



Small Spaces
Recasting the
Architecture
of Empire

SWATI CHATTOPADHYAY

B L O O M S B U R Y

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*To the memory of my mother
Pusparenu Chattopadhyay*

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The work for this book was conducted in the margins of other research projects. It has been sustained by small parenthetical notes in the archive and surprising finds on visits to old houses and during fieldwork in the last three decades. The ideas that permeate this book were perhaps first generated over three decades ago when I encountered the work of James Deetz in his classes at Berkeley, where Jim, Dell Upton, and Jamie Horowitz helped me hone my fondness for small things with the fire of intellectual rigor. The writing itself took shape in the last decade and in conversation with friends and family members. Like the contents of this book itself, the sources and sites of research and engagement are scattered. This preface is thus a humble acknowledgment of the many voices in the archives, and the people who helped me think with and about small things and small spaces.

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Versions of four of the chapters were published in other venues. A different version of Chapter 5 was published in Harald Fischer-Tiné and Maria Framke, eds., *Routledge Handbook of the History of Colonialism in South Asia* (2021).¹ The central argument of Chapter 8 was presented as the Eduard Sekler Talk at the Society of Architectural Historians' Annual Conference in 2021 and subsequently published in the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*.² A different iteration of Chapter 13 was published in Anuradha Roy and Melitta Waligora, eds., *Kolkata in Space, Time and Imagination: Rethinking Heritage* (2019).³ Similarly, a shorter version of Chapter 16 was published in Charlotte Ashby and Mark Crinson, eds., *Building-Object: Shared and Contested Territories of Design and Architecture* (2022). I have benefited from the substantive comments and editorial acumen of Anuradha Roy, Melitta Waligora, Harald Fischer-Tiné, Maria Framke, David Karmon, Judy Selhorst, Charlotte Ashby, and Mark Crinson.

James Thompson, my editor at Bloomsbury, liked the strange idea for an architectural history book and shepherded the project with patience. Anonymous reviewers provided critical feedback. Alex Highfield and Rosamunde O'Cleirigh at Bloomsbury and the production team saw it through the final stages of publication. I am grateful for their assistance with the editorial decisions that went into the book.

I wish I had been able to present this book to my mother who had in small ways and large sustained and inspired my thinking about small spaces. She taught me that all the things that matter in this world reside in small acts and it is vital that we learn to notice the small things forgotten. To her loving memory this book is dedicated.

PART ONE

Small Spaces

1

Of Small Spaces

This book is an invitation to shift our attention to small spaces. These are spaces that have long been considered insignificant because of their size or location or for the minor role they seemingly play in the larger social and political scene. Small spaces are simultaneously evident and elusive. They are lived spaces we don't notice. They span and breach social classes and categories, sensations and materialities, deprivation and delight. As objects of inquiry, they demand that we ask what constitutes smallness.

Small spaces are deemed to lack value, and thus seldom appear in historical narratives, architectural or otherwise. They are service spaces—cook rooms, godowns, and bottlekhanas—spaces with uncertain names and hazy genealogies in the margins of the archive of the British empire. They are peripheral and discontinuous; never front and center. They are work spaces, storage spaces, backspaces. The godown was a fixture of colonial port cities in South and East Asia from Calcutta to Canton: its ubiquitous presence notwithstanding, it has left small footprints in the historiography of empire.¹

As subterranean spaces, they take the form of root cellars in which rows of bottles are shelved by caring hands. They are often ill-lit and illicit. Lack of illumination obscures, deprives. But it can also enable. They are hidden and hiding spaces: the cellars in which enslaved people were imprisoned, the garrets in which they took shelter, the hidey holes underneath the earthen floor where they stowed away food stolen from their labor.² They are forgotten spaces.

Often seen as anomalies because their bounds are ill-defined or because they are fungible—they have *give*—in their shape-shifting characteristics, in their propensity to spill over, they disrupt the decorum of formal spaces that are expected to remain fixed in their propriety. They are spaces appropriated from the dominant infrastructure of grids, roads, and public spaces. These are the hawker stalls and squatting casual workers on sidewalks waiting for customers. We call such spaces informal, unauthorized, and cannot fathom their errant logic.

Smallness may refer to small dimension, though many such spaces by themselves or as collectivities occupy large areas. Even when such spaces are

physically substantial, they do not register in the dominant scheme of things. Spaces such as verandahs, courtyards, terraces, fire escapes, stoops are part of a global lexicon of spatial types, and yet are rarely deemed sufficiently important to merit close reading.³ They are supplementary to the principal spaces in a building. As adjunct spaces they do not press for attention. Small spaces remain peripheral to our vision (Plate 1).

As property, small spaces are low in status, even though they are indispensable spaces of production. As utilitarian spaces they constitute the everyday vernacular landscape. They are architecturally undistinguished and rudimentary in terms of construction, and thus are unlikely to be explored in terms of aesthetics. They are not deemed worthy of appreciation for beauty or craft, unless designed by an architect. The marks of labor—the work of those who ensure production, profit, sustenance, and waste removal—are intentionally erased from the kitchen, cellar, and bathroom. They are connected to “master spaces” through distinctive formal devices that ensure the separation of labor from served spaces. Back entrances, service stairs, dumbwaiters create links that are meant to keep labor invisible, while enabling the comfort of the master.⁴ Like the dumbwaiter, small spaces are meant to remain mute so they don’t presume to interject or share in the glory of formal spaces. Such erasure prevents small spaces from being recognized as spaces of emergence: agentic locales that have the capacity to throw fresh light on power, community, and solidarity.

Size, placement, and nomenclature of buildings are deliberately used to make social distinctions and to marginalize. British residents in India referred to servants’ quarters as godowns—storage spaces—since it seemingly made no difference that one was meant to house people and the other was meant to house things. Indeed, storage spaces were often better built than the spaces for servants and the enslaved. Slave owners in colonial America and the United States used scale, size, and location to place the enslaved “literally out, away, apart, down, at the back, to the side, or confined in storage areas within them” to visibly and corporeally render the subordination of labor explicit.⁵

Visibility can be threatening. To be deprived of agency in public is to become invisible in plain sight. The slave auction block and holding pens were fixtures of ports, markets, plantations, courthouses in cities of the Atlantic world, small and large. Their everyday ruthless visibility, their exceptional roles in devastating lives were normalized and stood in contrast to the mostly unnamed multitudes whose presence was erased even as their bodies were enumerated—recorded and marked—for profit. Most such sites remain unmarked; they lack a history to call their own.

In their temporal conjunction, small spaces become singular: the patch of light to which you take a book to read. The steady script on fragile airmail paper charting arrivals, partings, and recipes become openings for conversations, rituals, and remembrances. They are archival photographs of nameless subjects. They record the presence of peoples and spaces, named

and unnamed, and provide grounds for speculation of what might have been.⁶

Smallness is a clearing in the woods marked by a modest sculpture of small stones and leaves, a shrine renewed every day. In their impermanence, they constitute geographies that defy description. They can be culturally specific to an extent that does not suffer translation. An accidental step on a wet rice-paste design on a red-oxide floor, they are stowed away in a corner of the mind, a footnote to a marigold morning in early spring. It is Proust's recollection of the smell of madeleines dipped in tea: small spaces as ephemeral sensations carry the promise of return.

To whom are these spaces important? The answers all seem utterly mundane and ordinary; worse, personal—not important to anyone else. Their material impermanence makes them easy to ignore within the long arc of historical narratives. Why bother with small spaces in the age of big data and the hyper object, when we are asked to stretch our extrapolative and conceptual capacities to their limits? Why subject small spaces to historical narration?

To claim history is to claim agency. To claim history is to read singularity in the repetitive and anonymous. To write a history of small spaces is to assert a way of thinking otherwise about space and empire. Small spaces can appear threatening, because they are anything but ordinary. Small spaces, in their very ubiquity, hold unparalleled potential. They have the strength to endure; in repetition they morph and regenerate. Small spaces are resilient spaces. Even when no one is paying attention, they transcend the chasm of time and geography to connect peoples and memories.

Why Small Spaces?

In his book *In Small Things Forgotten*, first published in 1977, James Deetz makes a plea for attending to the small artifacts that comprise our daily lives. Recalling a colonial Anglo-American probate inventory he writes:

At the end of the listing the appraiser made a final entry, "In small things forgotten, eight shillings sixpence." In this he acknowledged things that he may have overlooked but that nonetheless had value . . . For in the seemingly little and insignificant things that accumulate to create a lifetime, the essence of our existence is captured.⁷

By mapping the "small things forgotten" across different types of artifacts, Deetz suggests, we might be able to discern the logic that undergirds choices made in the production and consumption of objects, be it houses, ceramics, pipe stems, gravestones, or cuts of meat. Paying attention to the small things of everyday life might be the *only* way to access the significance of cultural

practices that have not been accorded importance in the traditional narrative of history enamored with battles, great men, and monuments.

I extend Deetz's argument to the small spaces of empire, but in so doing I ask a different set of questions about how smallness is understood and configured, about the relation between size and scale in our imagination of empire, of how scale is given value, and who has the capacity to produce that value. In the next chapter I expand on scalar imagination, but here I want to register that smallness, when it comes to space, exceeds both scale and size. It involves the politics of materials and labor. So, rather than taking smallness as a given, defined by dimension or scale, I ask: how do the small things that comprise our everyday lives become dwelling spaces, enabling imagination, creativity, and habitation? How are small things and spaces related to constitute meaning? How are such spaces and the relation between objects and spaces reappropriated to function as sites of resistance? How do they challenge historical narratives? How do they sit in relation to empire?

Small spaces are fragments, products of division, isolation, excision: a fragmentary landscape created by repeated processes of racial, caste, gender, and class sorting. We habitually ignore such spaces *because* they are productive in more ways than one. And yet they remain as traces in the archive *because* they sustain life and thereby become sites of affect and memory. They are spaces of unanticipated potential, harboring the capacity to spark affect, foster connections in unexpected ways. Servants, the enslaved, children, and women flit in and out of these spaces—once in a while they take charge and become the center of commentary. Small spaces in the hands of the marginalized become tools for hacking the dominant code. Indeed, they are the only way to interrupt the rule of dominance. They cast a challenge to imperial histories and their claims to bigness defined by vast territorial acquisitions, the logic of capital accumulation, and the devotion to large scale and big profit. This book is driven by the desire to hold on to that potentiality in smallness, even as it shifts valence.

In Isolation and Connection

Small spaces as interstitial spaces are connectors. And yet they demand that we not just notice connections, but attend to these spaces' potential for fragmentation and disruption. The modes through which small spaces are connected enable us to imagine other ways of viewing and experiencing the landscape. When we begin with small spaces, we notice subjects and effects that remain invisible at the big scale of analysis. Here we notice connectors as interruptions. It is this potential that helps challenge the understanding of history as a narrative of bigness—great wars and armed conflicts, famous men (and sometimes women, just for a change of pace), big profits, and the voice of authority—unrelentingly telling tales of momentous change,

speaking about, over, on behalf of those who are thus made inaudible and invisible.

Small spaces can shock our collective naivete of believing that spaces function as they are intended: that they are what they are named to do, that modernity's gift resides in calling out defined activities for particular spaces at distinct times. In a geography of small spaces, the kitchen in a plantation appears no longer just a place of round-the-clock toil, but a place of sexual assault, of a whipping so brutal that it traumatized a young Frederick Douglass.⁸

Defined by unanticipated expansion and contraction of time, small spaces are experienced in terms of waiting, watching, servicing time. Take Harriet Jacobs's description of the loophole of retreat in the *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) as an example. As a young enslaved woman, for seven years she hid in a garret to escape the sexual predation of a white enslaver. The garret was connected to the storeroom in her grandmother's house:

Some boards were laid across the joists at the top, and between these boards and the roof was a very small garret, never occupied by anything but rats and mice. It had a pent roof, covered with nothing but shingles according to the southern custom for such buildings. The garret was only nine feet long and seven feet wide. The highest part was three feet high, and sloped down abruptly to the loose board floor. There was no admission for either light or air.⁹

Her uncle Philip, a carpenter, created a concealed trap door which communicated with the storeroom so that she could enter the garret: "The air was stifling; the darkness total." Jacobs found a gimlet and drilled a hole one inch wide so she could observe the goings-on in the street outside.¹⁰ That inch-wide aperture was her opening to the world.

When there is no space to call one's own, no enclosure that the law would heed, this was a spatial discovery. Jacobs narrated her escape as a movement from one hiding space to another: in a storeroom, under the floorboard, in a garret, as well as the dangerous peripheral space of the swamp. Her sense of self and self-preservation was premised upon utilizing this garret as the "loophole of retreat." The garret was withdrawal and escape.¹¹ It was also a location that enabled Jacobs to observe without being seen.

We can cite many such examples. Children, women, the outcaste, the marginalized, the enslaved inhabit fragmented worlds. Seen from their circumscribed positions, the world appears not as a panorama, but as fragmented scenes.¹² Correspondingly, there is no easy transition from subjection to subjectivity. Jacobs wrote her narrative when she was much older, having patched together her sense of self as subject by relying on her experience of interstitial spaces between disparate worlds. This understanding of spatial discontinuity, excision, and circumscription resonates with Antonio Gramsci's view that histories of subaltern groups are episodic and

fragmentary.¹³ The challenge is to write the history of that spatial fragment.¹⁴ How do we reconstitute the servants and the enslaved—“unseen people,” to use artist and writer Abanindranath Tagore’s description—to the spaces where they labored?¹⁵ How does one understand the relation between marginalized bodies and interstitial spaces using the tools of architectural history?

Architectural Imagination

For long we have taken recourse to the architectural plan to understand the relation between bodies and space. Robin Evans in his classic “Figures, Doors and Passages” notes: “If anything is described in an architectural plan, it is in the nature of human relationships, since the elements whose trace it records—walls, doors, windows, and stairs—are employed first to divide and then selectively to re-unite inhabited space.”¹⁶ Discussing the mid-nineteenth-century work of Robert Kerr in *The Gentleman’s House* he observes how domestic space became neatly defined between route and destination, served and service spaces. Kerr, he notes, “made diagrams that reduced house plans to . . . trajectory (route) and position (destination), proposing that their proper arrangement was the substratum upon which both architecture and domesticity were to be raised”¹⁷ (Figure 1.1).

Keen to read architectural plans as harboring subterfuges and evasions, Evans nevertheless does not question the ontology of the plan as a mode of seeing and knowing. Implicit in his reading of the plan as architectural method is the idea of a fully formed undivided subject who vicariously moves through the building, sees and inhabits the whole. The abstract plan and by proxy the building is wholly available for cognizance, scrutiny, and experimentation. That space is perceived differentially, that space is

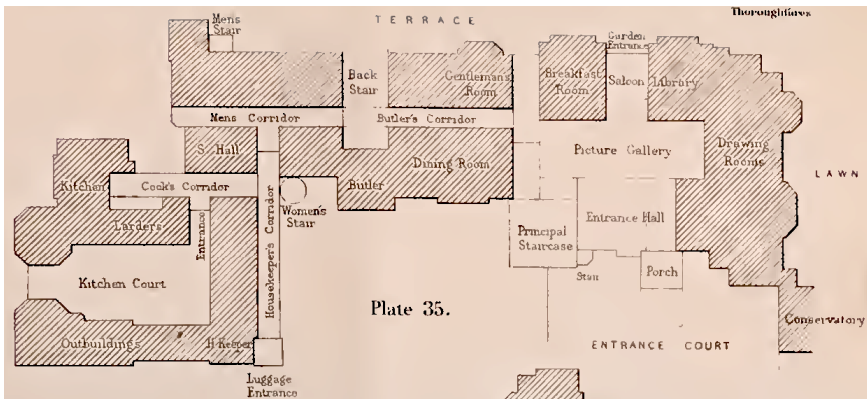


FIGURE 1.1 Robert Kerr, Bearwood, Berkshire, 1865–74, floor plan showing the locations of corridors, staircases, and passages. Source: Robert Kerr, *The Gentleman’s House* (London: John Murray, 1864).

fragmented, that the placid plan of domestic space hides just as much as it reveals does not enter the discussion. If it does, it is in the last instance. Because before we get to the everyday terror of that placid domestic space of the main house, we pay homage to authoritative modes of thinking architecture.

This mode of thinking and writing architecture is a product of the imperial enterprise that defined the modern world and continues to shape our imagination of space. As historians of colonialism and empire, as those who analyze buildings and spatial relations, we have not taken stock of the extent to which our analytic methods, our understanding of disciplinary boundaries and the nature of evidence have been shaped by imperial formations. We haven't learned to read the architecture of invisibility, the process through which subjects, names, and histories are excised from the archive. To break that habit would require more than digging for information about one minority architect here, another beautiful artwork crafted by a "native" artisan (where everyone instinctively knows what native means—the colonized/Indigenous), or the proof of a rare text that details the mode of construction in a remote location. We also seem to instinctively recognize what "remote" is: it is at a distance from the metropolitan center of empire. Remoteness in the colonial milieu was constructed through the very technologies that collapsed distance, the forces of colonial extraction that promoted an insatiable desire for resources—minerals, plants, animals, and objects—that could not be procured from proximate spaces.

Writing three decades ago, Edward Said notes: "There is I believe, a quite serious split in our critical consciousness today, which allows us to spend a great deal of time elaborating Carlyle's or Ruskin's aesthetic theories, for example, without giving attention to the authority that their ideas simultaneously bestowed on the subjection of inferior peoples and colonial territories."¹⁸ That problem identified by Said has not disappeared in architectural studies in the intervening decades, despite the labor of three generations of scholars working on colonial architecture and urbanism. The disciplinary segregation of modern Europe from the rest of the world is the norm: colonial histories are left to those who study regions beyond Europe, as if the colonies and imperial thinking never entered the ivory gateways of Britain, France, Germany.¹⁹ Those who study the architecture of American colonies or the antebellum United States scarcely trouble themselves with the abundant literature on colonialism in the rest of the world, or with postcolonial theory shaped through the analysis of European imperialism in the non-Western world, lest stubborn similarities across imperial territories make the United States look less exceptional. Those who take on "empire" as an analytic unit nonchalantly rely on English- and French-language archives to think through empire, as if the vast gamut of languages in the colonies have scant purchase for thoughts about architecture or history.

Said's reference to the split in critical consciousness is meant to explain the need to think of empire in terms of cultural formations that were

connected but also had their own life “beyond the laws and political decisions.” The importance of novels, he argues, resided in their “worldliness” because of their complex affiliations with their “real setting.” Connections would emerge from the references to “explicit places in the various texts, with the enveloping setting—empire—there to make connections with, to develop, elaborate, expand, or criticize.”²⁰ He reads in a selection of novels a geography of spatial relations that constituted empire.

In this work, by *empire* I am referring to such a set of spatial relations—not as the territorial fact that European powers claimed to possess, but in terms of the processes that contributed to the territorial transformations of the world as modern European states sought to control overseas resources for trade, profit, and scientific exploration. This distinction between empire as a self-evident geographical space whose lines can be drawn on a map, and empire as a set of spatial relations produced through construction *and* conjuration, rests on the recognition of the social excess that haunted cherished boundaries between “blacks” and “whites,” elites and subalterns, and threatened to undermine lines of control.²¹ It is in the terrain of spatial relations created by the trade in commodities, by the forced and unforced migration of vast numbers of people as servants, convicts, the enslaved, merchants, soldiers, state employees, artists, scientists, writers, and tourists, that I locate the small spaces and what these meant or might have meant in terms of creating the infrastructure that was empire.

I look across geographies and cultures to understand the emergence and perpetuation of similar spatial modalities in over two centuries of European colonial dominance between the mid-eighteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. Thus, while the bulk of my examples are drawn from British India, and specifically from the Bengal Presidency that covered much of the eastern and northern part of the subcontinent, I also signal the parallels and connections with colonial East Asia, Africa, and the transatlantic world, and the experiences of consumption, representation, and collection in the larger colonial world. The effects of empire pop up in unexpected spaces. Despite their historical particularities, in the striking similarity of the representations of spaces, building types, and the location of people within these spaces across the career of the British empire, we can sense the shaping of norms of representation, of the exchange of knowledge, techniques, materials, and expertise that would come to define the modern imperial world and become foundational to modern architectural history. There are also, however, similarities in the modes of resistance to this shaping, and it is in this realm that we might discern myriad approaches to addressing the rule of dominance through small things and small spaces.

The cast of characters in this story is large and varied: from servants and the enslaved, English memsahibs and Bengali homemakers, both European and Indian writers, as well as military and civil servants. They appear sometimes as the protagonist and sometimes as the “chorus”—unnamed,

unfelicited, but as the necessary arrangement that makes the solo performances audible and perceptible.

Axes of Interpretation

The book takes its entrée into small spaces through the things—foodstuff, household goods, furniture, potted plants, and boxes of medicine—with and around which sociospatial relations were constituted, and that became sites for telling stories. In choosing the things and sites I have been partial to those that have received little or no prior historical treatment. And this is not simply because these tell stories that remain untold, but because they dishevel the neatness of imperial understanding of sources, events, and sites.

Three axes of interpretation organize the chapters in this work: trade and labor, land imagination, and objects and collections. As subjects of inquiry, trade, labor, landscape, collections, and collecting have for long been considered central to empire studies. The movement of commodities and labor across regions constituted trade networks and reshaped geographies of production and consumption. Various modes of imagining the land were created through travel and dissemination of aesthetic ideas. Portable objects and collections generated new modes of transmitting knowledge between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I hope we can apprehend in the small spaces a different reading of such enterprise, constituting a geography that not only connected but disconnected.²²

If space is produced through social relations, I attempt to link the physical (traditionally presumed to be fixed) space of a room, a courtyard, or a field that a person can walk into and inhabit, with the objects around which social relations are construed. Such connections foster possibilities of dwelling. In the stories I have selected, the presumed fixity of a room is disturbed by the movement of bodies and goods, by the passage of time. The boxes and bookshelves are not only movable and thereby help manipulate the space in which these objects are kept, but they constitute spaces within. These become expansive sites of imagination and sociality in a manner that often defy their modest dimensions. The bookshelf becomes more than a container for storing books; it becomes a prop in a social encounter; a small trunk of possessions unpacked, its contents sunned and repacked, becomes susceptible to a mode of caring that instantiates a different kind of spatial relation in its capacity to connect distant imaginaries.

The spaces that constitute this story are, however, meant to be neither exhaustive nor part of an identifiable whole. Their episodic and fragmentary presence is just as important and telling as their connectivity. The reader should be advised that I am not writing an architectural history of the verandah, kitchen, godown, and so on as architectural types. I am invoking their particular presence in the historical archive to rethink what constitutes empire.

In addition to this introductory chapter and the next one on scalar relations, I have devoted a brief chapter at the beginning of Parts Two, Three, and Four to introduce the methodological issues pertinent to the particular set of objects and spaces I am tackling under these headings. The thread that connects them is a refrain of ordinary spaces, even in exceptional buildings. Constellated as a geography of small spaces, the archive I have assembled offers glimpses of *another place* from which a host of actors made room to imagine and reconstruct their worlds. Another place is not a designated or even shared space but emerges out of a sharing, as differentiated openings into the everyday lives of those who lived through the fabrication of empire. In the Epilogue I return to the clusters of meaning that cling to the art and politics of smallness.

2

Empire of Small Spaces

My interest in small spaces was sparked by minor discoveries in the colonial archive: of names such as “bottlekhana” with which I was unfamiliar, from passing comments in the colonial record of the British empire to memoirs in English and Bengali that recalled the time of empire as a geography of small objects, sites, events. To fathom that geography, I had to work against some fundamental assumptions about empire and architectural history.

We are told that empires are big affairs. Building empire is about conquering and accumulating territories, a collective enterprise of enormous proportions. The map of the British empire grew so rapidly and steadily over the span of a century that it defied imagination. In a late-eighteenth-century map of the world the not-yet British empire could be discerned over small strips of land that hugged coastlines of enormous peninsulas in India, Australia, and Africa; by the eve of World War I the empire had appropriated a quarter of the world’s landmass. It is thus perhaps not surprising that the expansive logic of empire and its self-fulfilling prophecies of scalar advantage have been endlessly cited as evidence of the fact of empire, leaving scant room for attending to the small spaces that made this big imagination of empire possible.

This story of imperial expansion is told through wars, annexations, and much-prized commercial goods: cotton, indigo, saltpeter, opium, spices, tea. It is a narrative of complex trade networks, vast territorial occupations, large-scale revenue management, and a complicated machinery of knowledge production—surveys, census, official minutes, and reports. These stories are cross-hatched with the massive numbers of forced and voluntary migrations, and the creation of new forms of free and unfree labor. The cacophonous archive assembled to weave these stories is remarkable not always for what it foregrounds, but for the gaps and silences that pockmark its surface, for the spaces that glimmer in the background, seemingly powerless to stand up to the dominant discourse of what makes trade and politics happen.

Long-distance Trade

Take the case of long-distance trade. Trade histories of the British empire have primarily focused on the large scale and on bulk commodities. No

doubt this has much to do with the need to grapple with the magnitude of change in the balance of trade between Asia and Europe with the consolidation of the British empire, and with the intertwined histories of colonialism and capitalism that demanded ever bigger scales of production, transportation over vast distances, and generated the territorial sublime of empire. Correspondingly, there is an important literature that examines the movement of commodities along various routes between Europe, Africa, and the Americas, and the vast magnitude of trade in human cargo that was key to the “successful” production and processing of these commodities.

In such histories, smallness is connected to lack of value through the figures of fragmentation and isolation.¹ In his groundbreaking work on the rise of the bazaar in the “age of European domination,” Rajat Ray explains that what had been dismissed as small-scale “debased, fragmented and marginal” economies of Asian peddlers were in fact complex processes of banking and shipping with their own spatio-economic hierarchies that defined robust trade networks throughout Asia, Africa, and the Arab peninsula.² Ray applies a new optics to the landscape of colonial trade that helps us see how different levels of trade—the market in the abstract sense as well as the urban marketplace of wholesale trade and retail trade—comprised an integrated network through which trade and credit moved “with surprising facility.”³ He makes a case for the practices at the small scale adding up to aggregates with an impact on larger economic and territorial scales:

To conceive the “modern world system” in terms of “the European world-economy” alone is to miss a dimension in its formation without which its overall shape cannot be grasped. The rise of the bazaar moulded in a vital manner the process by which the capitalist world economy expanded outwards from Europe into Asia and Africa.⁴

Ray demonstrates the interlacing of European networks and the “bazaar economy” in the shaping of modern trade and banking.

Tirthankar Roy cites scale—and specifically the large scale of resources that joint-stock companies could command—as the key to explain the differences in the reach of trade networks and business practices among Indian merchant bankers and the East India Company’s (EIC) merchants.⁵ It is evident from his discussion of the EIC’s practices that there were defined zones of exclusivity within this far-flung global trade that shaped the economic enterprise and politics of empire. If large scale, in terms of the magnitude of capital and the infrastructure that it creates, produces value, one could argue that small-scale entities—often lodged within global networks—have their own complexity and generate value differently than do large-scale entities and transactions. Smallness in terms of scale may signal marginalization, but by that same token may suggest power and exclusion.

The problem with trade histories of empires at first seems twofold: empirically, it has to do with the kinds of commodities that have received the most scholarly attention, and methodologically it is about how these have been studied. The literature on British trade with India, for example, has primarily focused on those commodities that in terms of volume and profit were among the most important exports from India. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries these were cotton, saltpeter, indigo, tea, opium, piece goods, and grain. For the same period, we have research on the import to India of woolens, worsted textiles (“stuffs”), cotton manufactures, metals (copper, tin, iron, lead), firearms and munitions, and snapshots of the range of other commodities imported by private traders that constituted the balance of import cargo.⁶ B. R. Tomlinson and Huw Bowen have brought attention to the increase in the import of “general merchandise” with growing territorial control from the mid-eighteenth century onwards.⁷ In a 2010 essay Bowen makes the important point that a considerable range of such commodities entered the Indian market through private trade before the EIC lost its commercial monopoly (1813), and that these commodities had a considerable impact on Indian patterns of consumption.⁸ This latter set of commodities constitutes the realm of what James Deetz would call “small things.”

Yet we have only a sketchy idea of the details or the long arc of the impact of these small things. We know little of the spaces through which these goods moved to link sellers and consumers, and what happened at the endpoint of consumption—who bought them, how were these stored, consumed, and managed? We have fine analysis of the volume and price of commodities, the rules and regulations that controlled colonial trade, and the crucial role played by the big agency houses and the merchant bankers—Europeans and Indians—in constructing the paths of trade.⁹ Scant attention, however, has been paid to the material culture and spatial correlates of this trade. The exceptions to this trend are few.¹⁰ For the import trade to India, the exception is David Arnold’s analysis of the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century everyday technologies of empire: sewing machines, bicycles, typewriters.¹¹

Long before the age of “everyday technologies” that is the focus of Arnold’s work, “Europe Goods” had entered the markets of Indian port cities and made significant incursions inland, following the tracks of the colonial army and the civil service.¹² The volume of trade in Europe Goods, imported provisions, and alcohol in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was large enough to show up on import summaries presented by the EIC.¹³ Between 1792 and 1811, the percentage of trade in provisions, wine, beer, spirits, glassware, earthenware, and platedware remained modest in relation to the total value of imports, but increased over the course of the nineteenth century. In 1811 the total value of these imports exceeded by a small margin the total value of woolens (Table 1).

TABLE 1 Decadal increase in the import value (in £) of commodities imported by the East India Company from England to India between 1792 and 1811, showing the value of each commodity and percentage of total import value. Source: British Library IOR W5804 (v).

Commodity	1792	1811
Provisions	13,438 1.74%	42,028 2%
Wine, Beer, Spirits	38,125 4.93%	122,340 5.84%
Glass and Earthenware	20,584 2.66%	118,172 5.64%
Plates and Platedware	5,166 0.68%	21,968 1.05%
Woolens	110,524 14.29%	277,196 13.23%

The value of trade in each commodity fluctuated from year to year. In some years such as 1818, the figures for glassware and earthenware imports exceeded that of woolens, and the total import of alcohol and provisions came close to the value of woolen imports.¹⁴ This increase in the value of imports has been typically dismissed because the high price of import goods was beyond the means of most Indians and the demands of these goods “was limited within the circle of Europeans.”¹⁵ The size of the market for this class of goods was indeed small, and remained so into the twentieth century. However, it was possible to “secure a wide margin of profit” in such trade.¹⁶

While each individual commodity within the group was small, as a cluster of related commodities it commanded a significant profile. Everyday commodities such as glassware, tableware, foodstuff, and alcohol defined Anglo-Indian foodways, and even when constituting a modest proportion of the import trade had a remarkable cultural impact. The passage and consumption of Europe Goods gave rise to a variety of spaces, altered spatial nomenclature, and engendered new forms of agency. Enter the bottlekhana and cook room.

An economic approach to empire fails to take into account the material culture impact of such transactions and spaces. The spatial changes were related not only to the process through which commodities were moved from one location to another, or how ideas about consumption circulated through print and visual media, but the process through which these

commodities and media triggered and naturalized scalar identities. Generations of men and women were taught through books on housekeeping, gardening, and home medicine, and imagined from advertisements and news media how to prepare and conduct themselves to extract value as a way of creating and harnessing scalar advantages, including at the small scale. The small spaces of empire as sites for producing and appropriating value had an important role to play in this process.

The Aura of Bigness

My prefatory comments about the movement of trade goods and commodities—from bottled provisions to books—might suggest that I am adopting one of the models of global history that have received some traction in the last two decades. Two significant moves within the discipline of history have addressed the problem of scale and historical narrative. To move past the limitations of the nation-state as a unit of analysis, scholars have turned to “connected histories” as a way of linking economic, cultural, and political processes. Working on histories of the early modern world, Sanjay Subrahmanyam describes it as a project of seeking out the “fragile threads that connected the globe.”¹⁷ This has had a significant impact on how empire studies is conducted. More recently, the scalar anxiety of manifold planetary crises, the threat posited by the Anthropocene, and the ecological limits to capitalism have prompted advocates of working-class and subaltern histories, such as Dipesh Chakrabarty, to turn their energy to confront the bigness of historical, geographical, and geological events with a new urgency.¹⁸ The politics of environmental violence that distances the scale of individual perception from “non-visible” scales of the ocean, atmosphere, and distant future relies on scalar disjunction.¹⁹ It is thus critical that we learn to read the entanglements of imperialism with the aura of bigness and see the manner in which the “color line,” to use W. E. B. Du Bois’s phrase, marks this entanglement.

An enduring legacy of nineteenth-century imperialism is the aesthetics of scale that correlated bigness, power, modernity, and domination with infrastructure. Consider George Parkin’s 1892 “Commercial and Strategic Chart of the British Empire” (Plate 2). Parkin was an ardent imperialist, author of *Imperial Federation: The Problem of National Unity* (1892), and the second president of the Geographical Association.²⁰ Parkin’s map shows the British empire as a color-coded consolidated entity, distinguishing it from non-empire. Empire’s unity is emphasized by delineating trade routes and telegraph lines that span oceans and continents. It celebrates expansion, connectivity, commerce, movement, and construes empire as homogenous. The spatial connections seem to emerge inevitably and surely from the technological and trade infrastructure. The geographical scale of imperial ambition, caricatured in an 1892 depiction of Cecil Rhodes on the map of

Africa after he announced plans for a railroad and telegraph line from Cairo to Cape Town, carries home the point about the grandeur of imperial geopolitics (Figure 2.1). It is not a happenstance that images and plans for infrastructure construction—roads, railways, canals, bridges, hydroelectric projects—were swapped across empires and were eagerly adopted by modern nation-states freshly independent from colonial rule, from Ghana to India, as the very essence of self-determination and modernity—as indicators of moving up in the economic scale.²¹

Such visions glorifying the relation between empire, bigness, and infrastructure as a network may just as well be construed as the stuff of “connected histories.” Recognizing the problem of valorizing the history of those with global connections, Subrahmanyam makes the point that the object of connected histories is not to disavow the importance of local, particular events: “not to deny voice to those who were somehow ‘fixed’ by physical, social and cultural coordinates, who inhabited localities.” “But if we ever get to ‘them’ by means other than archeology,” he remarks, “the chances are that is because they are already plugged into some network, some process of circulation.”²² His salutary reminder, however, neglects to foreground the problem of scale and the strategies of reading the archive.



FIGURE 2.1 Edward Linley Sambourne, *The Rhodes Colossus*, Caricature of Cecil John Rhodes, after he announced plans for a telegraph line and railroad from Cape Town to Cairo. *Punch*, December 10, 1892.

Implicit in this statement is a scalar argument that views local, particular events as small in value and “fixed.” These particular events gain value—by becoming visible—in being plugged into a larger network of regional and global proportions. A scalar hierarchy kicks into a network model of historical process to assign discrepant values to local and global entities. Scale is conflated with size to support notions of smallness and bigness.

Discussing the aura of “bigness” in global imperial histories, Jonathan Saha has astutely remarked that “connected histories” could just as easily become elite histories with little explanatory power: “a big history of empires written across a huge chronological sweep does not necessarily explain more than micro-studies embedded in particular cultures.” It depends on how we construct the connections and how we perceive the “human scale” in it. He puts it plainly: “[I]t is difficult to imagine the important work of explaining and breaking down imperial ideologies of race and gender being achieved through this big history.”²³ Within the “connected histories” approach lies the danger of reinforcing colonial ideologies that claim the human subject as a bounded scalar unit, thereby ignoring affective ties and intra-species relations.

Historians who have attempted to bring global histories in conversation with local histories have struggled with the scalar interchanges between the local and global, even as they have done meaningful work by introducing the “small voices” of history into the global sublime of statistics. For Antoinette Burton, the lens of world/global history offers sight lines to various geographical locations that have remained beyond the bailiwick of Western histories.²⁴ In a 2007 article, arguing along the lines of Charles Picot’s work on “village modernity” in West Africa, she calls for global histories to act as “reorientation devices” to register the “off-centre, the ex-centric, the polycentric, the anti-centric and the ‘remotely global’.”²⁵ Others have leaned on the potential of microhistory to reduce the “scale of observation” and bring to light those lives and events that global history does not capture.²⁶ Making an argument for global microhistories, Tonio Andrade in a 2010 article notes that microhistory infuses human drama into global histories of empire and their propensity to narrate flows and processes in the abstract.²⁷ Global microhistory, he argues, is a form of good storytelling, the value of which is considerable. In contrast, in a 2006 article on associationism and anticolonialism in the Caribbean, Lara Putnam reminds us that microhistories are intended not to put a human face to a process but to challenge the understanding of the process itself. In proposing a method for bringing microhistories in conversation with Atlantic histories, Putnam notes the “purposive manipulation” of scale shared by both microhistory and Atlantic history, and the important distinction between scale and scope. The latter refers to a distinction between the scale of analysis and the scope of interpretation that may exceed the bounds of space and time of the microhistorical instantiation. Here she calls out microhistory’s remit in illuminating connections between popular and scholarly knowledge,

between victims and accusers, agrarian cults and witchcraft, founded on “close reading of multiple texts.” While these forays into microhistories remind us of the migrant, dispossessed, and ordinary subjects who carry the potential for rethinking imperialism,²⁸ they also point to different modes of engaging space and time.

Scalar Alterity

Both Andrade and Putnam preface their articles with poems. Andrade quotes William Blake: “To see a world in a grain of sand / And a heaven in a wild flower, / Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand / And Eternity in an hour.” Putnam’s epigram is Edward Kamau Brathwaite’s lines: “the unity is submarine / breathing air, our problem is how to study the fragments/ whole.”²⁹ Blake’s verse signals a flash of recognition of divine power that illuminates the potential to imagine and comprehend infinity at a corporeal and human temporal scale. The moment of epiphany collapses scales to reveal the universe in a microcosm. In that momentary implosion a whole universe of relations become perceptible. Scalar alterity figures as divine dispensation. Brathwaite’s verse moves in an entirely different trajectory to describe scalar alterity as a geographic force. It alludes to connections that once existed but had since been erased or are buried. And yet these connections remain as sensing possibilities, as potential channels for the flow of knowledge, practices, movements, stories, and affects. Putnam notes that both C. L. R. James, the author of *Black Jacobins*, and Eric Williams, the author of *Capitalism and Slavery*, intuited this submarine unity as their lives spanned the British West Indian migratory world across the Black Atlantic.

Brathwaite’s submarine unity is prefaced with and grounded in the geologies of continental and oceanic scales. It is the tectonic movement of earth and water—“geological plate being crushed by the pacific’s curve”—that generates the landform layers; these scales of transformation predate Atlantic slavery and are thus aboriginal. Analogically, it is from the violent destruction of cultures that new scales of recognition emerge, fragments are reshaped into communities.³⁰ Brathwaite’s call for studying the fragments/whole does not lead to a larger knowable entity, but appears as an insistence to recognize the nature of the fragment, its contours and multi-directionality—“from or *towards* ancestral origins.”³¹ It calls attention to the resonances in the stories, spaces, and lives that were scattered and now require an empathetical commitment to hear, gather, restructure, and rearrange. Speaking of the plantation as a unit of Caribbean Studies, he remarks, “The plantation model . . . is in itself a product of the plantation and runs the hazard of becoming as much tool as tomb of the systems it seeks to understand and transform.”³² He suggests the insertion of other scales of analysis—inter-structures—to access the “inner plantation.” The

“unit is submarine.”³³ What becomes the inter-structures/infra-structures of empire, if we do not begin with the model of empire as a constituted entity?

Every architectural student, at the outset of their studies, is taught to apply scale to a building or spatial element. Rather, they are taught how to scale down and represent a building with dimensions that would actually fit the space of representation. This follows the cartographic convention of scale which is a relation between two entities: a relational ratio. The entity being mapped is full-scale, while the map as fractional representation conveys dimensions through a proportional logic. Of course, this assumes that the entity precedes the map. When the map or drawing precedes the entity, when a plan is not merely a geometrical projection but also a projection into the future, it is assumed that the same scalar process can be engineered in reverse. Such scaling methods are flagrantly abused. For one, entire analytic methods of scale models, graphs, mapmaking have been devised to make a large entity or problem appear manageable, seeable, and open to analysis and comprehension, even if such mapping/modeling erases things that matter—materials, processes, inhabitants, and even if that comprehension is utterly incorrect, because in scaling down/up we confront multiple problems. One is the discrepant relation between process and size. When Charles Correa criticizes Le Corbusier’s “City of 3 Million” by noting that a simple arithmetic of population vis-à-vis floor area does not solve a design problem of mass housing, he is not merely critiquing the logic of aggregates (of filing large numbers of people and objects in space based on principles of efficiency) but suggesting that a larger aggregate of space functions differently than a smaller cluster of space.³⁴ The social infrastructure changes with scale. This should be commonsensical in design thinking, but it is not. Alternatively, consider how geometry and social process cannot be reconciled. When a political boundary is mapped on paper and then actualized on the ground, it encounters materialities and processes that are simply not recognizable at the scale of representation or are intentionally erased to promote political agendas. As Joya Chatterjee notes in her discussion of the partition line that divided Bengal in 1947, the boundary mark on paper was not a clean line that could simply be geometrically transferred on the ground—such lines could not relate to either geographical features or everyday transactions of agrarian communities in a region where rivers make and remake the land every few years.³⁵

Representational scaling down to smaller manageable bits, normalized in our disciplinary thinking, is based on the idea of the small as easily observable and thus comprehensible. The relation between size and spatial affordance is conferred social value. Difference, however, appears not merely between representation and reality, and across scales, but difference, as Zachary Horton has recently argued, inheres in scalar imagination.³⁶

Horton usefully summarizes the various disciplinary approaches to scale.³⁷ While mathematics (when not based on empiricism) assumes scale-

invariance—that is, it adopts a “homologous scaling operation” that allows an entity to scale up and down infinitely by keeping its internal relationships invariant—in physics scale is taken as absolute size domain, with each scale being a “conventionally derived slice of reality.”³⁸ Horton uses the term “resolving cut” to describe the action through which such a slice is isolated.³⁹ A resolving cut isolates and stabilizes a particular scale by allowing individual entities to be resolved at that scale. Size here is absolute, but scale is not. It is thus premised upon a “field of view” that suggests “what sort of entities are resolvable” within a particular field of view. Thus, the same object at various scales may appear different with the use of various techniques of observation (mediations) as comprising different entities—rather than merely being a miniature or a larger version of that same object. A scale thus may be thought of as a “reference frame wherein certain differences can be detected, or resolved, while others fall either above or below the perspectival threshold of differentiation. All differences can be resolved at some scale, but only certain differences can be resolved at any given scale.”⁴⁰ In biology and engineering, scale is understood in functional terms to describe “the constitutive relationships between size, parts, and whole.”⁴¹ In this view, “organisms do not linearly scale: any change in size requires a redistribution of organs and their functions.”⁴² Entities at different scales will be organized and function differently. Alterity is built into scalar thinking.

In his discussion of scale in Andean art, Andrew Hamilton brings something else to the discussion of scale and size. Scale, Hamilton beautifully demonstrates, is “a perceptual quality of art” which “plays a primary role in the ways viewers engage with and subsequently interpret objects.” The comprehension of scale, he points out, is not universal; it is culturally specific.⁴³ His analysis also suggests that scale is not only related to size in culture- (and discipline-)specific ways, but that scale may be correlated to materiality in complex ways. And this is not about a shift in scale revealing a new elemental structure. A small-scale version of a fan as part of burial practice was not only constructed out of different materials than the larger (usable)-scale artifact, but through the use of materials seemed to have signaled more importance than the larger fan. Scalar alterity in Andean artifacts may appear in a symbolic manner rather than purely as a measure; it might inhere in the Inca notion of objecthood in which *camay* or “generative force” of matter—“neither visible nor tangible”—was assumed to materially infuse substances.⁴⁴

In its territorial imagination, spatial disciplines like architecture and geography assume the relevance of size domains and also in many cases the compositional integrity of entities at each scale that we see in biological sciences and engineering. When we think of scale and empire, we typically think of territorial scale and magnitude of capital and commodities. The three dominant spatial models of empire are nested hierarchies from local to global (e.g., home, city, region, nation, empire), divisions of the

world in presumably horizontal zones but which are implicitly hierarchical (core, semi-periphery, periphery), and networks across horizontal and vertical terrains of land, water, and air (infrastructures that enable exchange of commodity, labor, expertise, knowledge, data, etc.). These are not simply three different ways of imagining the structure of empire, but different forms of mediations. They register and occlude processes in distinct ways.

The animated discourse among geographers about the politics of scale in the last three decades stems from an effort to confront these inclusions and occlusions. Scale here ceases to be “geographical heuristics” and comes to correspond with “real material processes, events and spatial formations.”⁴⁵ As Neil Smith argues, space is produced through scalar construction. From this point of view, scales are social constructions that may be seen as hierarchically nested entities constituted by economic and political forces and which may be circumvented by scale-jumping. Opposed to the many problems of this hierarchical conceptualization of scale, Sallie Marston, John Paul Jones, and Kevin Woodward have proposed a “flat ontology” of scale that can attend to the connections among sites/milieux that are continually being transformed. Adam Moore, Stephen Legg, and others have troubled these models to question the degree to which these scalar designations are discrete or fluid, and have brought into focus multiscale assemblages and movements across scales that attend to “how scale operates as a category of practice” even if one accepts the epistemological foundations of scalar domains.⁴⁶

The most useful aspect of these debates in relation to the concerns of this book is how scalar assertions were created to retain colonial sovereignty.⁴⁷ There are, however, lingering problems with how scalar imaginations privilege certain narratives of empire: that macrostructures are more connected than microstructures, or that inserting microhistories into macrostructures will provide a heterogeneous, dispersed model of social relations that constitute empire. There is little concern with how scale relates to senses other than the visual, particularly smell and touch, which do not obey the optical logics of scale.

In some ways, by focusing on the small things and small spaces I aim for the scale in which the microdynamics of sensorial space and power may become perceptible. The alterity that inheres in the small-scale leads through extension, excess and slippage into a multisensory world where other narrative turns become possible. This project of small spaces addresses both spatial and temporal parameters and begins with artifacts and spaces that are dimensionally small and may or may not add up to large aggregates. It registers evanescent moments that may not concretize as events. Smallness here does not imply miniaturization, but responds to the fullness of the materiality of the artifact or space—in their connectedness and disconnectedness. Small artifacts and spaces, contrary to popular misconception, are not easy to comprehend or analyze.

Writing Small Spaces

Noticing small spaces in the archive and in our everyday lives is difficult. As has been said about infrastructure, we only notice infrastructure when something goes wrong: for example, we become cognizant of water infrastructure only when the faucet runs dry. Only in exceptional moments do small spaces surface in the dominant optical field, appearing as so many problems to be solved, subjects to discipline, punish, and reform. They are expected to remain contained, confined, and working. *It is in working that they become invisible*. In contrast, those who have to fetch water every day from a river or well, who do the working, are hardly unaware of the infrastructure's affordances—the class, race, caste, religious lines that striate the landscape of everyday need. The latter appear in the archive when summoned for their recalcitrance and resistance.

Writing about long-neglected small spaces presents methodological difficulties. How do we recover traces that have been consigned to oblivion? How do we make sense of such traces when they are recovered or that shine through the chaos of the archive? We have a difficult time convincing others that small spaces and minor actors matter. Few believe they are important. Even when we concede their importance, we resist the notion that small spaces are “pivotal.” Few consider them paradigm-shifting.⁴⁸

The approach to small spaces I advocate requires us, in a fundamental sense, to unlearn habits of thinking about architecture and history—what matters and what counts as evidence.⁴⁹ In my previous book, *Unlearning the City: Infrastructure in a New Optical Field*, I made an argument that to unlearn the city we cannot begin with the dominant discourse as a framing or jumping-off point in a debate about urban infrastructure. We need to begin somewhere else, turning our attention to materialities that dis/connect and constitute communities. There my recourse to urban popular culture was a means to unlearn the term “infrastructure” and put it to a different descriptive task. In so doing, I made a case for looking at horizontal connections that link subaltern and elite practices, rather than assume a so-called bottom-up approach.

The problem with a bottom-up approach is that it risks carrying over, depending upon, and replicating disciplinary prejudices while supposedly reversing the top-down approach. As Upton notes, the tradition of vernacular architectural history was to create a canon of folk buildings, replicating the process of analysis and evaluation used to canonize architect-designed great works of architecture.⁵⁰ Those who moved out of canonical frames did little to read the politics of the vernacular. In a more recent article Upton criticizes the implicit or explicit boosterism of much American vernacular studies: “Our tale is relentlessly cheerful. Our farmers and carpenters and shopkeepers couldn't possibly be among those farmers and carpenters and shopkeepers and housewives who committed crimes large and small, participated in anti-Catholic or anti-Chinese riots, or peered out from Ku

Klux Klan hoods.”⁵¹ Turning to “vernacular architecture” does nothing by itself to change the racist, masculinist prerogative of architectural history.

While it is possible to locate and “uncover” hidden voices and narratives through ethnographic work to redress the absence of those voices that have been erased from the archive, these voices come no less unmediated than those from the dominant historical archive. Both require a practice of reading and behave us to honor silences as we archive and analyze.⁵²

The documents I assemble here from the archive of trade reports, advertisements, probate inventories, records of household expenses and lists of servants, memoirs, housekeeping guides and recipe books, pictorial evidence, photographs and architectural drawings are wide-ranging, but they are also decidedly one-sided, predominantly a product of the British and Indian educated class’s effort at documentation, recollection, and reform. My reading of this assembly purports to unarchive—by paying attention to the marginal spaces, that which is left over, refused, unacknowledged, and looking for the openings where the archival line of thought is strained by its banality and becomes too fragile to maintain a countenance of control, where it erupts in anger, frustration, and fear. Unarchiving is thus a form of disassembling: noticing, while unwinding, what might have been erased and left out in the process of archive-making, both intentionally or because some spaces and events thwart representation.

As in the probate inventory that Deetz cites in which the small artifacts were too insignificant to be listed separately, small spaces are ubiquitous in this archive. Yet they resist description. The long list of commodities offered for sale in newspaper advertisements and notices in cities that connected Europe’s trade with Asia appear too banal for speculation. The minutiae about dusters and dishwashing that populate housekeeping guides obscure the regimes of labor that were pressed into the service of keeping white homes clean and white bodies comfortable. The descriptions of pickling fruits on terraces appear too minor to be worthy of architectural histories of empire. Servants figure prominently in these records, but their utterances are noticeable in their sparseness. When their voices draw attention, it is because they are ventriloquized by the masters and mistresses as amusing episodes of the insufficient knowledge of the native population, or because they are deemed threatening. Such utterances mark the lines of difference, of an effort to sort relations of class, gender, and race. For the most part, these actors are unnamed. Their *presence*, however, is on record. As they are made into objects of gaze and speculation, they stand as accusations of empire. When I have found the names—the “boy” Turab Ali, already a grandfather, or Bhowany Bose, wine godown sircar, or Syfollah, bottlekhana sircar—I have heeded their names as spatial presence.

In well-regarded memoirs penned by Indians, small spaces are seen as indulgent, ideological excesses of the self, tinged with the illicit. The authors all offer apologies for expending the reader’s attention on such indulgence. But they persist with their stories, and along the way speak of spaces in