The Global-Popular: A Frame for Contemporary Cinemas

Bishnupriya Ghosh, Bhaskar Sarkar

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That we now inhabit the global-popular has become something of a commonplace. Upsurges from the Arab Spring to right-wing populisms; the number of active Facebook users crossing the billion mark; the popularity of Psy's Gangnam Style and Shah Rukh Khan fan clubs sprouting all over Europe; the dissemination of alternative medical practices (e.g., acupuncture), health regimens (e.g., yoga), and lifestyle orientations (e.g., feng shui); the proliferation of bottom-up low-tech "make-do" modes like *gambiarra* and *jugaad*: these popular creativities and mobilizations constitute an experiential realm that appears so ubiquitous and self-evident that cognition and mapping become difficult.

If the global and the popular are now everywhere, how does one conceptualize the conjugation global-popular? What specifically does the hyphen between the two seemingly banal and all-encompassing terms do? If the conjunction is not simply additive, how are we to theorize it?

The global-popular is primarily experienced in three overlapping realms: the economic, the political, and the cultural. Discourses of globalization focus on top-down economic forces. Economic accounts of the global culture industry, for one, conflate the global-popular with the global-corporate, reducing political and cultural dimensions to epiphenomena. Our understanding of the global-popular includes bottom-up practices that cut across the three realms. The casting of Scarlett Johansson as the lead in the 2017 remake of *Ghost in the Shell*, a pop cultural event, fueled a pointed debate about global racial politics.[1] The global convulsions around #MeToo, a popular political groundswell, are inducing changes in workplace cultures, dating rituals, and representational regimes that have routinely idealized lotharios and stalkers

as romantic heroes. Renewed demands for social justice ricocheting across continents in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement spur an impetus to think about the structural congruencies between embedded hierarchies such as caste and race.[2] This salience across multiple domains adds to the difficulty of characterization, let alone rigorous definition, of the global-popular.

In this issue, we examine cinematic formations *within* global-popular cultures. Even as we track economic and political entanglements, our focus remains attuned primarily to cultural circulations. Comprising six new articles and an introduction, the issue explores how the concept of the "global-popular" might be productive for cinema studies. This means asking, among other things, what happens to cinema under the sign of the global-popular? "Cinema" here is broadly construed to include its diffuse multimedial manifestations and cultural extensions. Simultaneously, we ask: What does this focus on cinema bring to our understanding of the global-popular?

Keeping with the cinematic theme, we begin with a "trailer" for each of the issue's organizing concepts. First, cinema. The last four decades, the era of contemporary globalization, have witnessed the phasing out of celluloid cinema. This gradual demise is related to tremendous developments in digital media technologies and the proliferation of screens. Cinema's "death" has brought about its efflorescence in novel multimedia formats, including its replatformings and remediations.[3] Two other modes of proliferation—financial-speculative opportunisms and popular-representational practices—contributed to the explosion of cinema in the postcelluloid era. Writing about the transformation of Bombay cinema into Bollywood, Ashish Rajadhyaksha argues that Bollywoodization has meant the formalization, standardization, and corporatization of the Bombay industry, transforming it from a celluloid-based cinema into a veritable culture industry (Rajadhyaksha 2009). While "films" remain its imputed center, the Bollywood juggernaut now involves a wide array of activities, products, and services from television franchising, music videos, and star concert tours to online fan communities, fashion zines, and gallery art installations. The same is true of J-pop, K-pop, Hong Kong cinema, Hollywood, and Nollywood. The following image featuring a snapshot of Bernie Sanders at the 2021 US presidential inauguration, and rumored to have originated from Cairo, has appeared in a global torrent

of memes (Figure 1). Whether or not the rumor is true, anecdotally, we can report on the Cairene passion for *aflam hindiya* and, in particular, the blockbuster *Sholay* (1975) that we encountered during a visit in 2008.

Second, the global-popular. The hyphen precludes the simple qualification of one term by the other; instead, each fundamentally transforms the other to produce an amalgam. In this distinctly experiential domain, the centrality of the popular—of volatile creatives and intransigent impulses—rends all hegemonic materializations of the global. The global becomes a pluriverse whose constituents are partial, localized, and emergent. Simultaneously, the rise of the global as *the* salient aspirational horizon, eclipsing earlier principles of organizing communal affiliations and future visions (civilization, religion, nation), provides new channels of articulation for local-popular energies. This imaginative-aspirational sense of the global-popular is thoroughly entwined with the techno-economic infrastructures and processes of what is usually referred to as globalization. In contrast, our understanding of globalization is "Davos + the other 99%" or, more pertinent to our focus here, global media oligarchies along with bottom-up participatory media practices.

Figure 1. Bernie-*Sholay* meme, January 21, 2021

As an approach, the global-popular does not stop at the critique of global techno-economic hegemonies. Rather, it draws attention to ground-level activities in the local-popular arena. Thus, the first objective of this introduction is to situate the popular as anchoring analytic for the global, while simultaneously tracking the dissemination of the local-popular from its national moorings. Such speculations provided the problematic for a two-part conference held at the University of California, Santa Barbara, in 2016. The present issue collates the papers that were explicitly about cinema as a part of global-popular cultures. The second objective of this introduction, then, is to explore the productivity of the concept for cinema studies. We pursue these objectives in the balance of the introduction by historicizing cultural studies in a global frame, and by placing the global-popular in relation to cognate concepts in cinema studies—specifically, world cinema and transnational cinema.

A GLOBAL CULTURAL STUDIES?

The rise of cultural studies as a disciplinary paradigm coincided with the onset of contemporary globalization. Discussions within cinema studies that are most germane to our exploration of global-popular cine-cultures are crucially inflected by cultural studies methodologies. Before we proceed, two caveats are in order. For us, the "contemporary" does not signal a radical rupture with the past; one of our contributors tracks the itineraries of early 1980s' Bombay cinema's disco dancer backward (to Hollywood disco films and Donna Summer ditties of the 1970s) and forward (to the circulation of the "Bollywood" figure, including various East European homages, over the last three decades). Nor do we mean to suggest that nothing before the 1980s, purportedly the onset of neoliberal globalization, matters to the current conjuncture: indeed, as the two contributions here on the currency of the cinematic father figure and the Malay female vampire demonstrate, precolonial and colonial cultural traces persist as significant resources for negotiating current anxieties.

Anglophone cultural studies gained traction precisely for its attention to local and microlevel cultural phenomenologies that were, nevertheless, imbricated with commercial mass culture. But this orientation

also became a roadblock to the study of more global cultural forma-
tions, partly because of a linguistic bias and partly because of the
scale of the problematic. Salutary attempts to "internationalize" cul-
tural studies by studying cultural bodies and practices beyond the
Anglophone world embraced and foregrounded difference (linguis-
tic, cultural, historical). But their outcomes were legible mainly as
area studies scholarship; the "beyond" remained just that. The emerg-
ing international archive of cultural experiences took the increasingly
salient realm of the global-popular for granted, almost as a geocultural
unconscious, without explicitly addressing it.[4] Global scale continued
to be addressed mainly in scholarship that analyzed the workings of
global media capital; but even the more nuanced of these works fell
into broad arguments about the Disneyfication of global culture, los-
ing sight of local, ground-level complexities.[5]

    Simon During makes an early attempt to apprehend the global-
popular as such; although sans the hyphen the first term becomes
a qualifier of the second, together they invoke an expansion of the
realm of the popular on a global scale. While his piece appears at
the height of the so-called turn to Antonio Gramsci in cultural theory
(with hegemony and negotiation as its twin conceptual interventions),
and in the wake of widespread applications of the Gramscian concept
of the national popular, During disavows "any intended Gramscian
resonances." With a bit of tweaking, several of During's insights—
foregrounding the differences between cultural globalization and the
global-popular, while locating some points of intersection—remain
useful for us. First, in stressing site specificity, During draws atten-
tion to the materiality of culture: the flows and traces, structures and
nodes that constitute the global-popular. Second, by arguing that com-
mercial mass culture can generate indie, art, or niche cultural forma-
tions, During draws attention to the former's myriad affordances and
complicates the relation between cultural globalization and the global-
popular as covering the entire gamut from oppositional to complicit.
Third, During finds no universal pattern propelling current transforma-
tions: they are neither all sacred nor all secular, neither always irrational
nor always enlightened. But, when he declares that "cultural global-
ization is occurring along another, much more restricted track—via
show business" (During 815), one wonders if he is not imputing to the
global-popular, by contrast, some utopian democratizing potentiality

that is decidedly Gramscian. Fourth, focusing on the global popularity of Arnold Schwarzenegger starrers all through the 1980s, During harps on a special effects-driven, gendered—that is masculinist—dimension of the global-popular that will be difficult to sustain analytically in light of more nuanced scholarship on fan cultures, and in the wake of Tony Leung, Lupita Nyong'o, and Gale Gadot.

No such democratizing impulse is at stake in the discussion of Hong Kong martial arts and gangster films in Meaghan Morris, Siu-Leung Li, and Stephen Chan Ching-kiu's influential coedited volume, *Hong Kong Connections: Transnational Imagination in Action Cinema* (2006).[6] Here, the contributors focus on transpositions and translations of cultural forms across national contexts. The popular references not only the robust embrace and creative mobilization of generic and stylistic elements but also the incorporation of entire forms (Japanese and Korean warrior narratives, Chinese opera and Indian "musicals," or Southeast Asian non–kung fu martial arts). As these cultural forms congeal into the martial arts genre, we witness the emergence of a stable global node through which scholars track transnational production, distribution, and exhibition. This conception of the global signals the ambition for a widening gyre of generic circulation, which is an *aspirational* dimension key to the global-popular. While the aspirations frequently involve global—or, more realistically, regional—box office clout, other ends are also in play. For instance, the institution of specialized taste cultures, usually around cult films; or, as in the case of Moumen Smihi in this issue, the configuration of a local art cinema; or, spurring political mobilizations, as in the case of Hong Kong martial art films in the Telegu context, or Basque nationalism around the privatization of Spanish television in the 1980s and 1990s—when a subnational community takes advantage of transnational connections to challenge the hegemony of the national.[7]

Like all popular genre films that acquire cult status, action films traffic in highly reified characters, situations, and iconographies. Characterized as cool, zany, hardcore, or "so bad it is good," cult films—assembled via the reflexive reification of certain generic and stylistic elements—undoubtedly remain a mainstay of the global-popular. But given the inordinate attention they garner—from journalistic accounts to coffee table books to academic analysis, not to mention numerous

dissertations in the pipelines[8]—cultic value, accrued through the trans-duction of the exotic (strange, weird, unfamiliar—most often Asian) into the essential ("101 films you *must* see before you die") within cos-mopolitan enclaves with ostensibly sophisticated tastes, now threatens to overwhelm all other aspects that might have informed the local pro-duction and reception of these films. That so-called cult films emerge from their own financial and social exigencies, and draw on their own cultural repertoires, is lost in such translations. As Bhaskar Sarkar pointed out with respect to the Hong Kong martial arts films of the 1990s, their supernatural protagonists, breakneck pacing, and stylistic flourishes added up to historically situated engagements with East Asia's rapid socioeconomic transformations and the political hysteria leading up to the British handover of the Hong Kong territories to China in July 1997 (Sarkar 2000). More recently, Valentina Vitali draws on three cult film cycles from Italy, Mexico, and India that occupy, in spite of their wide popularity, an unstable position within cinematic canons to make a strong case for careful accounts of their industrial and cultural specificities (Vitali 2016). A volume on "Latspolitation" makes a similar argument.[9] As localized video cinemas emerge all over the Global South,[10] taking advantage of cheap, ubiquitous, and easy to use digital technologies, their plebeian address and low-fi aesthetics are bound to invite more celebrations in the cultic key. In the face of such reductive tendencies, where affirmation masks the effective dismissal of entire lifeworlds, it becomes imperative that scholars examine the direct, seemingly artless tenor of these cultural formations—often veer-ing into the lowbrow, the bawdy, and the grotesque—as vital signs of a worldly realm that we call the global-popular.[11]

COMPETING TOPOGRAPHIES

In tracking cinematic nodes of the global-popular, some of the essays in this issue focus on categories and figurations that have transcul-tural resonances. As Rosalind Galt argues, the Malay pontianak films at once trade in cultural nationalism and in the universalized cult of the vampire. Peter Limbrick explores Moumen Smihi's sustained attempt to formulate a Maghrebi local-popular, while parlaying his

global legibility as an "art cinema" auteur.[12] Rey Chow and Markos Hadjioannou explore the "universal" figure of the father as mediations of historical experiences of globalization. Films centered on the father figure rely not only on its global intelligibility but also on comparable material processes of dislocation and fragmentation. Sensorial encounters that shape structures of understanding, they call up global feelings pointing to kinship and community in flux. Situated and universal, popular and avant-garde, global and local: such incommensurabilities, along with the intricate economic, social, and figural transactions they induce, are the substance of the global-popular.

The "world" in "world cinema"—a concept that has enjoyed surprising currency, particularly in British cinema studies[13]—pulverizes and flattens these incommensurabilities and historically produced complexities. An obvious carry-over from Goethe's two-century-old idealist conception of "world literature," it is an idealism no longer tenable in light of global histories of dispossession. The term used in the singular depends on the all-inclusiveness of the qualifier "world," in which case it becomes tautological; or else it denotes the domain of films originating beyond the United States and Western Europe as remainder (as in "world music"), thus reproducing a tendentious binary at odds with the category's avowed cosmopolitan intent. In a widely reproduced article, Dudley Andrew maintains that the purchase of world cinema lies in its ability to displace the cinematic canon, "put[ting] students inside unfamiliar conditions of viewing" and "taking the measure of 'the foreign' in what is literally freshly recognized as a global dimension" (Andrew 2004, 9). But what precisely is unfamiliar and to whom? What students are being served by this displacement, which reproduces *their* unfamiliar as "the rest" of global cinema?[14] A recent collection, *The Routledge Companion to World Cinema* (2018), plots its object along two axes. The longitudinal includes "historical, geographical, national, regional, transnational and global" coordinates; the complementary latitudinal attends to the "theoretical, industrial, thematic, aesthetic, technological and commercial" drivers of cinema (Stone et al., 2). The latter section, proceeding around nodes (e.g., realism, women's cinema, soft power) and cutting across various national contexts, tends toward the category of the transnational. In some instances, it is even congruent with our mapping of cinema as a constitutive part of the global-popular. But the longitudinal take reproduces

the constitutive binary of Anglophone cinema studies: Hollywood is the structuring absence here, with a maiden contribution on US cinema devoted to the American indie film in the context of international art cinema.

Our intervention may appear to be a losing battle, given the entrenched currency of the category in common parlance as well as in journalistic and scholarly discourses. And we do not mean to dismiss all discussions of world cinema: there are scholars who have called out its analytical problems.[15] In their introduction to *Remapping World Cinema: Identity, Culture, Politics in Film* (2006), Stephanie Dennison and Song Hwee Lim posit "World Cinema" as a concept "destined not to definition and closure but to ceaseless problematisation" (9). They want to

> question not just what world cinema is but also to/for whom it is a problem, in what contexts, how and why; to interrogate to [*sic*] what purposes does it serve, under what kinds of mechanisms of power does it operate, and what audiences does it seek to address or perhaps empower. Indeed, *why theorize, problematize, or even promote World Cinema as a theoretical concept?* (9)

Even as we accept the usefulness of the rubric as a site for productive debate, we have to ask *why indeed*? After at least two decades of interrogation, what is the continuing purchase of this troubled category? To deploy rhetoric that has gained salience in questioning broad patterns of social discrimination, is this persistence not the sign of a systemic bias?

Among scholars of the world cinema paradigm, Lúcia Nagib is exemplary in her call to conceptualize it as global process, as circulation. She argues that world cinema is a "method, a way of cutting across film history according to waves of relevant films and movements, thus creating flexible geographies" (35). This dynamic, processual approach comes closest to our global-popular framework. But, while we acknowledge the indeterminate political valence of the global-popular, Nagib sees world cinema as "a positive, inclusive, democratic concept" beyond all binaries (35). Even as we emphatically oppose the epistemological othering of non-US or non-Anglophone cinemas, we recognize irreducible contradictions that animate cinematic practices. These conflicts cannot be wished away by their intellectual emplacement within a level playing field, which has been the purported objective of multiculturalist paradigms designed to manage difference.[16]

We want to hold on to the project of formulating a capacious category that does justice to cinema's universal reach without falling back on universalizing epistemologies. Universal legibility is precisely what renders the "global" as the default category for Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover in their magisterial collection on global art cinema. In capturing the broad modalities of "art cinema," while attending to uneven flows across geopolitical terrain, Galt and Schoonover privilege the "global" over the "international" or the "world" as competing qualifiers for their objects of study. If "world" carries a hoary history, for Galt and Schoonover, the international carries another burden: that of a certain politically motivated cinema that, once again, conjures a universal. The global, in contrast, is a site of disjuncture and difference (to echo Arjun Appadurai's felicitous formulation). Even as it shores up a planetary imaginary, it also signposts geopolitical stratifications that determine *what can translate*—in the dual senses of what can *move* and what can *become legible*—across transnational contexts.[17] Dependent on such frictions and flows, gaps and linkages, the global cannot harness the positivist valence of world cinema or its legacy of canons. It is in this sense of contingency and incompletion that the global becomes the default option for Galt and Schoonover. Existing in complicity with financial-industrial capacities, in negotiations with regulatory institutions, and driven by a will to increasing circulation and world-historical salience, this is a global that is shot through with the popular-commercial.

For us, the global is more productive than mere default. It is true that specific iterations of the global, rather than fully realizing some universal paradigm, approach it asymptotically—always maintaining a distance from it. While some would call this a "failure," Galt and Schoonover embrace this incomplete global as establishing a zone of interaction and a communicative space across different contexts. We would like to argue that such failures are central to *becoming global* in at least two significant senses. Instead of pursuing a predetermined endpoint, a universalized global, it is conceivable to think the global itself as a horizon of potentialities: "the global," then, proliferates as many possible globals. The virtuality of these projections not only suggests that there is *more* to be done in the future (becoming global as a necessarily failed project) but also shapes current material pursuits (becoming global as a necessarily future-oriented project).

Furthermore, each actualized global formation is what it is: while reaching out toward a global horizon, it recalibrates this endpoint according to local needs. Each version takes up elements that are salient to consciousness at that moment: it is a *good enough* sense of the relations that constitute the global from that particular vantage point. Such a partial and procedural understanding, which pluralizes the global, draws on postcolonial and "fringe" perspectives whose insistence on historical differences and discontinuities was a necessary corrective to an overemphasis on connectivities and networks as hallmarks of the global. In sum, our understanding of the *global* always foregrounds historical differences that the *world* seeks to paper over in its liberal-humanist inclusivity. One might recall Michael Jackson's "We Are the World" number during the 1985 Live Aid Concert, televised across the planet.

Marking themselves as distinct from all universalized benchmarks, myriad actualizations of the global jostle for a foothold in our imaginations and experiences. We seek to highlight mobilizations of the global rooted in local, bottom-up popular practices (for example, DIY media cultures) alongside those spurred by translocal commercial-popular enterprises (for instance, culture industries fueled by media capital). This productivity of the global-popular is a good starting point to consider why "transnational cinema" does not quite do it for us either. Certainly the "global" and the "transnational" overlap significantly as qualifiers of the institutions, technologies, distribution channels, networks, and publics of cinema. The transnational becomes salient as a category at a time when disenchantments with the modern nation form come together with the increasing spectralization of the nation-state by the forces of global-capital.[18] As Katarzyna Marciniak and Bruce Bennett note, transnationalism "is often used to refer to transformations in advanced capitalist societies that reconfigure traditional boundaries of national economies, identities, and cultures" (2016, 11). For film and media studies, the perspective brings much-needed attention to experiences of migration, exile, and diaspora and to the increasingly complex production histories of individual films, including what Hamid Naficy refers to as the "interstitial mode" of "accented cinema." Thus, the transnational frequently serves as empirical description of actual materializations: we can study transnational stars and genres, film financing and production teams, streaming platforms and

audiences. In this regard, the transnational tends to congeal, establish, stabilize. There is a certain clarity about its components—its infrastructures and flows, aspirations and agencies, constraints and affordances. We would even argue that its trajectory is toward greater coverage, transcending and thus bringing more and more nations into its ambit, eventually reaching the global-as-universal.

In distinction, the global of the global-popular, the global as pluriverse, is an *emergence*. While many scholars prefer the transnational for its trackable granularity and consider the global to be vacuous, we argue that the latter's processual, emergent character is precisely its strength. The totalized global remains an ideal: depending on awareness, salience, and access, every attempt at actualizing it ends up overlooking, missing, ghosting what some see as its constitutive elements.[19] In particular, postcolonial and Global South perspectives, attuned to histories of epistemic rupture and material dispossession, show up the impossibility of any stable universal-global. What we have instead are *many* global imaginations, materializing and dissipating, providing not total but good enough coverage.

With creative mediations covering fissures and gaps, stretching proximate elements apart while enfolding incommensurables, every global imagination emerges as more than the sum of its parts. The global as pluriverse surfaces in Sangita Gopal's notion of the "microimports" from Korean revenge films that flash up in Bollywood cinema. A twisted vengeance drive, a pathological protagonist, eruptions of extreme violence—such semiotic elements might attract scant attention in transnational film analysis; they are often taken as further proof of Bollywood's derivativeness. Gopal, however, reads them as resonances arising from middle-class debt-credit experientialities under neoliberal globalization. Underscoring the importance of special effects to Asian cinemas via a historical account of Kaiju, Godzilla, and King Kong, Joshua Neves tracks emergent popular geographies around monstrous figurations that, notwithstanding their imperial origins, are rendered utterly pleasurable. Neepa Majumdar argues that critical dismissals of *Disco Dancer* (1982) as a lowbrow film fail to recognize formal experimentations induced by the import of a "disco sensibility" into 1970s popular Hindi cinema. Starting with a Donna Summer song, she follows the afterlife of the hip-gyrating figure in fan cultures spanning East and Central Europe. Unlike the transnational, then, the

global-popular is not as beholden to an empirical optic: it is more about *projecting* the sense of belonging to a larger spatiotemporal world. For the transnational to work as a category, a border has to be crossed producing material, psychic, even epistemic displacements; but a global-popular imagination can kick in anywhere, even in the "hinterlands" of the nation-state. After all, we don't need to be cosmopolitan *cinecognoscenti* to be in thrall with *Godzilla*, disco, or hyperfantasies of revenge.

POLITICAL IMAGINATIONS

At first glance, it is the transnational that appears to index partial formations; after all, an alliance or a passage between two nation-states already puts us in the realm of the transnational, and with some 206 nation-states making up the current global order, there is a large, if finite, number of transnational arrangements possible. From critical historical perspectives, that number becomes even larger, reflecting various subnational formations such as the First Nations, separatist enclaves, and disputed territories. That is to say, the idea of the transnational bifurcates into top-down (associated with nation-states, corporations, regional blocs) and bottom-up (the provenance of the fringe, the transgressive, the stateless) articulations. On the one hand, the transnational assumes a flat world in which all actors have the power to negotiate. Such an ideal makes civil-associational arrangements possible and legitimate, enabling transnational regimes and agencies to emerge through the cooperation between sovereign nation-states. On the other hand, the transnational names a domain in which the depredations and inequities of this world become glaringly visible—the stateless and the dispossessed crossing borders for a better life, even bare survival, or migrants fighting for citizenship—leading to calls for concrete humanitarian policies and interventions. In either context, there is a strong case for positive action from the state-capital nexus in negotiation with civil society groups. The transnational remains firmly wedded to a modernist ethos underwritten by developmental reason, civil normativities, and liberal humanitarianism.

Likewise, the global initially appears to invoke the universal in its totalizing and standardizing capacities. The neoliberal paradigm of

globalization certainly reiterates this unitary, homogeneous, and ultimately reductive sense of globality, enforcing a single trajectory of collective becoming. It is the foreclosure of possibilities, of futures, that we seek to challenge in advancing the global-popular as a realm that, in its political ambiguities, consistently shores up many globalities. To modulate the global in terms of the popular is to place certain agonistic histories centerstage: the histories of savages and the damned, of mobs and crowds, countering all attempts to normalize with questioning, recalcitrance, even downright refusal. For large segments of the world's population, the global has to be reconfigured, rewired, and repurposed to stave off exploitation, to make it work for them, or to simply survive. If institutions of global governance seek to impose norms and laws, the people on the ground devise creative workarounds; if global corporations prescribe particular trajectories for consuming technologies, the new prosumers expand and extend tech affordances, short-circuiting innovation-obsolescence cycles. This is not to suggest a model of radical resistance but to underscore a set of tactical negotiations involving, at once, compromises and tradeoffs, complicity and subversion. In other words, in its political resonances, the popular remains unpredictable.

Invoked as the basis of democratic agencies and solidarities, the popular has often been celebrated as spontaneous vitality pitted against the hegemon. From such a perspective, the popular is too easily conflated with grassroots resistance. More pessimistic takes focus on the compromises and complicities that evacuate its utopic potentials and turn it into a reactionary force. But the actualizations of the popular remain far more knotty, skirting extreme polarities and well-rehearsed teleologies. Lexicographic entries dating back several centuries already communicate mutations and contradictions. Raymond Williams notes that while the popular was deployed mainly as a legal and political category (as in popular estate) in Europe of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it emerged as a cultural category sometime in the eighteenth century. If "popular culture" came to denote a derogatory designation of popularity (as in popular press, popular entertainment) having to do with vulgar taste and simpleminded persuasion, it also came to mean culture produced by people—most notably in Herder's conflation of the people and the folk. Of course, in the context of early twentieth-century German experience, this last affirmative sense gave

way to fears about various populisms that exploited popular prejudices and anxieties to unleash fascist energies. The characterization of the January 6, 2021 storming of the US Capitol as the "people's takeover" of the "people's house" indexes the schizoid, volatile, and fungible nature of this "empty" category.[20]

Ironically, this fear of popular culture and populist politics also courses through leftist scholarship of the mid-twentieth century; for instance, E. P. Thompson characterized English working-class consciousness as prepolitical, implying that they need intellectuals and the party to be brought to properly political consciousness. Here we encounter a distinctly Gramscian line of thinking; except Gramsci's preferred term for nonelite subjects, the *subaltern,* sits in uneasy and unstable relationship to the popular.[21] In the late twentieth century, working within postcolonial contexts, the South Asian Subaltern Studies Collective, and subsequently its Latin American counterpart, mounted a critique of the national popular for its domesticating subsumption of the more volatile and seemingly spontaneous energies of subaltern communities—a subsumption that only perpetuated their domination by postcolonial elites.[22]

It is these more volatile—often rogue and uncivil—subaltern energies that have come to roost in the global-popular. We find it useful to move away from the Gramscian assumption that subalterns cannot represent themselves and thus must be represented. It is more likely that subaltern agents have always found the means to represent themselves culturally and politically, but because of their distinctive idiolects and worldviews, elite populations—including intellectuals—have lacked the wherewithal to recognize these representations as such. More pertinent to the contemporary moment, the availability of digital technologies of recording, reproduction, and dissemination, which are more affordable and easy to use, has democratized access and largely obviated the problem of subaltern representation. The effects of the new technologies are seen at the level of production and circulation: fans upload to online sites their favorite media objects, produce "slash" versions, or add to star hagiographies; Nigerian videos incorporate local versions of Bollywood film songs; the most "unsophisticated" emotions, the "basest" pleasures, the most "hackneyed" plot structures, now circulated far and wide, capture fresh, avid audiences and take on new significance. While well-worn debates about original

and copy, tasteful and trashy, deep and superficial persist, the fecundities of the global-popular continue apace. Whether it is the congeries of media piracy or the emergent video cinemas all over the world, in these gray sectors of economic enterprise and cultural creativity we see subaltern expressions congealing into the more irrepressible articulations of the global-popular.

To think contemporary cinema is to account for the ways in which cinema as a cultural assemblage is continually in conversation with global-popular aspirations, practices, and agencies. It is to discern, define, and analyze how all the ancillaries and offshoots of cinema both serve *and* shape it: films produced by streaming services, piracy as distribution, appropriation as creation, reflexivity as storyline, and so on. In its myriad proliferations, cinema becomes more volatile in form, circulation, and politics.

ENTANGLEMENT AS METHOD

If the global functions as a dynamic galvanizer of the aspirational charge of the popular, operating as an affordance for popular agencies no longer held back by elite nationalist imaginations, then the popular disabuses the global of its universalist and elite-cosmopolitan pretensions, grounding it firmly within local, quotidian concerns. One might then expect any *interface* of the two to entail further convolutions and folds, producing unexpected exchanges, volatilities, and articulations. What happens when the global and the popular *encounter* each other so that each one is transformed through the other's mechanisms, institutions, and affordances? In short, what *does* that hyphen do?

We claim that instead of settling into stable polarities, the itineraries of the global-popular manifest as flows and frictions, overlaps and intersections, ruptures and stretchings. One critical approach is suggested by Rey Chow's provocative conceptualization of entanglement as a figure for "the linkages and enmeshments that keep things apart; the voidings and uncoverings that hold things together" (2012, 12). The challenge is to hold on simultaneously to the generative potentialities of equivalences and to the incommensurabilities, allowing emergent and unfamiliar configurations to become legible.

The six essays in the proposed issue address cinematic materializations of the global-popular. One way to track their contributions is to consider how they apprehend and illuminate the interface. Two essays focus on transculturally resonant figures such as the father (sign of heteropatriarchal power) and sexually transgressive monsters (signs of social chaos). Naturalized and universalized through kinship systems, these already-loaded templates provide the global ground for popular conjurations. The pontianak, or female vampire, becomes an increasingly sexualized queer figuration articulating Malaysian cinema's global aspiration, while the mutating global dad of contemporary cinema, now embodying care in a significant modification of more traditional distant patriarchs, mediates tensions and shifts in urban environments. Conversely, a second pair of essays track the impact of broad popular sensibilities—disco stylings or Um Kulthum's iconic voice—on local taste cultures in the context of Bollywood and Moroccan "art" cinema. Plucked from cinema, the pelvis-thrusting disco dancer gyrates across cultural radars in far-flung locations, accruing value as a sensuous node of lowbrow affects. While revered as an auteur, Moumen Smihi anchors his cinema in regional-popular North African and Arab cinematic sensibilities, styles, and gestures, marking it as something like a subaltern art cinema in comparison to its European counterparts. A final pair of essays analyze the swirl of special effects-driven screen monsters (*kaiju*, *Gojira*, *King Kong*) and cinematic microimports (idioms, iconographies, narrative innovations) across global media circuits. As these elements move, they become part of a global cultural warehouse, primed for decontextualized deployment. If special effects, indulging audience appetite for an accelerated cinema of attractions, becomes a calling card for high-tech Asian media industries, microimports of Korean revenge drama elements in New Bollywood urban thrillers whet middle-class fantasies of retributive justice. Together the essays not only give flesh to the global and the popular but also point to the *work* the hyphen indexes and accomplishes: the encounter between the global and the popular plays out as inspiration and annotation, movement and arbitration, conflict and consolidation.

What kinds of analytical moves are necessary to make the global-popular at once a more materially grounded and imaginatively generative rubric? One way to proceed is to distinguish the levels, scales,

and temporalities at which the global-popular operates. Without such a mapping, the confusions and slippages will obfuscate the specificities of the phenomena under scrutiny, eliding many of their constitutive mechanisms. To provide one possible example, we might distinguish heuristically between global structures, nodes, and traces whose interactions materialize the global-popular. Common scripts such as the father figure, or sensibilities such as queerness, which always refer back to naturalized transcultural moorings, function as global *structures*. In distinction, cultural indices such as "art cinema" or "revenge genres" historically constituted through agencies, institutions, and movements are better understood as global *nodes*. Most of the essays direct their analytical energies toward cinematic *traces* that invoke and build upon structures and nodes: accents and idioms, iconic and generic bundles, tastes and affective dispensations. These materialities are perhaps the hardest to track, categorize, and constellate because they are as dispersed and plastic as they are contingent. But that is precisely the task at hand. Instead of relegating such traces to area studies or to national cinema studies, or indeed organizing them as scholarship on style or soundtrack or stardom, we hope to think about their relation to global nodes and networks, systems and processes. The global-popular helps foreground the unbidden economic-cultural bundles and phenomenologies that can at once be surprising and humdrum, ubiquitous and elusive—the traces and nodes that do not correspond to the self-evident research objects of transnational media studies focused on circuits, flows, and transborder communities. In a sense, then, we see the transnational as a subset of the global-popular. In this way, we hope to engage not only the shifting vicissitudes of macrolevel cinematic institutions and practices under globalization but also the microscalar constituents—and even the more fluid, amorphous, nonrepresentational aspects—of contemporary cinema.

All in all, the issue engages the circuits of the global-popular, focusing on not only connectivities and flows but also the enclosures, the separations, and the discrete bundlings—as genre, as culturally resonant figuration, as portable accent. One way or another, it addresses the inchoate desires and instrumental aspirations that are afforded in the global-popular: a "quality" life, a planetary reach, a global influence. Thus, it ultimately indexes the geopolitical and historical differences of "becoming global"—differences frequently straitjacketed as

the unoriginal, the derivative, the trivial, the failed, and the not-quite, not-yet.

Bishnupriya Ghosh, University of California, Santa Barbara, has authored *When Borne Across: Literary Cosmopolitics in the Contemporary Indian Novel* (Rutgers University Press, 2004) and *Global Icons: Apertures to the Popular* (Duke University Press, 2011) and coedited *The Routledge Companion to Media and Risk* (Routledge, 2020). She is currently completing a monograph on viral emergence, *The Virus Touch: Theorizing Epidemic Media*.

Bhaskar Sarkar teaches at UC Santa Barbara and works in the areas of Indian cinema, post-/decolonial media, the Global South, cultures of uncertainty, and piracy. He is the author of *Mourning the Nation: Indian Cinema in the Wake of Partition* (Duke University Press, 2009) and the coeditor of *Documentary Testimonies* (Routledge, 2009), *Asian Video Cultures* (Duke University Press, 2017), and *Routledge Companion to Media and Risk* (Routledge, 2020).

Notes

1. See, for instance, "Scarlett Johansson Tells" and Ahern, "Asian American Media Group Accuses."
2. See, for instance, Isabel Wilkerson's (2020) comparative rearticulation of US histories of racism.
3. See Gaudreault (2020) on the divergent circulations of cinema.
4. See, most notably, Abbas and Erni (2004).
5. See the influential work focused on Latin America published around the time that cultural studies was gaining prominence as an intellectual formation: Dorfman and Mattelart (1975). Recent scholarship has begun to integrate cultural studies perspectives with media industry studies approaches, combining ethnographic and interview-based analysis with archival research and political economic analysis, for instance, Curtin (2007), Govil (2015), and Punathambekar (2013).
6. Morris et al. (2006).
7. Srinivas (2006) and Maxwell (1994).
8. For such a range, see Kobayashi (2017), Tombs (1998), Hunt (2003), Schneider and Williams, (2005), and Mathijs and Mendik (2007).
9. Ruétalo and Tierney (2011).
10. We take the Global South to be a highly unstable historically constituted space, and not any stable hemispheric territory.

11. See the insightful work of Kumar (2015) on Bhojpuri cinema.

12. See also Limbrick (2020).

13. See, for instance, Grant and Kuhn (2006).

14. See Sarkar (2008).

15. Useful complications of the category, deployed in the plural, are to be found in essays collected in Ďurovičová and Newman (2009).

16. The multiculturalist paradigm finds treatment in Shohat and Stam (1994).

17. The "planetary" in our invocation indexes a phenomenological experience of totality and not the "planet" of earth systems science that is legible through natural disturbances (as characterized by Chakrabarty [2019]).

18. See Ďurovičová and Newman (2009) and Ezra and Rowden (2006).

19. See the discussion of the global as a penumbral emergence in Neves and Sarkar (2017, 1–32).

20. See Laclau's (2005) discussion of the "people" as an empty signifier.

21. Pondering the place of the agrarian South within a unified Italy, Gramsci's writings led to the concept of the national popular, which was taken up in cinema and cultural studies by scholars such as Landy (1994) and Forgacs (1986).

22. See Guha and Spivak (1988). The problematic of postcolonial/neocolonial subalternity has been taken up in the context of the so-called Fourth World consisting of indigenous populations and other fringe groups living in remote areas of the national space and addressed within our discipline largely with respect to subaltern incorporation within regimes of, and access to means of, representation. See, for instance, Russell (1999), Wilson and Stewart (2008), and Schiwy (2019).

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