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Figures of Transit
Tracing a Century of Hollywood in India

Nitin Govil†

Anything can happen—it’s a long way to Delhi....

—Indiana Jones (Harrison Ford)
in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984)

Indy’s words frame the convoluted transit of Hollywood’s passage to India. Nowadays, such frank assessments of indeterminacy are rare, given Hollywood’s recent expansion to 10 per cent of the Indian exhibition market, driven by the box-office success of films like *2012* (2009) and *Avatar* (2009). Such success, along with the proliferation of institutional connections between Indian and American media, is seen by many as proof that India is now finally ‘developing’ into a mature entertainment market ready to interface with other global medias. The problem with this kind of omniscient sociology, predicated on demonstrating a definitive,

† With thanks to Debashee Mukherjee for her insight and invaluable research assistance. Additional research assistance for this chapter was supported by Barbara Hall at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (Special Collections). All studio correspondence cited in this chapter is available at the Warner Brothers Archives at the University of Southern California. Many thanks to Ned Comstock for providing access to the archive.
measurable, and spectacular market impact, is that it misses the more ephemeral points of contact that both seep into and slip beyond official histories and political economies.

Entering into the biography of Spielberg’s film as it moves across various overlapping histories of circulation intimates something of the artefactual and artful nature of Hollywood in India. I begin this chapter by working through the film’s life story, constituting an archive of commodity circulation that is marked by the rhetoric, practices, and texture of encounter rather than the accumulation of box-office receipts.

A HOLLYWOOD ARCHAEOLOGY

Let us start with a mystery of origin. Is Steven Spielberg, the director of Temple of Doom, a descendent of Admiral Georg Spielberg, who voyaged to the subcontinent before the formation of the Dutch East India Company in the early seventeenth century? Sadly, recorded history does not bear this out. Spielberg’s daughter is named Mikaela George, and the shared middle name will have to substantiate any genealogy. A much more reputable Indian family connection is through the director’s father, Arnold Spielberg, who passed his World War II stories onto his son. Posted in Karachi and outside Calcutta (now Kolkata) as a B-25 radio operator, Spielberg senior also flew combat missions to Imphal as part of the early Burma Campaign, striking against Japanese targets as well as the anti-colonial Indian National Army.

When Steven Spielberg went to India in 1977, it was for more prosaic reasons than revisiting the place of his father’s wartime memories. Columbia Pictures, the producers of Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977), had amassed unrepealtable box-office profits in India and was obliged to spend the money domestically. Spielberg and the studio decided to use the funds for a shoot just outside Bombay, now called Mumbai, doubling as Dharamsala, where villagers point to the sky in collective acknowledgement of an alien visitation. Prior to filming, the film’s second-direction unit’s camera equipment was impounded by Indian customs officials suspicious of unauthorized resale, much to the ire of the director. Despite these difficulties, Spielberg was back in India in 1983 to scout locations for Temple of Doom. As before, he was frustrated by tax and equipment clearances mandated by Indian location shooting policy. Indian authorities also objected to the film’s dialogue, which included the words thuggee and maharajah. Fed up, and claiming
that Indian rivers were too polluted for shooting anyway, Spielberg left India to shoot three weeks' worth of exterior shots in Sri Lanka.

A prequel to Spielberg's wildly successful *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* is set in 1935, the same year that Hollywood released *Clive of India* and *Lives of a Bengal Lancer*. Both films are set against a British Empire in decline and feature vaguely disguised caricatures of Indian anti-colonial nationalism. These films, along with *Gunga Din* (1939)—whose thuggee high priest is a clear antecedent for *Temple of Doom*'s Mola Ram—led to the Indian National Congress' calls for a boycott of American cinema. But the boycott controversy was fortuitous for Baburao Patel, the enterprising and self-promoting editor of *filmindia*, who used the uproar to cement the national reputation of his magazine in the late 1930s. *The New York Times*, commenting on Patel's recent visit to Hollywood, reinforced the Congress' protests against the 'unsympathetic treatment accorded the Indians in several recent pictures', but Patel was careful to acknowledge that 'we import 250 American pictures annually, and last year the producers took a net profit of $2,000,000 out of India'.

Meanwhile, Ram Bagai, *filmindia*'s 'Staff Correspondent in Hollywood', exhorted his Indian readers to submit story ideas directly: 'I have been asked by Hollywood producers to please bring back some Indian stories—something really Indian. We are ready to make films on India—the real India—but we know so little of that India. It's up to you and India to show us!' Hollywood's problems with 'inauthentic' Indian stories were reinforced when *Gunga Din* was banned in India. Still, Hollywood took advantage of the controversy over 'Empire' films to promote *The Rains Came* (1939)—with the ethnically malleable Tyrone Power cast as an Indian doctor—advertised as the first 'pro-India picture from Hollywood.'

The political debates over Hollywood's representation of the subcontinent, and the drama of authenticity staged in the travels of journalists and film texts, clearly figures into the setting of *Temple of Doom*, which narrates this history as a screen memory of the colonial encounter. So it's not surprising that *Temple of Doom*'s phantasmagoric travelogue, rehashing the caricatured indigeneity of colonial travel genres, was itself referenced in campy fashion in the Hindi B-film *Shaitan Tantrik* (1999).

Around the time he left India to film *Temple of Doom* in Sri Lanka in 1983, Spielberg reconciled with his former girlfriend, actress Amy Irving, then shooting in India and cast as the Indian princess Anjuli in
the HBO mini-series *The Far Pavilions* (1984). The same year, Satyajit Ray attempted to file a plagiarism suit against Spielberg, claiming that the story for an earlier Spielberg film, *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), had been plagiarized from ‘The Alien’, a script he had submitted to Hollywood in 1967. Even if he later decided to make the film based on ‘The Alien’, Ray insisted, ‘people will think that I have borrowed from the American films whereas exactly the opposite has been the case’. Ray’s criticism of Spielberg extended to *Temple of Doom*, which Ray saw while in London in 1984, describing the film as ‘absolutely haywire, unbelievably bad’ (quoted in Robinson 2004: 9). The film was initially banned in India, vilified by the US National Asian–American Telecommunications Association, and protested against at a Seattle movie theatre in a demonstration led by a Pakistan-born political science professor who carried a placard labelling Spielberg and executive producer George Lucas as ‘Raiders of the Third World’.4

The itineraries of influence, controversy, and rejection formed by *Temple of Doom*’s Indian inter-texts frame screen practice and culture as they circulate through the politics of encounter. By taking into account its ‘eventful biography’ (Kopytoff 1986: 90), the film’s life-story anticipates the literal and figurative movements of Hollywood as its first century in India comes to a close. All the key themes of this complex story are present: geopolitics and development, primitivism and fecundity, mimicry and masquerade, caricature and barbarism, individual desires and frustrations, institutional difficulties and chaotic bureaucracies, and underneath it all, the tantalizing possibility of collaboration.

Two decades ago, film star Shah Rukh Khan insisted that, ‘soon Hollywood will come to us’. In fact Hollywood has been travelling to India for almost a century. In the early 1920s, Florence Burgess Meehan, scouting shooting locations in South and South East Asia, claimed that ‘the Orient receives the cameraman gladly and warmly ... it loves the moving pictures and that “gifted child of the gods” who carries a Bell and Howell is all but revered in most places’ (1921: 4). The Western camera was a talisman, with its reverence strategically cast as aspiration for the Indian film industries. India also offered a study in contrasts, with Hollywood occupying the opposing standard. Margit Kelen, writing in the pages of *Travel* magazine in 1934, wondered, ‘did India have its Hollywood and who were its great stars and the big directors?’ ‘I found my answer,’ she wrote, ‘in a squalid suburb of Bombay. Here
in an enclosure set off from the neighboring huts by a stone wall was India’s motion picture capital. It was scarcely an impressive place. This framing of Indian cultural difference in comparison to Hollywood was echoed by the 1927 Indian Cinematographic Committee, who asked whether ‘the differences in social customs and outlook between the West and the East [necessitated] special consideration of films in this country’ (ICC 1928: 205). These early observers of cinematic exchange between India and the United States firmed up the rhetoric of contact when so much of the encounter remained unpredictable, driven by local exigencies.

This chapter is an attempt to figure the circulation of screen objects and events through different material circuits and environments. ‘Figure’ refers both to those enumerated forms of commodity travel (for example, systems of transnational exchange, imports, and exports) as well as those informal processes through which translocal movement is imagined and engendered. In macro-economic calculations of the balance of trade, figures are normally evoked to reference cross-border commodity flows. I’d like to move beyond this formal arithmetic and retain the colloquial sense of the verb figure as a way of ‘working things out’.

The art historian Richard Schiff proposes a tripartite understanding of the term figure—as the materiality of the object, the forming of a thematic, and the ghostly forms that nonetheless exercise real force (1996: 323–4). As artefact, act and imaginary, figures are objects, practices of reflection, and accounts of movement. Figures are real, rhetorical, and representative. In what follows, I focus on three figures—copies, numbers, and letters—through which Hollywood has encountered and made sense of Indian media ecologies (and vice versa). These three figures are imagined and materialized through various itineraries of contact, drawing the historical into contemporary practice. The intent here is to ‘provincialize’ Hollywood in the process of framing commodity transit, taking up the forms of circulation that constitute its cultural politics of movement (Hansen 2010). In his call to ‘unsettle cinema’, Singh (2003: 12) asks that we understand cinema as a ‘socially embedded set of practices’, shifting ‘away from the fictionality of cinema as a formal “text” towards its fictive quality, its being “made up” as a form’. Part of a larger shift within contemporary media studies to move textuality beyond boundaries, this chapter focuses on the ways in which screen objects and practices are figured through their transit.
FRAMING THE COPY: RESEMBLANCE, DEVELOPMENT, AND PIRACY

S.K. Ratcliffe, the liberal English journalist and editor of Calcutta's *The Statesman*, once insisted that, 'the United States is the India of the West' (quoted in Gupta 1986: 6). Echoes of this imagination of India as America's double can be heard in the frequent claims of resemblance between Hollywood and Indian media industries. The American director Frank Capra claimed that 'between the largest free nations, one the youngest, the other the oldest, there is a kinship of the spirit—a kinship that can mean only good for all mankind.'7 Similarly, commenting on recent Indian corporate interest in acquiring Hollywood properties, Reliance BIG Entertainment chairman Amit Khanna notes a 'natural synergy between the film industries in India and the U.S.'8

Despite these overtures to similarity, Hollywood has been held up, for most of its history, as the opposing standard for the Indian industries. In this way, Hollywood comes to embody the apotheosis of media aspiration, defining the path along which all other cinemas must necessarily travel. Hollywood has often served as ground for Indian media comparison—as one commentator put it the 1930s, 'India has four hundred movie houses only, compared with 20,500 of U.S.A., with one-third the population' (Singh 1934: 18). Likewise, Garga insists that, 'the imitation of Hollywood permeated most aspects of Indian film production, the star myth included' (1996: 55). On the other hand, Indian cinema's industrial problem. Das Gupta suggests, lies in its imperfect imitation of Hollywood. While 'Hollywood is our guru,' he argues, 'in imitating Hollywood, the mass film in India has landed itself in a system without studio control, formula filmmaking without Hollywood's variety of formulas, an annual investment of some 85 million dollars without Hollywood's audience research or other organizational safeguards' (1969: 31). Das Gupta opens up the animating contradiction of development, whose universal applicability and modular capacity for local transformation obscures the fact that the time of development is actually asymptotic. In modernization, there is no achievable 'after development', so its deferral gets both projected and internalized as aspiration. 'Hollywood is just a state of mind', notes art director Saboo Cyril, but this ingrained imagination is precisely the locus of Hollywood's enduring influence.9

While development structured the relationship between Hollywood and the Indian film industries, some embraced the strategic possibilities
of an indigenous cultural sovereignty. Upon visiting the Bombay facilities of ‘Hindu Hollywood’, a noted British travel writer claimed that ‘the impact of East and West was startling’, and that ‘unlike his Western prototype, the Indian producer has to be constantly curbing his actors and actresses; their features are so mobile, their gestures so eloquent, and their emotional equipment so rich and spontaneous that his task is to damp the flame rather than to add fuel to it’ (Nichols 1944: 106, 116).

Closer to the ground, Indian practitioners have re-signified the scarcity vilified by development as a valuable cultural resource. As K.A. Abbas put it. “resources”—hardware like studios, cameras, lighting equipment, sound-recording apparatus, etc.—may be imported (if not indigenously produced) ... but “Creativity” which is much more important, indeed it is the sine qua non of film production—cannot be imported or taken on loan’. Abbas’ suggestion that indigenous artistic development is directly linked to industrial deprivation inverts the logic of development without completely rejecting it. Echoing Swadeshi as well as import-substitution industrialization’s claims on national aesthetic innovation, Abbas continues:

[Many countries of the world, big and small, which went through revolutions, had to start (or resume) the activity of cinema production almost from scratch ... embargoes and political boycott, and sometimes economic consideration of saving on foreign exchange, made it difficult, if not impossible, to import foreign equipment and raw stock. But they made world classics with old and repaired cameras, scraps of film stock, and developed revolutionary technique. (1979: 50)

Subtending both the travel writer and the media practitioner’s national distinctions is the figure of the copy. Rooted in the colonial history of mimesis, development’s monsters of imitation—the parasite, the doppelganger, and the copycat—are spectral presences that haunt the modern. American film studios have long portrayed Indian media forms as vampires, feasting on the lifeblood of Hollywood ingenuity. In the 1950s, Hollywood claimed that it supplied ‘a great deal of the Indian industry’s raw material in plots and ideas’. In the 1980s, American studios insisted that they had lost over US$ 1 billion due to remakes and video piracy in India. Such accusations were not lost on the Bombay-based Trade Guide, which called remake-happy Indian screenwriters ‘mere translators’, nor did they escape the producers of Banda Yeh Bindass Hai (2009), who reportedly paid US$ 200,000 to 20th Century Fox for straying too close to the script of My Cousin Vinny (1992).
The contemporary emergence of ‘Bollywood’ as a vernacular reference to Indian media production demonstrates how the copy constitutes the relation between Hollywood and Indian media. A ‘cheeky and parodic echo’ of Hollywood, ‘a mimicry that is both a response and a dismissal’ (Jaikumar 2003: 25), Bollywood signifies the practices of derivation as Hollywood’s Indian equivalent. Taken this way, we might understand Bollywood less as an industry and more as the expression of a relation, with the copy at its root.

Despite the productivity of resemblance embodied in the term ‘Bollywood’, the film industries have historically conceived of the copy in terms of intellectual property, linking piracy to criminality. Media industries claim piracy as an existential threat that is tied to the explosive alignment of new technology, home taping, and downloading—all everyday consumption practices that contribute to the death of industries (Johns 2009). Contemporary links between media piracy and terrorism are only the latest in a long trajectory of industry anxiety (see Govil 2004).

Yet, material commodity circuits disaggregate the alleged fidelity of the original. Early on, India was the last stop on Hollywood’s global tour. After American cinema had recouped its investments in the domestic market and made big profits dumping its product on Europe, India would get the used and worn Hollywood prints. So, the original Indian experience of Hollywood was always one of degradation, with prints marked by the passage of global transit. Departing from the predictable discourses of intellectual property, predicated on spectacle, ownership and criminality, Sundaram’s (2010) conception of ‘pirate modernity’ speaks to the constitutive experience of piracy in the Indian mediascape. The ordinary translations of the copy have addressed institutional deficiencies in resources for film instruction. For example, as Hollywood has served as an archive, a repository of styles, narratives, and techniques for generations of Indian film-makers.

Media piracy in India also creates the possibility of a vast, untapped market for Hollywood. ‘What we have here,’ said Hollywood’s world-wide anti-piracy chief in 1992, ‘is one of the last great potential movie markets on earth—and we’re very interested in legitimizing it.’

Then there are those rare moments when Hollywood recognizes that piracy plays an enormous role in creating audiences and the cultures of anticipation that account for its global popularity. After all, piracy drives the industrial discourse on futurity, expansion, and responsiveness. Shekhar Kapur, one of the rare mainstream directors to respond to piracy productively, notes that, ‘pirates, very often, actually are the people who are down at
the grassroots and who understand what the consumer wants because the corporations are too lazy'. Ultimately, the phenomenology of the copy disrupts and leapfrogs the teleological time of development. Piracy is, like other forms of forgery, a shortcut that translates and updates 'the original' for contemporary purposes (Kurz 1967).

The uncanny everywhere-ness of piracy haunts the spatiality of commodity transit, cracking the bounded nature of markets. Yet, copying—of a sort—actually turns out to be part of Hollywood's plans for India. Surging on the popularity of Avatar's (2009) descent into India, Reliance MediaWorks recently announced a tie-in with In Three, a California-based 2D–3D conversion company to convert both new and back-catalogue Hollywood films in a process called 'dimensionalization'. Adding a third Indian dimension to Hollywood is projected to cut 50 per cent of the usual costs of 3D conversion. Mirroring these sanctioned Indian copies of Hollywood are Hollywood copies of Hindi cinema. As part of a larger development deal with Reliance BIG Pictures, Brett Ratner's re-edited English version of the Hindi film Kites (2010) was released simultaneously with the 'original' in May 2010, with 40 minutes of cuts—'things that just wouldn't translate'—and the majority of non-lead actors dubbed in American dialects and most of the songs removed. 'For me,' says the star of the film Hrithik Roshan, 'it's about breaking barriers. The larger goal, the big dream, is to have an Indian film watched by a world market.' That Bollywood can add an extra dimension to Hollywood by re-animating its catalogue—and that Hollywood can translate Bollywood for a global audience—tells us that even in the film industries, the modularity of the copy has effectively taken over the older modality of development.

ENUMERATION AND THE DISCOURSES OF EXTREMITY

A 1928 Paramount Pictures memo notes that India's 0.6 per cent share of Hollywood's total foreign income was only slightly higher than 'other small places in the world' (Vasey 1997: 85). In the 1950s, Hollywood films held 3 per cent of the Indian film market. In 2008, Indian media conglomerate Reliance made a bid to acquire Hollywood studio Metro–Goldwyn–Mayer for US$ 1.5 billion, on the heels of its US$ 550 million investment in DreamWorks. Avatar (2009) earned Rs 22 crores during its opening weekend in India, on its way to a Rs 100 crore collection in its first five weeks. The trajectory of these figures, from the minuscule to the majestic, captures something of the logic of
enumeration for Hollywood, which for years has known India through the circulation of numbers. As the most highly enumerated industry in the world, Hollywood's numbers are transactional as well as a matrix of translation. In other words, for Hollywood, numbers are not only the content of exchange but its form as well.

For the Indian film industries, numbers have a different history. M. Visvesvaraya's opening speech at the inaugural Photo–Cine–Radio Exhibition in Bombay in February 1935, organized by the still new Motion Picture Society of India, noted that 'the great need of the industry is reliable statistics which is the yardstick by which every industry is measured' (1935: 4).

It is not that numbers were not collected, of course. Early Indian film culture was enumerated through formal and informal inquiry. In the teens, municipal governments concerned about the fire hazards of makeshift theatres compiled lists of permanent and itinerant cinemas. Censorship regimes would count films in the process of certifying them. Foreign distribution outfits and local entrepreneurs kept records of imported exposed stock for duty purposes. Photography studios and practitioners monitored the circuits of new and used film equipment. Box-office takes were tallied and entertainment taxes levied. Film clubs polled their members to get a sense of audience preferences. These various practices produced disparate sets of numbers only occasionally combined to create an aggregate sense of 'an industry'.

Furthermore, material practice in Indian cinema has long thwarted the accuracy of data. In the 1920s, colonial governmentality and the proliferation of film trade organizations focused attention on the politics of enumeration, understanding statistics as the administrative mechanism for greater managerial efficiency and centralized control. Yet in 1928, the Indian Cinematograph Committee (ICC) bemoaned 'the almost complete dearth of statistics and reliable information' required for 'a proper understanding of the real position of the trade and the best methods for improving it' (ICC 1928: 14).

Subsequent industry overviews tended to be less than sanguine about the possibility of an epistemic shift tied to enumeration. Figures quoted by K.S. Hirlekar were only meant to 'give an idea of the dimensions of the industry' (1938: 33). Panna Shah noted that statistical 'information is based on nothing more than common talk or mere guesswork, given out with the hope that in the absence of proof, it would not be easily challenged' (1950: xii). The Film Enquiry Committee's 1951 report claimed that the figures given 'to illustrate the progress attained by the industry are not
comprehensive nor can their accuracy be fully vouched for. That cannot be so in the very nature of things' (Film Enquiry Committee 1951: 14). Such frank assessments of the unreliability of numbers permeate the history of Indian film discourse. Numbers were produced in droves, but there were few portentous claims to their precision.

However, the last decade has seen the proliferation of big numbers in Indian film industry discourse, enabled by the circulation of Indian entertainment reports produced by Indian business lobbies in collaboration with international management consultancies. Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry–KPMG’s 2009 Industry Report predicts a rise in the number of Indian multiplexes from 850 in 2009 to 1,254 in 2012, while total Indian box-office of US$ 1.6 billion in 2008 is projected to rise to US$ 2.5 billion by 2013. The 2009 PricewaterhouseCoopers report claims that the Indian film industry would grow by 11.5 per cent over the next five years, swelling from Rs 107 billion in 2008 to Rs 184.3 billion in 2013, while domestic box-office receipts would increase 10.2 per cent cumulatively over the next five years, from the present size of Rs 81 billion to Rs 132 billion in 2013. In a remarkable conceit of precision, the US-IBC/EY 2008 brochure reports that piracy cost the film industry US$ 959 million and 571,896 jobs in 2008.

Yet the contemporary exchange of big numbers belies the history of Hollywood in India, where the materiality of money manifests in the practical problem of remittances and blocked funds. These restrictions testify to the granularity of money flows, undermining the smooth logic of exchange presumed by big numbers. Hollywood has spent a long time working through the structural impediments of monetary transfer. In the 1930s, Hollywood’s local Indian agents worked with regional and central film industry organizations to lobby the government for the reduction of import duties on film stock and equipment and a decrease in entertainment taxes. For most of the 1950s and 1960s, Hollywood was concerned with the repatriation of Indian profits.

The 1950s saw a global rise in the use of protectionist measures against Hollywood. Facing the accumulation of ‘blocked’ funds, Hollywood companies operating in foreign countries turned to investing in co-productions and funding location shoots for American films. For example, Paramount used blocked funds to film *The Ten Commandments* (1956) in Egypt. In the early days of blocked fund spending, Hollywood also invested in shipbuilding and bought whiskey and furniture to sell in American dollars (Lev 2003).
In 1956, Hollywood studios combined for over Rs 11 million in gross India billings, of which Rs 4.5 million was spent on local overhead, and close to Rs 5 million (US$ 1 million at the official exchange rate) was transferred in cash out of the country, with the remainder spent on things like duty (MPEAA 1957). Remarkably, Hollywood repatriated almost the same amount that it spent in overhead on the local Indian office. In 1957, concerned over shortages in foreign exchange, the Indian government slashed the import quota of films to 10 per cent of 1947 import figures. Hollywood negotiated an agreement to raise the quota to 75 per cent, as long as remittances were restricted to 12.5 per cent, with the remaining funds to be held in a blocked account. Future trade pacts would stop and start on the question of repatriation limits. By the early 1970s, Hollywood had amassed almost Rs 60 million in blocked funds. As a Hollywood trade pact languished in India in the 1970s, Pakistan decided to unfreeze blocked monies in the country and over Rs 14 million were paid out to the Hollywood studios over the next 10 years.

So, what is Hollywood? The multiple ways in which blocked funds were used constitute a definition of Hollywood that far exceeds the film text. In the early 1960s, the Foreign Finance Committee of the Motion Picture Export Association of America (MPEAA) considered the following: selling US$ 3 million worth of blocked rupees to an Indian shipping company interested in creating a liner service; funding an American manganese mining company; paying air freight on cargo and Hollywood personnel carried on Air India; leasing movie theatres in Bombay; funding Indian location shooting; paying customs duties; purchasing Indian films for distribution in the West Indies; and paying income taxes on technicians. Proceeds from a screening of The Millionairess (1960), released at the New Empire theatre in June 1961, helped support a working women's hostel in Bombay. In 1975, Jack Valenti used blocked funds to pay for a party at the US embassy during the International Film Festival in India, where he lobbied the US ambassadorial core to plead Hollywood's cause to the attending Indian government officials.

In the 1970s, US companies agreed to funnel 20 per cent of earnings into US-Indian co-productions and give 20 per cent towards providing interest-free loans to national corporations. In 1978, the Kinematograph Renter's Society, which represented US firms, offered the Indian Film Finance Corporation an interest-free loan of Rs 10 million, culled from a vast store of blocked funds in India, on the condition that the money would be used for the construction of new theatres. Hollywood was
convinced that investment in the Indian theatrical sector would allow greater exhibition venues for US features while taking advantage of a general call for greater theatrical construction in India. In the early 1980s, Hollywood gross earnings in India were dispersed 40 per cent towards operating and maintenance costs for its local distribution offices, 30 per cent towards interest-free loans used by the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC) to finance theatre construction and aid domestic film-makers, with less than 10 per cent towards repatriation to the US and the remaining 20 per cent towards blocked funds. Hard currency repatriation limits were liberalized in the 1990s, but contemporary limits on direct investment and foreign exchange limitations still structure the logic of Hollywood's transit in India.

In his discussion of forms of social interaction predicated on exchange, Simmel (1971: 64) distinguishes between 'the purely objective form' of trade and 'intermediate forms' such as 'the reciprocal giving of gifts'. Hollywood's blocked funds combine these forms, constituting reciprocity within the transit of trade. A 1959 MPEAA memo stresses that remittance restrictions exemplify 'the desire on the part of the Indian government to see that we do the maximum possible to help the Indian motion picture industry' (MPEAA 1959). Blocked funds were not only a means to prevent a foreign exchange crisis, but a means to create a conduit of exchange between industries. An exchange facilitated by the blockage of money—one form of circulation enabled by the arrest of another.

**EPISTOLARY FRICTIONS: LETTERS, AUTOGRAPHS, AND ENTREATIES**

Travelling actors—either as tourists or while shooting on location—are among the higher profile forms of inter-industry contact, garnering star-struck press and popular attention. The examples are numerous. An Indian film delegation on a visit to Los Angeles in 1952 captivated the American movie crowd. As *The Times of India* reported, 'it was the spiritual values transpiring from the speeches of the Indian guests that thrilled and captured their Hollywood audience'. Hollywood stars offer similar stories of sublimity. 'The Indian experience has been a wonderful one,' said Sally Field on her first trip to the country in 1994. Visiting Mumbai to meet with the members of the Tibetan Youth Congress, Richard Gere claimed that, 'India is like an older and wiser brother to Tibet and is even more important as Buddha was born
on this soil’. Other stars offer the platitude as the preferred speech genre. For example, on her first visit to Mumbai in 1996, Demi Moore said, ‘the film industry here, I gather, is one of the biggest in the world’. Sarah Jessica Parker encapsulates Hollywood hokum in saying, ‘I have never visited India but of what I have read and heard from people, it’s one of the few places I want to visit’.

While the observations of stars on tour can be framed as individual perceptions masquerading as stereotypes, celebrities are sometimes implicated in larger geopolitical forces. For example, John Kenneth Galbraith, American ambassador to India, once asked Warner Brothers to provide a 35mm print of Rio Bravo (1959) to entertain Angie Dickinson at an April 1962 screening at the ambassador’s Delhi residence. Then on a trip to India, reportedly hurried out of the country as rumours of her alleged affair with John F. Kennedy swirled around Washington (Claridge 1997), Dickinson indicated her desire to meet Jawaharlal Nehru. Galbraith recounts the incident in his biography:

One afternoon, I sent [Nehru] a note, saying I knew him to be busy but could he spare a moment for a lovely Hollywood star who would like to meet him? Within the hour I had word back saying that in great emergencies he could always make time. Could I bring my guest over at once? I found Angie, took her to the Prime Minister’s Residence, and they talked for nearly two hours. I remember especially one question from Nehru. ‘Miss Dickinson, when you are making a film, you spend some months studying and then creating the character you are playing. Doesn’t that have some permanent effect on your own personality?’ To Nehru’s delight, Angie replied, ‘I certainly hope not, Mr. Prime Minister. In my last four films I’ve been a woman of deep ill-repute’. (1999: 138)

Warner Brothers was asked by the MPEAA to coordinate with the United States Information Service office to make the Rio Bravo print available. ‘Naturally,’ noted the letter from Warner Brothers’ E.R. Rosencrantz to the studio’s manager in India B.N. Nadkarni, ‘we should incur no expenses in this connection’ (Rosenkrantz 1962). And it was equally important, given the customs of diplomatic reciprocity, that Kenneth Clark, the executive vice-president of the Motion Picture Association, write a thank-you note expressing both his and Galbraith’s gratitude in making the print available.

These gestures of reciprocity help manage the industrial points of contact between Hollywood and Indian media ecologies. For example, when K.M. Modi of Western India Theatres asked the Director of
International Relations at Warner Brothers to supply 8x10 autographed photos of Natalie Wood and Suzanne Pleshette, Warner Brothers obliged, throwing in a autographed Rex Harrison photo 'for good measure' (Nadkarni 1964; Schaefer 1964b). The stars themselves were not above collecting autographs of each other: as The Times of India reported during the Indian film delegation's visit to Hollywood in 1952, 'Nargis was collecting signatures of her American colleagues while Greer Garson made sure that she got those of her newly won Indian friends'.

The publication of autographed photos of Hollywood stars in early film magazines helped propagate a parallel discourse of Indian stardom beyond the image itself (Majumdar 2009). The signed star image also generated the fiction of a personal relationship, an intimate intersubjectivity of contact that flattened perceived asymmetries between media industries. For example, Paul Muni's autographed photo—signed 'To Mr. B. Patel, My Best Wishes, Paul Muni'—was published in filmindia along with photos of the editor Baburao Patel 'sandwiched but by no means un-comfortable' between Hollywood stars Gloria Dickson and Lya Lees. The fact that Patel chose to showcase these photographs in the same magazine where he routinely excoriated Hollywood as a fraudulent polluter of Hindu civic virtue tells us something about his literary predilections for combining sex, misogyny, and communalism (see Manto 1998). But it also demonstrates the persistence of media rituals that collapse the world of the star with that of the spectator (Couldry 2003). The autograph that authorizes the photo as authentic invokes the paradox of the signature (Derrida 1984), testifying to the unique, material singularity of the star but also to the capacity for destabilization, repetition, and circulation of the star-as-image. This alignment of the body of the star with the iterability that supports the textuality of stardom creates a figure of transit that negotiates between one industrial form and another. Paul Muni's photograph is both of Hollywood and outside it, which is why Patel can use it to promote an Indian publication without compromising any claim on cultural distinctiveness.

While celebrity tourism, star photos, and geopolitical intrigue are privileged moments in the circulation of screen culture, there are also more mundane forms that characterize everyday industry contact. Reports, memos, faxes, texts, e-mails, notes, and ledgers constitute the literary productions that enunciate film industries. I am interested here in the epistolary documents that frame the industrial encounter in ways that gesture to both dialogue and difference. Consider Indian film

Epistolary forms attest to the materiality of historical and cultural practice, forcing us to contend with the contexts of their production. Even though their intimate forms of address and signatory authority foreground the body of the author and the addressee, letters must be considered in their textuality (Gilroy and Verhoeven 2000). As literary artefacts, letters are conversational in form, and when published, they perform the 'face-work' of the industry (Goffman 1963).

These epistolary points of contact predate Hollywood. A December 1910 letter from Rajahmundry to the editors of Moving Picture News explains the predominance of mythological epics on the Indian stage, promising to provide language and cultural assistance to American producers interested in cinematic adaptation, for 'one-third share of the net profits'. The editors responded with the 'hope that some enterprising manufacturer will be keen enough to avail himself of the opportunity now offered'. The 1910s saw the proliferation of such Indian entreaties, strategically phrased in the speech-genre of genuflection, requesting new and second-hand prints, noting audience reactions to Hollywood film, and testifying to the importance of the Indian market. Letters framed informal networks of international exchange that were critical to the circulation of pre-cinematic technology and knowledge as well as the movement of pirated and second-run prints amongst itinerant exhibitors in the subcontinent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (see Mahadevan 2009).

Fan letters reveal the ways in which Hollywood negotiates forms of spectatorial attachment and discovery. Gulab Singh Sengar, a mathematics lecturer at Lohia College in Churu, wrote an aerogramme to Jack L. Warner, then President of Warner Brothers in 1964:

You will be greatly surprised to get this letter from a stranger thousands of miles away. But I could not help it. I have tried my level best to get some information about a picture, DANGEROUS, produced by your studio in 1935. Bette Davis won her first 'OSCAR' for this picture. I want to know the name of the person who directed this film. I have searched many magazines and Almanacs but could not find the name of Director of 'Dangerous'. I hope you can solve my difficulty. This is my humble request to you and I am sure you will help me out of this difficulty. I have become desperate after so many failures in my search. (Sengar 1964)
Within two weeks, Warner Brothers’ Director of International Relations Carl Schaefer sent a short letter back responding with the requested information (Schaefer 1964a). What was the point of replying to a fan letter that was never circulated outside the studio? Before attempting a tentative answer, consider a contrasting letter written to Jack Warner four months after Sengar’s.

Manharlal H. Chawda’s August 1964 letter requests Jack Warner to meet with his brother Dhiraj, a colour photographer on a two month trip abroad, interested in capturing a portrait of Warner as ‘a daily life of a big producer in Hollywood and [showing] it to India through the Indian film magazines’. Promising to return the favour by introducing Warner to the Maharaja of Udaipur in order to develop the Lake Palace Hotel as a possible Hollywood shooting site, Chawda framed his letter to Warner as a request from one Rotarian to another. According to S. Gupta (1953: 6), Vice President of the Rotary Club of Jamshedpur, Indian Rotarians saw themselves as bridging East and West through the concept of fraternal service. Although enhancing international business relationships was a clear benefit of the elite Rotary mandate, Carl Schaefer received a terse memo from Warner’s office: ‘JLW said for you to take care of these Indians (from India) when they arrive which should be soon now. If he calls I will transfer him to you. I gather that JLW [Jack L. Warner] does not want to be in town when they are at the studio’.

In the first case, a request from a fan is responded to positively, while an entreaty from a fellow member of an elite global fraternity is brushed aside. Clearly, the epistolary figure speaks to the dilemma of physical exchange between Hollywood and India. Like the material singularity of the star that is displaced yet legitimated through its circulation, the epistolary form is predisposed towards the exchange of information rather than bodies. As figures of transit, such letters manage the material, symbolic, and discursive relations between Hollywood and India. But epistolary forms can also point towards the dangerous possibility of actually meeting the face behind the name, which is why the enduring feature of so many of these letters is that they remain unanswered.

POSTCARDS FROM THE EDGE OF HOLLYWOOD

In 2003, Ohm Films International announced plans to tie up with the Hollywood studio Metro–Goldwyn–Mayer to dub and re-release The Spy Who Loved Me (1977) and Goldfinger (1964) in Hindi, Tamil, and
Telugu. For publicity, Ohm Films planned an India ka Bond yatra, a motorized procession travelling through India for almost a month during the film’s release, featuring streetplays and Bond doubles on stopovers ‘to introduce 007 directly to the masses of India’.

The India ka Bond publicity junket cleverly encapsulates Hollywood drift—the forms through which the commodity moves as it travels.

Tracing Hollywood in India—one of the few remaining places in the world where it plays as a secondary cinema—presents challenges and opportunities for comparative media research. Many of the characterizations that substantiate global Hollywood—cultural imperialism, narrative ubiquity, distributional hegemony, market saturation, state subsidy, and the logic of numerical calculation—cannot be uniformly applied in the Indian context. This does not mean that Hollywood is insignificant in India, nor does it deny the extension of structural features that define Hollywood across global and local predicaments. Attending to Hollywood in India allows for different kinds of questions to be asked. Looking at the ways in which Hollywood materializes in forms of encounter, excavating its practices of global and local sense-making, implicating contemporary movements within older figurations of exchange, allows for a certain flexibility in analysis. ‘Provincializing’ Hollywood—locating an account of its material existence in specific places and times, understanding the diverse ways that Hollywood is imagined, vernacularized, and figured in everyday screen practice—defies the grammar of mobility through which the narrative of impact is most often communicated (Chakrabarty 2007; Hansen 2010). At the very least, it relieves us of the burden to make Hollywood speak in the same language everywhere.

NOTES

18. ‘Film Delegates Welcomed’, The Times of India, 9 October 1952.
24. ‘Film Delegate Welcomed’, The Times of India, 9 October 1952.
29. ‘Mera Naam Bond ... James Bond’, Screen, 26 December 2003, p. 18.

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