In his 1913 essay on ‘Experience’, Walter Benjamin refers to youthfulness as a ‘brief night’ of ‘rapture’ followed by the ‘long drudgery of grand experience’, made up of ‘years of compromise, impoverishment of ideas, and lack of energy’. Within a neoliberal framework, one could see the ‘brief night’ stretching to encompass longer age-spans: ‘the forties are the new twenties’. Youthfulness is often equated with a hedonistic hyper-consumption, which smacks of desperation and a sense of impending lack. A capacity for consumption might, after all, be the only remedy against ageing that capitalism has to offer. Yet we hear just as much these days about premature exhaustion resulting from the velocity and precarity associated with capital’s drive for a ‘surfeit of accumulation’.

Existing scholarship in the field of postcolonial childhood and youth studies is extremely rich and varied (Balagopalan 2015, Kapur 2005 and 2015, Banaji 2006). Scholars converge however in their picture of young people in the neoliberal conjuncture as rushing to keep pace with accelerating rhythms of accumulation, either as labouring bodies, or as consumers, or both. The present volume endeavours to bring together voices that acknowledge this accelerationist tendency, while also coming to terms with the flexible and makeshift nature of neoliberal accumulation: in which children and youth may become redundant even before joining the workforce. The idea is to engage with the contradictions of youth as both subjects and objects of capitalism’s terminal crisis, consuming recklessly and being recklessly exploited, but also increasingly detached from the production process. This detachment seems to manifest in pop cultural form as an anomie and inability to be at home in the present.

Thus youth oriented pop culture of recent decades, in South Asia and beyond, has cultivated genre revivals and retro-themes, which aim to reproduce the codes, affects, and intelligibility of former youth subcultures. The surge in the genre of ‘the small-town Bollywood film’, for example, can be seen as a throw-back to a space and time in which genuine youth and childhood subcultures were still possible. When the youth factor in today’s pop-cultural forms (parodic web-series, memes, animation, video games, street art, rap videos etc.) feeds so heavily on the past, how might a reimagined present and future be hiding in plain sight? How might the contradictions of childhood – a freedom that can only be seen from the vantage point of unfreedom – encode the governing contradictions of late capitalism in South Asia and beyond?

This special issue invites scholars to look at new and counterintuitive aspects of contemporary childhood and youth pop culture in South Asia, to explore new directions, whether by looking at new materials or formulating new comparisons. This special issue will be germane to ambitious and experimental work from scholars working on media and forms which have yet to be studied in great depth. And yet we invite scholars to debate and retheorize areas of childhood pop culture which have already been the subject of substantial scholarly attention, renewing and reinvigorating old conversations, and reflecting on the trajectory of childhood studies. South Asia can be taken in a very large sense here, whether the globalized subcontinent of today’s SARC nations, or the broader South Asian diaspora. South Asia encompasses the dialogues between past and present integral to youth pop culture in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, etc., as well as the ongoing dialogues between South Asia and the world at large.
Topics for papers may include but are not limited to the following:

- Representations of the reorganized landscapes of childhood: schools, small towns, and tutorial institutions for competitive exams
- Representations of young people within changing family dynamics: the recasting of clearly gendered parenting roles
- Representations of queer subjectivities
- Representations of young people as workers in the parallel economy: the retail industry
- Representations/creations of youth subcultures in media discourse
- The criminalization of young boys and girls, and the creation of youth brigades and lynch mobs
- The debilitating psychological effects of militarization and civil war on young people in Kashmir and the Northeast
- The scope for students occupying and communizing in the reorganized topography of the corporate school and the neoliberal university
- Libidinizing young people's bodies, especially those of Dalits and Muslims in neo-realist films
- New forms of protesting sexual and institutional harassment
- Commodification of girl power and female friendships
- High fashion's fondness for the childish: e.g., the return of the frock for young and older women in the subcontinent
- New media technologies and the algorithms of what goes ‘viral’
- Fan culture and youth icons
- The fate of postcolonial youthful affects in an environment of deep crisis

Dates and Deadlines
Abstracts of 400-500 words along with author bio should be emailed to nc8@hawaii.edu by the May 31, 2019.

In addition to critical essays of 6000-8000 words, we also welcome shorter creative pieces of 2000-4000 words in the form of interviews, photo essays (B/W) etc.

The deadline for the first draft is November 30, 2019. All contributions will be peer-reviewed and the final submission will be due by March 31, 2020.

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