

## Note

1. Many scholars are foundational to this area, including Jeanne Allen (1980; on advertising and exhibition lures for filmgoers in the 1910s–1930s), Robert C. Allen (from 1979; on theater locations and class implications for viewing), Rick Altman (from the 1980s; on music, lecturers, and sound), Mary Carbine (1990; on theaters and exhibition practices in Chicago's black districts), Richard de Cordova (1990; on children's Saturday matinees), Kathryn Fuller (1996; on small towns and early fan culture), Ina Rae Hark (1994; on implications of gender in theater management), Charlotte Herzog (from 1977; on theatrical architecture), Russell Merritt (1976; on class, ethnicity, and gender address in early nickelodeons), Charles Musser (from the late 1970s; on early cinema exhibition), Diane Waldman (1986; on YMCA screenings in Colorado), and Gregory Waller (from 1992; on black moviegoing in the pre-sound era).

## SAMHITA SUNYA

### *Cinemas Dark and Slow in Digital India*, by

Lalitha Gopalan

Lalitha Gopalan's latest book opens with her account of acquiring a link to view *Ghode ko jalebi khilane le ja riya hoon* (*Taking the Horse to Eat Jalebis*, Anamika Haksar, 2018). Finding herself "floored by ... a work like no other I had seen before, unclassifiable" (3), Gopalan attends closely to the film, discussing not only its form and aesthetics, but also how the film came to be. What unfolds is a story of fine-grained specificities, in terms of production processes, modes of exhibition, budgets, technology, labor, institutions, and friendships. This attention to detail continues in Gopalan's archival and curatorial undertaking toward a philosophy of images. Gopalan explores the "affordances of the digital" (9) through a set of three independent feature films that were themselves contemplating the pasts, presents, and futures of cinema in a specific time and place: India in the 2010s, during a period of transition to digital filmmaking.

Following this introductory chapter, titled "Opening," each chapter is anchored in an analysis of three films. It would be misleading to suggest, however, that each chapter is about its respective films alone. Instead, Gopalan details a dense web of connections and practices that each film opens up, in addition to closely reading the films for their conceptual engagements with media and medium specificity in a crucible of transitions wrought by the digital era of neoliberal globalization.

In part 1 of the book, the two chapters that follow the introduction—"Minding the Gap" and "Slowing

Down"—are among the most compelling sections. "Minding the Gap" refers to the gap of absent archives, as the availability of, and access to, films in digital formats remain dependent upon the vicissitudes of capital, in terms of technology and infrastructure. Thus, the excess of films that are readily available and accessible in digital formats can even further obscure those independent undertakings whose production and distribution occur on the margins of established institutions, aesthetic and formal traditions, and mainstream platforms.

Chapter 3, "Slowing Down," considers the long take as an affordance of the digital that has marked several contemporary Asian films. Gopalan ties a "cinema of waiting" (146) to the experiences of those who are abandoned by the state amid increasing privatization on the one hand, and the persistence of state bureaucracies on the other. Gopalan does not naturalize the long take to a spectatorial sensation of soporific entrancement, however, for she avows the "sensation of agitation" (148) that the long take can also produce. Slowness, in other words, is contextual: while it can suggest a sense of relaxation and unwinding in one circumstance, it can suggest a sense of insufferable tedium and frustration in another.

Part 1 establishes an ontology of darkness and slowness in digital images as coterminous with structures of darkness and slowness that exist both as conditions of, and responses to, a globalized, uneven digital world. She refers, for example, to the spatial engagements of *Divya Drishti* (Sidharth Srinivasan, 2002) where "perimeters of the metropolis ... [open up] ways of thinking of the space of action in peri-urban spaces as theatres of darkness in the expanding economies of production and consumption" (126). Against notions of either convergence or the universality of the digital, Gopalan maintains an emphasis throughout the book on local specificities of intermediality, given the "range of technologies whose obsolescence has not yet been pronounced in India" (119).

Part 2 consists of five chapters that focus on genres, approaches, or movements, including the eighth and final chapter, "Time Out," on women's filmmaking collectives that emerged in India in the wake of the #MeToo movement. Chapter 4, "Bombay Noir," and chapter 6, "Road Movie," emphasize itineraries of independent filmmaking that engage with global genres. Chapter 4 contemplates the ubiquity of cell phones in films that grapple not only with hyperconnectivity, but also with the militarization of the everyday through surveillance. Chapter 5, "Tamil New Wave," connects both slowness and darkness to the ruins—inclusive of the environmental ruins—of industrial capitalism, in contrast to the ruins of war that precipitated the New Wave cinemas that rippled outward from postwar Europe.

A passage on dust in chapter 5 provides one of the book's most poignant reflections, as Gopalan reads dusty images as atmospherically conjuring a dystopian, neo-noir landscape of everyday exploitation and violence. She astutely observes, meanwhile, that Hollywood studios had been contracting film-digitization endeavors to Chennai-based Prasad Labs in order to outsource the painstaking labor of removing dust from archival film prints—a process that has remained cost prohibitive for many Tamil films produced in the same city, revealing the inequities of globalization (239–40). Chapter 7, “Untitled: Amitabh Chakraborty’s Cinema,” returns to the question of archival gaps, this time through a case study of the filmmaker Amitabh Chakraborty’s marginal practices that have embraced impermanence and teetered on the precipice of oblivion. His oeuvre includes, for example, “[s]everal films made for television, both cable and for the state-run channel Doordarshan, [which] are lost” (301). Gopalan engages his three independent, feature-length films that survived and were accessible to her, even if only as transfers to degraded, lower-resolution formats.

The book’s chapters derive their philosophy, theory, and politics from a slow and detailed contemplation of the films they profile. A few themes do recur, however, in terms of the contexts that have shaped the (non)archive of the digital that Gopalan draws together. Chief among these, perhaps, is the heavily undertheorized role of film schools in shaping the history of cinema. Gopalan pays close attention to, especially, the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) as a hub not only for practical fine-arts training, but also for collective thinking about cinema through its teacher-filmmakers, film-viewing curricula, technological training, and pedagogical approaches. In addition, film schools like FTII have been a place for formative and enduring friendships between students and the filmmakers, editors, cinematographers, and sound designers who taught them. FTII’s generations of alumni have included foreign students as well, particularly from countries that were historically part of the Non-Aligned Movement. Indeed, while Gopalan shows that friendship has been a crucial part of the ad hoc teams that worked together on “unclassifiable” projects, she also emphasizes the fact that such friend networks of trained filmmakers have tended to be a heavily male space.

It is in this context that the book’s final chapter accords crucial importance to the establishment of the Indian Women Cinematographer’s Collective, first launched as a Facebook group in 2015. On the one hand, FTII has yielded an especially fertile ground for conceptualizing and practicing independent modes of filmmaking through

experimentation with digital technologies and formats. On the other hand, the very unevenness of globalization, with which the films across the preceding chapters allow the reader to grapple, has run parallel to another unevenness in terms of gender parity in media industries, as evident in the #TimesUp and #MeToo movements led by women workers. As Gopalan comes to the end of her account, she reiterates the importance of curatorial work that can shape scholarship through its attentiveness to practices—both independent and collective—outside various mainstreams.

Gopalan closely attends to a set of contemporary films that easily escape the purview of established traditions—whether those of popular, documentary, or art filmmaking—in a period of transition to the digital. She trains her eye on independent films that critically engage the digital (era) as temporally and materially bound to the ravages of capitalism and the unevenness of neoliberal globalization, as witnessed from a location in the Global South. From her fine-grained analyses of the formal, material, and technological specificities of individual films, darkness and slowness—gaps, peripheries, shadows, opacities—emerge as ontologies of cinema in digital India.

For some readers, Gopalan’s account may bring to mind such works as Gilles Deleuze’s *Cinema* books, which apprehend moving images through monist philosophies of being that regard experiences of time and movement, as well as the traumas of modernity, as inseparable from cinema. While Deleuze’s *Cinema* books draw mostly from now-canonical reserves of US and European cinemas, Gopalan turns to recent films that are marginal even within accounts of Indian cinema. Her philosophy of cinema—as a philosophy of being—remains attentive to forms of marginality that occur both as conditions of the digital’s embeddedness in structures of global capital, and as positions from which to contest their exploitative regimes.

Taking a cue from Gopalan’s emphasis throughout her book on the friendships, conversations, and contingencies that brought her to the films she discusses, I found myself bursting with glee over something of a serendipity. As a graduate student at Rice University, I had worked as film festival assistant to Titles, a festival of contemporary experimental films from India, curated by Ratheesh Radhakrishnan, that ran from 2011 through 2014—the very period that Gopalan’s book takes up. Thanks to Titles, it was thrilling for me to encounter the familiarity of even a small cross-section of the incredible archive that Gopalan draws together and draws upon. Indeed, the bibliographies and filmographies that follow each chapter are among the book’s outstanding achievements.

As Gopalan relays to her reader, this book was not one that she had set out to write. Yet, in the course of her research on independent short-format filmmaking in India, Gopalan came to assemble an archive of feature-length films whose invitations to slow contemplation, and incitements to consider conditions of precarity amid the seeming plenitude of the digital, could not be left unanswered.

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## JUANA SUÁREZ

***The Cinema of Sara Gómez: Reframing Revolution*, edited by Susan Lord and María Caridad Cumaná with Víctor Fowler Calzada**

This edited volume is a timely contribution to the limited scholarship on the work of Afro-Cuban filmmaker Sara Gómez. To date, this scholarship has consisted mostly of loose references and chapters in academic anthologies and histories of cinema or in books and monographs in Spanish, which circulate sparsely. Gómez appears as an ubiquitous reference in these texts on how women participated in the first years of the Cuban Revolution and its promises. Gómez's work attests to the seismic transformations that the Cuban Institute on Cinematographic Arts and Industry (Instituto Cubano del Arte e Industria Cinematográficos, or ICAIC) brought to the island in the fields of film production, reception, and distribution by making cinema a pedagogical tool for societal transformation. Gómez is best known for her feature *De cierta manera* (*One Way or Another*, 1974), which was edited by Iván Arocha and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea with the collaboration of Rigoberto López in the wake of Gómez's sudden death during postproduction at the age of forty-three. Gómez is also known for her work as assistant director on Agnès Varda's *Salut les cubains* (1963).

*The Cinema of Sara Gómez* revisits those references while expanding access not only to Gómez's archive but also to the repository of the Cuban intellectual landscape in the 1960s and early 1970s. The kaleidoscopic insight offered in this book emphasizes the intersectionality of race, gender, class, social, and political issues that characterize not only the public persona of the filmmaker but also her work. The book elucidates the particular context from which the filmmaker's

rich work emerged, and how her intellectual interest and concerns gained shape in the form of film, cultural journalism, and activism. Gómez's prolific work as a documentarian is discussed at length in different approaches (interviews, academic essays, and memoirs, for example) and is referenced in the complete filmography that closes the book.

Susan Lord's introduction explains how the project was nurtured through the various stages of collecting materials and forging intellectual friendships and connections in Cuba and abroad. The process led Lord to the main questions that drive the book: What impact did Gómez's films, made in the 1960s and 1970s, have, and what do they offer today? *The Cinema of Sara Gómez* features a diverse array of texts, produced at different points in time by both local and diasporic Cuban voices and by scholars around the globe interested in her work. By collecting all these voices, the book becomes a reconstruction of Gómez's multifaceted activities as music connoisseur, journalist, and ethnographical filmmaker.

In some instances, this account has personal overtones, given that the book includes interviews with intellectuals and filmmakers who were close friends or worked closely with Gómez. This is the case with her friend Inés María Martiatu Terry; with writers, critics, and activists; and with fellow filmmakers Sergio Giral and Rigoberto López, editor Iván Arocha, and cinematographer Luis García Mesa. All of these friends/collaborators provide context for what the years before the Revolution were like as well as those of the Revolution itself. Their anecdotes reveal Gómez's critical stances during that time of transition, and, on occasion, they address the eventual erosion of the political process. Marguerite Duras's interview with Gómez in 1967 constitutes the epilogue of the book, inviting the reader to once again consider the frameworks between then and now that are at play in the reevaluation of Gómez's work.

*The Cinema of Sara Gómez* thus functions as a conversation among Cuban intellectuals, scholars, and film critics on Gómez and her times. This focus on Cubans making sense of the work of a fellow Cuban produces a decolonizing effect and charts a path for new types of research that can lend clarity to the complexities of Cuban intellectual thought and production across different eras. The scholarly chapters and essays touch on the multilayered nature of the filmmaker's work and on the intersectional capacities Gómez's public persona embodies: race, gender, and revolution.

Rather than partitioning the book by topic or genre, the editors have interwoven the texts, interviews, and essays, creating a polyphonic effect where references are shared yet never redundant. They all offer complex analyses of Gómez's particular manner of exercising feminism, evidenced in her