

# TRAVELING STYLES OR THE CHALLENGE OF APPROACHING COMMERCIAL HINDI CINEMA AS WORLD CINEMA

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## *Abstract*

This article proposes a contribution to a methodological and theoretical discussion in contemporary film studies: how to study and teach cinema cultures in the age of globalization? In a first step, the approach to World Literature proposed by literary scholar Franco Moretti is re-visited and discussed in terms of its productivity and limitations. The article then asks if cinematic traditions can be understood in a comparative perspective, as the result of processes of mutual exchange, circulation and friction beyond the confines of a paradigm of national cinema, and along pathways of circulation not necessarily shaped and controlled by the supposedly inevitable forces of Western capitalism. Commercial Hindi cinema is used as a case study – the article in particular discusses the temporal-spatial constellation of *Pakeezah* (*Pure One*, Kamal Amrohi, 1972).

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*[T]he film is one of the most melodramatic ever made,  
beautiful and mysterious throughout.*

Peter Wollen on *Pakeezah*.<sup>1</sup>

This article proposes to make a contribution to one of the key methodological and theoretical (or should I say conceptual) discussion in contemporary film studies: how to study and teach cinema cultures in the age of globalization?

I use the expression “cinema cultures in the age of globalization” as a placeholder for what was formerly called World or Transnational Cinema. In a way similar to the label World Music, the notion of World Cinema has become a synonym for all non-Western cinemas, a kind of pseudo-genre for the commodification and canonization of the geographical “other.” At the same time the concept of Transnational Cinema is more and more turning into an empty signifier since both on the level of production and consumption, more and more films are “transnational” (or regional or local) by definition. Conversely and perhaps paradoxically, while cinema is becoming more “transnational” at the level of production transnational studies tend to underestimate the continuing significance of the national and of the concept of national culture as a frame of reference in both the production and circulation of moving images – as contested and conflicted that concept may be.<sup>2</sup>

The concept of globalization is complicated and contested in itself. Nonetheless I propose that thinking about, and re-thinking globalization may allow us to gain a foothold to address the problems of both World Cinema and Transnational Cinema that I just outlined. I propose to understand globalization here as both a process and a perspective. As a historical process globalization unfolded and unfolds in different phases and shifts, and dates back several centuries.<sup>3</sup> As a perspective on the other hand, globalization is more recent, a concept arising from a new understanding of difference towards the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, as cultural theorist Arif Dirlik has suggested.<sup>4</sup>

In order to explore new ways of conceptualizing cinema cultures in the age of globalization I will begin by re-visiting the approach to World Literature proposed by literary scholar Franco Moretti and discuss its productivity and limitations in addressing the problems that I outlined.<sup>5</sup> Moretti's approach has been critically adapted to the study of film through the work of the late Paul Willemen.<sup>6</sup> Willemen first used Moretti's concepts of distant reading and of mapping literature on to the accidents of geography for studying South Korean Cinema in 2002,<sup>7</sup> before developing a broader proposal for a comparative film studies from 2006 onwards.<sup>8</sup> For Willemen a comparative film studies is "not an alternative discipline, but a detour in order to re-arrive at a better model of cinematic functioning"<sup>9</sup> and hereby expose the severe limitations of "the Euro-American model of cinema which constitutes the frame for the existing paradigm of film studies."<sup>10</sup> According to Willemen comparative film studies would emphasize "the universal encounter with capitalism" and its effect on cinema.<sup>11</sup> As much I sympathize with Willemen's plea for moving beyond a Euro-American model of film studies, I am somewhat ambivalent about his position of emphasizing the universal encounter with capitalism and its effect on cinema as the *via regia* for a comparative film studies.<sup>12</sup> A strong case can be made that whatever critique of the universalizing tendencies of a Euro-American model of film study Willemen's approach may comport will be undercut by his move of introducing a quasi-transcendental notion of "capitalism" as a new universal that guarantees the underlying unity of cinema, thereby subtly but effectively re-homogenizing the object of study from what remains essentially a Western point of view. Particularly in the light of new studies about the informal economies of cinema outside of the realm and reach of Hollywood and Western cinemas – Ramon Lobato's book comes to mind –, it remains doubtful whether hypostasizing world capitalism as a force with which a "universal encounter" is inevitable produces a useful framework for a comparative approach to the study of film.<sup>13</sup> The subtleness of Willemen's approach to the esthetics of cinema in a comparative perspective needs to be matched with an equally differentiated and heuristically powerful approach to the economics of film.

Another point of contention concerns Willemen's continuing adherence to the basic tenets of apparatus theory. As Christian Metz points out at the end of the key chapter of the *The Imaginary Signifier* (1977), in which he develops the analogy between the cinematic apparatus and the psychic apparatus according to Freud, this analogy is literally topical and contingent upon the accidents of geography: it is a theory developed by an European theorist to explain cinema culture in major European urban areas. It is a theory, cautions Metz, that may lose its explanatory power once we take it beyond the confines of its culture of origin. However, extending the reach of the basic tenets of apparatus theory to cover non-European and non-American cinema culture makes perfect sense if one subscribes to a universalizing reading of the Althusserian variety of apparatus theory. According to such a reading the processes of interpellation through the cinematic text, and thus of the production of subjectivity, occur regardless of any accidents of geography and culture

because they are part and parcel of the “universal encounter” with the forces of capitalism that Willemsen evokes, if not the privileged occurrence of that encounter.<sup>14</sup>

My own reading of Moretti’s proposals will follow a different path from Willemsen’s, one that attempts to avert both a hegemonic understanding of capitalism as a homogenizing force of cinema culture and a similarly hegemonic understanding of textual interpellation as the unifying default mode of spectatorship. The question I would like to answer, by taking Moretti as my point of departure, is: how can different cinematic traditions be understood in a comparative perspective as the result of processes of mutual exchange, circulation and friction beyond of the confines of the paradigm of national cinema, and along pathways of circulation not necessarily shaped and controlled by the supposedly inevitable forces of Western capitalism?<sup>15</sup> My reading of Moretti raises a number of critical points that I will address in my concluding section, and in answering my research question I hope to contribute towards the global media theory that film scholar Bhaskar Sarkar calls for in his work on contemporary Indian cinema.

My own contribution will use commercial Hindi cinema as a case study for this discussion. As many scholars of Indian Cinemas have insisted, the diverse and manifold past and current cinematic traditions of the Indian subcontinent represent an ideal testing ground for the shortcomings and limitations of the paradigms of film study that have helped shape, and in turn have been derived from, the Western canon of film classics, most notably the auteur paradigm and the national culture/national cinema paradigm that views great works by great auteurs as transcendent expressions of the essence of a national culture.<sup>16</sup>

While research on the subject has taken great strides in recent years<sup>17</sup> commercial Hindi cinema continues to be treated as a relatively marginal object and to be discussed as either exotic or hermetically specific, as a popular art form that reproduces cultural stereotypes of the “Indian” and Indian culture and defies understanding by Western audiences. Theoretically sound approaches informed by such an understanding argue that Hindi cinema has developed its own language and semiotics, which must then be assessed on their own terms. As Corey Creekmur remarks, in doing so these approaches make a claim of exception that reinforces the normative standard of the aesthetics of Euro-American entertainment films. In order to address this problem Creekmur argues for a model of mainstream entertainment film in film theory that is broad, non-specific and inclusive enough to include commercial Hindi cinema rather than treat it as a deviation from a standard model of cinematic narration.<sup>18</sup> While supporting Creekmur’s rejection of theories that attribute to commercial Hindi cinema (or other non-Western cinemas) the status of an exception Bhaskar Sarkar cautions against the denial of cultural specificity that such a model would entail. However, while Sarkar himself abides by the concept of cultural specificity demands that claims of cultural specificity be historicized, and that they should examine the extent to which the culturally specific is shaped both by local cultural traditions and international influence. Averting the pitfalls of a homogenizing notion of “universal encounters” with capitalism, Sarkar emphasizes that processes of exchange and circulation neither merge completely with the nation-state nor align seamlessly with the pathways of global capital:

*[R]ather, they operate at the level of the translocal-popular – the level which, while largely complicit with hegemonic apparatuses, continues to hold as-yet-unrealized promises of democratic imaginations and interventions.*

Refocusing the analysis in this way, Sarkar argues, holds the promise that

*[b]y examining this translocal-popular exchange, we can avoid slipping into the problems of exceptionalism, exoticism and containment associated with the multiculturalist paradigm.*<sup>19</sup>

This brings me back to Moretti, who advocates something similar. With respect to literature, he formulates the thesis that the modern novel always arises as a compromise between a foreign form and local material and forms. There is, in other words, always a translocal-popular exchange at work in the gestation of modern literary forms, rather than merely an adaptation of local materials to a prescriptive standard format emanating from a dominant cultural source. In the following, I will argue that we can extend this hypothesis to commercial Hindi Cinema. Paraphrasing an idea of Moretti's, it could be possible to say that the decisive question is not whether or to what degree Indian films can be measured against Western models. Rather, it is important to examine what connection is assumed between the so-called "Eastern" narrative and representational modes and "Eastern" materials, and between "Western" forms of the production of modern (commercial) art and entertainment forms such as Hindi cinema. In the case of Hindi cinema this trade of forms must also be understood as taking place in a field shaped by political and cultural forces related, not least, to the country's colonial past.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, what may appear to a Western onlooker to be a hermetically specific, but authentic expression of local cultural traditions may well be – even in popular cinema, or rather: particularly in popular cinema – an act of cultural self-assertion, a defiant adaptation of Western film technology to a local or regional agenda of cultural policy and politics through culture. One of the most stunning facts about Indian cinema, Hindi and otherwise, is that it has maintained a home market share of more than 90 percent ever since the introduction of sound and even after the liberalization of the early 1990s which included a liberalization of the markets for cultural goods. Whatever form the translocal-popular exchange of Hindi cinema may take, it is one that remains deeply popular with its home audience.

The problematic that I have just sketched will be discussed here using the example of the spatial constellation in *Pakeezah* (*Pure One*, Kamal Amrohi, 1972). I will first summarize some of Moretti's relevant findings, and then go on to discuss a selection of scenes from *Pakeezah*. Based on this outline I would like to propose a number of elements towards a global theory of popular cinema in film studies that takes into account both the proposals of Creekmur and Sarkar.

One of the key points of such an approach should be that it can contribute to work against what historian Dipesh Chakrabarty has called "asymmetric ignorance."<sup>21</sup> By asymmetric ignorance, Chakrabarty means the problem that generations of thinkers "who shape the nature of social science have produced theories that embrace the entirety of humanity."<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, these theories are assimilated and dispersed in post-colonial countries. As Chakrabarty laconically states, the problem of asymmetric ignorance is "not simply a matter of 'cultural cringe' [...] on our part or of cultural arrogance on the part of the European historian."<sup>23</sup> Rather, it is about "the everyday paradox of third-world social science [...] that we find these theories, in spite of their inherent ignorance of 'us,' eminently useful in understanding our societies."<sup>24</sup> In unfolding this paradox, Chakrabarty makes a case for scrutinizing the great European intellectual models to see if they are valid for the so-called Third World. The intellectual movement on the way consists in figuratively declaring Europe a theoretical province. Or at least this is how one might encapsulate – admit-

tedly simplified – his 2000 book *Provincializing Europe*, which has become quintessential to post-colonial theory.<sup>25</sup> In particular, it is important to him to counteract the posture, widely held even among social scientists in post-colonial countries, of measuring social development by the standards of European theoretical models. In these models, for instance, India's absence of an evolving bourgeoisie in the European sense must be thought of as a "lack." The provincializing of Europe, in this case, consists in tracing the universal demand for validity of European intellectual models back to their regional realms of validity. The absence of the bourgeoisie can only be conceived of as a lack in a place where this legally would have to have been put into place. Its lack in African countries or India has to be conceived differently, indeed and first of all not as a lack. In a quite similar way, Franco Moretti calls into question the normative canonical demands of certain European literary traditions, namely French and English literature since the Renaissance. If literary studies measures everything that is produced elsewhere by the heights reached in English and French literature since Shakespeare and Classicism, then, according to Moretti, this overlooks a decisive point: that these traditions, while indeed significant, are in themselves not suitable to provide universal norms because they represent an absolute exception in the history of literature as measured by global standards. Similarly, while Stanley Cavell may be justified in his claim that the classical Hollywood cinema has produced more masterpieces, in absolute numbers, than all of Elizabethan poetry combined, we can still not elevate these masterpieces to the status of a norm against which everything else has to be measured. Where Moretti proposes to provincialize the European tradition, we have to provincialize both Hollywood and the European art cinema.

## Franco Moretti's conjectures on world literature and the study of film

Franco Moretti starts his essay with the question of what it means to turn to world. As a specialist in Western European narrative literature between 1790 and 1930 – that is, as a specialist of the grand tradition of the bourgeois novel –, Moretti admits to feeling like a charlatan when he extends his scholarships beyond the geographical bounds of Great Britain or France to address the question of "world literature". Eschewing the traditional Goethean understanding of "*Weltliteratur*" as transnational communication through significant works of canonical literature, Moretti chooses a broader approach and ponders the option of simply reading more books, before concluding that world literature is not simply a new object, but a new problem, which therefore also requires a new critical method. Different from David Damrosch, whose works on world literature have contributed significantly to establishing the respective field, Moretti is less interested in defining individual works that are world literature through their reception than in the global and local circulation of certain aesthetic modes. For his reflections on world literature, Moretti initially draws on a working hypothesis from the history of economy, and more specifically on the work from the school of World-systems theory.<sup>26</sup> For these, international capitalism is a system that is simultaneously one system and at the same time displays inequalities, that is, a system with a center and a periphery (or semi-periphery), which are linked to one another by increasing inequality that extends into the periphery. The Israeli literary scholar Even-Zohar, for example, negotiates the relationships between "world literature" and national literary traditions by relying on the theory of translation and speaking of "source literature" and "target literature." As for the



idea of mutual influence, he maintains that this does not exist as such: “There is no symmetry in literary interference. A target literature is, more often than not, interfered with by a source literature which completely ignores it.”<sup>27</sup> One could argue that Even-Zohar’s argument amounts to an application of Chakrabarty’s problem of asymmetric ignorance to the field of literature. Moretti’s idea of inequality, which regulates the relationships between different cultures according to the model of global capitalism, works in a similar fashion. The fate of a culture (usually of a so-called peripheral culture) intersects and is altered by another culture (usually from the so-called center), which is in turn completely unaware of the other. One could object that Immanuel Wallerstein’s model of center and periphery has little or no connection to a post-colonial position like Chakrabarty’s, nor is it complex enough to account for the multiple layers of contemporary socio-economic realities, which have long ceased to be organized a singular center-periphery model. Just witness the rapid rise of the People’s Republic of China over the last two decades and the massive anxieties the scenario of a multi-polar economic world order generates in the minds of Western observers and policy makers. At the same time, particularly in the field of cinema, the rapid development of what Ramon Lobato proposes to call the informal economies of cinema, which do not follow the topology of center and periphery but evolve laterally and heterotopically to the global pathways of Western-dominated trade instead further complicates the application of the center-periphery model. I will come back to this critique at the end of my article. For the time being, however, I will maintain Moretti’s basic conception to explore to what extent the model can prove to be useful.

By bypassing the canon-building devices of classical literary studies and applying the explanatory matrix of social history, Moretti creates a methodological conundrum which he himself highlights by quoting French social historian Marc Bloch: “Years of analysis for a day of synthesis.”<sup>28</sup> Rather than proceeding through exemplary cases studies of universally acknowledged canonical texts, literary history, and by extension film analysis and film history, need to be reframed following the lead of Fernand Braudel, Wallerstein and re-built, if you will, on a broad empirical foundation. For the field of film studies, French film historian Michèle Lagny has proposed an approach to writing film history based on a serial analysis of large collection of (genre) films, an approach inspired, like Moretti’s approach to literary history, by Braudel.<sup>29</sup> But where Lagny looks for iterations of patterns in chronological series, Moretti proposes to replace the traditional hermeneutics of the close reading of canonical texts with what he calls distant reading.<sup>30</sup> In order to analyze and understand a certain time period of regional literary culture, the method is no longer to closely read a representative sample of influential works, but to read pretty much every book published in that period or area. With this approach, which requires a large amount of data, it becomes possible to discern and analyze entities that are either much smaller or much larger than particular texts, such as patterns of geographical mappings of plots, aesthetic/narrative modes, themes, tropes, or genres and systems. Combined with his assumption that the Western European novel should not be viewed as the norm and rule of literature, but as an exception in the history of literature, this approach allows Moretti to formulate that something like a law of literary evolution can be established:

*In cultures that belong to the periphery of the literary system (which means: almost all cultures, inside and outside Europe), the modern novel first arises not as an autonomous development but as a compromise between a western formal influence (usually French or English) and local materials.*<sup>31</sup>

The modern novel thus does not arise in cultures on the periphery as an autonomous development, but as a compromise between Western formal influence and local material. A review of diverse literary histories confirms this finding. As Moretti writes:

*Four continents, two hundred years, over twenty independent critical studies, and they all agreed: when a culture starts moving towards the modern novel, it's always as a compromise between foreign form and local materials.*<sup>32</sup>

Let me state, as others have done before, that Moretti introduces a kind of creeping teleology, which undercuts his own claim of a supposedly ab-normal status of the modern European novel. Rather, it would seem that in this passage Moretti posits the modern novel as the *telos* of literary development toward which all cultures sooner or later start to move. Later in the essay, Moretti extends and specifies the formula as follows: “The compromise at hand here is a compromise between a foreign form, local materials, and local forms, or more precisely: a mixture made up of foreign plot, local characters/figures, and a local narrative voice.”<sup>33</sup> This leads to a somewhat paradoxical result: against this backdrop, the French, English, or Spanish novel do indeed represent an exception; what passes as typical according to this approach are the other forms of the novel. However, the mixed forms, which are supposedly really typical of the novel as such, only become discernible against the normative idea of the modern novel towards which each culture sooner or later moves, an idea which likely would have to be derived from the European model of the novel. Taking Chakrabarty’s point about the need to provincialize Europe seriously one could go one step further and argue that the formula of a mixture of foreign plot, local characters and a local narrative voice already applies to Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, generally considered to be the first European novel. *Don Quixote* derives its interest from combining a “foreign” plot (the medieval epic) with local figures (Don Quixote and Sancho Panza) and a local narrative voice (the irony inherent in the open, flexible form of the novel). As such, if we take Moretti’s continuing push for a comparative morphology based on large data sets, i.e. systematic examinations of how forms vary in space and time, and of how they travel and circulate in space and time, but provincialize his claims of an exceptional/non-normative status of the European model (which is, as it turns out, really a claim of an exceptional/normative status of the European novel) and combine his approach and this critique with a post-metaphysical, post-universalist understanding of capitalism and global trade, we may arrive at a methodology that proves useful for the study of cinema in a globally comparative perspective.

### Commercial Hindi cinema: The case of *Pakeezah*

Against this theoretical and methodological backdrop, I would now like to come to the aesthetics of commercial Hindi cinema and to my original question, i.e. how can cinema traditions be understood in a comparative perspective as the results of a process of mutual exchange, circulation and friction beyond a paradigm of national cinema, and along pathways of circulation not necessarily shaped by Western capitalism? I will use Kamal Amrohi’s *Pakeezah* as my example, less in the sense of a case study than as an example that allows me to discuss

and determine the parameters of a prospective analysis of a larger set of films. As much as *Pakeezah* deserves to be appreciated as a singular film and celebrated for its artistic success the film serves here as a somewhat random example, chosen for the purposes of methodological demonstration.<sup>34</sup>

The choice of Amrohi's film is specific, however, to the extent that *Pakeezah* exemplifies the problem of the merging of the migration and interpenetration, if you will – of different modes and traditions of representation. The film may be said to exemplify the convergence, and the friction between “Western” film style and “Eastern” practices. This convergence begins at the level of the technical staff. The director of cinematography was Joseph Wirsching, originally from Austria.<sup>35</sup> The collaboration of non-Indian technicians on Indian films, particularly as camera technicians, is not unusual in Hindi cinema history, but it is also not the rule. In his work on early Indian sound film filmmaker and film scholar Riyad Wadia, the great nephew of Homi and grandson of Jamshed Wadia, the founders and studio heads of Wadia Movietone, speaks at length about how the sound film pioneers of the 1930s and 1940s carefully studied and attempted to emulate English and American stunt and adventure movies of that time. The stunt and adventure films that the Wadia brothers produced for their company based on their analysis quickly achieved legendary status in Indian cinema. However anecdotal the evidence, the examples of *Pakeezah* and the Wadia action films exemplify the migration of styles and forms at the level of both personnel and material – and in both cases, these migrations are partially determined by the field of political and cultural forces of late colonial reign of Great Britain in India.<sup>36</sup>

Aside from Joseph Wirsching's involvement, *Pakeezah* is also interesting for the context that I am delineating here because despite its obvious artistic merits, it is considered only a moderately successful film. In particular, critics complain that the film has a disjointed feeling to it and does not hold together, which can in part be traced back to its long production time which stretches over a good thirteen years. As Valentina Vitali writes in her essay “The Families of Hindi Cinema: A Socio-Historical Approach to Film Studies,”<sup>37</sup> the preparations for *Pakeezah* began at a time when the feudal romance was the dominant genre of Hindi cinema.<sup>38</sup> Its completion and first screening in 1972 came at a time of disillusionment, when Jawaharlal Nehru's nationalist modernization project was hitting up against its limits and social fears were running rampant. All of this found its fit expression in the new genre of angry-young-man films with their key actor and big star Amitabh Bachchan.<sup>39</sup> In this sense, *Pakeezah* can be read as a transitional film from the feudal romances of the 1950s to the genre of angry-young-man films of the 1970s.<sup>40</sup> It stands in symptomatically for the transition from Nehru to Indira Gandhi and her economic policy of the so-called Green Revolution, a transition that also included forming a new audience, a new middle class. If we follow Vitali's reading, the aesthetic heterogeneity of *Pakeezah* – which from a critical point of view is of course only a problem if you adhere to a neo-humanistic norm of coherence and unity in attributing value to a work of art – is an expression of different visual regimes built up around the female lead and her spatial positioning. Vitali distinguishes between three scopic regimes: hierarchical, perspectival, and theatrical-frontal. She writes:

*Its formal uncertainties [...] are an effect of the fact that while the film addresses contradictions within nationalist modernisation that had began to become apparent in the 1960s, at the same time the film has not yet worked out the narrative strategies required to erase successfully perception of contradiction.*<sup>41</sup>



Vitali's symptomatic reading of *Pakeezah* has its merits, despite the somewhat literal fashion in which she derives the social and economic underpinnings of the film's form from its production and reception history. Nonetheless I would like to provide another reading, and one that to a certain degree is in opposition to Vitali's. As I would like to argue the form problem of the film, its supposed lack of coherence, is first and foremost a problem of form and not of circumstance. Rather than through the lens of a literalist materialism, I propose to take a clue from German comparative literature scholar Peter Szondi and his groundbreaking analysis of the crisis of modern drama which, in a somewhat more Hegelian/Adornian perspective, takes problems of form to be expressive of conflicts that arise in artistic terms and are resolved through, or remain unresolved in artistic practice.<sup>42</sup> Accordingly, the "jumps" and breaks that characterize the film may be read not so much as the product of a protracted production history, but as the result of a compromise that is indicative of the specific conditions in which commercial films in India emerged, as a narrative cinema that appeared to be at the cultural periphery.

What I mean by this can be best demonstrated through a sequence from *Pakeezah*.

The courtesan Nargis/Sahibjaan (Meena Kumari) and Salim (Raj Kumar), who has fallen in love at first sight with the beautiful dancer and above all with her delicate feet, meet once again. The scene occurs in Salim's tent, where Sahibjaan is led to by chance. A boat belonging to a rich suitor is shipwrecked when he shoots into a herd of bathing elephants in order to sail on. Enraged, the elephants attack the boat. Then follows a leap in time. Sahibjaan, who has apparently escaped, rides toward the shore on a part of the ship that had broken off and finds a tent containing a bed, where she falls down exhausted. At the headboard she finds a diary that tells of an encounter with the feet of a sleeping beauty, for which the writer can find no words. Sahibjaan, however, has no trouble finding the right word to describe this encounter: love. A musical number begins and segues into another sequence. The song is a kind of daydream about love being in the air. The new sequence begins with the courtesan lying on the cot. From off screen we hear the hoofbeats of approaching horses. The courtesan slowly rises; a Spanish-sounding melody begins which then dramatically escalates. Sahibjaan sinks back onto the cot, Salim appears at the opening of the tent, but she cannot see him. There is a cut to his face, then a counter-shot to the courtesan lying on the cot. With the pan from her face and down to her feet, the shot is attributed to Salim as his point of view. There follows a reverse shot back to his face, then a cut back to the henna-painted feet, back to him, then he slowly turns his head away from her. Cut to her face, her eyes are now closed again and her voice resounds as an "inner voice," which we can tell from the faint echo. Sahibjaan speaks as if her daydream were continuing: "Allah, he is close to me and I'm on the verge of suffocating..." It is a sort of imaginary address, in which it is not (yet) clear whether she is aware of Salim's presence. Then the camera changes again to a medium shot, which includes both of them, in which he slowly leaves the entrance to go somewhere behind the tent to light his pipe. With his back to the camera he begins to speak, which could be considered a kind of interior monologue. Salim once again turns toward the tent, and we see the shadowy outline of Sahibjaan sitting up in the bed. Now Salim seems to speak directly to Sahibjaan. Once again we are with her in the tent, listening to him as he directly greets her. Then the camera changes again to an outside shot of him in front of the tent. While Salim is speaking, we alternately see the courtesan in the tent and him, the lover outside in front of the tent. The sequence of shots does not correspond to an eyeline match, such as would have been compulsory in classical Hollywood cinema at this point. At the level of sound

and voice, however, the montage suggests that the two are now speaking to each other. Over the course of the scene, this turns into a dialogue of sorts since she attempts to answer his questions directly. But at the level of the *mise-en-scène* and editing, the monologic quality of the two speaking positions remains in place, which, as I have mentioned, can be seen as the consequence of not maintaining the eye-line match. Even though the two characters remain in two different spaces, in front of and inside the tent, within Hollywood continuity editing, a crossing of the line would be avoided, since this would rather question the status of the sequence: wish, dream, reality, fantasy? Above all the introduction to the sequence occurs in a kind of “in-between world,” which gradually becomes a reality for the characters.

When later in the scene Salim addresses the letter declaring his love, which he had laid at Sahibjaan’s feet in the train, her hand, which has been slowly reaching up in the direction of her throat during this off-screen story, makes it clear that she does indeed remember the letter he is talking about. And at once we also hear a male voice, which reads “her” part of the letter out loud. At this moment, however, a dialogue from an earlier scene is replayed, which has to do with the love letter. During this letter episode the music takes on an increasingly dramatic tone, up to the point where it abruptly breaks off. At the same time the kerosene lamp in the tent goes out (close up). Then we see a shot of the setting sun, the next cut brings us (as evidenced by the lighting conditions) to the following morning. The passing of time is palpable, but this abrupt ellipsis is not clearly coded. The two characters are still separated by the wall of the tent, but they are nonetheless shown in a single shot. We get the impression that the couple has gotten closer in the ellipsis. The rest of the scene is no longer kept in suspense. Salim and Sahibjaan appear to have arrived in a common reality. Subsequently he rides away from her, he has something to take care of. On the soundtrack we hear sounds borrowed from spaghetti westerns, mixed together in a clearly melodramatic instrumentation, typical for Hindi cinema at the time.

What interests me initially in the sequence described here is the specific composition of space and time, and the alignment and non-alignment of sound and voice with visuals. To a large extent the sequence progresses in a kind of in-between status: oscillating between the action of the song and the narration, and between subjective and objective narrative position/voice. The scene jumps back and forth between internal and external focalization, between subjectifying sequences of shots and narrative zero-degree, “objective” narration. As for narrative space, the two characters initially move in two different “spaces,” which are occasionally linked up at the auditory level. Only at the end they do seem to have arrived in the same space. One could speak of an aesthetics of spatialized interiority, deployed through a use of film style and the formal parameters of film that has no standard equivalent in the narrative conventions of Western cinema. From the normative point of view of Western narrative cinema, this scene is deficient: unclear in its status, not respecting the conventions of the construction of characters with its clear delineations of inner states and physical action, and of the coherence of narrative space as a space of action (the “diegesis” of Etienne Souriau). This effect of “non-clarity” or confusion emerges not only from the disregard for eye-line matches, but also from the acoustic analepses and interior monologues. If we evaluate the use of these techniques in the film without taking heed of the standard solution of Western narrative cinema for a scene of this type, we realize that disregard for eye-line matches, acoustic analepses and interior monologues are all techniques. Rather than deploy a regime of space and subjectivity where cinematic space is constructed primarily as a stage for physical

action with attendant psychological states that may or may not be explained through techniques of focalization and subjectivation, popular Hindi cinema appears to favor a regime of spatiality that is defined by the dynamics and intensity of affect. This spatialized interiority may well be traced back to the narrative form of the love poem, and the scene just analyzed may be read as a transfer and adaption of the paradigm of spatialized interiority of the love poem into the constraints of film. Thus the sequence may be read as a formal compromise, as a negotiated solution, that transfers some of the tenets of regional narrative traditions into an adapted narrative medium, fundamentally changing, as it were, the established conventions of that medium in the process.

## Coda

As I indicated above the approach that I am advocating in this article has a number of points of communication with the work of other scholars, such as the work of S.V. Srinivas on pan-Asian processes of circulation and exchange in the example of Hong Kong action cinema in South-India,<sup>43</sup> in which he shows how certain aspects of the Hong Kong martial arts genre are constitutive for popular Telugu film.<sup>44</sup> Bhaskar Sarkar has also made productive use of Srinivas's works for a global media theory. In particular, Sarkar emphasizes the importance of the practice of "borrowing." He writes:

*Srinivas points to the banality of cinematic "influence" and of attempts to trace it. Originality has never been an absolute or even crucial requirement for Indian (or other) popular cinemas: as a modern cultural medium, cinema has thrived on cross-cultural interaction and pollination. He [Srinivas] calls for a shift of focus to the "processes at work in the act of borrowing," which get "obfuscated" by the "tracking of influence" in its misleading "attention to what is trivial."*<sup>45</sup>

Sarkar himself adds a small case study on the reception of Raj Kapoor in China, once again underscoring that a global media theory should not take Hollywood and its global distribution network as the yardstick against which all other film cultures should be measured. Once again it becomes clear how important it is to liberate an approach like that of Franco Moretti from the terminological corset created by Wallerstein and from its own residual Eurocentrism and to rethink the problem of "world cinema" on the basis of new global socio-economic theories.

Similarly, we need to review the concept of "distant reading" and the postulate of large data sets.<sup>46</sup> It is no coincidence that Michèle Lagny's project of a serial history of film has remained, with a few exceptions, just that: a project. Film is a complex multi-modal art form, and analyzing large sets of films poses even bigger problems both in terms of the quantity of work and the methodology to be used than analyzing large sets of novels.<sup>47</sup> A reductionist approach that focuses exclusively on plot for the sake of expediency, for instance, would completely miss the point of the sequence I just discussed. The call for a distant reading also conjures up the specter, and the pitfalls, of a purely quantitative understanding of empirical research. In addition, then, to a non-reductionist approach to film analysis, a comparative study of film would have to involve a triangulation of methods, in which approaches from the social sciences and the humanities cross-fertilize each other and where contradictions and ambivalences remain admissible. To the degree

that an approach to a comparative study of film inspired by a critical understanding of Moretti can be sustained in the longer term, the key indicator of its heuristic power should be always be something that Dudley Andrew highlights in his own critical reading of Moretti: “A close analysis of key films from any locale should reveal a conflicted cinematic vocabulary and grammar.”<sup>48</sup>

Translation: Daniel Hendrickson

- 1 Peter Wollen, “Ten Crucial Dance Movies,” in *Sight and Sound*, no. 9, September 1996, pp. 28-31.
- 2 Chris Berry, Mary Farquar, *China on Screen. Cinema and Nation*, Columbia University Press, New York 2006.
- 3 Sebastian Conrad, Andreas Eckert, *Globalgeschichte, Globalisierung, multiple Modernen: Zur Geschichtsschreibung der modernen Welt*, in Sebastian Conrad, Andreas Eckert, Ulrike Freitag (eds.), *Globalgeschichte. Theorien, Ansätze, Themen*, Campus, Frankfurt-New York 2007, pp. 7-49.
- 4 Arif Dirlik, *Global Modernity. Modernity in the Age of Global Capitalism*, Paradigm, Boulder 2007.
- 5 Franco Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature,” in *New Left Review*, no. 1, 2000, pp. 54–68.
- 6 See e.g. the Special Issue of *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, *Considering Comparative Film Studies: In Memory of Paul Willemen*, no. 1, 2013.
- 7 Paul Willemen, “Detouring Through Korean Cinema,” in *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, no. 2, 2002, pp. 167-186.
- 8 Paul Willemen, “For a Comparative Film Studies,” in *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, no. 1, 2006, pp. 98-112; Paul Willemen, “Introduction to Subjectivity and Fantasy in Action: For a Comparative Film Studies,” in *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, no. 1, 2013, pp. 96-103.
- 9 Paul Willemen, “Introduction to Subjectivity and Fantasy in Action: For a Comparative Film Studies,” cit., p. 98.
- 10 *Ibidem*.
- 11 Paul Willemen, “Detouring Through Korean Cinema,” cit., p. 167.
- 12 A critical reading of both Moretti and Willemen offers Manas Ghosh, “Theorizing New Asian Cinemas: Problems of the Historicist Approach,” in *Journal of the Moving Image*, no. 7, 2008, [http://www.jmi-online.org/film\\_journal/jmi\\_07/article\\_06.php](http://www.jmi-online.org/film_journal/jmi_07/article_06.php), last visit 2 October 2013.
- 13 Ramon Lobato, *Shadow Economies of Cinema. Mapping Informal Film Distribution*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2012.
- 14 See also Madhava Prasad, “Singular but Double-entry: Paul Willemen’s Proposals for a Comparative Film Studies,” in *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, no. 1, 2013, pp. 3-13.
- 15 I will be referring above all to the following text: Bhaskar Sarkar, *Tracking “Global Media” in the Outposts of Globalization*, in Nataša Đurovičová, Kathleen Newman (eds.), *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives*, Routledge, London-New York 2010, pp. 34-58. But see also: Bhaskar Sarkar, *Mourning the Nation: Indian Cinema in the Wake of Partition*, Duke University Press, Durham 2009 and “The Melodramas of Globalization,” in *Cultural Dynamics*, no. 1, 2008, pp. 31–51.
- 16 See e.g. the introduction of Rajinder Dudrah, *Bollywood Travels: Culture, Diaspora and Border Crossings in Popular Hindi Cinema*, Routledge, London-New York 2012.
- 17 Important e.g. *Journal of the Moving Image. Journal of the Department of Film Studies, Jadavpur University*, <http://www.jmionline.org>, last visit 2 October 2013; *Journal of South-Asian Popular Culture* (Taylor & Francis); *BioScope. South-Asian Screen Studies* (Sage). Apart from Dudrah, cit., and among many others: Nandini Bhattacharya, *Hindi Cinema. Repeating the Subject*, Routledge, London 2013; Sara Dickey and Rajinder Dudrah (eds.), *South Asian Cinemas: Widening the Lens*, Routledge, Abingdon-New York 2012; Neepa Majumdar, *Wanted Cultured Ladies Only!: Female Stardom and Cinema in India, 1930s-1950s*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana-Chicago 2009.



- 18 Corey Creekmur, *Picturizing American Cinema: Hindi Film Songs and the Last Days of Genre*, in Pamela Robertson Wojcik, Arthur Knight (eds.), *Soundtrack Available: Essays on Film and Popular Culture*, Duke University Press, Durham 2001, pp. 375-406.
- 19 Bhaskar Sarkar, *Tracking "Global Media" in the Outposts of Globalization*, cit., p. 49.
- 20 Priya Jaikumar, *Cinema at the End of Empire: A Politics of Transition in Britain and India*, Duke University Press, Durham 2006.
- 21 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2007 (2000), p. 28.
- 22 *Idem*, p. 29.
- 23 *Idem*, p. 28.
- 24 *Idem*, p. 29.
- 25 For a critique of Chakrabarty see Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization*, Duke University Press, Durham 2010.
- 26 Most prominently Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1974-2011, 4 vols.
- 27 Itamar Even-Zohar, "The Laws of Literary Interference," in *Poetics Today*, no. 1, 1990, p. 62.
- 28 Marc Bloch, "Pour une histoire comparée des sociétés européennes," in *Revue de synthèse historique*, 1928. Quoted in Franco Moretti, "Conjectures in World Cinema," cit., p. 57.
- 29 Michèle Lagny, *De l'histoire du cinéma: Méthode historique et histoire du cinéma*, A. Colin, Paris 1992.
- 30 Franco Moretti, "Conjectures in World Cinema," cit., p. 57.
- 31 *Idem*, p. 58.
- 32 *Idem*, p. 60.
- 33 *Idem*, p. 65.
- 34 There are a few publications on *Pakeezah*, and as a rule they see it as representative of the so-called courtesan film. A good compilation of this literature can be found at: <http://filmstudiesforfree.blogspot.com/2009/05/heart-of-gold-pakeezah-and-hindi.html>, last visit 12 May 2013. There is also an informative close reading in Richard Allen, Ira Bhaskar, "Pakeezah: Dreamscape of Desire," in *Projections*, no. 2, Winter 2009, pp. 20-36.
- 35 On Joseph Wirsching: Amrit Gangar, *Franz von Osten and the Bombay Talkies: A Journey from Munich to Malad*, Bombay 2001, and the Wirsching-Foundation: <http://www.wirschingfoundation.blogspot.com/>, last visit 12 May 2013.
- 36 Priya Jaikumar, *Cinema at the End of Empire: A Politics of Transition in Britain and India*, cit.
- 37 Valentina Vitali, "The Families of Hindi Cinema: A Socio-Historical Approach to Film Studies," in *Framework*, no. 42, 2000, [www.frameworkonline.com/Issue42/42vv.html](http://www.frameworkonline.com/Issue42/42vv.html), last visit 12 May 2013.
- 38 On the genre of the feudal romance of the golden 1950s, see: Madhava M. Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Contribution*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi 1998.
- 39 Valentina Vitali, "The Families of Hindi Cinema: A Socio-Historical Approach to Film Studies," cit.
- 40 Or, as Allen and Bhaskar suggest, as a kind of meta-courtesan film, which in itself contemplates the courtesan's liberation from the claustrophobic milieu of the genre. Richard Allen, Ira Bhaskar, "Pakeezah: Dreamscape of Desire", cit. For the 1970s see: *Journal of South Asian Popular Culture, The 1970s and its Legacies in India's Cinemas*, no. 1, 2012.
- 41 Valentina Vitali, "The Families of Hindi Cinema: A Socio-Historical Approach to Film Studies," cit.
- 42 Peter Szondi, Michael Hays, *Theory of the Modern Drama: A Critical Edition*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1987.
- 43 <http://hongkongaction.cscsarchive.org/>, last visit 22 July 2012.
- 44 S.V. Srinivas, *Hong Kong Action Film and the Career of the Telegu Mass Hero*, in Meaghan Morris et al. (eds.), *Hong Kong Connections: Transnational Imagination in Action Cinema*, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong 2005, pp. 111-123.
- 45 Bhaskar Sarkar, *Tracking "Global Media" in the Outposts of Globalization*, cit., p. 57.
- 46 For literary studies, see also: The Global Circulation Project, <http://literature-compass.com/global-circulation-project/>, last visit 12 May 2013.



- 47 See, for instance, Cultural Analytics as founded by Lev Manovich in 2007, <http://lab.softwarestudies.com/2008/09/cultural-analytics.html>, last visit 12 May 2013.
- 48 Dudley Andrew, *An Atlas of World Cinema*, in Stephanie Dennison, Song Hwee Lim (eds.), *Remapping World Cinema*, Wallflower, London 2006, p. 23.