

Introduction

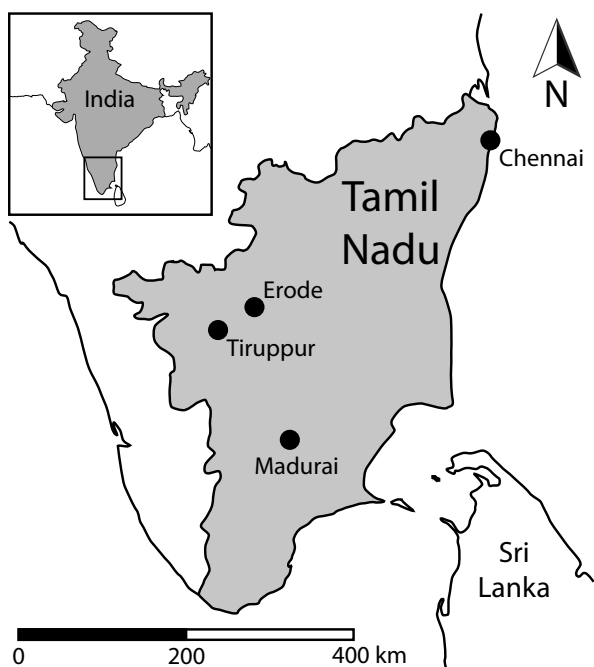


Figure 1. Tamil Nadu, India

Doing *Style*

“Āmbiḷḷaikki mīśai tān alaku.”

‘For a man, a mustache is beauty.’

—TAMIL SAYING, SAID TO MY BARE FACE

I’d never seen a mustache like Anthony’s on a college student. Nor have I since. Anthony was a middle-class young man studying in an elite arts and science college in Chennai, the cosmopolitan capital of the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu where I was conducting research (figure 1). The mustache ran across Anthony’s upper lip, dipped down at the corners of his mouth, halted at his chin, and then moved outward along his jaw line, stopping midway and curling upward. When I asked Anthony about his mustache, he smirked and simply said “*style*,” which was to say that it was, like other objects of youth status (such as brand apparel and English speech), different, attention-grabbing, transgressive, cool. Not everyone felt that way. For some, such a mustache was too much, too ostentatious. It was hostile, arrogant and uppity. It *overdid style* (*style over-ā paṇṇātu*).

A curling mustache like Anthony’s is typically associated with the Madurai region from which he hailed—a sign of traditional, if rugged, adult masculinity.¹ Such an abundant mustache is iconic of power, aggression, dominance and thus of particular authority figures—police officers, soldiers, politicians—and certain dominant martial castes. More generally, for young men like Anthony, healthy mustaches are taken as stereotypical of ‘big men’ (*periya āḷuṅka*): high-status adults who inhabit and uphold the *maṛiyātai* (‘respect’) of

“society” and “culture” (*kalāccāram*) and thus command respect and ‘prestige’ (*kauravam*) themselves.²

Anthony’s mustache was anomalous because within the gendered age hierarchy that defined his liminal place as a young man (*iḷaiñnar*), he was excluded from commanding such adult respectability and authority. Not that most youth like Anthony wanted such a status. As Prabhu, a slight, middle-class college student with only a soft dusting of facial hair, said to me, ‘At this age, one shouldn’t look like a *periya āl* (‘big man,’ ‘adult’). We are youth. What does a college kid need a mustache for? You can’t expect us to act like serious people!’ As he explained, an adult-looking mustache on a young man is old-fashioned, age- and status-inappropriate, and in the case of a mustache like Anthony’s, too rural and aggressive.³ It would be embarrassing. At the same time, as if to excuse his own (lack of) facial hair, Prabhu noted that not being able to grow any facial hair was also embarrassing. You’d look like a *cinna paiyan*, a ‘little boy’ or ‘child’ whose masculinity was deficient. One needed some facial hair.

Young men’s faces, then, betrayed exclusion and ambivalence, liminality. But they produced it as well. Many young men preferred “different” grooming styles that navigated the child’s smooth skin and the adult’s beautiful mustache: a “goatee” (just the chin), a “French beard” (goatee plus mustache), a pencil-thin, sculpted beard (inspired by American hip-hop fashion), a “trim” (five o’clock shadow) or a light beard (both associated with the *rowdy*, or ‘thug’), or a clean shave (associated with foreigners, urban elites, and north Indians; only worn by students who could grow sufficient facial hair to shave; cf. Srinivas 1976:152).⁴ Such grooming styles reinscribed normative adult masculinity and age hierarchy (by differentiating “mature” hirsute youth from hairless ‘little boys’), even as they bracketed such hierarchy with alternate grooming patterns, which, importantly, reached toward other, exterior social worlds and subjects: foreigners, US hip-hoppers, urban elites, north Indians, *rowdies*. Doing so did (or at least tried to do) *style* (*style paṇṇratu*).

But if most youths’ facial hair did *style* by implicitly invoking normative adult masculinity while explicitly refashioning it, Anthony’s mustache was seemingly identical to what youth *style* otherwise eschewed. And yet, Anthony’s mustache also harbored its own metamarks of difference. Anthony kept his whiskers trimmed close and neat, rather than letting them grow out, as if a mere outline of the real thing. But not only was his mustache not quite that of the rugged ‘big man’; it was recognizably taken from a recent film, *Singam* (2010), whose rowdy police-officer hero, played by the film star Suriya, has just such a mustache (figure 2).⁵

By reanimating the filmic representation of this manly mustache,



Figure 2. Three mustachioed men: Anthony (2010), Suriya in *Singam* (2010), and a *periyā āl* from Kambam town in Theni district (2009). The photo of this ‘big man’ from Kambam was taken on a film set in rural Theni where I was conducting research as an assistant director on the Venkat Prabhu film *Goa* (2010). This man was a “junior artist” (‘extra’) typecast for his mustache to function as a rural ‘big man.’ Men with mustaches like this (*mīsaikkārahka*, or ‘mustache men’), while a widely circulated cinematic stereotype, were also not uncommon in this region of southern Tamil Nadu.

Anthony simultaneously sported and disavowed the very hair on his face, capturing something of its social value even as he put it in quotes. His mustache was and was not the mustaches he was citing. And thus it was and was not his own.⁶ As with all *style*, as we will see, to not brook such difference is to risk becoming too similar to what is cited. This is why, in fact, some of Anthony’s classmates saw his attempt at *style* as excessive and contrived, as *over style*. It came too close to those hierarchies and inequalities of age, respectability, caste, and urbanity that socially located these youth and kept them liminal and subordinate; it came too close to those hierarchies that these youth, through *style*, attempted to suspend.

From Style to *Style*

This book presents an ethnography of the pragmatics and metapragmatics of youth cultural practice in south India. I focus on how practices of *style* encapsulate and produce experiences of hierarchy, liminality, and ambivalence for college students like Anthony and his peers. Navigating a horizon of avoidance and desire, embarrassment and aspiration, intimacy and status, solidarity and individuation, youth cultural practices of *style* are performative of youth subjectivity and sociality, of the not quite and the not yet, a semiotic of difference and deferral cast in material form. This book theorizes this sociological and semiotic dynamic, this push and pull of *style* and its excesses and lacks. I explore how this dynamic underwrites the ways in which youth sociality unfolds in, and constitutes, the peer group and how, in this unfolding, such sociality reaches out to and

becomes entangled with the various media forms and social worlds that youth reanimate in their everyday lives: global brands and elite fashion, English and its cosmopolitan ecumene, Tamil film heroes and their film worlds (and mustaches), among others still. Such a study of *style* is an account of the poetics of liminality as the central feature of youth cultural practice and its mass mediation.

This is familiar terrain for scholars of youth culture. Foundational work on youth subcultures by the Birmingham school of cultural studies in the 1970s also analyzed what they called “style,” theorizing how youth subcultural styles expressed, and symbolically resolved, the larger class and age conflicts of postwar Britain (Hebdige 1979; Cohen 1993[1972]; Clarke et al. 1997[1975]). In this vein of work, “style” had two senses, describing the aesthetic forms and social practices linked to particular subcultural identities (“punk,” “mod,” etc.) while at the same time analytically drawing these diverse subcultural styles together as part of the more general phenomenon of youth cultural expression under conditions of capitalism. The analysis of style in both its senses was part of British cultural studies’ attempt to recover an expressive youth politics of resistance that both demonstrated the authentic response of working-class cultures to capitalism and drew out the ideological and institutional processes by which class inequality was glossed over and naturalized.

In this book, my interest concerns something different, if uncannily so: *style*, a particular local discourse among youth in contemporary Tamil Nadu. Neither a gloss for an aestheticized subculture nor an analytic to reveal class reproduction and resistance, *style* is an ethnographic datum, a term used by Tamil youth to typify a diverse congeries of objects and activities associated with youth sociality and status, aesthetics and value. My point of departure in this book, then, is how youths’ discourses and practices of *style* reflexively explicate and intervene in their own life worlds and social projects. As an ethnographic object, *style* provides the book’s analytic entry into the pragmatics of these life worlds and social projects. My use of the word “pragmatics” here is important, for less a question of the expressive or ideological aspects of youth culture—that is, how we might treat *style* as allegorically reflecting something of the larger political economy (say, post-1991 liberalization) and thus needing to be read or decoded by the analyst (Nakassis 2013d:245–46, 266–67)—my interest is how *style* acts in the world as a kind of performative, constituting youth culture in its various manifestations.

The term “*style*,” importantly then, is not (quite) my own. It is a youth word, concern, and tool, just as it is, as the analytic lens of this book, a borrowing from my friends’ everyday talk about status, value, and aesthet-

ics in the college and beyond. The term is not quite theirs either though. For them too, it is a borrowing. But while the etymon of *style*—or *style-u* as it is typically pronounced in colloquial Tamil, with an epenthetic, or “enunciative,” -u [u] appended—is English, the site of its borrowing is to be found elsewhere. In fact, it is to be found in multiple elsewhere. Most famously and visibly, *style* invokes the so-called Superstar of Tamil cinema: the “King of *Style*,” Rajinikanth. As I discuss in chapters 6 and 7, Rajinikanth is an important source for *style*, its veritable embodiment and origin, its definition made performative flesh. The word *style*, as far as my friends knew, was first used in Tamil to talk about Rajinikanth. *Style*, however, is more than Rajinikanth, and acts of *style* draw on many other sites of borrowing: global brands (chapters 2–3), music-television VJs (chapter 5), and other film actors (like Surya, as we saw above), among other sites.⁷

Always marked in my text by italics, *style* cites some other social imaginary while being necessarily marked as distinct from it, like a quotation that repeats another’s words while framing those words as not quite themselves anymore and not quite those of their current animator. This does not mean, of course, that *style* is exogenous to youth practices, that *style*’s origins, material forms, and logics are only ever to be found elsewhere. Quite the opposite. Much of the work of the book is to show how *style* is an irreducibly local phenomenon only ever analyzable relative to the particular contexts and concerns of the youth for whom it is consequential, even as those acts reach outward and away from their here-and-now. As a form of reflexive practice about the liminality and ambivalence of youth by youth, *style* performatively brings such liminality and ambivalence into being, instating modes of youth subjectivity and sociality that radiate outward from youths’ peer groups, entangling, most importantly for this study, the very producers of the social forms that young people take up and reanimate in doing *style*. I call the semiotic form of this performativity “citationality.”

Theoretical and methodological concerns drive my close attention to the reflexivity and citationality of *style*. This book details how the liminal phenomenology and citational semiotics of *stylish* youth practices come to be manifest in particular material and textual forms, a process of becoming and (de)stabilization mediated by the reflexivity of those very practices *and* by the entanglements that such practices forge with other social projects like garment design and manufacture, music-television production, and film production.⁸ In order to capture the tangled relationships that *style* reflexively mediates and materializes, this book moves between research with young people in colleges and research with those involved in the design, production, and circulation of the *stylish* forms

that populate youth peer groups. I focus on how “producers” of (“counterfeit”) brand garments (retailers, distributors, wholesalers, designers, and manufacturers in Madurai, Chennai, Tiruppur, and Erode; chapters 2–3), televised Tamil-English speech (music-television VJs and producers in Chennai; chapters 4–5), and commercial Tamil film (actors, directors, producers, and other technicians in Chennai; chapters 6–7) come to be entangled with youth “consumers” of such forms through the idiom of *style*. By situating *style* on both sides of the screen and commodity chain, I show how the dynamics of doing *style* in the college perforate the media object—shaping its genesis, and hence its very materiality and textuality—and, in doing so, prefigure and invite its citational use by youth to do *style*.⁹

In tacking between these different sites, this book builds on and attempts to articulate various literatures that have theorized the relationship between youth practice and mass media. On the one hand, this book looks to scholars who have shown how, under conditions of late capitalism, contemporary media and marketing practices have shifted their focus to representing, targeting, and addressing youth demographics (e.g., Frank 1998; Mazzarella 2003:215–49; Lukács 2010)—that is, the “production” of mass media. On the other hand, this book draws on scholars who have demonstrated the creative ways in which young people engage with media objects (e.g., Hebdige 1979; Bucholtz 2002; 2011; Weiss 2002; Liechty 2003; de Boek and Honwana 2005; Lukose 2009; Newell 2012)—that is, the “reception” or “consumption” of mass media. In traversing such approaches, I suggest that the issue is not simply the necessity of presenting complementary points of view on the “same” media object (i.e., its production and reception). Rather, my aim is to underscore that the primary ethnographic datum about mass mediation is the complex *entanglement* that media coordinate between multiple social actors as they come to mutually (if only partially) orient themselves to the material and semiotic forms that, by this very orientation, they bring into being. As I show, such a view of mass mediation, ironically perhaps, requires us to decenter—and to attend to how the citationality of *style* decenters—those very forms. Focusing on this entanglement requires us to analytically bracket, and thus put in question, the stability and coherence of things like brands, mediatized English, and film texts and instead focus on empirical moments when those things are themselves bracketed, suspended, and deformed. Doing so, I suggest, offers a fresh perspective on the study of mass mediation and youth culture.

In what follows in this chapter, I contextualize how liminality and social hierarchy were experienced by the young people with whom I lived and spent time, focusing on the ambivalent practices that reflexively regis-

ter and performatively enact that liminality. As I show, the citationality of youth practices of *style* emerges out of and responds to experiences of liminality and hierarchy, even as these practices produce and transform such experiences. I pay particular attention to the role of the college in framing such experiences and practices and in rendering them particularly acute. In order to set up this discussion, I first situate my ethnographic research with college students, locating the institutions in which they matriculated within a wider set of historical shifts that have changed the face of higher education in contemporary India. I then turn to an ethnographic account of how the college—as social imaginary, institution, and space of social activity—shapes the peer group, a site of sociality marked by a fundamental tension between, on the one hand, the transgression of adult norms through acts of *stylish* individuation and, on the other hand, modes of intimacy and solidarity that problematize those very *stylish* acts. It is this particular ambivalence and tension, I argue, that shapes the phenomenology and semiotics of doing *style*, making acts of *style* take on a particular “double-voiced” (Bakhtin 1982), or citational, form. Finally, the chapter discusses how the citationality of *style* entangles the media forms (and subjects) that youth reanimate in their own peer-group activities, in turn rendering those forms (and subjects) citational.

The Colleges Where I Worked

Conducted from 2007 to 2009, with follow-up trips in 2010, 2011, and 2014, my research with college students took place in five predominantly English-medium colleges in two cities, Madurai and Chennai.¹⁰ Madurai is a city in the south of Tamil Nadu comprising about one million residents (with the greater metropolitan area nearing 1.5 million).¹¹ Known for its numerous temples and its “pure” Tamil, it is often described as a big village due to the amount of in-migration from neighboring rural and peri-urban areas and its relatively conservative public culture. In Madurai, I conducted research in three colleges: a historically elite, but now perhaps best described as semielite, coeducational, but largely men’s, college founded by Protestant missionaries in the late nineteenth century (approximately 2,800 students, undergraduate and postgraduate); a semielite women’s college founded by an American missionary and educator in the late 1940s (approximately 3,000 students); and a reputable coeducational college founded by a Hindu industrialist in the 1940s that, relative to the other two colleges, had a relatively greater amount of lower-middle-class students and students from rural backgrounds (approximately 2,200

students).¹² All three colleges were “autonomous,” which is to say that they had the right to maintain a degree of curricular and administrative autonomy from government universities, including the right to create “self-financing” departments (i.e., departments solely funded by relatively expensive student tuitions) for new, in-demand courses.¹³

In the coeducational Christian college, I lived in two “hostels” (or dormitories) over the 2007–2008 academic year. I first stayed in a hostel for undergraduate students enrolled in self-financing departments and roomed with two Christian third-year students: Stephan, a hip and fashionable, near-fluent English-speaking young man from Kodaikanal (a “hill station” to the northwest of Madurai), and Sebastian, a relatively more conservative young man from a village in Tirunelveli district (about 200 kilometers south of Madurai) whose English was relatively basic. After three months in the self-financing hostel, for the rest of the year, I lived in a hostel for undergraduate students enrolled in “aided” departments (i.e., departments whose costs were subsidized by the government and thus whose tuitions were relatively cheap). I roomed with two first-year Hindu students: Yuvaraj, a quiet but friendly young man from Dindugul (a medium-sized town north of Madurai), and Shanmugam, an even quieter young man from Devakottai (a small town east of Madurai) who spent much of his time practicing hip-hop dancing, at which he excelled. All four students would have described themselves as middle class, but by my observations, Yuvaraj and Stephan came from relatively more affluent families. All four were native Tamil speakers with the exception of Stephan who, while fluent in Tamil, came from a Malayalam ethnolinguistic background. In this college and in the coeducational Hindu college, I spent time on campus with both hostel students and “day scholars” (commuting students), went on outings (to movie theaters, shops, restaurants, parks, bars, and other colleges’ “culturals” competitions), attended classes, and conducted interviews with them. In the aided hostel of the coeducational Christian college, I screened films and music-television programs for students, which were followed by group discussions. In the women’s college, while I enjoyed comparatively limited access to student life (more on this below), I was able to spend time with students on campus and conduct semiformal interviews. I also screened films and held discussions with students afterward. In all the colleges, I interviewed administrators and professors.

In Chennai (also known by its colonial name, Madras), a city of 4.7 million inhabitants (with the larger metropolitan area nearing 8.7 million), I conducted research in two colleges during the 2008–2009 academic year: an elite autonomous Catholic college founded in the 1920s

(approximately 7,000 students) and a historically prestigious government college founded by a Hindu philanthropist in the mid-nineteenth century, the student body of which is now predominantly working class and lower caste (approximately 4,500 students). Certain departments of both colleges were coeducational, though the Catholic college had more female students than the government college, which was almost exclusively male at the undergraduate level.¹⁴ The Catholic college had the most affluent student body of the five colleges that I worked in, and the government college had the least. I stayed in the Catholic college's hostel, which housed both aided and self-financing students, for five months of the academic year. I lived very briefly with an upper-middle-class young man from the northeastern state of Bihar and then with Sam, a gregarious, upwardly mobile, middle-class young man from Salem (a small city in the northwest of Tamil Nadu). Sam was a native speaker of Tamil, and he had a relatively strong command of English. As in Madurai, in both colleges, I went to classes, spent time with day scholars and hostel students on and off campus, and interviewed students, administrators, and professors. I also accompanied the third-year students of one coeducational department from the Catholic college on their weeklong "college tour" (field trip). In all these colleges, while I interacted with both undergraduate and postgraduate students, I predominantly write about undergraduate students, given that the dynamics I describe in the book were most pronounced among them. In addition to the students in these Madurai and Chennai colleges, I also selectively conducted research with students from other colleges in the state as well as with youth and adults who did not attend college.

During the time of my research, all the colleges that I worked in were adjusting to significant, and in many ways deleterious, changes brought on by the privatization of higher education, a process that began in Tamil Nadu in the late 1970s and intensified with the liberalization of the Indian economy in the 1980s and 1990s (Sebastian 2008; Tilak 2013a). These changes, which I discuss in the next section, have shaped the shifting forms of inequality and heterogeneity that mark the student bodies of the colleges where I worked, providing a fertile, and fraught, ground for the complex dynamics of doing *style* that are the focus of this book.

The Changing Face of Higher Education in India

The first modern colleges in India were established under colonial rule as institutions for British Orientalist scholarship about India, scholarship that would help the East India Company (and later the British Raj)

rule indigenous subjects by their own customs and laws.¹⁵ With the anti-Orientalist turn in the early nineteenth century, higher education in India became increasingly, if contentiously, figured as a tool to create a loyal class of elite Indians through modern English education (Basu 1991; Srivastava 2003; Chandra 2012), “English” here comprising the English language (chapter 4), Western canon and “modern” epistemologies (Seth 2007), as well as an anglicized habitus including, for example, British fashions of dress (Tarlo 1996; chapter 2). This early phase of higher education was unabashedly, if not unproblematically, elitist (largely availed by urban, upper-class and upper-caste men, predominantly Brahmin; see Fuller and Narasimhan 2014:61–89), even if the university system was understood to be open and secular in principle (Béteille 2010). Higher education was the access point to coveted civil service jobs, and in contrast to more recent patterns discussed below, this period saw relatively large growth in arts and science colleges with little growth in professional and engineering colleges (Basu 1991).

With India’s national independence in 1947, higher education was increasingly framed by the mandate to expand its demographic base by class, caste, and gender,¹⁶ largely through reservation policies (though caste reservations had already been in place in the Madras Presidency by the 1920s, given colonial concerns about Brahmin monopolization of education and civil service posts and, relatedly, the emergence of an indigenous, non-Brahmin movement).¹⁷ Even if higher education remained a bastion for elites of various kinds, guided by a Nehruvian developmentalist dispensation to “uplift” the nation, the democratization of higher education in the postindependence period did lead to both the expansion of higher education (in terms of number of students and institutions) and its demographic diversification.

If higher education during colonial rule was oriented toward the colonial apparatus and its civilizing project and if, in the postindependence period, it was oriented toward modernizing the nation through “socialistic” development and democratization, since at least the 1980s, but in particular since the 2000s, higher education has come to be increasingly oriented toward the “global knowledge economy” (Fernandes 2006; Chanana 2013[2007]). With liberalization, the growth of Information Technology (IT) and related private sectors—particularly in south Indian cities such as Bangalore, Hyderabad, and Chennai—has led to a seemingly bottomless demand for engineering, applied science, and commerce degrees. To meet this demand, new institutions—private engineering and other technical and professional colleges (Fuller and Narasimhan 2006), private arts and science colleges, and “parallel colleges” and other private tutoring and cer-

tificate centers (Fernandes 2006:96–99, 131–33; Lukose 2009)—have proliferated at astonishing rates, while existing institutions have attempted to keep pace by expanding their offerings.¹⁸ Overall, this demand has resulted in decreased enrollments in arts and science colleges of those belonging to what the professors and administrators where I worked called the “creamy layer”: elites who, in the past, would have leveraged their liberal arts education to secure coveted civil service employment. Today this creamy layer predominates in elite engineering and other professional institutions, many of which are privately run (Fernandes 2006:88ff.; Fuller and Narasimhan 2014:93–96). As a result of this shift, arts and science colleges overall have seen increased enrollments of working-class students, lower-caste students, first-generation students, and students from less-prestigious Tamil-medium schooling backgrounds.¹⁹

Within arts and science colleges, demand has significantly grown for relatively more expensive self-financing courses in computer science, commerce, and natural sciences—courses that can lead to master’s degrees in IT or business and jobs in IT-related fields or multinational corporations—and, to a lesser degree, courses in English literature, which are seen by some to offer advantage in accessing call-center and other multinational corporate job opportunities (LaDousa 2014). This shift has been to the detriment of other departments within these colleges. Because admissions to these arts and science colleges are by department and because, by and large, parents and other elder kin choose the departments to which students apply by speculating on future job prospects, departments that are seen as less likely to get one a job in the neoliberal, white-collar workforce—such as history, sociology, Tamil, philosophy, and economics—have suffered massively in enrollments. Most students joined these departments simply because they could not get into other departments or other colleges (Annamalai 2004:190). The result is that students from privileged class, caste, and regional backgrounds were more likely to be found in (self-financing) courses like commerce, computer science, and the like, while first-generation students, rural students, and lower-class and lower-caste students were more likely to be found in (aided) arts and sciences courses that were considered to lack “market value.” These hierarchies mirror linguistic differences as well, with students in more prestigious colleges and departments being more likely to have been schooled (or schooled for longer) in English-medium schools, while less prestigious colleges and departments have more Tamil-medium students.

As a result of such changes, the colleges where I worked were heterogeneous social spaces that were internally crosscut by various axes of social difference (class, caste, region, language, department, funding type).²⁰

This, in turn, has created overlaps *across* arts and science colleges, making the various colleges where I worked in some ways more alike overall than they would have been in the past, even as their student bodies were perhaps more unlike those of a generation or two ago.

The students with whom I socialized, and on whom I focus discussion in this book, were located, in one way or another, somewhere in between the extremes of these intersecting axes of social difference and inequality. Just as important, their peer groups had their centers of gravity somewhere in the middle of these continua of class, caste, and language. They were neither the most elite nor the poorest, neither the most nor the least fluent in English; rather, they comprised a range of class positions and linguistic fluencies. They were always mixed in terms of caste and community.

This in-betweenness wasn't simply a descriptive, demographic fact. It was a reflexively experienced state of ambivalence about one's place within such hierarchies. This ambivalence was all the more acute, of course, because the college institution promised class and linguistic mobility, because the college plotted a trajectory toward one privileged pole of these tangled hierarchies—the urban, English-speaking, (upper-) middle-class, “modern” subject—that was *not* who these youth and their peers in their here-and-now could claim to be.

My focus on the middle is important to underscore because the dynamics of *style* that concern this book are most acute and visible among such youth. The tensions and ambivalence of their liminality were the most experientially palpable, and thus the most likely to take citational form in acts of and metadiscourse about *style*. Indeed, the discourse and practice of *style* was of less importance for students in the least-prestigious departments of the government college, who tended to be the least affluent (though they too did and talked about *style*),²¹ and it was near absent in the rarefied circles of elite, English-fluent students in the most prestigious, self-financing departments in the Catholic college, for whom *style* (in the sense used, and in the ways performed, by other students) would be considered gauche and “*local*” (a term denoting low status that I discuss in chapter 2). As a result of this focus on the middle, much of my discussion centers on the commonalities across the colleges rather than the extremes or differences, though I occasionally take them up for comparative reference.

Finally, it is important to highlight that the anchor of my discussion is young men. This is for a number of reasons, not the least of which is my relatively restricted access to female students and their peer groups as compared with the intimacies and proximity I had with young men, as noted above. But more than this, though not unrelated to it, the dynam-

ics of *style* and the very cultural category of youth that *style* attempted to perform were most elaborated and visible among young men. As elsewhere (Liechty 2003:233–34; Comaroff and Comaroff 2005; Jeffrey 2010), the figure of youth is masculinized in Tamil Nadu. In popular Tamil imaginaries, the category of youth is stereotypically associated with transgressiveness, ostentation, exteriority, self-centeredness, and the publicly displayed individual body. These associations are central to the pragmatics of *style*, and they are resolutely problematic for normative femininity.

This is not to say, of course, that *style* is exclusively the domain of young men. As numerous conversations and friendships with young college women showed me, they did talk about and do *style*, transgressing normative bounds and experimenting with new subjectivities through dress, language, and film, among other media. College was, in fact, a privileged space for young women to do so, even more so than for young men, whose public movements were not as restricted and whose behaviors were not as contained by the patriarchal kin group and its proxies as women's. What it is to say, however, is that what *style* presupposes and does is much more likely to be policed and violently censured for young women by both their female and male peers and by their kin and college administrators who, given increasing coeducation driven by privatization, felt it necessary to ensure patriarchal norms of public, feminine comportment in the college. The problematics of *style* for women are, as I discuss in more detail in chapters 2 and 6, a function of the way in which the control and containment of the young woman's body, and her sexuality more particularly, underwrite the patriarchal economies and hierarchies of men's status and respectability that *style* plays with, undermines, and refashions. This makes the stakes of young women's *style* more extreme and thus makes *style*, in certain ways, less visible and less likely to be (feliculously) performed by young women. Or at least, it makes *style* manifest in other, relatively less sexualizing modalities (such as English use, as suggested in chapter 4).

Liminality and Youth

As noted above, the college students with whom I worked experienced an acute sense of being in between, an experience conditioned by multiple axes of social difference and inequality that came together in the college. While in various chapters of the book, I discuss particular manifestations, experiences, and productions of hierarchies of class, language, and gender—the most important of which for *style*, perhaps, is class—below I focus on the relationship between age hierarchy and liminality precisely

because age was the predominant idiom within which such various in-betweens took shape and were experienced and expressed. Which is to say that the various sociodemographic axes of difference that organized students and their ambivalent expectations of the future were wrapped up in the very cultural category of youth, that liminal subject position that *style* performed and attempted to open for inhabitation—that is, performatively bring into being.²²

To say that young people are liminal is perhaps to state the obvious. In contemporary Tamil Nadu, as elsewhere, the age category of youth (denoted in Tamil as “*iḷamai paruvam*,” “*vāliba vayasu*,” “youth,” or “teen-age”) is construed as a transitory status in the lifecycle.²³ Youth are neither children nor adults, neither dependents nor quite independent. They are not fully subordinate to adult authority, as are children, yet they are also excluded from institutions and economies of adult authority and status, often located in nonpermanent jobs or, as for the students that I worked with, educational institutions like colleges. Indeed, as I discuss below, the college is perhaps the liminal institution par excellence in Tamil Nadu (as it is elsewhere): a time and space set apart that affords the possibility to be liminal and to produce liminality, and thus youth.

While we typically think of liminality, and hence the category of youth, as being in between sociodemographic categories, times, or spaces, in my discussion, liminality encompasses much more. For me, liminality is a reflexive orientation to the experience of being beholden to multiple mandates at the same time, which is to say that if liminality takes flesh in and through a particular configuration of space, time, and sociality (a Bakhtinian chronotope of youth, as it were), it is crucially because of young people’s reflexive attunement to the ambivalences and contradictions that place them in that very sociospatiotemporal order of things. Liminality is, in this sense, a production and an achievement of a particular kind of reflexive, affective stance to the in-between and in-transit or, as I would put it more generally, to multiplicity and contradiction. Liminality is as much about attempts to act on social time-spaces as it is about attempts to act in social time and space. I am particularly interested in liminality, then, as a relationship between seeming incommensurables, as the experience of opposing social forces and discourses as they are encountered by the subject (chapter 2), of the necessity to be or not be more than one thing at once. Sometimes this is framed and experienced as a trajectory in the lifecycle but not always.²⁴

Below I discuss two ways in which such liminality manifests itself for and is produced by the college youth with whom I worked and lived: first, as an experience of age hierarchy that prompts forms of transgression, in-

cluding acts of *style*, that attempt to open up alternate spaces of youth aesthetics, value, status, and authority and, second, as an experience of age hierarchy that prompts forms of egalitarian sociality that problematize such transgressions and acts of *style*, even as such forms of sociality make acts of *style* possible. In the first case, liminality is produced as the necessity to be at once neither an adult nor a child and thus, simultaneously, to be *like* both. In the second, liminality is produced as the necessity to simultaneously do *style* without doing either too much or too little *style*. These intersecting liminalities set the stage for my discussion of citationality and mass mediation in later sections of this chapter as well as for understanding the more general dynamics of *style* that are at issue in the rest of the book.

Hierarchy and *Style*

The students with whom I worked experienced and produced themselves as youth through their relationship to the forms of authority to which they were subordinate and excluded, to what they sometimes simply referred to as “society” (or in Tamil, “*samūkam*” or “*samutāyam*”): one’s kin and caste group and, more generally, high-status male adults (‘big men’) who set the rules for legitimate social interaction.²⁵ Such students performed youth and thus produced youth status through acts that transgressed adult authority and respectability (*mariyātai*)—in particular, middle-class norms of respectability aligned with the college institution—by availing and instating alternate normativities, socialities, gendered subjectivities, aesthetics, and values. While *style* was not the only way this was done, it was one of its predominant idioms.

The texture of everyday college life was filled with performances of transgression on and off the campus. For young men, this included horsing around in the college canteen, mocking teachers when they were out of earshot, writing graffiti on classroom and bathroom walls, engaging in provocative youth fashion, skipping class and getting drunk, smoking cigarettes outside of the college, fighting with rival cliques, teasing and romancing female classmates, or hopping the college wall after curfew to catch the “second show” (the last film screening of the night; cf. Willis 1977). Such transgressions were often direct reactions to what students felt to be the excessive rules and restrictions of the college (or “society” more generally), the way the college treated them like ‘little boys’ (*cinna pasaṅka*), curbing their freedom and assuming that they weren’t “mature” enough to think or fend for themselves; they were, they insisted.²⁶ And

they demonstrated this to themselves and their peers through such transgressions.²⁷

By transgressing norms of adult authority, *decency*, and respectability—which is to say the very basis upon which age hierarchy subordinated and excluded students as not yet and not quite—students reinscribed the very coordinates of the hierarchy that they attempted to suspend and stand apart from through their transgressions. Acts of *style* perspectively divided students into ‘big men’ and ‘little boys.’ Students who didn’t do *style*, who didn’t transgress by disregarding hostel rules and jumping the wall, who didn’t smoke and drink or display flashy Western fashions were considered by those who did to be ‘little boys’ who were too afraid of the hand of authority, who didn’t have the “maturity” or *tairiyam* (‘boldness,’ ‘courage’) to skirt authority, do what they felt like, or assert their own alternate authority and sense of aesthetics and value. At the same time, acts that demonstrated such “maturity,” importantly if contradictorily, were understood positively as childlike in their conspicuous lack of seriousness. As Prabhu noted at the outset of the chapter, one can’t expect youth to act like serious people, like ‘big men’!

For those typified by others as ‘little boys,’ the same discourse of maturity could be inverted: what about jumping the hostel wall after hours makes one mature? All that it would accomplish would be getting them in trouble. Acting as if they were a bunch of ‘big men’ (*periya āluṅka*), such youth would only manage to show how childish (*cinnappullettanam*) they really were. There was a limit to transgression (a statement all would agree on, even if they disagreed on where that limit was located) and a limit to *style*.

What is important to notice is that it is precisely in relation to adult normativities of authority and age hierarchy that youth “maturity,” and hence social status, is calibrated and negotiated among students in and between their peer groups (for indeed, peer groups formed around emergent local norms about what was considered to be acceptable deviation from adult authority). This is accomplished through the experience and production of a double mandate: to be simultaneously neither a child nor an adult and thus *like* both a child (playful, unserious) and an adult (bold, independent, authoritative).²⁸ A sociologically grounded experience of age and generational difference prompts productions of liminality as the felt necessity to be both and neither, to be multiple. Doing *style* does just this. And it does so as a reflexive commentary on and intervention into the very hierarchies that it uncannily reinscribes as the coordinates of youth status, sociality, and subjectivity.

These dynamics took a particularly visible and elaborated form within

the college, a “modern” space that was spatially, temporally, and socially set off from the everyday experiences of hierarchy outside of the college that underwrote what these youth called “society.” For administrators, professors, hostel “wardens,” and especially for students, the college was supposed to be a space for experimentation with new freedoms and modes of being in the world (Parameswaran 2001; 2002; Lukose 2009).²⁹ (Hence my friends’ annoyance when they felt they weren’t being accorded such freedoms.) In college, students could do all the things that could not always be easily done at home, in the space and presence of elder kin and neighbors: speak in new languages, dress fashionably, romance and flirt, roam around town, and the like.³⁰ This made college a place for novelty, transgression, and play. At the same time, this freedom had its limits inscribed by the college itself. Administrators, professors, and hostel wardens also saw their role as a surrogate (if altered) patriarchal authority. Even as the college kept adulthood and the seriousness of the future in abeyance, it also brought both closer by attempting to socialize and discipline students to the *decent* middle-class subjectivity that, it was hoped, would afford students mobility in the postcollege, white-collar economy. The college, not unlike the peer group (as I discuss below), bracketed “society,” even as it reinscribed and stood in for it. And through that doubling, the college afforded its students a space for transgression that was not quite transgression, a place to enact youth subjectivities in ways that allowed college, and thus adult, authority to be suspended, if only for a time. This doubling allowed for, and in a sense invited, *style*. It called for students’ active production of transgressive experiences of liminality, for the need to assert their distance from an adult order of things by keeping it close, but not too close.

Hierarchy and *Over Style*

Youth practices in the college didn’t simply repudiate or bracket adult respectability and propriety through cheeky facial hair or late-night escapades. They also turned on engaging and bracketing the very idea of hierarchy itself, on attempting to instate forms of egalitarian sociality that suspended and inverted, if only temporarily, the hierarchies of kinship, caste, class, and age and generation that shaped the very experience and production of youth as an inhabitable subjectivity (Osella and Osella 1998; 2004:245–46; Nisbett 2007). This came out in a conversation about caste with Vignesh, a student at the Madurai college where I lived. Vignesh explained, with conviction, that in the college, caste was not observed.

Caste was something that happened out there in villages or back then in the past but not here and now in the college. In the college, one was free to socialize with whomever one wanted, regardless of class, caste, or religious community. He didn't even know his friends' castes, he insisted. Without missing a beat but with an air of regret, Vignesh went on to say that he fully expected to have to orient himself to caste after college and after marriage. 'Growing up' meant going 'into' caste. There was no choice, he noted, 'Because that is how society is here. It makes you observe caste. After marriage, we all have to go inside society/caste' (*"Kalyāṇattukku appuṛam samūkattukkuḷḷē pōkaṇum"*). Whether or not Vignesh's account of caste in the college or postmarriage life is accurate, he understood himself, as a college youth, to be outside of caste and adult "society." And this imagined exteriority to caste and community structured his social interactions in the college. As he noted, and as I also observed, it was generally proscribed and in bad taste to explicitly align with or even to talk about caste with college peers (Lukose 2009:177). Invidious distinctions of caste and community, to say nothing of class (chapters 2, 6) and linguistic difference (both of which were surrounded by this very same disavowing discourse; chapter 4), were always deferred: never us, here, now.

Of course, caste, community, class, and linguistic difference did matter in these youths' lives. They pervaded their home lives, their ability to move through public space, and even the college campus itself, particularly at the level of administrative politics.³¹ Precisely because of this fact, such distinctions had to be disavowed and kept at bay through practices that acted *as if* such distinctions didn't matter. If and when distinctions of caste, class, religion, or language inserted themselves, it was always as a disruption of what these young men and women understood as how youth sociality in the college—a "modern" institution—ought to work (Jeffrey 2010). Such hierarchies were to be suspended, a suspension that was the very foundation of peer-group sociality.

This suspension of hierarchy was also enabled by the ways in which the college organized students into year cohorts by department and hostel, irrespective of age—that key principle of respect and authority in Tamil Nadu.³² Year cohorts (for undergraduate students, first years, second years, and third years),³³ in effect, neutralized age difference within and across years, hierarchically ranking year cohorts by the relative relation of "juniors" and "seniors" (i.e., those of lower or higher years). Such ranked cohorts were formed in a number of ways. They were inscribed and produced by hazing practices in which seniors "ragged" their juniors (chapter 2). Further, with very few exceptions, one did not take classes with students of other years or other departments. Within hostels, one normally lived

with one's year mates. As a result, students' intimate social circles were formed precisely by the fault lines of inequality and hierarchy that shot through the college (most important, year, but also department, funding type, and in certain colleges, hostel), exteriorizing such hierarchies as the outer boundary of the otherwise relatively flattened, age-neutralized peer group. As subsequent chapters show, it is precisely where such differences were not institutionally flattened—as with class and language—that one found the most interactional work to level them. This is not to say that, as with caste distinctions, such inequalities of language or class (or hostel or department) did not cut across peer groups. Rather, it is to stress that the college, as an ideologically invested and institutionally organized space, tended to bracket such hierarchies as the basis for peer-group sociality, conditioning the ways in which and with whom youth interacted (and thus did or did not do *style* with or for). This was despite, or rather because of, the fact that students experienced the college as a heterogeneous space shot through with difference.

Youth peer groups are spaces of intense intimacy, reciprocity, and peer pressure. Such intimacy and solidarity is expressed through the sharing of food, words of abuse and fictive kinterms (see below), class notes, clothing, cigarettes, and other kinds of property, as well as through physical displays of homosociality—rough housing, holding hands, running fingers through each other's hair, and sleeping in the same beds—all of which are otherwise, outside the college, normatively contained within the caste and kin group. Youth peer groups bracket and transgress these lines by figuratively replicating them within the peer group, reanimating and suspending forms of caste and kin intimacy and solidarity by recasting friendship through them (Nakassis 2013d; 2014; cf. Osella and Osella 2000a:230; Alex 2008:535). Adults often find such physical and linguistic intimacy disturbing, even insolent, precisely because it crosses the boundaries drawn by “society” (Osella and Osella 1998; Nisbett 2007).

The important point here is that sociality in the college is founded on the bracketing and reinscription, and thus transformation, of forms of hierarchy and that in this case, such experiences and engagements with hierarchy organize the peer group around a tension: on the one hand, the peer group affords—and in certain cases, demands—individuating status-raising acts of *style* that transgress norms of adult authority, respectability, and propriety by figurating them in alternate forms; on the other hand, the peer group demands deference to its own alternate norms, norms that require eschewing precisely the social differences that the former affordance/demand portends. The peer group comprises a centrifugal and centripetal push and pull (cf. Simmel 1998[1904]), a productive

tension between egalitarianism and hierarchy, solidarity and differentiation, intimacy and individuation, and between *style* and its lacks and excesses—*style* that is *over*, that tries too hard, that shows off too much or not enough. The peer group makes *style* possible, for it provides youth with the breathing room necessary for its display (for in other contexts and for other audiences, *style* is likely to be policed and even proscribed by higher-status individuals), even as it makes doing *style* problematic (for every *stylish* act risks being seen as invidiously reinscribing hierarchical difference, and thus tipping into *over style* by acting too much like a ‘big man,’ by coming too close to what one’s acts should only ever figuratively represent). Remember that Anthony’s *Singam*’s tache was not simply seen by some of his peers as hokey. By being too similar to what it cited, it was also seen as arrogant and uppity, as presuming he was a bigger man than he was, as showing off too much. Teasing, gossip, social ostracization, and even physical altercation were all modes of dealing with the excesses of *style*, of continually reconstituting the peer group as a relatively egalitarian space, a space itself opened by the suspension of those perduring modes of adult status and respectability from which youth were excluded and by which they were subordinate.

There is a kind of performative contradiction to doing *style*, then, precisely because the quality of excess, of being *over* is immanent in and implied by *style* as a mode of ostentatious self-differentiation and individuation. As this book’s various chapters show, in order for *style* to be felicitous, it must hedge on itself, constantly mitigating its interpretation as *over*. As Gregory Bateson (1972:182) pointed out in a different context, there must always be some metacommunicative framing that mitigates the descent of play fighting into actual melee or, as in this case, that mitigates self-individuation devolving into invidious hierarchy. Caught and constituted in this dialectic, doing *style* is required, to invoke Georg Simmel’s (1984[1909]:151) reflections on flirtation, to split itself into a “playful approach and withdrawal,” to be a “tentative turning toward something on which the shadow of its own denial already falls.” Doing *style* is required to be citational.

Citationality and *Style*

Here, then, are two intersecting liminalities that emerge from college students’ reflexive experiences of their sociological status as youth: the double mandate to simultaneously not be an adult and not be a child

yet be like both *and* to do *style* without doing too much or too little *style* (and thus tentatively resolve the former mandate). These liminalities entail what performance theorist Richard Schechner (1985:111–13) refers to as “not [. . .], not not [. . .]” or the “twiceness” of the “as if”—that is, what happens when something or someone is beholden to two or more mandates that are not easily resolvable to each other but that willy-nilly must be (or must be attempted to be). Here liminality manifests itself as multiplicity harnessed in a unified, if internally complex, act. In Anthony’s case, for example, it manifested as the very hair on his face—a grooming *style* that figured him as being not and not not a child and not and not not an adult, not and not not a film star and not and not not a rural ‘big man.’ These interlocked liminalities and multiplicities, as I show throughout the book, inflect nearly every domain of youth practice in the college, which is to say that such liminalities give college youth culture, and the very category of youth, in Tamil Nadu its particular ethnographic texture.

The semiotic form of such liminality is citational. Citations manage the necessity to speak with two voices in the same breath, to inhabit numerous roles and identities at once, to abide by multiple, potentially contradictory mandates or points of view simultaneously. Citations enable the “playful approach and withdrawal” of flirtation, as Simmel puts it. Like canonical citations such as quotations, citational acts re-present some other social form or discursive event through one’s own voice but keep it in quotes, simultaneously reanimating and bracketing what is cited as not quite one’s own (Nakassis 2013b).

Take, for example, youths’ address practices, a central mode by which youth mark and create intimacy and solidarity in their peer groups (Nakassis 2014). As noted above, college students’ speech is peppered with kinterms for male cross kin and affines. In Madurai and Chennai, terms like *māms* and *māpps* (derived from kinterms for mother’s brother and brother-in-law/cross cousin, respectively) are *stylish* ways of addressing friends. Such “fictive,” or tropic (Agha 2007), kinterms invoke in the here-and-now of their utterance an elsewhere, an absent kinship, even as they keep it in abeyance. They cite kinship. The *style* of such citational kinterms turns on their nonnormative, even transgressive quality—that is, that they are “incorrect” uses, that they disregard (some of) the kinship norms and affects that they invoke, bringing kinship into the peer group even as they keep it at arm’s length. The citationality of such address practices materializes the very liminality of youth sociality in the college, articulating the fact that students are not kin and yet are not not kin, that they share intimacies

reserved for certain cross kin relations (in distinction, tellingly, to the relatively hierarchical patriline) in a space otherwise predicated on the absence and negation of kinship logics and hierarchies—namely, the college.

This simultaneous reanimation and disavowal of what is, not coincidentally, the central kernel of “society,” kinship, is materialized in the very lexical realization of these terms: *māms* and *māpps* are *stylishly* truncated, deformed versions of the kinterms they cite—*māmā(n)* and *māppiḷḷai*, respectively—their lexical alteration being a reflexive sign of their status as citations, or the “shadow of (their) own denial,” as Simmel put it. In their rematerialization, *māms* and *māpps* are and are not kinterms. Such terms decenter kinship through a detour and an elsewhere. Moreover, this elsewhere is itself already doubled, for such youth uses harken to another mediatized site of borrowing. These terms are seen as *style* in Madurai, for example, because they are associated with Chennai youth and, more to the point, with their stereotyped depiction in film and television (see chapter 5), just as English address terms like “dude” and “bro”—glossed to me by Chennai friends as “the same as” fictive cross kinterms in Tamil—are *stylish* in Chennai, given mediatized association with American youth worlds.

Important to the performativity and citationality of doing *style* is how it does something to what it cites, decentering and negating it, simulating and hybridizing it. Citational acts are, to appropriate a term from Judith Butler (1993:175), “deformative.” In disavowing what they otherwise seem to be, citations alter what they reanimate and thus also transformatively entangle the act and agent of citation with what and who is cited. A closely trimmed mustache, an abbreviated kinterm, a misspelled brand name (chapters 2–3), English sprinkled into Tamil or vice versa (chapters 4–5), and playful quotations of films (chapters 6–7)—all such *stylish* forms cite their “original” sources, appropriating their value while reflexively marking their deforming difference from them. Such double-voiced signs do *style* through the “close distance” (Mazzarella 2003) they achieve with what they cite, a semiotic liminality that figurates participation in, for example, rural masculinity, cosmopolitan fashion, the global linguistic ecumene, and filmic imaginaries, even as these imaginaries (and youths’ pretensions to participate in them) are bracketed and refashioned. The citation harbors multiple stances and voices (Bakhtin 1982; Voloshinov 1986) and, in doing so, attempts to manage multiple mandates and desires, to embody liminality and engage hierarchy.

Central to the felicity of *style* is this citational reflexivity: the act of *style*’s framing of itself as citational through the material traces of its deformativity. Without quotation marks, acts of *style* come too close to what

they cite, too close to that which, as we saw above, must be repudiated and distanced from so as to do *style* in the first place. Without quotation marks, citations become the literal acts they purport to only reanimate (Nakassis 2013b): acts of invidious distinction and hierarchical difference. Without such metemarks of difference, doing *style* falters. It *overdoes style* (or underdoes it) such that acts figurating exteriority go too far (or not far enough), either by being seen as illegitimately asserting oneself as the ‘big man’ or by being seen as coming too close to the figure of the ‘child,’ as with acts of filmic citation that approach ‘childish’ subaltern practices of fandom (chapter 6). The citationality of youth practices constitutes an attempt to have one’s cake and eat it too, to both individuate from and defer to one’s peers, to be like but not to be children and adults, to come close to exterior objects of alternate value but not too close.

As I show in chapter 2, this means that citationality—a term that I have appropriated from Jacques Derrida (1988)—is not simply a function of what Derrida calls “iterability,” the identity (or “ideality”) and difference that every repetition entails; rather, citational acts are reflexively mediated by their figuration and interpretation *as* iterations, *as* citations. Not all semiotic acts are marked, or taken, as citations. Only some come to be. This implies that theoretical questions surrounding citationality—such as questions of subjectivity (chapter 2)—can productively be posed as empirical issues about how particular acts figure themselves and their contexts and come to be taken up as such (or not). Such questions, as the book shows, are best answered ethnographically.

To be like but not to be, to co-opt what is not one’s own and to be seen as doing just that, to pass near the scorching sun and the dark-blue sea without melting or drowning one’s wings all require the reflexive semiotics of the citation, its ability to hold diverse voices in suspended animation, to put what is (re)presented in quotes, to bracket it even as it is reanimated, and to draw attention to that very fact. Citationality brings what is just out of reach close but not too close. The citational act and subject of youth practice is and is not quite (yet). It is this doubled quality that allows the tensions of the peer group to be managed, that allows adulthood to be deferred and childhood transcended and thus allows youth to be inhabitable (which is to say, produced), if only for a time. And it is, as I discuss below, what entangles youth with mass-mediated social forms and those who “produce” them and what allows global brands, south-Indian music-television English, and commercial Tamil film texts to be domesticated for use in the peer group, to be formed and deformed through the push and pull of *style*. It is such citational interlinkages that constitute, I suggest below, a central object for the study of mass mediation.

Mass Mediation and Style

In navigating the multiple mandates of performing youth and doing *style* in the college, media forms have a pride of place in youth peer groups: the mustache of a film star, a global designer brand, a swatch of English borrowed from music television, and the like. Such forms are sites of aesthetic engagement and entertainment. They are objects of value, imagination, and desire. And this also makes them foci of youth sociality, tools for youths' status work. In this book, I intentionally, if unconventionally, treat these various social forms as instances of mass media. In doing so, I follow Asif Agha's (2011a; 2011b) call to expand and refocus the category of media around what he calls "mediatization."³⁴ Agha (2011a:163) defines mediatization as those "institutional practices that reflexively link processes of communication to processes of commoditization." What is at issue in this book, however, is not so much the commoditized nature of communication (though the media forms discussed in the book are, indeed, commoditized) but Agha's expansive treatment of mass media as involving interdiscursive connections across "phases" of mediation. I am interested in framing mass mediation from the perspective of the coordination of otherwise disparate events of discursive interaction at scales that involve, but also exceed, face-to-face exchange. From this point of view, objects of *style*, like brand garments, filmic mustaches, on-air English-Tamil speech, and the like, are all media forms in the sense that they mediate, or coordinate, and thus produce large-scale, dispersed social relations (to wit, youth culture) in ways irreducible to single, local events of interaction. Mass mediation, for me, requires attending to the interdiscursively forged *relations* between events and sites of social practice—between the campus and the textile workshop, the tea stall and the film set, the hostel television room and the television studio, but also among the college campus, the tea stall, and the hostel; between television stations and their VJs; between actors and their films; between local textile producers and global brand manufacturers. I treat such relations as the constituting social fact of mass media.

While social forms like brands, youth slang, and film are not typically grouped together as mass media, they operate and are organized in ways whose similarity benefits from a singular methodological and analytic framework. This book provides one such framework. I ask how we might see media objects as the precipitates of the entanglements between youth peer groups and the "producers" of such objects. The semiotic form of this sociomaterial mode of entanglement is the citation; its cultural substance

is *style*. As I show, through its citational semiotics, *style* mediates the materialization and entextualization of particular media objects by calibrating the social projects of those who come to be commonly oriented vis-à-vis those very forms.

While the study of mass mediation necessitates attention to each of these social projects and their interrelationships, in this book, my primary departure point and ethnographic anchor is the youth peer group; secondarily, it is those involved in the “production” of the media that youth draw on in their everyday social practices.³⁵ The primacy given to youth, and young men in particular, follows from my emphasis on how the various media forms that are reanimated in youth peer groups to do *style* are themselves already marked and re-marked by the dynamics of the peer group, by its liminality and citationality. Youths’ citational practices do something to the media forms they cite, not simply in the post hoc moment of their “reception” or “consumption,” but in the way in which they are made and unmade at the sites of their creation and circulation. By grounding my analysis in the youth peer group, then, I aim to demonstrate how the very constitution of media must always be situated beyond the canonical, and proximate, contexts of their “production” (and, it turns out, their “reception”). I show how those involved in the making of brand garments, music television, and films come to be entangled with youth (their “consumers”), just as youth are with each other, an entanglement that results from producers’ citations and imaginations of youth practice, from their own common aesthetic orientation to *style*, and from the ways in which the market viability of their productions depend on their addressing and being citationally taken up by youth. Media materialize such multiple entanglements, simultaneously registering and anticipating them.

This way of framing mass mediation complicates the way we typically think of media. As I show in the various sections of this book, if we take such citational relationships as our primary datum, then the basic categories upon which our theories of brand, language, and film presume—namely, brand, linguistic code, and text—are rendered problematic precisely because the citational relations that I discuss in this book themselves turn on bracketing the ontological status, fixity, and coherence of these categories. Each pair of chapters focuses on this problematization and interrogates these ontologies: What and when is a brand (chapters 2–3)? What and when is a linguistic code (chapters 4–5)? What and when is a film text (chapters 6–7)? How does *style*—in mediating the various sites and social projects that conspire to materialize the media forms that acts of doing *style* seize upon—depend on these ontologies, even as it deforms

and decenters them? What might the citation tell us about what is being cited, the deformed about the norm that it reanimates and brackets?

Answers to these questions raise larger issues for theorizing mass mediation. Work on mass media has long tended to implicitly assume the stability, autonomy, and coherence of the media object as being what producers “produce” and consumers “consume” (or audiences “receive”), setting up each as distinct, if not independent, with regard to the others. It is on this linear imaginary of a media division of labor that a division of academic labor is based: some scholars read and decode media objects, others elicit “reception,” others study their “production.” In such a view, the relationships between these sites become an aporia, a gap created by fixing, and fixating on, the stable media object.

While in some ways, this way of talking about mass mediation is unavoidable (indeed, these terms appear in various guises in the chapters that follow) and certainly generative in certain moments, as a whole, this book attempts to problematize such ways of treating media—and thus notions of “production,” “consumption,” and “reception”—by taking the citational relationships between garment manufacturers and youth, music-television VJs and youth, and film actors and youth as its object of analysis. I show how such entanglements are the conditions upon which particular media artifacts and genres are intelligible and materialized. From this point of view, media forms can fruitfully be seen not simply as tools taken up by youth or the outcomes of media producers’ creative efforts but as barometers of citational interactions stretched across social space and time, as dynamic materializations whose very citational forms bear the past and anticipatory traces of various social actors’ citational engagements.

Similar theoretical moves and critiques have been raised in the study of so-called new or digital media through concepts such as “interactivity” (Gane and Beer 2008), “prosumption” (Manovich 2001; cf. Toffler 1980), “produsage” (Bruns 2008), “convergence culture” (Jenkins 2008), and “spreadability” (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013). However, as this book suggests and as I discuss in the concluding chapter, a methodological and analytic framework that undermines discrete categories of production and consumption is required even to understand how so-called old media work (Lukács 2010:22–23), and even social forms not typically included in the category of “the media.”³⁶ Whether old or new, canonically considered media or not, the question remains: how are social relations between various noncopresent social parties mediated over space and time? This basic question is hindered by assuming the self-same stability and autonomy of media forms.

The question this book raises, then, is under what conditions do such ontologies—brand, code, text—and thus the media forms that come to instantiate them come to be intelligible as such, materialized in such a way that their analysis is even possible at all? And if such coherences are the achievements of the very processes being studied, how are we to think those processes? Can analytics like brand, code, and text be presumed upon in a coherent analysis of the citational semiotics of *style*, a semiotics that animates such ontologies even as it decenters and deforms them? Or do such ready-at-hand analytics (namely, brand, code, and text) instate their own ideologies of semiosis that obscure that citationality and hence obscure what they purport to elucidate in the first place (namely, what and when a brand, linguistic code, or film text “are”)? Is it, then, the very (in) coherence of such ontologies and analytics that has to be theorized? To invert Richard Schechner’s (1985:296) proposition, is it precisely because everything is in quotation marks that the categories are not settled?

Notes

CHAPTER ONE

1. Herein lies a complex citational history, for mustaches such as Anthony's (*arivā mīsai*, 'machete mustache' in Tamil; also known as an "imperial" [partial beard] mustache in the United States and Britain) are enmeshed both with south Indian regional and caste styles and with colonial British military grooming styles. Among the British military, large, lustrous mustaches were prompted by nineteenth-century encounters with the mustachioed French military (whose mustaches were said to be "appurtenances of terror") and, importantly for us here, with the British's Indian subjects (Brendon 2007:127). In the first half of the nineteenth century, British soldiers were required to be clean-shaven, while the sepoys were allowed facial hair (Reynolds 1949:273). Given Indian associations of facial hair with virility and the shaven face with effeminacy, and an increasingly felt need by the British to assert racial and martial superiority, mustaches became compulsory for British soldiers in India from 1854 to 1916 (Brendon 2007:127–28). More generally, facial hair flourished on male British faces in the latter half of the nineteenth century with the so-called mustache movement.
2. Not all mustaches are linked to respectability, of course. The excessively large and thus aggressive mustache can also transgress the civility of *mariyātai*. There is a complex and historically deep semiotics and sociology of adult facial hair that can be elaborated here (in particular, as it interfaces with caste, as seen in various entries of Thurston and Rangachari 1909; Srinivas 1976:68, 152; Olivelle 1998; Osella and Osella 2006:12, 46, 209–10; Gorringer and Rafanell 2007:103). My interest, however, is in contextualizing how young men today

figure their own facial hair vis-à-vis their stereotypes of adult facial hair (which simplifies this complexity to a certain extent). On the cultural concept of *mariyātai*, see Mines 2005:81–100; on its linguistic manifestations, see Levinson 1977 and Scherl 1996. On ‘big men’ in Tamil Nadu, see Mines and Gourishankar 1990 and Mines 1994.

3. In Anthony’s case, such an ample mustache indexed forms of masculinity at odds with the urbane, *decent* subject that was supposed to be cultivated in/by the college (cf. Jeffrey et al. 2008). Before they went on job interviews, many of these students would make sure to—among other things, like putting on a tie, getting a haircut, and wearing cologne—shave or trim their facial hair, conforming to their idea of what a young professional should look like.
4. Beards are highly meaningful in Tamil Nadu; they can index “love failure” (*kātal tōlvī*), or depression more generally, and are also associated with non-normative masculinities (cf. Srinivas 1976:152; Olivelle 1998)—from the *rowdy* to the mentally unstable and the mendicant—as well as, for certain beard styles, religious identity (orthodox Islam).
5. Suriya’s mustache is also reminiscent of Kamal Hassan’s famous *arivā mīsai* from the 1992 film *Thevar Magan*, where he plays the eponymous ‘son of Thevar’ (the name of a dominant, martial caste in the Madurai region), drawing on and reinforcing the stereotypical associations of this style of mustache (see notes 1 and 2 in this chapter).
6. Such ambivalent citational acts, as reanimations in Erving Goffman’s (1981) sense of “animation,” represence forms while reflexively marking particular stances toward what is being presented. In this case, reanimating another’s act marks differences in what Goffman terms the author (who composes the act’s form), the principal (who is responsible for it, who stands by and behind it), and the animator (who materializes it), hence reanimation’s complex (meta)semiotic form, as Goffman (1981:227ff.) notes in his discussion of the “embedding” of utterances (and the various footings implied therein). See the main text for more discussion.
7. We might compare *style* to Sanjay Srivastava’s (2007:227ff.) discussion of what he calls “ishtyle” (utilizing the north Indian borrowing of the English word “style”) and “fashion.” In discussing Indian sex and health magazine advertisements, Srivastava analytically distinguishes “fashion,” a cosmopolitan aesthetic of the upper-middle classes, from “ishtyle,” an aesthetics of surface among the “non-middle classes” that stands in an “excessive relationship with fashion” (ibid.:228, original emphasis). Ishtyle “wants fashion” (ibid.), makes overtures to it, and thus is entangled by it. Taking up these terms in their discussion of Malayali youth dress, Caroline and Filippo Osella (2007) make a more stark differentiation: “ishtyle” denotes a working-class, vernacular, film-driven mode of status and aesthetics (what their informants called “*freak style*”) as opposed to a middle-class focus on “fashion” and global trends (cf. Osella and Osella 1999). While there are resonances among my discussion, Srivastava’s, and the Osellas’s (cf. Nakassis 2010:295), there

are also some differences. First, while Srivastava notes that *ishtyle* (and here, *style*) is always already interlinked to questions of what he calls “fashion,” I would also emphasize that *style*’s relationship to upper-middle-class modes of consumption (e.g., brands and English, as discussed in chapters 2 and 4) is not a straightforward one of “wanting” but is more ambivalent. Second, the students with whom I worked were liminally located between the two class segments that “*ishtyle*” and “*fashion*” index. Further, they were part of an institution—the college—that they hoped would move them across these segments. *Style* expresses and intervenes in that liminality (and thus mediates these two terms), problematizing any clear isomorphism between *ishtyle* or *fashion* and *style* (or for that matter, with what my young friends called “*fashion*,” a word often used along with “*style*” to denote something trendy and new). A further complication is that Tamil film fashion (on and off the screen) is—as Srivastava notes in the north Indian case—wrapped up with, and disseminates, global fashion.

8. While both “*style*” and “*stylish*” are used in Tamil with roughly equivalent meanings (and both as nouns), “*style*” is more common and can be used in a wider number of constructions. In my own discussion, rather than write “*style-ish*” for the adjectival form of the Tamil word “*style*,” I simply write “*stylish*.”
9. In this book I interchangeably use the terms “media form” and “media object” for those mass-mediated artifacts, signs, texts, and genres (or fractions thereof) that youth reanimate in their peer groups. This is a heterogeneous set that includes, but also cuts across, how we typically unitize media (e.g., as entextualized commodity forms such as programs or films), comprising not only swatches of linguistic form, visual design elements, dance movements, and mustaches but also television programs, registers of language, film texts and genres, garments, and brands. These are not “objects” in the canonical way we figure things like, say, chairs (but neither perhaps are chairs). Rather, they are semiotic objects constituted and materialized by their metasemiotic objectification (cf. Silverstein and Urban 1996). Part material object, part culturally genred form, these fractions of mass mediation are united by the fact of being cited by Tamil youth to do *style*. (In these cases, it is the act of citation that objectifies them.) The terms “media form” and “media object,” then, conflate distinctions of (material) token and (genred) type (following the fact that citational acts may reanimate either or both of them). While I often move between discussion of tokens and types of media objects/forms, my concerns lie mainly with types of media objects/forms. See the main text in this chapter and chapter 8 for more discussion.
10. “English-medium” and “Tamil-medium” refer to the English and Tamil languages, respectively, being used as the languages of instruction and examination. While all departments in the colleges where I worked (except literature departments) offered English-medium streams, only certain departments offered Tamil-medium streams. In addition to a bachelors in

Tamil literature, the government college in Chennai that I worked in also offered a Tamil-medium bachelor's degree in history, while the autonomous Madurai colleges that I worked in offered Tamil-medium bachelor's degrees in economics. Both courses of study were considered to be unprestigious and to have little "value" in the job market. The autonomous college in Chennai where I worked offered no Tamil-medium undergraduate degrees besides its bachelors in Tamil literature. Even in English-medium courses, however, teaching and classroom discussion was often conducted in Tamil. (Some classes were conducted almost entirely in Tamil, with only the "notes"—that is, the materials that would be tested on examinations—dictated in English.) The amount of Tamil depended on students' and professors' (lack of) comfort with English. As English competence was generally higher in the more prestigious, or more expensive, departments and colleges, instruction in those colleges and departments was more likely to be in English than Tamil. See following main text and note 19 in this chapter for more discussion.

11. Population data for cities in Tamil Nadu that are discussed in this book are taken from the 2011 census (accessed January 26, 2015, <http://www.census.tn.nic.in>).
12. By "elite" I mean colleges that have a national reputation for excellence and draw the most competitive students; by "semielite" I mean colleges that have a regional reputation for excellence, but are perceived as less prestigious and less competitive than elite colleges. The distinction also registers the different, if overlapping, economic, social, and cultural capital of colleges' student bodies. These terms are my own and are rough due to the fact that, as I discuss in the main text, student demographics and the perceived "value" of liberal arts education have been undergoing dramatic change in recent decades.
13. Colleges in India are affiliated with either government or private degree-granting universities. The colleges I worked in, whether they were autonomous or not, were all affiliated with government universities and received subsidies from the state, though to varying degrees.
14. All of the colleges I worked in were coeducational at the postgraduate level with the exception of the women's college. Note that saying that the elite Chennai college was Catholic or that the Madurai colleges were founded by Protestant missionaries does not imply that only Christian students attended. Students from every community attended these colleges (as per government reservations), though these colleges did have more Christian students than represented in the general population (given the administrations' discretion with their "management quota," which at the Catholic college's aided courses, for example, was 50 percent).
15. Here the noun "Orientalist" refers to a generation of scholar-administrators working in early British India. It is distinct from, though not completely unrelated to, Edward Said's (1977) use of the term "Orientalism" and its adjectival derivation "Orientalist." See Trautmann 1997:22ff. for discussion.

16. Female education has been an issue of reform in India since the nineteenth century, though its ends in the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century largely focused on uplift of the family and nation by producing a better wife and mother rather than gender equity per se. On this, see Chanana 1988; 1994; Jeffrey and Jeffrey 1994; Seymour 2002; Seth 2007; Chandra 2012.
17. Reservations are akin to American “affirmative action.” The early adoption of reservation policies in higher education in the Madras Presidency, P. Radhakrishnan (1993) argues, were not simply due to the non-Brahmin politics of the Justice Party, but had a longer history linked to Britain’s worry (and collection of statistics) about the dominance of, and thus dependence upon, Brahmins in colonial administration and higher education (also see Fuller and Narasimhan 2014:9–10, 61–89). The victory of the non-Brahmin Justice Party in the first direct election in 1920 saw the state government institute reservations in higher education to mitigate Brahmin dominance and to increase access for otherwise subordinate social groups.
18. Shah (2013[2005]) and Tilak (2013) note that in India, there were 3 universities and 27 colleges in 1857, 19 universities and 500 colleges in 1947, 320 universities and 16,000 colleges in 2005, with close to 634 universities and 33,000 colleges in 2013. Fuller and Narasimhan (2014:94) report that while between 1949 and 1950, only 5,500 engineering graduates were produced, by 1970, the output was around 20,000. In 1997, 65,000 graduates were produced, and in 2006, 220,000 were produced. Chanana (2013[2007]) notes that self-financing colleges in Tamil Nadu increased from 54 to 247 between 1993 and 2001 (while government arts and sciences colleges increased from 56 to 60, and aided colleges from 132 to 133), while self-financed engineering colleges increased from 71 to 212 between 1996 and 2001 (government and aided engineering colleges remained the same at 7 and 3, respectively; also see Fuller and Narasimhan 2014:95). As of 2014, there are more than 500 self-financed engineering colleges in Tamil Nadu. Enrollments in private colleges in Tamil Nadu from 1996 to 2001 increased from 20,250 to 55,500, and in 2010, 150,000 places were available.
19. Tamil-medium education is generally less prestigious and less expensive than its English-medium counterparts. This is an effect both of the Indian education system’s colonial heritage and of the current global political economy. On vernacular-medium versus English-medium schooling in north India, see LaDousa 2014 and Proctor 2014; see Ramanathan 2005 for discussion in the college context; for general discussion of English-medium education in India, see Annamalai 1991; 2004.
20. On the complex and contentious debates surrounding inequality in contemporary higher education, see the essays in Tilak 2013.
21. This is complicated because the historical reputation of the government college where I did research is as a center of student politics, and thus as a tough and rowdy place. More than *style*, the keyword to denote youth status in this college was *gettu* (literally, ‘prestige,’ ‘dominance’). Like *style*, *gettu* was used

in all the colleges I worked in. It was used for an overlapping set of practices and objects as *style* (though *gettu* could be used to talk about adults, while *style* almost never was), and often with a similar, if not the same sense (see Nakassis 2010:95–108). By contrast to *style* (as a mode of ego-focal individuation performed for an audience), *gettu* was often used to typify acts or objects that instated hierarchical ranking vis-à-vis social others. Hence, unlike *style*, its use was more often to outline relationships of dominance between groups (e.g., seniors vs. juniors, between cliques, or between colleges), or to describe particularly dominant individuals in the college (e.g., the head, or “*tala*,” of a bus route, see Nakassis 2010:100; n.d.). *Gettu* is generally associated with a more rugged working-class masculinity (it was almost never used to typify women), a toughness that figured, and sometimes instantiated, physical domination and violence. This was most stark in the comparisons made by the students at the two Chennai colleges where I worked. When typifying the other college, *gettu* and *style* took on class-inflected meanings, even if both terms were used at both colleges largely to denote the same objects and activities. While the government college was known as a *gettāna* college (‘tough college’), the Catholic college was a *style-āna* college (‘*stylish* college’). The terms were also used slightly differently in the two colleges. Students from the elite college (who were more affluent) used *gettu* and *style* with more overlap (thus eliding the class-linked indexicalities and semantics of these two terms and their extensions), while the government college students differentiated *style* and *gettu* to a greater extent. In general, it was the case that less affluent students were more likely to point to more affluent students as the ones who really do *style*, though as I suggest in this chapter and argue in chapter 2, this reveals a complex ambivalence toward class that the economy of *style* necessitates.

22. As Deborah Durham (2004) has argued, “youth” is akin to a linguistic shifter (also Bucholtz 2002:527–28), an indexical sign whose reference “shifts” based on who is animating it and in what context. As this implies, youth is not a homogeneous category of analysis or experience. As the history and anthropology of youth has demonstrated, the category is historically and culturally variable. Certainly, youth as it is currently imagined and experienced in South Asia is a relatively recent phenomenon (Nandy 2004[1987]; Saraswathi 1999; Liechty 2003; Lukose 2009), differentially experienced by age, class, caste, gender, and region—among other sociological and psychological variables (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 2005; de Boeck and Honwana 2005; Cole and Durham 2008 and references therein). Indeed, for reasons linked to their quick integration into the workforce (especially for the working-class poor) or into the kin or community group (especially for those from highly orthodox families, and especially for young women), many young people in Tamil Nadu have little to no experience of the age-category youth as discussed in this book. For the students with whom I worked, however, youth was a salient framing of their social practices and modes of

sociality. And given explosions of youth-targeting media and marketing, the expansion of education institutions, and the steadily rising age of marriage, the experience of youth is important for an ever-increasing number of people in Tamil Nadu.

But more than its cultural and historical variability, saying that youth is a shifter implies that it is multiply realizable in and across events of interaction. Shifters like youth are ambivalent signs, their uses and meanings specific to their contexts, and yet simultaneously independent of them. If youth is a shifter, then what counts as youth depends on the pragmatics of the particular interactions in which the category itself is in play, on the social relations and contexts it presupposes and brings into being, and crucially, on how the category is cited or troped on in novel ways. To be a shifter means precisely being open to the proliferation of the not quite, to the porousness of normativity that gives the indexical category in question its performative potentiality. Hence when it comes to youth, “old” men can act *like* (or by being *like*, even *be*) youths, and “young” men can, depending on the context, not be considered youth at all (Meiu 2014). This is also why the demographic extension of youth is never sufficient to exhaust its social meanings, why its boundaries can never be completely shored up, and why it can never be completely fixed. It is why youth is always a gradient category, a composite effect, only ever inhabited in partial ways and only some of the time (Johnson-Hanks 2002). The important questions, then, are under what conditions and in what contexts is youth as a category intelligible, and to what effect? Through what kinds of performances is youth inhabited and made intelligible and palpable to others, its qualities of personhood performatively materialized in the world? In a word, how is youth and its semiotic vestments, as linguistic anthropologists would put it (Silverstein 2003; Agha 2007), enregistered?

23. Anthropologists have long approached youth and adolescence as a transitory stage between childhood and adulthood. As Mary Bucholtz (2002) has argued, this has conferred upon studies of youth an adult-centric point of view, treating youth as not quite adults, as unfinished and only partially socialized beings. The result has often been that youth culture is not treated as its own site of cultural creativity and autonomous normativity. While Bucholtz (2002) is correct in warning anthropologists not to reduce youth practices to a teleology of adulthood, *style* as youth practice and discourse cannot be understood except as that which animates and keeps in abeyance the adult (and the child). The issue, then, is not just an epistemological problem for anthropologists. It is also an issue for those with whom we work; Tamil youth reflexively figure their experience as liminally between childhood and adulthood, a fact that must be taken into account in theorizing their social practices.

At the same time, as Deborah Durham (2008:166) has noted, by approaching youth through notions of the rite of passage (Van Gennep 1960)

and ritual liminality (Turner 1967) anthropologists have tended to romanticize the figure of youth as the vanguard of change, social development, and resistance to the status quo. Often such studies analyze the ways in which youth cultural practices appropriate and recontextualize hegemonic, often global social forms (say, a brand, an English phrase, a mustache), doubling them in the act of defying them and, in doing so, opening up new social and political horizons (Willis 1977; Hebdige 1979; Comaroff and Comaroff 2005:27–29; de Boeck and Honwana 2005:10; Lukose 2009; Jeffrey 2010: 72–102). In this book I too highlight the liminality of youth and their creative appropriations, or as I prefer, citations. As I show, however, less a question of resistance or subversion, youths' *stylish* citations have everything to do with the politics of the peer group, with the necessity to manage intimacies and solidarities with peers while negotiating status through transgressions of adult normativity (Nakassis 2013d).

24. Many, if not all, youth cultures around the world are characterized by the dynamics of liminality that I discuss in this book (see, e.g., Willis 1977; Hebdige 1979; Cosgrove 1984; Rampton 1995; Gondola 1999; Osella and Osella 1999; 2000b; Bucholtz 2002; 2011; Weiss 2002; Lukose 2009; Tetreault 2009; Jeffrey 2010; Newell 2012). Though, in this, youth cultures are certainly not unique. Examples of this dynamic of liminality, ambivalence, and citationality can be found in writing about (post)coloniality (Fanon 2008[1952]; Bhabha 2004[1993]; Chatterjee 1993; Taussig 1993:176–92; Povinelli 2002; Blackburn 2003), fashion (Simmel 1998[1904]), flirtation (Simmel 1984[1909]), queer sexuality and gender (Newton 1972; Butler 1993; 1997; Harvey 2002; Hall 2005), the (“new”) middle classes (Liechty 2003:61–86; Fernandes 2006; Dickey 2013), ritual (Turner 1967), performance (Brecht 1964; Turner 1982; Schechner 1985), and psychodynamics (Freud 1995[1915]; 1995[1925]; 1938; Bateson 1972).
25. For these youth, the discourse of “society” agentified a generalized experience of hierarchy and subordination, the real and imagined strictures and adult normativities of propriety and respectability that they felt their own practices to push up against. In my discussion, neither “adult” nor “society” should be taken as descriptions of how such entities exist in the world as such, but how they must be taken to exist by young people so that their own activities and experiences are intelligible to them and pragmatically efficacious in their peer groups. I do little to unpack what one could possibly mean by “society” as an analytical construct useful for describing social life. Instead I use it as a placeholder, as young people themselves use it, to explicate youth sociality.
26. On “maturity” and its connection with youth status and the lifecycle in the Kerala context, see Osella and Osella 2000b.
27. Such acts were not primarily addressed to, or designed for, adults. More than rebellion, youth fashion, slang, smoking, and the like were directed toward one’s peers (Juluri 2003; Bucholtz 2011:12; cf. Willis 1977:12–13). When

- statusful adults, especially elder kin, were present as possible addressees or bystanders of such acts, youth were likely to quickly put out their cigarettes, clean up their speech, and squash their *style*. My hostelmates often underwent a minor makeover before they went back home—cutting their hair, removing their earrings, and putting on staid, muted dress.
28. Cf. Schwartz and Merten's (1967:461ff.) discussion of the "hoody" and the "socie," Willis's (1977:13ff.) discussion of "lads" versus "ear'oles," and Eckert's (2000) discussion of "jocks" and "burnouts." All such categories divide youth based on alignment to adult authority. Jock/burnout and socie/hoody primarily vest such differences in class identities. By contrast, the opposition between the *cinna paiyan* and the *periya āl* figures student difference through age categories (cf. Willis 1977:15 on the childishness of the "ear'oles").
 29. This experimentation and freedom was experienced more as a form of leisure and play than anything else. In contrast to the Indian colleges that Craig Jeffrey (2010) and Ritty Lukose (2009) have written about, the student bodies of the colleges where I worked were relatively apolitical. This was partially due to the historical particularities of Tamil Nadu (compared with Uttar Pradesh and Kerala) and to the institutional particularities of the colleges where I worked. In the autonomous colleges where I worked, students largely had no formal rights to contest collegial decisions. The college administration reserved the right to expel students without appeal, effectively reducing any possible political power that students might have. Even in the government college in Chennai where I worked—a college famous for its political activism and for being a training ground for politicians—political activity was generally absent, the result of a concerted effort by the college administration in the 1990s to stamp out student politics in the name of "academic excellence" and "discipline" (Nakassis n.d.).
 30. A common explanation for why my friends and hostelmates did something—like grow out their hair, pierce their ears, or grow their thumb or pinky nail—was simply that they could *not* do it at home or in school. College was figured by these students as a space of relative freedom in direct contrast to the stifling rules of the home or school. In general, my college friends made every effort to not seem like school students (Nakassis 2010:45).
 31. During the time of my fieldwork, there were a number of caste conflicts between Dalit and Thevar students in the law college of Chennai, as well as at various government colleges in southern Tamil Nadu. Such conflicts, however, did not spill over into the colleges where I worked, though students were relatively sensitive about issues of caste, a fact registered by how they avoided the subject altogether. In this book, I am interested to highlight what kinds of sociality, subjectivity, aesthetics, and value emerge in the space of this ideological disavowal of caste and other forms of inequality. While there is more that could be explored as to how caste and community mediated the practices that I discuss in this book—for example, in spaces where

such disavowals were not operative or failed to hold—and how “caste feeling,” as students sometimes put it (Nakassis 2014:183), may have persisted and insinuated itself within peer groups, I do not pursue such avenues of inquiry.

32. In distinction to the other colleges I worked at, where department affiliation was one of the key modes of student identity and peer-group organization, in the Chennai government college, for most day scholars, one’s “bus route”—that organization and identity defined by the named city bus route that one took to the college—was a more important mode of peer-group organization and identity. On bus routes, see Nakassis 2010:72–75, 98–105; n.d.
33. For postgraduate students, year cohorts would be ranked as first-year MA students, second-year MA students, and M.Phil students, each more “senior” than the previous and to the undergraduates.
34. The term “mediatization” is also used by media and communication scholars, though with a different, if not totally unrelated, sense (see, e.g., Schulz 2004; Livingstone 2009; Lundby 2009; Couldry and Hepp 2013; Hjarvard and Peterson 2013). This large literature is primarily concerned with what happens to social forms (“culture” and “society”) when they come into the technological and institutional ambit of particular media (cf. McLuhan 1964; Baudrillard 1994; Bolter and Grusin 1999). Like Agha (2011a; 2011b), this literature has tried to shift focus away from the typically narrow definitions of mass media and from concerns with media “effects.” But rather than situating media within larger interdiscursive networks (of which their status as “mass media” is a particular phase), this literature attempts to understand how media institutions and technologies increasingly (often, in epochal terms) come to “mediatize” nonmediatized spaces and activities. In this book, my focus is not on what happens to putatively nonmediatized practices when they become mediatized. Such a formulation already presumes a distinct temporal boundary between the nonmediatized and the mediatized, as well as imputing an ontological autonomy and stability to “the media” (Deacon and Staney 2014). As I argue in this book, to study mass mediation is to fundamentally problematize and blur the coordinates by which we could even pose this formulation. This requires not focusing on “the media” or their “logics” as they mediatize social actors’ practices and projects (which are thereby figured as external to such media), but on the relations and entanglements between such actors and their projects as they come to materialize *as* particular media and media objects. The question here, then, is how we are to account for how media objects come into being through interdiscursive linkages that continually, if tenuously, sustain such media objects as the site of coordination between such so-linked projects.
35. The converse methodological emphasis would focus primarily on a particular site of media production or a particular media form and trace out its entanglements with its multiple publics.
36. The temporalities and socioinfrastructural organization of so-called new me-

dia are certainly different from so-called old media, a fact that reflections on new media's novelty have pointed out. The socioinfrastructural organization of certain old (i.e., broadcast) media similarly, if inversely, motivate reanalyses of their functioning as top-down in nature and as involving a radical disconnect of producer, text, and audience. And yet, what such reanalyses of old media obscure is precisely what those of new media exaggerate. What differs between so-called old and new media are the scale and rate of spatiotemporal calibration (or “interactivity”) between the multiple parties that are oriented to the media objects that their relationships materialize. This is, I would suggest, ultimately not a difference in kind. Rather, it is a difference in how different media reflexively prefigure particular ideologies of circulation and use in their very technomaterial form across a history of use, reanalysis, institutionalization, and reuse. See chapter 8 for more discussion.

CHAPTER TWO

1. The Oxford English Dictionary (3rd edition; 2008) has its first entry for “ragging” in 1788 Britain, in the sense of scolding or boisterously teasing (see Davis 1899:133–47 and Peck 1904:432–33 on ragging at Oxford in the late nineteenth century and 1840s, respectively). The sense of “ritually humiliating new army recruits or university students by physical or verbal bullying” is a later development, attributed by the OED to early twentieth-century Britain and South Asia. Today, the term “ragging” is predominantly used in South Asia, with specific reference to higher education.
2. This was ironic, since Sebastian also narrated to me how he refused to be ragged by his seniors, standing up to them and thus eliciting more ragging from them. Sebastian's steadfast courage in the face of ragging was one of the reasons his same-year hostelmates looked up to him, even if he refused to participate in the college's economy of *style*, as I describe later in the chapter.
3. This hierarchical intimacy was modeled by the fictive patrilineal kinterms used across years (Nakassis 2014): male seniors addressed their male juniors with “*tambi*” (‘younger brother’) and received “*aṇṇan*” (‘older brother’) in return. This relationship not only entailed juniors' subordination to seniors but also entailed seniors' responsibility to advise and help out their juniors. One mode of ragging that diagrams the ambivalence of this intimacy within hierarchy is the practice of seniors forcing freshers to take them out to the movies (moviegoing typically being an activity done with peers) while demanding that they pay for their tickets (a command entailing their juniors' subordination).
4. For some students, this reformulation of age and generational difference as year difference was upsetting. Arun was a second-year student when we lived in the same Madurai hostel. Before coming to Madurai, he had discontinued his studies at another college, making him one year older than his cohort members. Over the course of the next two years, he increasingly began to