Interviewing European travellers on the mythical "hippie trail", Malle recounts in his *Travel Diaries* their astonishment at this "initiatory journey" (an astonishment he shared), the dream of a whole generation of Westerners. His impressions of these travellers, who appear to be profoundly out of touch with Indian reality, shed light on some of the texts on the back of postcards sent in the 1970s:

> "They live completely on the fringes of the countries they travel through, which puts them at the total mercy of the authorities and the people of each country. They tell stories of prison, beating, rape, they are charming with their Parisian accents, incredibly first-hand. […] They talk about love, war, the West, money, communism. […] They are nineteen years old. One of them is exempted from military service, but the other refuses to report for duty. […] They claim to be Fourierists, they want to set up a phalanstery, to abolish money." [40]

Louis Malle went to India to make a series of documentary films (*L'Inde fantôme: Réflexions sur un voyage*, a series of seven documentaries for television broadcast in 1969, and a film, *Calcutta*), capturing scenes of daily life in the India that fascinated him. "For the rest of his life, India was really an immense ghost that never stopped haunting him. He often spoke to me about it, he looked at pictures, he asked me about it, as if it were a dream he had accidentally entered at a certain point in his life, and from which he could not detach himself", wrote his friend, the film director Jean-Claude Carrière, on this subject. [41] For *Calcutta*, Malle filmed the ghats—the staircases that descend into the sacred Ganges River—the Howrah Bridge (also shown on one of the cards in the collection), the second-hand book sellers on College Street, the stalls manned by sculptors carving statues of deities in the alleys of Kumortuli. Taking a sociological

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40   Malle, Louis, *L'Inde fantôme. Carnet de voyage (1967–1968)*, Paris, Gallimard, 2005; p. 167.
41   Ibid; p. 7.

look at the capital of Bengal, Louis Malle's film offers a beginner's guide to life in Calcutta, showing street scenes that are like emblems of political, economic, cultural and religious facts. For the series of television films, he shot a scene during a public education session of the Madras family planning centre (an episode that echoes a stamp, found on many of the cards, representing "Family Planning" in 1976), followed by a scene depicting a handout of Soviet-made condoms, a reminder of the political links between 1970s India and the Soviet bloc. His more personal recollections, collected in travel diaries published after his death, are evocative of the texts of some of the postcards in the collection:

> "This morning I am writing on the terrace of the hotel in Gopalpur, it is 6.30 a.m., the sun is still very low. In front of me, the beach, the water, the fishermen bringing in their nets, the very soft, slightly funereal light of tropical mornings. I feel an incredible rush of nostalgia [...]. Seeing this boat struggle against the waves, I feel a strange impression, which, if I analyse it, combines both the obvious feeling of the beauty of nature and its total harmony with this group of men, to which I add a whole potential of emotions comprising both my past memories and my dreams, the same dreams that I have had since my first journeys, and which have impelled me to make this one [...]. It is precisely when travelling that you find your bearings, that your character takes his place more clearly, in relation to beings and situations with which the contrast is sharper than at home. I travel to escape my character as a little Frenchman, and it is the journey that makes it perceptible to me."[42]

Finally, the Italian writer Antonio Tabucchi (1943–2012) discovered India in the 1980s. This journey and these discoveries gave rise to a short novel, *Indian Nocturne*, a story full of mystery and which inspired Alain Corneau to make a film, in equally twilight tones, in 1989. In this novel, more like a long hallucination, the narrator goes in search of an old friend who has disappeared and who is none other than himself.

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42   Ibid.; p. 168–69.

Fig. 7: Panaji (Goa), View of the port, 1970s.

This search takes him to places as eclectic as the Taj Mahal Hotel in Bombay, to slum hotels in a dilapidated "Cage District [which] was much worse than I had imagined. I'd seen it in the photographs of a famous photographer and thought I was prepared for human misery, but photographs enclose the visible in a rectangle. The visible without a frame is always something else."[43] We also discover the setting of a hospital in which the narrator talks to a doctor, then a mysterious Theosophical Society in the state of Goa, and finally a bus-stop on the Madras-Mangalore Road, a bus station depicted in a night scene ("The night was soft and damp with a strong scent of herbs. I took a turn round the bus, smoked a cigarette leaning on the steps at the back, and then headed for the waiting-room. On the door jamb someone had stuck a picture of a divinity unknown to me, done in coloured chalk").[44] It is both a realistic and mysterious vision of the traveller's India that unfolds in this novel. The first scene, set in a taxi along Marine Drive, illustrates some of the maps in the collection which show several views of this mythical boulevard bordering the Arabian Sea and featured in many Hindi films. The last chapter of this short, yet extremely rich novel features a mailman character

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43   Tabucchi, Antonio, *Indian Nocturne*, Edinburgh, Canongate Books, 1984; p. 3–4.
44   Ibid.; p. 62–63.

who seems to enter into a direct dialogue with this collection. His cryptic words resonate, once again, with this collection. Tabucchi's mailman seems almost to be talking to the collector when he confides to the narrator on a beach in the state of Goa:

> "I worked as a mailman in Philadelphia, at eighteen already walking the streets with my bag over my shoulder, without fail, every morning, in summer when the tar turns to molasses and in winter when you slip on the city snow. For ten years, carrying letters. You don't know how many letters I've carried, thousands and thousands. They were all upper class, rich, the people on the envelopes. Letters from all around the world: Miami, Paris, London, Caracas".[45] The narrator then asks him, "And what are you doing today? His surprising answer is clear: "I write postcards. It's me who writes the ladies and gents of Philadelphia now. Postcards with a nice sea and the deserted Calangute Beach, and on the back I write best wishes from mailman Tommy".[46]

In conclusion, we have chosen to reproduce three handwritten texts from the corpus that stand out for their originality. They reflect powerful emotions felt during a journey, or more concrete experiences, preserved only through the medium of the postcard. We felt that they deserved to appear, at the end of this introduction, in a collective work that aims to capture the diversity of possible views on India and its metropolises in the 20th century, on modernity in architecture and on the postcard as a medium of modern architectural culture.

> 9 August 1965
> "Dear friends,
> When I arrived here, I wanted to come and chat with you and tell you about my trip. But the damn old sun sucked the little energy I had left after two weeks of amoebic dysentery where I thought I would collapse. Now it's too late, I'll have to tell you in person when I get back. The violent monsoon rains seem to have subsided, but the sky

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45   Ibid.; p. 83.
46   Ibid.; p. 87.

is leaden. The heat is so heavy, so humid that you only have to take three steps outside to come home dripping sweat. We are in a real hole, clustered around the industrial complex: coal mine, aluminium factory and rolling mills, all in a flat country in the middle of rice fields. Everything is exuberant: bugs of all kinds and sizes (especially rats, cockroaches, and ants), the scent of flowers (I've never seen so many species of jasmine!), the misery of human masses beyond our European imagination. No meat, no wine, no whisky, and no car. And yet the morale is good. Sometimes we dream of a holiday in the snow. Have a good trip and be assured of our warmest sympathy. Monique" Sent to France

10 May 1975
"My darling, I still have not received any letter from you. Should I come back or not? I would like to return, of course. Here it is… No fun at all. Please write quickly."
Sent to Germany (West-Germany, West-Berlin)

1975 (stamp date)
"Many warm greetings from beautiful Bombay from your Roland. Yesterday is 33 degrees as it is for us during summer. Maybe you have seen me in the "*Current Camera*"? I hope so. See you soon!" Sent to Germany (East-Germany, Hoyerswerda)

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*Fig. 8: Mumbai, The Jehangir Art Gallery (1952) with, in the
background, the CST Museum (formerly called Prince of Wales
Museum, 1905).*