
Problems of Translation

World Cinema as Distribution History

Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's editorial introduction to *The Oxford History of World Cinema* opens with a quote from Paul Rotha, a British filmmaker who was also a prolific and influential film critic and historian: "The cinema, wrote the documentarist Paul Rotha in the 1930s, 'is the great unresolved equation between art and industry.'"¹ Among Rotha's publications were two volumes titled *The Film Till Now: A History of the Cinema* and *Movie Parade: A Pictorial Survey of the Cinema*, first published in 1930 and 1936, respectively. When they came out in subsequent postwar editions, their subtitles featured a curious alteration: the first was reprinted in 1949 as *The Film Till Now: A History of World Cinema*, and the second in 1950 as *Movie Parade: A Pictorial Survey of World Cinema*.

Across film scholarship and pedagogy, the term *world cinema* appears in a variety of iterations: a descriptor contrasted to national cinema; a catchall "foreign" film or survey-course category; and a vehicle for exploring canonicity, transnational genealogies of form, and transnational histories of circulation.² This chapter examines an institutional genealogy of world cinema as a particular history of world cinema that emerged in postwar Europe from the problems and possibilities of distribution in translation. I look more closely at why commercial Indian films, despite their prolific circulation overseas, were often excluded from any serious consideration as world cinema. Transnational Anglophone discussions of commercial Indian cinema often diagnosed the films' dependence on songs as an index of the cinema's underdevelopment and incoherence. That is, the films did not translate well. Paradoxically, songs were also identified as the element that drove Indian films' overseas circulation regardless of language translation. That is, the song-filled films were immanently comprehensible and required no translation.

World cinema's postwar cachet as a category on the one hand and the prolific overseas circulation of Hindi films on the other invite conceptual and his-

torical reconsiderations of film distribution as an issue of translation. This also sets the stage for a 1960s period in which institutions of cinema proliferated as a response to crises in both global Cold War contexts and Indian national contexts. Twentieth-century Europe has been a key site for analyzing histories of media distribution in a multilingual context. Accounts of world cinema have much to gain, however, from considering the contemporaneity of not only Hindi films' prolific circulation among worldwide audiences but also tensions over their circulation and even dominance across robustly multilingual contexts both within and outside India.

Film festivals and European art cinemas mushroomed as various new waves rippled across the globe in the postwar decades amid larger geopolitical shifts, all of which were registered by the slight, yet nonetheless crucial editorial shift in Rotha's titles—that is, in the shift from “the cinema” to “world cinema.”³ Yet, in the 755 pages of *The Film Till Now: A History of World Cinema*, only three pages, under a section titled “Films from Other Countries,” deal with cinemas outside Europe and North America.⁴ Rotha and co-author Roger Manvell open their preface to the 1950 edition of *Movie Parade* by noting that “since the first appearance of this book in 1936, the cinema has added to its world audience and hence to its social influence.”⁵ The previous edition's preface, meanwhile, observes that “in almost every country in the world, there have been made thousands of films.”

Between 1936 and 1950, the two editions' characterization of the relationship between cinema and the world changed not in any significant consideration of films from contexts outside Europe and the US but from the earlier acknowledgment of the universality of film *production* around the world to an emphasis on the expansion of an *international audience* for cinema and hence, its “social influence” throughout the world.⁶ The second edition's suggestions of a new world order and of a moving-image medium that had “added to its world audience and hence to its social influence” highlight links between the aftermath of the Second World War; the proliferation of newly independent, formerly colonized nations; and the Cold War division of the globe into first, second, and third worlds in the shadow of the US's increasingly interventionist, militaristic positions throughout the world.

In earlier periods, US films had enjoyed substantial popularity in European markets, first in the 1910s and again after World War I.⁷ After World War II, however, US film companies' dominance in Europe was unprecedented.⁸ In turn, as Mark Betz notes:

A certain kind of film culture was fostered in the first three postwar decades (and reached its apogee in European art cinema of the 1960s) that has shaped our understanding of cinema ever since. For during this decade the idea that filmmaking was a personal form of artistic expression combined with the *international film marketing* of European films in ways that distinguished the latter as more than mere commercial entertainments—and in ways that have indelibly stamped both the history of the cinema and the practices of Anglo-American academic film studies.⁹

Betz further underscores the specificity of this moment in the fact that since the development of synchronous sound, language translation had come to occupy a central role in film distribution. World cinema, as it emerged in postwar Europe, was fundamentally a project of a new kind of cinema that was premised on distribution in translation. European national-popular cinemas, meanwhile, tended toward continuity rather than rupture with prewar film narratives, forms, and themes.¹⁰ Here, too, however, language remained a crucial boundary that marked each popular cinema's identity and postwar success in their drive toward nationalization in the face of Americanization.¹¹

Scholarly treatments of cinematic language translation have tended to focus on one or both of two moments in the history of cinema: the coming of sound in the late 1920s and the postwar decades that saw the rise of European art/auteur cinema and the manner in which it was "internationally market[ed]" to audiences of different language backgrounds.¹² The international marketing of European films occurred alongside—and to a large degree in response to—US film companies' postwar dominance of European markets, which reprised their earlier climb during the late-1920s moment of cinema's transition to synchronous sound. Histories of cinematic language translation have been overwhelmingly plotted along the axes of firstly, Anglophone Hollywood's ventures into non-Anglophone markets and secondly, the polyglot space of European cinemas.

In a section of *Cinema Babel* titled "Babel—the Sequel," Markus Nornes chronicles the myriad debates and strategies through which producers, distributors, and audiences negotiated acute, high-stakes questions of cinema and translation, spawned by the coming of the talkie in the late 1920s.¹³ In Nornes's account, as in those by Antje Ascheid, Martine Danan, Kristin Thompson, and Mark Betz, the heavyweight in the ring was Hollywood, whose producers and distributors had everything to gain (or lose) by successfully surmounting (or failing to surmount) the languages barriers that had sprung up with the talkie, as dialogue had suddenly become a core component of cinema's appeal.¹⁴

In this moment of "Babel—the Sequel," early Hollywood-led translation strategies included internationally distributing talkies in silent versions; inserting translations of dialogue sequences throughout a talkie in the form of dense intertitles; producing multiple-language versions (MLVs) of films that were shot two or more times in multiple languages, either with the same or different sets of actors; and employing the Dunning process of using matte backgrounds against which to shoot actors from different parts of the world for producing versions in several languages.¹⁵ Nornes notes that in Japan *benshi*, or storyteller-performers whose narration had been integral to silent-era films, initially attempted to do the same with imported talkies—whether by narrating in place of the (muted) soundtrack, narrating simultaneously over audible dialogue in another language, or having the

projectionist stop and resume the film at multiple points so that the *benshi's* narration-translation could be intermittently squeezed in. Another translation strategy attempted in Japan was placing an extra screen next to the main screen and using a magic lantern to project translations as side titles. This strategy endured for some years in China, although the above processes were ultimately discarded for being unwieldy in terms of production costs, for being poorly received by audiences, or for a combination thereof.¹⁶

Distribution strategies of dubbing and subtitling arrived as the most viable solutions for the language-translation issues that plagued what Nornes terms “Babel—the Sequel.” Far from being a universal problem for cinema, however, the difficulty of neutralizing language barriers was welcomed as a boon by several postcolonial, third-world, and smaller-scale enterprises, that finally had a competitive edge over Hollywood and other major producers by being readily poised to make films in local languages.¹⁷ In these cases, audiences’ familiarity with a film’s language was a critical selling point, even if its production values were much lower.¹⁸ This competitive edge did not always outlast the efforts of larger industries. In each national and regional context, issues of cinematic translation at these key moments—during the years following the late-1920s transition to sound and during the aftermath of World War II that marked the independence of several formerly colonized nations—played out through a combination of related factors that included state policies, language regionalisms and language nationalisms, and political economies of production and distribution.

Martine Danan treats dubbing versus subtitling as a question of national preference, depending on state policy and on the mode of translation to which a particular national audience is most accustomed. She, too, locates the axis of Hollywood-European cinema as a primary context for entering the issue of cinematic translation. She highlights the technological capital involved in the talkie transition, noting that “when sound film started to become popular around 1930, American companies had a monopoly on the recording equipment and, for a few years, tried to prevent European countries from competing with them.”¹⁹ Ultimately, Danan concludes:

Dubbing is an attempt to hide the foreign nature of a film by creating the illusion that actors are speaking the viewer’s language. Dubbed movies become, in a way, local productions. . . . Subtitling corresponds to a weaker system in which a nationalistic film rhetoric and language policy are promoted equally. Suppressing or accepting the foreign nature of imported films is a key to understanding how a country perceives itself in relation to others, and how it views the importance of its own culture and language.²⁰

While Antje Ascheid, too, argues that the foreignness of dubbed films is mitigated by the sense that the actors are speaking a target audience’s own language, her emphasis in comparing dubbed versus subtitled films shifts from Danan’s primary

concern with differences in state-driven cultural policies to a concern with differences in the effects of subtitling versus dubbing, as experienced by spectators.²¹ Ascheid argues that while a sense of the “original text” being translated pervades subtitled films, dubbed films appear as originals. However, two related issues challenge this assertion—the first having to do with race, which Nornes raises briefly, and the second having to do with the history of realism and national identity in European art cinema, which Betz treats at length.

Ascheid, for example, mentions that a montage of clips from several well-known Hollywood films were edited for an Academy Awards ceremony with the intent to amuse audiences. What was meant to (and did) amuse US audiences was that “every star that appeared onscreen, from Fred Astaire to John Wayne, from Bette Davis to Meryl Streep, had been dubbed into French, Italian, German, and so on.”²² Ascheid observes that this sequence was hardly as amusing to many European audiences, for whom the altered voices were actually the most familiar and natural ones for the stars, whom they would have encountered precisely through such dubbed versions of their films. Ascheid writes, “It was somewhat bewildering to witness the Hollywood greats laughing at John Wayne’s voice, his German voice, a voice most Germans would identify as more authentically belonging to him than his original one.”²³

Like Danan’s argument that “dubbing is an attempt to hide the foreign nature of a film by creating the illusion that actors are speaking the viewer’s language,” Ascheid’s argument that dubbed films appear as originals holds true for the instances that she raises.²⁴ Indeed, the suspension of disbelief over the fluent French or German or Italian being spoken by characters in the American West, for example, could have certainly been motivated by the genre itself—that is, the fact that Hollywood westerns had been circulating in dubbed French, Italian, and German versions to which their respective audiences were accustomed.²⁵ However, another crucial factor contributing to the naturalization of dubbed voices in these instances may have been the visual proximity of Anglo-American actors and actresses to their European counterparts. In this vein, Nornes observes that the characters in dubbed films from, say, Asia or Africa, would have been marked as both visually *and* aurally—racially *and* linguistically—foreign to Euro-American audiences.²⁶

In 1957, an article appeared in *Variety* magazine, which carried the heading “India Latest Foreign Land to Badly ‘Misunderstand’ U.S. Film Economics.”²⁷ The article, printed as a response to an editorial in an Indian trade journal, deplored the editorial’s criticism of the unidirectionality of Hollywood’s relationship to Indian film industries and lack of interest in a two-way exchange in which the US would import Indian films with equal regularity.²⁸ The *Variety* article offers up its defense: outsiders to the US were having trouble comprehending such a thing as the exercise

of individual choice, and it was solely this exercise of individual choice on the part of audiences that determined what films were being exhibited in the US. In India, however, the low quality of “mostly song-and-dance” indigenous films, a lack of alternative film offerings, and a lack of educational opportunities had forced “the educated Indian” to turn to the UK and the US not just for films but frequently for higher education as well.²⁹

The article establishes this as the crucial difference between such an educated Indian and his US counterpart, who had no need to turn elsewhere for either education or films. An American viewer, after all, had a plethora of “quality screen material” coming his way not only from Hollywood but also from Europe “where pix are backgrounded against a milieu that is at least familiar.”³⁰ Cultural unfamiliarity, however, was not wholly insurmountable, the article assuredly proclaims, as “a few Oriental films, mostly from Japan, have clicked in selected spots, providing that offbeat and quality that are a definite attraction.”³¹ The *Variety* article, too, assumes Hollywood-European cinema as the privileged axis for the foreign exchange of “quality screen material”—world cinema, as it were—with a few Japanese films thrown in for a sprinkling of novelty.

Just a year earlier, in 1956, the American Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences had inaugurated a merit award for best foreign-language film.³² The emergence of this category highlights the institutional value accorded to the aural experience of an unfamiliar tongue as a standard for high-quality, award-worthy films from “elsewhere.” The implied expectation is that films nominated for this award would feature subtitles rather than being dubbed. Regarding subtitled versus dubbed films, Ascheid contends that “the subtitled version contains a number of reflective elements which hold a much larger potential to break cinematic identification, the suspension of disbelief and a continuous experience of unruptured pleasure.”³³ This assertion, however, rests upon counterexamples of dubbed films whose *aural* properties—including, of course, the language(s) of audible dialogue—are successfully naturalized to the films’ *visual* properties. Thus, “cinematic identification, the suspension of belief and continuous experience of unruptured pleasure” may indeed remain intact in—to return to Ascheid’s own example—dubbed German versions of US westerns, which German audiences may have beheld as German rather than foreign films.³⁴ Yet, as noted earlier, had it been a case of German speech emanating from the mouths of Japanese actors in a German-dubbed version of a Japanese film, the effect on German audiences may have taken a markedly different turn.

Key factors, then, in determining the effects of subtitling and dubbing are the specificities of a given film as well as the specificities of its production and circulation contexts, including the makeup of its various audiences and their prevailing assumptions about the ideal forms and functions of cinema. Often, the kinds of films that are subtitled would never be accepted by their target audiences in dubbed versions and vice versa. While Ascheid highlights the potential of subtitled films

to underscore their very foreignness and break identification through the viewers' constant awareness that their understanding of the film is being mediated through translations supplied as subtitles, the long-standing association of subtitles with neorealist, art/auteur, ethnographic, and documentary films potentially contributes to the opposite effect as well, in presenting such films as seamlessly authentic records of their foreign contexts through the preservation of an ostensibly organic wholeness of the bodies onscreen and the voices that belong to them.

"One of the unwritten rules of art cinema culture," Betz observes, "is not simply a preference but the exigency for the subtitled print."³⁵ Betz acknowledges that an oft-invoked explanation for this exigency is that, as Bordwell and Thompson put it, "dubbing simply destroys part of the film."³⁶ Bordwell and Thompson's assertion assumes that a film is a singular object rather than, in fact, hundreds of celluloid copies that are altered as a rule rather than exception: whether through slight modifications, such as a projectionist's changeover marks, or more drastic ones, such as dubbing.³⁷ For Betz, the misapprehension of dubbing's supposed destructiveness is most evident in the large number of Italo-French coproductions made during the postwar decades in which there was no recording of any live sound at all—in other words, no original sound that would have been destroyed by dubbing. In such instances, all dialogue was post-synced and each film was released in either Italian or French and then subtitled in other languages. Betz takes a historical route to offer an explanation, and his final analysis is keen. He highlights the critical importance of the auteur in maintaining the singular national identity of European art films that resorted to coproduction as a strategy of cofinancing:

When confronted with the evidence of multi-national investment in an art film, authorship picks up the slack. . . . The name of the auteur above the title anchors the European art film to its nation in a way that the same name above an English title does not. Art film coproductions among European nations, with no American investment, thus continue not to be recognized as such (i.e., as coproductions) because the inscription of national language at the level of the soundtrack and of national character in the person of the director combine to form an almost inviolable bond—a bond that is broken, I would argue, only by the travesty of the dubbed print.³⁸

Dubbing was not merely a travesty but approached the horrific and grotesque in writings by Antonin Artaud and Jorge Luis Borges.³⁹ Mikhail Yampolsky and Larry P. Joseph show that both Artaud and Borges invoked the horror of dubbing in their descriptions of a voice being dislodged from one body and supplanted into an alien body whose voice had been rent.⁴⁰ The dubbed body, in these descriptions, was the cinematic body taken to its extreme. It was a body whose wholeness was paradoxically rendered by the very thing most alien to it: the voice that entered from without, devouring the body's own voice while being itself devoured and incorporated into a body that it animated in turn, giving illusory coherence to the resultant hallucinatory chimera.⁴¹



FIGURE 8. Still from *The Bicycle Thieves* (1948): Antonio ekes out a living by hanging up film posters.

The intensity of this characterization reveals anxieties over cinema's propensities toward technologized productions of wholeness that were anything but. Above all, post-Enlightenment notions of the human—like that of being individuated by one's body and voice—could become loosened and no longer remain inviolate. Borges and Artaud had written their respective pieces just after the arrival of synchronous sound. Their writings captured an anxiety that intensified in post-war Europe, as European art cinema derived considerable impetus from a crisis of unmoored identity. European filmmakers not only witnessed US geopolitical dominance but also saw Hollywood films as grossly untethered from their realities. Hence, in Vittorio De Sica's 1949 Italian neorealist classic *The Bicycle Thieves*, Antonio's desperation is memorably underscored by the fact that his livelihood—and that of his family—depends upon the meager earnings that he gets from pedaling a bicycle around Rome and hanging up film posters of Rita Hayworth. In the posters that we see, she epitomizes a Hollywood star who basks in the glamour of a world that could not be further from the bleakness of the one at hand, both within and outside the film (fig. 8).⁴²

With the economic benefits of shared costs driving a number of European coproductions in the postwar decades, the Artaudian/Borgesian voice-body problem foreshadowed a national language–national body problem in postwar Europe. Reconstruction presented a crisis in Europe, as transnational diplomacy and collaboration seemed especially urgent in the aftermath of World War II's horrors. At the same time, participation in a world federation seemed to come at the cost of acquiescing to a (first-)world order that had American interests at its helm, following the US's dropping of atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. World cinema was a project of dealing with this crisis through an emphatic insistence on mutual exchanges of a certain kind of film—a product that was aurally and visually anchored in its national point of origin, at the same time that it was ordained in its very creation with an imperative to travel forthwith. By thus locating the emergence of European art cinema, its oft-cited commitments to an auterist realism, and the manner in which various problems of cinematic translation were

negotiated in the postwar period, my aim is to consider how the category of world cinema weighed on contemporaneous contexts—and historiographies therein—well beyond Europe.

Practices of cinematic translation in other locations offer contrapuntal histories to those charted thus far. These “other” histories of cinema and translation remain wholly embedded in the world of world cinema, even if the latter category did not always recognize them as such. The late-1920s and early-1930s upheavals over issues of cinema and language translation have engaged scholars in the question of how (primarily Hollywood and European colonial) film industries and distributors negotiated the bottlenecks of language engendered by the talkie. This context of experimentation eventually led to the postwar prevalence of subtitling or—far less desirable in spaces of art cinema—dubbing practices, as the most viable solutions for enabling Hollywood’s penetration of non-Anglophone markets as well as the international distribution of European art cinema. Other trajectories of inquiry, however, open up from passing notes in Nornes’s account that deal with possibilities of translation for song-dance-filled films. These were the very types of films that the 1957 *Variety* response had dismissed as unsuitable for even “the educated Indian,” much less for discerning audiences in the rest of the world.

Accounts of Hindi films’ overseas circulation frequently ascribe talismanic qualities to the film song as that which enabled Hindi films to travel “starting in the 1930s and peaking around the 1960s.”⁴³ It was indeed the coming of synchronous sound by the 1930s that allowed songs to be embedded in and circulate with a film. For cinema, then, the coming of sound was not necessarily a global descent into “Babel—The Sequel” in that synchronous sound seemed to also allow for the possibility of a kind of Esperanto through songs. For decades, songs were rarely translated, even when Hindi films were dubbed or subtitled. But to what extent was a film with songs more immanently legible than a film without songs?

Nornes mentions a report by Warner First National that was drawn up in 1931, which observed that “in Java they were projecting [foreign] films with no translation. . . . However, only the ones with more music than dialogue were making money.” The observation that musical films could be comprehended without linguistic translation emphasizes an apparently unique mobility across and irrespective of language barriers.⁴⁴ Yet, elements of song and dance were precisely what the 1957 *Variety* piece had singled out as roadblocks, irrevocably hampering the quality of Indian films and their comprehensibility among US audiences. The about-face that has happened since the late 1980s, with song-dance sequences being celebrated among audiences in the US and the UK as an outstanding feature sustaining the popularity of Bollywood, is frequently narrated as a process of Hindi cinema’s *becoming* transnational over the last three decades. An example of such pronouncements refers to the “unmoored quality’ of the [Bollywood]

film/song in the film's narrative . . . as the 'most transnational' part of the film, attested to by its increasing popularity in mainstream U.S. consumer culture."⁴⁵

Behind such pronouncements lies an equation of the US with the transnational, in addition to a characterization of film songs as exceptionally mobile and effortlessly legible. Since the 1930s, Hindi (and also other South Asian-language) popular films have enjoyed prolific circulation throughout not only the Indian Ocean regions of East Africa, the Persian Gulf, and Southeast Asia but also Fiji, the Caribbean, Central Asia, West Asia, North Africa, Eastern Europe, and East Asia. Yet, these circuits encompassing both diasporic and nondiasporic audiences remained largely outside the orbit of Indian cinema's arrival and consecration on the hallowed ground of world cinema. The latter was largely a project of postwar European art cinema where, as Betz notes, the auteur was established as the linchpin for the identity of a film, as an audiovisual, linguistic-geographical, and always subtitled artifact of its national origin. The world of world cinema, in other words, was an arena of inter-*national* exchange in which certain unwritten rules not only were in place but also had congealed through the crises of a handful of nations that had designated themselves and their own aesthetic, ideological, and pressing socio-economic priorities as the center of, respectively, the world and world cinema.

The power of this origin point of world cinema lies in its frequent effacement, despite the weight that it has exerted on the history and historiography of cinema. For example, several histories of Indian cinema with respect to the world have remained elusive, while a limited narrative of Indian cinema with respect to world cinema has remained more visible:

Before Bollywood went global, India had internationally respected film makers like Satyajit Ray, whose first Bangla film, *Pather Panchali*, released in 1955, put India on the global cinema map, winning international critical acclaim and running for more than seven months in New York, a new record for foreign films released in the United States. Known internationally as a master craftsman whose deep humanism and attention to detail set the standard for serious cinema, Ray was presented with the Legion d'honneur by the French president in 1990 and, in 1992, was awarded an Oscar for Lifetime Achievement in film, the only Indian to be thus honored.⁴⁶

The outsized celebration and canonization of Ray and *Pather Panchali* has often come at the cost of sidelining Ray's versatility and larger oeuvre, as well as the heterogeneity of Indian cinema across art, commercial, and avant-garde practices.⁴⁷ If Ray's neorealist classic *Pather Panchali* "put India on the global cinema [i.e., world cinema] map," then the question that arises is, what is the nature of this map? And what other maps might be lying around?⁴⁸

Ray's *Pather Panchali* was welcomed in 1955 as a milestone, ostensibly awaited by the "educated Indian" and his European and US counterparts who had been hard-pressed for "quality screen material" from a corner of the world that was notorious for churning out its particular brand of song-dance films. This arrival heralded

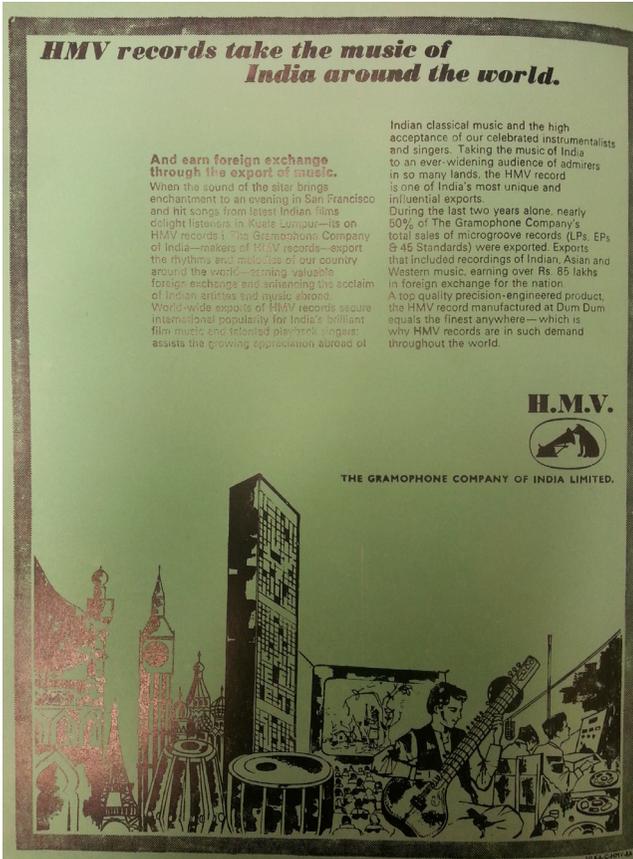


FIGURE 9. Advertisement from the 1960s and 1970s: “HMV Records Take the Music of India around the World.”

the anointing of not only Ray as an auteur of world cinema but also of sitarist Ravi Shankar as an ambassador for Indian music. Shankar’s exquisite instrumental score for *Pather Panchali* carried the pedigree of a by-then-state-supported classical form of North Indian music, which unfolded as an appropriate complement to the visually pristine humanist realism of Ray’s subtitled masterpiece.⁴⁹ A popular Gramophone Company of India magazine advertisement in the 1960s and 1970s carried the headline “HMV Records Take the Music of India Around the World,” and it proclaimed: “When the sound of the sitar brings enchantment to an evening in San Francisco and hit songs from latest Indian films delight listeners in Kuala Lumpur—its on HMV records!”⁵⁰ (fig. 9).

Much is obscured, however, by such binaries of high culture–low culture and first world–third world that opposed Indian classical music to film songs, even if it was true that listeners in San Francisco preferred sitar music, while listeners in Kuala Lumpur preferred film music. The popularity of Shankar and Indian

classical music among the 1960s US counterculture followed Shankar's initial visibility through Cold War-era projects of cultural diplomacy. Like filmmaker K. A. Abbas, Shankar had participated in an Indian cultural delegation's visit to the Soviet Union in 1954.⁵¹ The very next year, violinist Yehudi Menuhin was able to bring Shankar to the US for an Indian festival sponsored by the Ford Foundation.⁵² Shankar's popularity grew among the US counterculture movement that emerged in the wake of youth-led protests against the Vietnam War, and Shankar moved in the same circles as celebrated psychedelic rock musicians—most famously, George Harrison and the rest of the Beatles.⁵³

The spirit of “world music” collaborations through psychedelic rock was not altogether dissimilar from the contemporaneous eclecticism of Indian film music, especially with debutant Hindi film music director R. D. Burman marking a generational shift toward an upbeat, percussive intensity that was in step with global music cultures and youth cultures of the 1960s.⁵⁴ Shankar himself had previously collaborated with Abbas to compose the songs for Abbas's *Dharti Ke Lal* (*Children of the Earth*, 1946), a social realist film that had some exposure in the Soviet Union.⁵⁵ Ray, too, was not averse to songs in films. His lighthearted musical fantasy *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* (*Goopy the singer and Bagha the drummer*, 1969) was and is among his most popular, acclaimed, and commercially successful films, although it was much less visible than *Pather Panchali* in the West. Film songs, on the one hand, and Indian cinema's (non)visibility in the West, on the other, remained gravely interrelated concerns for several Indian filmmakers and critics over the 1960s.

“Next to Japan, India is the second largest film producer in the world,” proclaims editor-critic T. M. Ramachandran in an editorial preface to a 1970 Indian trade journal's special issue on Indian cinema.⁵⁶ He closes his preface with the pronouncement that “the encouragement of Government and hard work of domestic industry will enable India to occupy a prominent position in the world film map, given better international understanding and appreciation.”⁵⁷ The discrepancy between India's output as the “second largest film producer in the world” and its failure to occupy a “prominent position on the world film map” is quickly established as a problem of Indian films' underexposure and lack of acclaim in the West. Ramachandran also turns a developmentalist discourse of “film appreciation” onto audiences in the West when he notes that the problem is not so much Indian films' own lack, but rather the lack of “international understanding and appreciation” on the part of Western audiences. The special issue compiled contributions from several renowned film personalities of the time, including writer-director-journalist K. A. Abbas; directors V. Shantaram, Mrinal Sen, and B. R. Chopra; and Hindi film star-director Dev Anand.⁵⁸ Abbas, whose article opens the issue, professes that “cinema can be the means of creating international understanding between

diverse peoples divided by culture and ideology.”⁵⁹ As the article continues, Abbas also urges an open-mindedness toward Indian films on the part of audiences in the West:

Let the West learn to appreciate the distinctive features of Indian films—yes, even their inordinate length and their slow-moving plots—as we in India try to understand and appreciate the new and sometimes (to our sensibilities) complex and even shocking film-making of the West!⁶⁰

Abbas goes on:

The Indian films, it is sometimes complained, are over-long. . . . That the pace of the Indian film is slow, is another complaint often heard from the occidental picture-goers. . . .

Then there is the road-block of songs in Indian films. I was the first to produce a Hindi film without songs, but I have no patience with the snobbish view point that decries Indian films because they depend upon songs—and, it is argued, that robs them of their realism!

Art is not necessarily representation of reality. Sometimes, it is suspension of disbelief.⁶¹

Abbas’s characterization of songs as a “road-block” in Indian cinema’s quest for a “prominent position on the world film map” implies that the only foreseeable route to such prominence was through the West and through realism. Even though several articles in the issue mention the popularity of Indian films in other parts of the world, the issue is overwhelmed by concerns over garnering critical acclaim in the West as a way of rectifying the fact that, as another contributor laments, “Indian cinema still remains—to use an expression employed by a congregation of leading luminaries of film art assembled at the Venice Film Festival in 1964—‘an unknown territory.’”⁶²

Film critic Amita Malik’s contribution juxtaposes “a modest, small-budget, black and white film by Satyajit Ray” and the kind of films “made for peanut-munching, loudly whistling and charmingly escapist audiences [who] . . . have just devoured with relish the latest starlets from Bombay or Madras.”⁶³ Malik breathlessly continues:

It is this typical film which constitutes the folk art aspect of Indian cinema. For pop art is pop art anywhere and the Bombay film song, now known all over the world, is as much a part of modern life as the Rolling Stones. There is a faithful listener to All India Radio in Japan, who recently sent a unique fan letter to AIR in Delhi. He asked them to make sure that they played Indian film songs at a particular time in the evening because he confessed, he could not go to sleep without them. There are said to be stampedes across the border into Afghanistan from Pakistan every time a consignment of new Long Playing Records of Indian film songs arrives. And when the Afghans find their stocks running low, they send across to Iran, where Indian film songs are equally popular, for more.

This is the popular Indian cinema, as devotedly loved in neighboring Asian and African countries as at home.⁶⁴

Malik's description is reproduced in the prose of *John Kenneth Galbraith Introduces India*, a nonfiction guidebook published in 1974. Galbraith was an economist who had served as the US ambassador to India under President John F. Kennedy before he became president of the American Economic Association in 1972. The guidebook explains:

The 1950s saw the establishment of what the rest of the world rather vaguely calls the "typical Indian film." This is a marathon, which Indian audiences treat very much like a picnic, a day's outing with the family, complete with packed lunches, babies wailing in the auditorium, and an audience which includes wives of industrialists in their newest imported nylon saris to college students, illiterate domestic servants, peasants who cannot read the credit titles, and taxi drivers who are happy to miss a day's earnings to witness a personal appearance by a popular star.

The typical film plot has something for everybody, since it is, in effect, a tragicomical-musical-historical-sociological-dance-drama which audiences in developing countries in Asia and Africa devour wholesale, and quite often without subtitles or dubbing, *so strong is it visually*, and so familiar the dialogue *in any Eastern language*. The overseas fan mail of All-India Radio runs into thousands of requests for film songs. One listener in Tokyo confessed that he could not sleep at night unless he heard an Indian film song before going to bed.⁶⁵

The guidebook's description of "devouring" as the mode of spectatorship for a "typical Indian film" highlights its lowest-common-denominator appeal that encompassed people implied to be the most primitive of spectators: "illiterate domestic servants" as well as "peasants who cannot read the credit titles."⁶⁶ Malik's initial description is more sympathetic, as she situates herself as an insider in declaring Indian popular cinema to be "as devotedly loved in neighboring Asian and African countries as at home."⁶⁷ In this account, love comes to denote a "devouring," passionate cinephilia that precedes either rationality or language, which is further corroborated by insistent anecdotes of song-starved audiences stampeding across national borders for LPs, not to mention the twice-cited man in Tokyo whose nightly sleep came only if coaxed by the melody of an Indian film song. Recalling Dimitris Eleftheriotis and Dina Jordanova's call for a method of historiography that ensues from the anecdotal, how does one read such hyperbolic accounts of stampedes across the borders of Pakistan-Afghanistan-Iran or of the man in Tokyo? Even if inadvertently, these claims reproduce racialized (neo) colonial theories of spectatorship in naturalizing the immanent legibility and audiovisual excess of Indian films to interchangeable "Eastern" languages that are instinctively comprehensible to Eastern bodies and to racially marked Afro-Asian spectators' primitive urges brought on by sleep, hunger, and infatuations stoked by "starlets."

Editor T. M. Ramachandran specifically addresses Indian films in non-European countries in another section of the 1970 “Accent on Indian Cinema” special issue. The third subheading in the article, following brief sections titled “Traditional Markets” and “Import Policy Abroad,” concerns itself with the need for dubbing. Interwoven in Ramachandran’s call for dubbing initiatives as a matter of official film policy is a call for “coproductions and closer collaboration . . . for the mutual benefit of India and the areas in the traditional markets.”⁶⁸ While dubbing is posited as a means of systematizing and scaling up earnings in “traditional markets” where Indian films were readily distributed, coproduction is posited as a means of developing a more meaningful economic and diplomatic exchange by which the state would stand to also benefit. Ramachandran’s reference to “traditional markets” foregrounds the fact that by 1970, Indian films had established a regular presence among audiences in regions that he goes on to enumerate and discuss: Southeast Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and the Soviet Union. The call for infrastructural support through dubbing technologies and for state support through coproduction incentives emphasizes the general lack of both and the question of how, and if, Indian films circulating in the above-mentioned regions were being formally translated.

In pursuing these trails of distribution and the extent to which dubbing and subtitling were being implemented, fragmentary references point to the role of overseas hubs in the wider distribution of Indian films. *Indian Film*, a 1974 publication by the National Film Archive of India, laments that “it is a sad thought that our films exported to U.S.A. and Canada have still to be subtitled in Beirut for lack of proper facilities at home.”⁶⁹ As late as 1980, a section of the *Report of the Working Group on National Film Policy* also notes, “Except for one working subtitling machine available in Bombay, there are no subtitling facilities available in India, despite the simplicity of technology.”⁷⁰ As I have detailed elsewhere, in cases of Indian films being dubbed and subtitled over the postwar decades, these processes were taking place largely outside India, most often through the efforts of independent distributors and studios in the Middle East.⁷¹

Dimitris Eleftheriotis corroborates the role of independent distributors in his account of the “spontaneous” presence and popularity of Indian films in Greece through the 1950s and 1960s: “The suggestion that minor independent distributors spearheaded the importation of Indian films is not only supported by the study of the publicity material but it also makes sense in the context of international distribution practices at the time.”⁷² Eleftheriotis further notes that because songs were the key attraction of Indian films for audiences in Greece, the “onerous task of subtitling,” which often depended on acquiring and working from versions with English subtitles, was greatly alleviated. He adds, however, that a significant portion of the films’ audiences “were illiterate or semi-literate anyway.”⁷³ This issue of literacy, interestingly, does not arise as a significant factor in much of the historical

and theoretical work dealing with questions of cinema and translation, which again points to the ways in which postwar histories of film circulation and world cinema have tended to be confined to a rather specific axis of Hollywood and European art cinema.

Turning to other axes of cinematic translation not only reveals a range of translation practices in other locations but also invites reconsiderations of how one analyzes their histories and effects. Ahmet Gürata's reception history of the Hindi film *Awara* (Raj Kapoor, 1951) in Turkey, for example, observes that while dubbing was important to the film's success, dubbing did not localize the film to the extent that its Indian identity was overwritten. Gürata concludes that *Awara*'s success in Turkey emerged from a specific combination of the film's high production and marketing values, its exhibition in venues associated with Hollywood films, and its reception as a film that was at once foreign in its milieu *and* familiar in its (dubbed) tongue. The film struck a chord as a sophisticated, modern, yet Eastern exemplar for 'Turkish cinema and Turkish audiences' own modernizing aspirations, which critics zealously debated in the wake of *Awara*'s release.⁷⁴ Gürata's analysis, like that of Betz, captures a range of material contingencies that accounted for both the application and reception of cinematic translation processes.

Over the 1960s, Indian state agencies eyed dubbing as a cutting-edge technology for its potential to modernize and reassert state control over Indian films' overseas distribution and earnings. In 1963, for example, the Indian Department of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics published a report that called for dubbing and re-editing in order to better regulate the quality of Indian films circulating in Iran:

The process of dubbing foreign films in Persian has been undertaken successfully . . . and Iranian cinema goers have shown great admiration for dubbed films. . . . Dubbing has become one of the major factors in popularising and ensuring good return for foreign films. Almost all the foreign films are first dubbed in Persian either in Iran or in foreign countries before being exhibited in Iran. . . . Some of the Iranian studios are well equipped with implements for the purpose of dubbing, which is done in an efficient manner.

It has generally been observed that Indian films are usually lengthy as compared to other foreign films. In order to make it short, the film is cut at several places. . . . It has been suggested that Indian films should be specially edited for Iran as to maintain the continuity of the theme. Visitors have found that all the Indian films are generally alike in theme and action. Besides, third-rate films are imported at cheap prices and exhibited in the Iranian market. These create a bad name for Indian films.

There is a considerable scope for exporting to Iran quality Indian films with novelty of theme and action. In recent years some Indian films such as AWARA, BOOT POLISH, SHRI 420, MOTHER INDIA, JIS DESH ME GANGA BAHATI HAI have proved successful. The visits of top ranking film actors and actresses and good stories may prove to be box office successes, if steps are also taken for dubbing these films. It has been suggested that Indian film festivals might be held at Tehran and other centres with the collaboration of picture houses and importers. The best Indian films

have to be screened at first-rate halls during these festivals. Such festivals initiated in the past by other countries proved effective. The distribution of Indian films has also to be entrusted to well-established firms for screening at first-class halls.⁷⁵

The examples of “quality films” referred to here are the very song-dance-filled Hindi films that are entirely dismissed in other sources—whether Rotha and Manvell’s world cinema compendiums or the *Variety* editorial. Here, quality films with “good stories” are instead set against “third-rate [Indian] films [that] are imported at cheap prices and exhibited in the Iranian market.”⁷⁶

At the time of the report’s publication, commercial Indian films were readily circulating—and sometimes being translated—in Iran, albeit through independent distributors who, from the Indian state agency’s perspective, had little investment in maintaining the country’s reputation, as evidenced by the supposedly poor-quality films being sold to Iranian exhibitors. The overseas distribution and exhibition of mainstream commercial Indian films thus emerges as intertwined with lesser-known operations of making and trading B and C films. The report’s suggestions that Indian films and leading industry figures would benefit from their films’ active participation in overseas film festivals and exhibition in “first-rate halls” is held as a priority alongside box-office success in Iran. These priorities, as per the report’s findings, would crucially hinge on state control through yet-to-be-developed domestic facilities for dubbing.⁷⁷

This Indian government report seems to diverge from contemporaneous Anglophone discourses of world cinema and foreign-language films, since the latter tended to dismiss both dubbed films and Indian song-dance films as little more than trivial entertainments. Yet, the Indian government report’s embrace of dubbing and of song-dance films as “quality films” remains similarly premised on deriving a given film’s quality from assumptions about its audiences vis-à-vis nationalist constructions of ideal spectators. Dubbed films and Indian song-dance-filled films did not belong to an auteurist category of world cinema because this category naturalized the authenticity of a film to not only its auteur-derived nationality and unity (in name and tongue) but also its presumed cosmopolitan, modern spectator. While the Indian government report does not eschew either dubbed films or song-dance-filled films, it also naturalizes “quality films” to a similarly modern, bourgeois spectator who is the implied desirable patron of “first-rate” cinema halls in Iran.

In 1963, the same year as the report’s publication, the Indian government established the India Motion Picture Export Corporation (IMPEC). IMPEC sought to nationalize overseas distribution, and the above report’s call for dubbing is in line with IMPEC’s own—ultimately failed—attempts to streamline the revenue and reputational benefits of Indian films being exported. The report spotlights dubbing precisely as a means toward such statist centralization of infrastructural—and thereby economic—aspects of film distribution, ostensibly on behalf of Indian film industries as well. It further recommends editing shorter Iran-specific versions

of the films for similar reasons of control, citing distributors in Iran taking their own liberties to cut shorter versions of Indian films as they saw fit. In some cases, Iranian exhibitors may have cut out portions of Indian films in order to accommodate the added running time from another modification that constituted yet another practice of translation: the periodic insertion of Persian intertitles with summary-translations, which narrators sometimes read aloud.⁷⁸

The Indian government report's call for dubbing is minimally—if at all—actually about the language translation, since Indian films were readily circulating in Iran, among other places, with or without the application of a range of translation practices, from dubbing to subtitling to intertitling. The report is instructive for underscoring the aspirations attached to cinematic translation as an “open-sesame” for scaling and availing massive economic, cultural, and political benefits of film distribution across national and linguistic borders. A variety of stakeholders—state institutions, critics, filmmakers, industry personnel, and audiences—were centrally concerned not only with what kinds of films were being translated by what methods but also with what kinds of spectators could be reached in the process.

The frequent idealization of a certain kind of cosmopolitan, modern spectator was premised upon post-Enlightenment theories of human development, which naturalized specific kinds of films to the needs of specific kinds of audiences.⁷⁹ Such racialized, (neo)colonial hierarchies presumed that some audiences contemplated good films in translation through their faculties of the mind, while other audiences merely devoured poor-quality films, whose translations were largely incidental to the films' satisfaction of primal, bodily urges. At stake here is the assumption that films were effortlessly intelligible and consumable *because* they circulated among “lesser” audiences—whether those who occupied third-rate cinema halls in Iran or those “peanut-munching, loudly whistling and charmingly escapist audiences [who] . . . devoured with relish the latest starlets from Bombay or Madras.”⁸⁰ Tautologically, backward audiences and vulgar films made—and were made for—each other. In several accounts, it is through varying degrees of this logic that some, if not all, Indian song-dance films were immanently legible to certain spectators, while they remained utterly incomprehensible to more educated spectators, whose intellectual needs could not be met by such “third-rate” fare.

We must certainly eschew any “logic” that drew on hierarchies of human difference to naturalize the intelligibility of films to various spectators' cognitive-developmental proclivities. We must also look elsewhere to consider the historical question of what accounted for Indian song-dance films' intelligibility and their prolific overseas circulation that peaked in the 1960s. We can consider, for example, the visual, gestural, poetic, and musical modes of expressivity that constituted specialized cinematic languages through considerable creative labor, and we can entertain the possibility that audiences engaged actively and critically with these modes of expressivity.⁸¹ In some instances, Bombay (and other song-dance) films

offered not only a far more economical alternative to Hollywood films,⁸² but also political alternatives to competing modernities and world-making aspirations from first-world, second-world, and third-world locations.⁸³

In the next chapter, I turn to a genealogy of Hindi film song lyrics over three decades of sound cinema, between the 1930s and 1960s. I read song lyrics as a primary site of poetic ekphrasis in heated anticolonial and postcolonial debates over aesthetics, progressive social movements, and the role of modern literature and cinema therein. In celebrating love as an embodied excess of both cinema and modernity, some film song lyrics in the post-independence period began to argue a theory of the human that could be activated rather than compromised by technologized artifice. Here, the invocation of love allows for the possibility of a cinephilic practice that is at once contemplative, critical, impassioned, and embodied—at once thoughtful and “devouring.” To some, like Borges and Artaud, the dubbed cinematic body was horrific because it appeared deceptively human through the artifice of a technologized chimera.⁸⁴ But what of a technologized chimera that proclaimed its own artifice in order to transform a willingly seduced spectator’s very sense of the human? Not in the experience of wholeness but in the experience of being beside oneself—that is, in the possibility of delight through utter disorientation?