Neoliberalism and Global Cinema

Capital, Culture, and Marxist Critique

Edited by
Jyostna Kapur and Keith B. Wagner

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For:

My teachers, Chuck Kleinhans and Randhir Singh

Jyotsna Kapur

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Introduction

Neoliberalism and Global Cinema: Subjectivities, Publics, and New Forms of Resistance

Jyotsna Kapur and Keith B. Wagner

In the wake of the credit crisis and the subsequent Wall Street bailout in 2008, when we started to plan this book, we were sometimes asked why we would embark on such an outmoded project. After all, even the most avid advocates of neoliberalism, such as Alan Greenspan, had acknowledged that "mistakes" had been made and that the seeds of the current crisis lay in the unprecedented deregulation of the last two and a half decades.[1] In the desire for novelty that dominates the academic marketplace and the postmodern disdain for meta-narratives that still persists, it should be no surprise that Marxism or the critical analysis of capitalism would once again be declared fashionably out-of-date. Yet, if there is a moment when Marxism may be rigorously applied to understanding and seeing alternatives to our world, there could be no better time than ours. As neoliberalism has emerged as the hegemonic world order, the contradictions of capital—its tendency to disintegrate the world while it radically integrates it—have erupted globally in social tensions, people's protests, and widening chasms. New technologies of communications have served as the glue and conduit of neoliberalism whereas the production of culture is, after war, the second most important sector in the neoliberal economy. Consequently, Marxist critique, whose prime subject has been capitalism and its human consequences, when applied to global cinema can offer key insights into the nature and contradictions of the neoliberal project. In other words, global cinema can, in the hands of Marxist criticism, become a lens into the political economy of neoliberalism and its far-reaching implications on culture. It brings cinema studies into the center of any inquiry into contemporary society while at the same time bringing the unique assets of cinema studies, its study of the economics, aesthetics, and politics of cinema culture, to bear upon such a study. This book hopes to help ground cinema studies in this much-needed inquiry into the neoliberal project and also in imagining its alternatives.

DEFINING NEOLIBERALISM

Whereas we can expect to see more berating of the *idea* of neoliberalism, there can be little understanding of the transformative effects of its

practice, in fact, of our present moment, if we consider the last two decades simply a mistake or aberration brought about by the greed or miscalculation of certain individuals and not a systemic consequence of capitalism. We would have, for example, no way to account for the global nature of the current economic crisis; the radical restructuring of relations between labor and capital in favor of the latter; the dismantling of social welfare; the conversion of one nation-state after another to advancing the free market; and a rampant culture of commodification, abstraction, and dehumanization. Unless there is a structural change, a move towards socialism rather than capitalism, we can expect more of the same because neoliberalism is not an alternative to capital but a radicalized return to nineteenth-century principles of the free market. Yet, the return has been fiercer and more destructive the second time around, as capital has now at its service newer technologies that have further increased its mobility and power to exploit human labor. At the very same time capitalism is, as Marx explained, a system constituted by crisis: its propensity to increase production results in constantly declining profits and the more it expands the greater it creates its own opposition.

Indeed, the process has gone on for over the last four decades as capital has shifted its crisis geographically—from Latin America to Asia to Europe to now hit the metropolitan center, i.e., the U.S. itself—producing a ruling class that is richer than ever before and, by all accounts, appears committed to further privatization and concentration of ownership. Over the last four decades of continued dispossession of social wealth, to use David Harvey's description of capital accumulation by dismantling the welfare state, capitalist processes have burrowed deeper into the realm of the global and local, reproducing and deepening the enchanted, surreal sense of life that had found expression in the art movements of the early twentieth century, particularly surrealism. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff note the odd duality that has increasingly become part of the everyday, extending and transforming ordinary lives and institutional discourses at an alarming rate.

> Among them are an odd coupling, the binary complementarily, of legalistic with the libertarian; constitutionality with deregulation, hyperrationalization with the exuberant spread of innovative occult practices and money magic, pyramid schemes and prosperity gospels; the enchantments, that is, of a decidedly neoliberal economy whose ever more inscrutable speculations seem to call up fresh specters in their wake.[2]

Known to those outside the academy as free market capitalism, neoliberalism is best identified with the Reagan, Thatcher, and Deng administrations in the early 1980s, preceded by a bloody trial run in Chile in 1973. The linguistic origin of the term may be traced back to Latin America where, in the late 1960s, many were calling the increased market liberalization found on the continent as "neoliberalismo." There are also conflicting accounts

that the Hungarian neoclassical economist Janos Kornai was responsible for coining the phrase in the 1960s.[3] Regardless of its derivation, the term has remained a source of considerable confusion. The misunderstanding stems from an association of the "liberal" in neoliberal with some type of democratic principle rather than free market economics. This conflation is, in fact, precisely the kind of fundamental contradiction that Marx saw as inherent to the bourgeoisie. Although revolutionary in dismantling the traditional privileges of kings and the clergy and establishing the principles of democracy the bourgeoisie resisted the extension of democracy to all and secured its own class power through the ideology of the free market. See, for example, these well-known lines from the *Communist Manifesto*:[4]

> It [bourgeoisie] has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single unconscionable freedom—free trade. In one word, for exploitation veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.

There certainly is a fundamental contradiction between the political principles of liberalism, i.e., democracy, and the economic principles of free trade that undercut democracy by perpetuating inequality, exploitation, and poverty. Whereas bourgeois democracy guarantees the right of citizenship with its one-person one-vote mantra, political power continues to rest with national elites and global capital. The irreconcilability of democracy with the free market was clear in Latin America in the 1970s, when neoliberalism was marched in by military dictatorships; and it is becoming clearer now as contemporary anti-capitalist protests the world over, ranging from large civil demonstrations (just this year in London), worker agitations (against austerity policies in Athens in 2010), and violent uprisings (harking back to the first Palestinian Intifada in the Gaza Strip in 1990), are testing the limits of liberal democracy in the midst of increasing disparities. "Where people starve, all talk of democracy is a sham," is a commonplace left slogan in India that underlines this basic incompatibility between the free market and democracy.

Consequently, rather than prematurely announcing the aftermath of neoliberalism, or rejoicing in the post-neoliberalism canting, without any evidence of a restructuring or redistribution of wealth in place, the authors in this volume take stock of the contemporaneous now—roughly the late 1980s to the lead-up to the housing and financial crisis in 2008—reconsidering even more urgently the nature of subjects and subjectivities produced by the neoliberal project.[5] We propose to do so by taking cinema as the subject of our study, inquiring into the ways in which it has participated in and resisted the neoliberal project. The chapters in this volume weave in discussion of commerce with culture. They consider how the production of cinema as an industry and commodity intersects with its production of subjectivities; how the transformation of the business of cinema was a central

feature of the reorganization of neoliberal cultural production and also reveals the significance of culture in neoliberalism; the anxieties around public and private spaces as they are played out nationally and globally in cinematic texts; questions of gender and sexuality in relation to neoliberalism; and the relation between cinema, civil society, and the nation-state. In other words, this study attempts to investigate what Henry Giroux has called the "cultural politics" of neoliberalism.

We suggest then, to varying shades and hues of ideological interpretation, that cinema can offer a lens into both the political economy of the neoliberal project and its far-reaching implications on culture. In other words, we can hope to find what it feels like to live in a certain time, and therefore an understanding of, if not identification with, the conditions that produce such subjectivities. The effects of the neoliberal discourse, in that it produces subjectivities that have, as Lisa Rofel recounts, penetrated "into the sinews of our bodies and the machinations of our hearts," is a phenomenon that is necessarily articulated in culture, via cultural texts, such as cinema.[6] Cultural texts, as Marx explained, help explain capitalism in ways that economic treatises cannot (subsequently his well-known interest in Shakespeare, Balzac, and newspaper reports). In them one can understand what is sick about society and what remains resistant to being incorporated. Marxist critique, at its best, reveals the connections between subjectivities and historical-material conditions.

The authors in this volume take neoliberalism rather than globalization as a starting point because the former term identifies a history, structure, and a set of relations—i.e., free market capitalism. In contrast, the latter appears to suggest that globalism is something new and without a structure or direction even as it is clearly animated by nineteenth-century ideas of free trade and free market, and we have a theory—Marxism—that can help explain its logic. The various studies in this book then are very much informed by a sense of history, both in local and global contexts. They trace certain features of capitalism that have become radicalized in the neoliberal phase.

In terms of the production of culture, this has meant an increasing trend towards monopoly and concentration of ownership despite new technologies that continuously make it possible to generate a far greater democratic public sphere. In her chapter in this volume, Eileen Meehan elaborates on the emergence of the hydra-headed transnational corporation made possible by the deregulation set in motion in the 1980s. Not only is this giant trans-industrial, i.e., it owns various media industries but it is also trans-sectoral, i.e., it has its fingers in multiple sectors, such as GM with its holdings in finance, military, media, and manufacturing. Similarly, Toby Miller and Rick Maxwell trace the collusion between the Pentagon, Hollywood, and the digital special effects industry based in Silicon Valley. Yet, the contest with new technologies and social movements remains sharp as the chapters in this volume show in the context of Latin America, France, and Asia. See the discussion on Cuban cinema by Michael Chanan; Third Cinema and

documentary practice by Mike Wayne and Deirdre O'Neill; and French cinema by Martin O'Shaughnessy.

In terms of culture, the authors trace the anxieties that now haunt the social imaginary through close readings of texts. David Harvey, one of the key Marxist thinkers to connect the culture and economics of neoliberalism, has delineated the culture of neoliberalism as follows:

> Neoliberalization required both politically and economically the construction of a neoliberal market-based populist culture, differentiated consumerism, and individual libertarianism. As such it proved more than a little compatible with that cultural impulse called 'postmodernism' which had long been lurking in the wings but now emerge full-blown as both cultural and an intellectual dominant.[7]

Harvey further described the cultural crisis of neoliberalism, the terribly lonesome subject that stands at the pinnacle of bourgeois civilization, as follows:

> The anarchy of the market, of competition, and of unbridled individualism (individual hopes, desires, anxieties, and fears; choices of lifestyle and sexual habits and orientations; modes of expression and behavior towards others) [that] generates a situation that becomes increasingly ungovernable. It may even lead to a breakdown of all bonds of solidarity and a condition verging on social anarchy and nihilism.[8]

A closer look at the cultural politics and political economies of cultural production that neoliberalism has since restructured—from China to Peru to North America and beyond—provides a bridge to connect the micro with the macro in order to appreciate what full-blown capitalism has meant for life and culture. For instance, the postmodernism of affluent consumer societies financed on debt has had a far harder time taking root in neocolonial economies, such as Latin America in the 1970s or in contemporary India, where excessive private consumption has had to be guarded and militarized. Everywhere, the neoliberal ideology of extreme individualism appears to clash against an uncertain economy that has proven itself unable to guarantee the right to life, let alone one of dignity in many parts of the globe. Bourgeois economic expansion, Ishay Landa tells us, cannot be reconciled with "the sanctity of individual life."[9] Its implications for subjectivities are drawn out by close readings of (possible or impossible) lives played out on the world's screens.[10] In this regard, Bliss Cua Lim's exposition of speculation and risk-taking in the debt-and-borrowing society characteristic of the Philippines is echoed by Jyotsna Kapur's discussion of lumpen subjectivities in India and Keith Wagner's description of the cutthroat realities portrayed with such passion in Park Chan-wook's critique of contemporary South Korean society. Equally, Xudong Zhang characterizes both the social reality and the collective mind-set as schizophrenic in

his chapter on Chinese cinema. Very much the product of their times, the film texts discussed here remain filled with contradictions, mourning and rejecting the culture of neoliberalism even in the midst of celebrating or acting it out.

FROM WORLD CINEMA TO GLOBAL CINEMA

The other major theoretical aim of this volume is to help clarify the growing field of what is known today as world/international/global cinema. Whereas there has been a noticeable internationalizing of film culture the world over with the Internet, television, and film festivals breaking national boundaries and bringing a wide variety of films to global audiences, the study of international cinema has remained ghettoized in and out of film studies scholarship. Our major point of departure from these earlier perspectives is an orientation that is firmly global, in that we understand any particular instance or space to be globally orientated. In other words, whereas earlier treatments of the world's various cinemas under the rubric of international or world cinema tended to regard each as a separate entity marked mostly by national origin, we are interested in exploring the ways in which any and all cinema is the localized expression of a globalized integration; a process that has been well under way since the birth of cinema but is now more fully radicalized.

Let us not forget that in its very inception, cinema was imagined globally: early filmmakers, in particular, Eisenstein and Vertov with their cinematic juxtapositions of time and space, imagined it as a kind of international language; business, particularly Hollywood, looked beyond the nation to a world market; and early cinema served as a virtual travel machine for the working classes and those others who could not afford to travel. Such a "global sense of place," to use Doreen Massey's phrase, is very much in evidence today as well, both in the political economy of production as well as textual politics of contemporary cinema.[11] The industry imagines a global market, is constituted by an international division of labor, and texts, even when confined to local contexts, are marked by a global sense of space.

International or world cinema studies have, in contrast, tended to look for autonomy rather than interdependence. In their edited volume, *Remapping World Cinema* (2006), Dennison and Lim, for example, argue that world cinema is, in fact, a discourse, an "epistemological premise."[12] Their epistemological premise, in line with postcolonial theory and its roots in post-structuralism, chooses to disregard meta-narratives such as capitalism in favor of "hybridity, transculturation, border crossing, transnationalism and translation."[13] World cinema, they argue, resists the tension between non-Western uniformity and a self-reflexive "exoticization"; and is comprised of films determined to be something more than just Otherly delight.[14] Such a discussion is judicious in foregrounding difference, in discarding

the canon—as in world culture or literature—in favor of multiplicity and showing the continuing "effect of colonialism in an age of globalization."[15] However, by foregrounding colonialism as the primary antagonism this view elides the contradictions between labor and capital, the internal colonialism that has become the norm in neoliberalism, and is unable to account for the abstractions and depersonalization of commodity culture that are shared globally albeit colored by specific contexts.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Indeed, as the authors in this volume underline, neoliberalism has further augmented the capitalistic commodification of culture and its tendency towards monopoly over the means of cultural production. We have organized the chapters geographically because location remains integral to experience as well as the division of resources that have remained tied to a center and periphery relationship to global capital. Furthermore, our aim is to offer an overview of the truly global nature of the change we are in the midst of and, therefore, the close analysis of case studies based in specific locations. Our choice of film texts is deliberately eclectic, ranging from commercial popular cinema to the documentary and experimental as we are not tied into validating or rejecting a particular aesthetic but in the history and politics of aesthetic choices. The chapters may be read in order of geography or according to theme and the following outline of the book is meant to assist the reader in making such a choice.

We begin with the U.S. film industry because it has indeed led the way in neoliberal restructuring of the film/media cultural industries. An integral part of the web of consumer-capitalistic culture, the U.S. film industry is not only part of the corporate-financial structure at the top (i.e., GE, Coca-Cola, Ford, Apple, etc.), but it also is at the base of a culture of commodity, such that audiences are produced as commodities and buyers of commodities, thus sutured into an entire network of commodity relations. The industry has, in the words of Paul Grainge, perfected "the process of selling entertainment [which] has come to rely, increasingly, on the principles of deepening audience involvement in immersive world brands."[16]

Expanding on their extensive work on the global domination of Hollywood, Toby Miller and Richard Maxwell launch the critique in this volume with their moniker, Siliwood. Combining Sili(con valley) with (Holly)wood they underline the connections between U.S. cinema, state policy, and militarism that have sharpened in neoliberalism. They draw attention to the collusion between the state, for example, California's tax breaks to movie producers, the blockbuster model, and the movie magic of Silicon Valley's special effects laboratories that has been secured under the umbrella of the U.S. military-industrial complex. They take us back to the beginning, reminding us of Ronald Reagan and the long-standing ties between

Hollywood and neoliberalism. Moreover, this association between the military and Hollywood, Miller and Maxwell tell us, is endemic and can be traced back to the *Birth of a Nation* (D.W. Griffith, 1915), which was also given official military support. Now updating this connection to the two *Transformer* films (Michael Bay, 2007, 2009), Miller and Maxwell argue that the visceral violence and fetishization of weapons that has become iconic of these texts is a homage to military prowess in the twenty-first century. Far from the champion of freedom that it claims to be, Hollywood, or should we call it Siliwood, is sustained by militarism as state policy, financing strategy, and cultural politics.

Eileen Meehan deepens the discussion on the un-freedom of the "free market" by bringing her ongoing analysis of the monopolistic tendencies of capitalistic cultural production into the present moment to ask how neoliberalism may be outmoded if capitalist structures remain well in place. As Meehan shows, the legacy of neoliberalism is the trans-industrial media conglomerate—the seven big mass media firms, Bertelsmann, General Electric, National Amusements, News Corporation, Sony, Time Warner, and the Walt Disney Company—who benefited from worldwide government deregulation started in the 1980s. The business strategy that remains the most cost-efficient and profitable for these conglomerates is synergy, i.e., to cross-market intellectual property over multiple operations. It makes logical sense, then, for these conglomerates to own multiple platforms so that an idea or content may be marketed as a film, a video game, a theme park, a TV show, and so on. Not only would it be a challenge to untangle these holdings, it would be even more naïve to expect neoliberals to suddenly change course and democratize cultural production, especially given the ongoing stability of the entertainment-information sector, where Hollywood-style global cinema has continued to earn strong revenues at the box office. Meehan further explains the extent of the concentration achieved by neoliberalism by taking the case of GE, which she shows us is not only trans-industrial like the big seven media conglomerates, but also trans-sectoral. That is, GE's tentacles are not confined just to media but extend to consumer and industrial manufacturing and services, energy, military, and capital and financial services. To unravel the horizontal and vertical integration of a hydra-headed giant such as this would amount to a revolution—not just another tweaking or correction of the problem of capitalistic monopoly.

In the final chapter in the part on Hollywood, Dee Tudor begins the discussion on subjectivities, analyzing the nature of masculinity represented in two recent inter-media texts and franchises, *Dexter* and *Star Trek XI*. The fictionalized intersections of business, military, science, religion, and family relationships in these texts, Tudor proposes, offer a lens into the contradictions of gender construction in neoliberalism. In particular, she explores the ways in which neoliberalism has brought about a certain revocation of traditional notions of hegemonic white patriarchy in favor of a masculinity

that can compromise with and accommodate certain feminist positions, in particular the white bourgeois kind. For example, she indicates, certain pragmatic feminist ideas, such as "opening the paid labor market to women," can easily coexist with the tenets of white neoliberal masculinity. This kind of analysis of gender and capital has become increasingly urgent in the post-9/11 militarization of U.S. society and culture.

Next, we take up Latin America, where it all began. Market "reforms" were brought here by a violent seizure of power by the military with August Pinochet's 1973 coup destroying countless lives and terrorizing others. Yet, this was met with spirited resistance and solidarity. Latin America gave birth to Third Cinema, which was not just a film movement but also a radical politics that questioned both the U.S. Empire and its domestic collaborators. Its project of decolonizing both a people and the imagination, its combination of filmmaking and criticism, and, most of all, the ways in which it turned the spectator into a guerilla resister and an ally makes Third Cinema profoundly important for a cinematic history of resistance to neoliberalism.

Michael Chanan follows up his extensive work on Latin American film, especially Cuban cinema, to offer here an account of the changes that have taken place in Cuban film since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Chanan writes that when the Cuban revolution launched a project to create a new national cinema, in defiance of U.S. hegemony, the term 'neoliberalism' had not yet been coined. However, the new cinema that exploded onto the screens created waves among film audiences across the world; one of its leading directors, the documentarist Santiago Alvarez, spoke of "accelerated underdevelopment." Fifty years later, after various crises, both political and economic, a small Cuban national film industry still exists—just barely—which competes for international co-production funds with other Latin American producers. However, what has grown in its place is an active independent video movement that produces short works for television, video art for the galleries and clubs, and, most importantly, circulates over the Internet. Digital technologies have opened up the public sphere to topics, in particular related to family, sexuality, and gender, that were previously taboo. The result is that much of the new Cuban video art movement can be found on the Internet, despite the difficulties of access from inside the country because the hardware remains under the ownership of multinational media conglomerates. The impulse behind Third Cinema, i.e., to democratize and radicalize the public sphere, Chanan tells us, now lives on in the interstices of cyberspace.

In Peru, the same struggle to open up and democratize the public sphere continues. Film and literature scholar Sophia A. McClennen draws our attention to one such instance of struggle, the work of the Marxist film collective Grupo Chaski, and in the process highlights the neoliberal tendency to privatize the public sphere in much the same way as it encloses industry. Representing the most disenfranchised sectors of Lima society, Chaski has

been dedicated to revolutionizing all components of the filmmaking process. From the group's inception, they have consistently worked on creating alternative modes of exhibition at the same time that they have sought to make their films available to the public via commercial releases, television screenings, videos, and other more mainstream distribution outlets. Since 2004, the group began working on a project of local, grassroots distribution and exhibition, a process they call "microcines." McClennen's account restates how new technologies when backed by people's struggles—as Third Cinema was in its moment of birth—can dynamically open up and radicalize the public sphere.

Writing as theorists and practitioners, Mike Wayne and Deirdre O'Neill, discuss the ongoing significance of Third Cinema as an alternative to neoliberalism by grounding their own film practice in it. Wayne and O'Neill, on a teaching assignment in Venezuela, end up making *Listen to Venezuela* (2010), a documentary about Hugo Chavez. Comparing their work with contemporary films on Latin America, in particular, Kim Bartley and Donnacha O'Briain's *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* (2002) and Naomi Klein and Avi Lewis's *The Take* (2004), which they find to be conventional in form, they assert the renewed relevance of Third Cinema as an alternative to neoliberalism. Most notably, they argue that Third Cinema is a form of cultural politics that goes beyond the limits of traditional representative democracy/documentary and is most compatible with the impetus to build a 'horizontal' rather than a 'vertical society'; and echoes the call for a 'protagonistic' democracy embedded in the new Venezuelan constitution of 1999. In many ways then, Wayne and O'Neill may be included in the contemporary tradition of Third Cinema.

Next we move to Asia, an area that has gained increasing attention in the last three decades, to the extent that the twenty-first century has been called the Asian Century. Take Japan's economic prominence in the 1980s; China, whose economic growth, David Harvey remarks, may be considered a side effect of the Washington consensus in that the dismantling of manufacturing in the U.S. turned China into the world's biggest exporter; India's rising prominence as a market and source of labor along with geopolitical significance in the U.S. led war against Afghanistan; and the hydra-like formations of neoliberalism in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea.

Along these lines, Xudong Zhang summarizes the contradictions of Chinese neoliberal culture. He builds on his previous analysis that the paradoxes of capitalist-driven development in China have resulted in genuine schizophrenia in social reality and the collective mind-set along with the radical disintegration of traditional (both agrarian and socialist) social fabric, the decentralization of power, the loss of moral and theoretical authority, and China's uneasy and often embattled relations with a reintegrated and expanded capitalist West after the Cold War. [17] Zhang elaborates on the implications of a fading socialist organization of society by a close reading

of Jia Zhangke newest release, *24-City* (2008). This award-winning film is about an aeronautical/munitions factory that along with its industrially designed clay brick buildings and working-class inhabitants is set for demolition/dissolution to make way for a new postsocialist city, adorned with cosmopolitan high-rises and a super-rich class (*bu fao hu*). The film was shot in Sichuan Province with real factory workers telling their stories. In reading this film against the background of China's neoliberal turn, Zhang fleshes out the impossible contradictions of postsocialist living, especially the erasure of history and living memory, which is then repackaged and sold as commodified nostalgia of the Maoist period.

The contradictions between living memory and commodified nostalgia are to be found in commercial genres as well even when they explicitly avoid the kind of trenchant critique offered by a once nonmainstream filmmaker like Jia Zhangke. Ying Xiao discusses here a new genre, the leitmotif (*zhuxuanlu*) film, which is the birth child of state subsidy and the neoliberal blockbuster phenomenon inspired by Hollywood. In particular, she takes up the example of Feng Xiaoning's *Grief over the Yellow River* (*Huanghe juelian*), which outgrossed many foreign releases and Hong Kong imports in 1999. Following Xiao's reading, the film may indeed be considered a textbook illustration for the oxymoronic phrase "Market Socialism." A big-budget film with a domestic and global market in sight, it is an epic rendering of socialism as commodified nostalgia.

Sharon Hayashi explores the confrontation between the past and the present in Japan through a different lens, i.e., the widespread social anxieties about young people and intergenerational relationships that have become center stage with the increasing isolation of the individual in neoliberalism. Taking the newly coined term "freeters," i.e., part-time workers, unmarried men and women between the ages of fifteen and thirty-four years who are expected to hold their jobs for less than five years, Hayashi explains the ideological mystifications of neoliberalism. Whereas the precarity of freeter existence is very much a systemic result of neoliberalism, conservative discourse holds these young people as not only responsible for their insecure lives but, in fact, for the dissolution of the social fabric. Hayashi contextualizes the moral panic around youth violence and sexuality in the increasing precarity of life for young people under neoliberalism. In contrast, Hayashi identifies and describes instances of progressive youth cultural politics that present a collective response to neoliberalism, while at the same time restoring agency to the individual. Taking her cue from a new generation of labor activists in Japan, who are combining new aesthetic forms and multiple media with claiming public spaces, such as city parks, Hayashi offers significant insights in the ways in which cinema is being integrated into leftist politics. In particular she discusses Tanaka Hiroyuki's *Kani kôsen/The Crab Cannery Ship* (2009), a remake of an early twentieth-century proletarian novel now inflected with manga; Tokachi Tsuchiya's documentary *Futsû na shigoto ga shitai/A Normal Life,*

Please (2008), first screened at the New Year's Tent Village in Hibiya Park; and Yuki Nakamura's 2008 documentary *Shiroto no ran/Amateur Revolt*. Circulating on YouTube, shown in union meetings and public parks, these films present an alternative youth politics based in a savvy knowledge of media; an alternative globalization to the media conglomeration Meehan, Maxwell, and Miller describe earlier in the book.

Jyotsna Kapur's chapter also dwells on the generational politics of neoliberalism, in this case in India, as a new generation is being socialized into radicalized capitalist social relations. If, on the one hand, there is an increasing market-based rhetoric of individual freedom and choice, with its attendant promises of sexual autonomy, there is, on the other, a crushing onslaught of the power of money and commodity to decide one's fate in life. Working with the notion of lumpen-development or capitalism as a systemic underdevelopment of development, Kapur discusses the transformation of an iconic figure of Indian popular cinema, *Devdas*, from an early twentieth-century characterization as a romantic, tortured individual of exceptional sensitivity to the emergence in an incisive contemporary incarnation, Anurag Kashyap's 2009 film, as *Dev. D*, a lumpen who declares, almost cheerfully, "I am a slut." Rereading Freud, from a Marxist-feminist perspective, Kapur finds his analysis of the sadomasochistic inner life of the bourgeoisie to be especially helpful in understanding the current crisis of the self in contemporary Hindi cinema.

The estrangement of labor that Marx identified as the core dehumanizing feature of capitalist subjectivity has been radicalized in neoliberalism. Through a close analysis of Park Chan-wook's *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* (2002) and *Oldboy* (2003), Keith B. Wagner explains how the filmmaker reveals the estrangement of both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, such that instruments of labor turn into sadomasochistic tools of torture. Drawing upon Antonio Gramsci's tracing of the inner worlds of the bourgeois and proletariat under a previous phase of corporate fascism, Wagner takes us back into Marxist history to understand the present.

We move from the textual politics of representing labor to considering the nature of work in the creative-cultural industries with the contribution by Mirana M. Szeto and Yun-chung Chen on Hong Kong cinema. Noting the commodification of culture and the central role it has come to play in urban renewal under neoliberalism, Szeto and Chen discuss the ways in which the renewal of Hong Kong cinema under neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics has come at the costs of culture and the labor involved in producing it. They note a greater cultural bifurcation, homogenization, and distance from autonomous self-expression as Hong Kong cinema has been co-opted into the cultural and economic regime of mainland production. Tracing the cultural and human costs of this political economy through interviews with cultural practitioners, the authors counter the neoliberal discourse and its emphasis on economic growth.

Moving from these long-running cinematic traditions in Asia, our attention shifts to island state cinema. In this regard, Singapore represents one of the more interesting case studies in this volume due to its much-celebrated market readiness and fusion of Asian and Western business practices and models. "As a postcolonial island nation of under four million people (of whom over half a million are foreign), Singapore is famous for being run like a giant corporation."[18] Political economist Henry Wai-chung Yeung has asserted that "Singapore, as a major entrepôt in Southeast Asia, has relentlessly positioned itself vis-à-vis the global spaces of flows. Since its independence in 1965, the PAP-led state has planned and implemented several national development strategies to create and sustain Singapore's competitiveness in the face of accelerated global competition."[19] However, this state-market economy changed in the 1990s under IMF's stringent supervision after the Tiger Market crash. In order to remain competitive and position itself as a beacon of neoliberalism outside of China's state-regulated mixed economy and South Korea's *cheabol* consolidations, Singaporean businesses were encouraged to outsource labor and invest in transnational ventures that left many jobless—fissuring a gap between newly affluent white-collar entrepreneurs and the invisible working classes that carried on with menial jobs for their rich clientele. This invisible or at least semi-detectable class (in filmic productions) was then forced to carry on without the assistance or support of the island state. Yeung adds:

> The dismantling of such well-established state apparatus and the unconditional opening of domestic economies to foreign competition under the current IMF guidelines is tantamount to destroying the very foundation of their success—the embedded relationships between economy and state in these countries. The consequence can be extremely serious, ranging from social unrest (e.g. Indonesia) to extreme nationalism and xenophobia (e.g. Malaysia).[20]

Many of these themes are covered in Jenna Ng's chapter, which once again highlights the authoritarianism that underlines neoliberalism, as she explains the unstable balance that Singapore's one-party, socially conservative regime must maintain in order to pursue its neoliberal agenda. Her close reading of Djinn's *Perth* (2004) brings out a highly nuanced record of the painfully violent fantasies that underlie a global imaginary trapped in extremely crushing and impoverished local realities. Her chapter corroborates Tan See-Tam's recent discussion of Singapore's neoliberal condition as a "Society of Strangers" where human relations pivot around fantastic experiences, "empty lives and socially alienating spaces."[21]

In another exploration of the reification of life, its subjection to market values of exchange in neoliberalism, Bliss Cua Lim looks at independent Filipino director Jeffrey Jeturian's *Pila Balde / Fetch a Pail of Water* (1999) and *Kubrador / The Bet Collector* (2006). Both films reflect Jeturian's

preoccupation with the intrusion of exchange relations in all areas of human life, including sex, longing, death, and grief. In *Pila Balde*, sex is linked as much to emotional devastation as to economic desperation, and in *Kubrador*, gambling is presented as a way of life, such that every experience, including grief, is subjected to calculation. Lim then goes on to show the workings of neoliberalism in film production itself. Jeturian's *Pila Balde*, shot in thirteen days with a budget of U.S.$50,000, was part of a trend started in the late 1990s with Philippine studios giving new directors an opening to make films but on a bare-bones, exploitative budget.

Our part on Africa and Europe is, we are sorry to say, far less detailed than we had hoped but will be developed in future work. Here we carry Jonathan Haynes's discussion of the political economy and textual politics of Nigeria's Nollywood industry. Comprised of many small producers working with tiny amounts of capital, producing cinema directly for sale as cassettes or video compact discs this bare-bones industry presents an image of the city as a turbulent and dangerous landscape. Here class divisions are extreme but permeable, while enormous wealth does not buy insulation from the chaos and misery that surrounds it. They show supernatural forces permeating all social levels, particularly the wealthiest. The enchantment of the everyday that several authors have traced in this volume is very much alive in Nigeria as well.

Martin O'Shaughnessy reports on how the long-standing oppositional stance of French cinema against Hollywood hegemony and the significant part it has played in anti establishment critiques is being put to the test in neoliberalism. O'Shaughnessy traces, despite a state subsidy and French commitment to cultural exceptionalism, an increasingly bipolar cinema that is divided between small-versus big-budget productions, art-house versus multiplex exhibition, and film geared towards national versus global markets. He also points to specific film texts, both fiction and nonfiction, that have articulated a strong critique of neoliberalism. Elaborating on the resistance that French cinema has put up to capitalist globalization, both at the level of production and exhibition practices as well as in its texts, this chapter reaffirms cinema as a significant site of anticapitalist resistance.

In concluding then this reckoning with neoliberalism, as demonstrated in the practices and commerce of cinema globally, we find a sharpening of the contradictions and conflicts of capitalism, not their resolution. Each and every case study in this volume speaks of crisis: between the monopolization of cultural production and newer media technologies that another generation of cultural producers are using to resist and democratize the public sphere; between a social fabric that is coming apart as the middle class gets submerged under neoliberal withdrawal of social welfare while at the same time a younger globalized generation is experiencing a common dependency, a shared proletarianization, imposed by the market; between

the production of self as commodity and the painful and violent costs extracted by such domination. The return of nineteenth-century capitalist relations is, perhaps, nowhere as strikingly painful as in China, where Lin Chun writes:

> Engels's description of the conditions of the working class in the nineteenth-century England became applicable to Chinese workers in some coastal cities. It was widely felt among them, as reported by one labor scholar, that if Marx could see Guangdong today he would die of anger.[22]

The universal triumph of capitalism has, as Randhir Singh writes from India, universalized the systemic logic of capital and made Marxism both as social theory and political practice even more relevant today. "So long as capitalism lasts, triumphant or otherwise," Singh writes, "Marxism can neither die nor go obsolete, nor socialism, as a negation of capitalism, disappear from the agenda of human history."[23] Marxist theory offers an explanation of structures and whereas the triumphalism may have gone out of the neoliberal discourse it has by no means reversed course. As any mechanic knows, you can't fix something if you don't know it is broken, and we have offered in these pages cinema as one such site where the wreckage wrought by capital may be observed.

NOTES

1. Quinn, 2008.
2. Comaroff and Comaroff, 2001, p. 2.
3. Phillips et al., 2006, p. 588.
4. Marx and Engels, 2005, p. 43.
5. See, for example, Macdonald and Ruckert, 2010.
6. Rofel, 2007, p. 15.
7. Harvey, 2005, p. 42.
8. Ibid., p. 82.
9. Landa, 2007, p. 32
10. Rofel, 2007, p. 15.
11. Massey, 1994.
12. Dennison and Lim, 2006, p. 2.
13. Ibid., p. 6.
14. Ibid., p. 3
15. Ibid., p. 2.
16. Grainge, 2008, p. 175.
17. Zhang, 2007, pp. 6–7.
18. Ong, 2007, p. 177.
19. Yeung, 2000, p. 141.
20. Ibid., p. 146.
21. See-Tam, 2009, p. 210.
22. Lin, 2006, p. 9.
23. Singh, 1998, pp. 17–27, 25.

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Part I

Hollywood and Global Dominance

1 "For a Better Deal, Harass Your Governor!"

Neoliberalism and Hollywood

Toby Miller and Richard Maxwell

> Neo-liberalism is not Adam Smith; neo-liberalism is not market society, neo-liberalism is not the Gulag on the insidious scale of capitalism. . . . The problem of neoliberalism is rather how the overall exercise of political power can be modeled on the principles of a market economy. . . . [I]n order to carry out this operation . . . the neoliberals had to subject classical liberalism to a number of transformations. The first of these . . . was basically dissociating the market economy from the political principle of laissez-faire.
>
> Michel Foucault (2008, p. 131)

Our title, the epigraph, and Figures 1.1 and 1.2 touch on the core of this chapter: that Hollywood's boasts of freedom, individualism, and entitlement to world dominance are as bogus as neoliberalism's claim to have installed an unassailable regime of political and economic institutions that transcend the need for government.

The title quotes a 2008 story from *Moving Pictures Magazine*—a trade periodical—that urges its target audience of filmmakers to secure more and more public subsidies for their projects.[1] Such sentiment seems to run counter to the commonsense notion that Hollywood is a model of free-market economics. Enter the paradoxical foundation of neoliberalism and Foucault's insight: whereas neoliberalism's economic project required "permanent vigilance, activity, and intervention," the legitimacy of its political movement resided in the pretense that this would somehow happen without the government's help.[2] Thus its passion for intervention in the name of the market economy could not be identified with any doctrine of state control, even the reigning doctrine of nonintervention.

Figure 1.1 indexes an ongoing, structural crisis for the Hollywood screen industries that has made neoliberal deceptions hard to sustain—the tendency for runaway production to attract film and television drama away from its managerial, creative, and semiotic home in Southern California, particularly Los Angeles, and towards overseas locations. Hollywood is good at imagining its global demesne at a pictorial level. Paramount's fictional 1927 cartography is a relatively benign and amusing representation of how an industry built on fantasy manages to make dreams appear real.

YEAR	DAYS	PERCENTAGE
1993	6,965	N/A
1994	7,304	4.9
1995	9,393	28.6
1996	13,980	48.8
1997	13,284	(5.0)
1998	11,542	(13.1)
1999	10,526	(8.8)
2000	9,501	(9.7)
2001	9,379	(1.3)
2002	8,024	(14.4)
2003	7,329	(8.7)
2004	8,707	18.8
2005	9,518	9.3
2006	8,813	(7.4)
2007	8,247	(6.4)

Figure 1.1 Los Angeles feature-film production days: Totals and percentage changes from previous year.
Source: Adapted from FilmL.A. Inc. (2008).

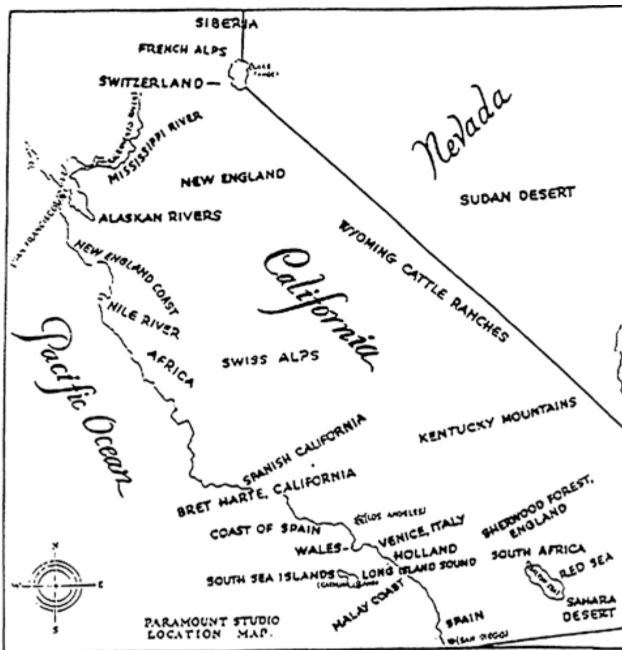

Figure 1.2 Paramount Studio's location map of California, 1927.
Source: (Lukinbeal 2002, p. 253).

NEOLIBERAL HOLLYWOOD
No state investment in training, production, distribution, or exhibition
No governmental content or censorship but anxiety over the impact of film sex and violence on the population
Copyright protection
Monopoly restrictions
Export orientation
Market model
Ideology of pleasure before nation

Figure 1.3 Neoliberal Hollywood.

But in another sense, it stands for the complex geopolitical ties between U.S. imperialism and motion pictures, which are as textual as they are political-economic. *Raison d'Hollywood* and *raison d'état* work for mutual benefit under the sign of such 'violent cartographies.'[3]

We draw on these insights in the following under a variety of headings. First, we examine neoliberalism as a dogma of intervention secreted within the discourse of freedom. Second, we consider Hollywood and the state in terms of diplomacy, money, and content. Third, we explore the history of this relationship. Fourth, we look at the contemporary hybrid of Siliwood, where Silicon Valley meets Hollywood, brokered by public subvention. And we conclude with a look at state support today.

But first, let's analyze the Kool-Aid of neoliberalism to express what Hollywood looks like in a market unfettered by government control. This grid invokes ideal-types from the discourse of neoclassical economics, with the state magically airbrushed from view (see figure 1.3). At the conclusion of the chapter, we'll redraw this grid in the light of our findings.

NEOLIBERALISM

What was neoliberalism? We use the past tense because the world's descent into the disasters of deregulation and offshoring has forced neoliberalism's prelates, from Beijing to the Bourse, to rethink their dismissal of alternatives (hint: Keynesianism). Countering the achievements of postwar Keynesian reconstruction was the yardstick against which neoliberalism measured its success—as each one unraveled in the name of privatization and deregulation, the unfurling paradox was that neoliberalism revealed itself both to be at the heart of state projects *and* their severest critic.[4] Dominant in world thought for three decades, neoliberalism was 'a whole way of being and thinking,' an attempt to create 'an enterprise society' through the pretense that the latter is a natural (but never-achieved) state of affairs, even as competition was imposed as a framework of regulating

everyday life in the most subtly comprehensive statism imaginable.[5] So neoliberalism could plead for investments in human capital as long as it derided government-led social engineering; it could call for the generation of more and more markets by the state, on the condition of fewer and fewer democratic controls; and it could hail freedom as a natural basis for life as long as it could employ the heavy hand of government policing to administer property relations. Foucault identifies cash-register think tanks as the American Enterprise Institute as the intellectual handservants of this practice, vocalists of a "permanent criticism of government policy."[6] The neoliberals' lust for market conduct extended beyond such matters to a passion for comprehending and opining on everything, from birthrates to divorce, from suicide to abortion, from performance-enhancing drugs to altruism. Nothing could be left outside the market, and nothing left to the chance that market relations might falter without massive policing.[7] Hence, film and television can be regarded in the U.S. as matters of private initiative *and* team membership; as opponents of state intervention *and* beneficiaries of tax relief; as dependants of state stimuli and diplomacy *and* educational *largesse*.

Neoliberalism understood people exclusively through the precepts of selfishness. It exercised power by governing them through market imperatives, so that they could be made ratiocinative liberal actors whose inner creativity was unlocked in an endless mutual adaptation with the environment. Foucault used the idea of panopticism to explain how neoliberalism relocated inherent tensions of the liberal political project, between freedom and control, democratization and order, into people's conduct, moral choices, and habits of thought. The state could only "intervene when it sees that something is not happening according to the general mechanics of behavior, exchange, and economic life."[8] The competitive market became a privileged "interface of government and the individual," the latter internalizing market criteria as a constellation of habits, choices, disgusts, delights, and judgments expressed as characteristics of personal identity.[9] The notion of consumption was turned on its head. Everyone was creative, no one was simply a spectator, and we were all manufacturing pleasure when we witnessed activities we had paid to watch. Internally divided—but happily so-each person was "a consumer on the one hand, but . . . also a producer."[10] Neoliberalism claimed to free the disabled from confinement, encourage new subjectivities, reward intellect and competitiveness, link people across cultures, and allow billions of flowers to bloom in a post-political cornucopia. It was a Marxist/Godardian wet dream, where people could fish, film, fuck, and write checks from morning to midnight—but under the duplicitous vigilance of the state and commercial market research.

Neoliberalism did not involve an absolute retreat of the state. The intensification of neoliberal globalization via a global division of labor, regional trading blocs, and globally oriented cities with supranational ambitions saw the market become "a 'test,' a locus of privileged experience where

one . . . [could] identify the effects of excessive governmentality."[11] This governmentality took the form of guaranteed rights as well as investment in capacities after the Second World War, when the state effectively said, "we are asking you to get yourselves killed, but we promise you that when you have done this, you will keep your jobs until the end of your lives."[12] But the promise eventually involved a return on investment. When Bill Clinton outlined five policy precepts that both reformed and argued against the postwar compact: a family orientation for workers; health-care and retirement systems; safety on the job; training for productivity; and employee participation,[13] his litany was calculated to endow the population with capacities, investing in their human capital in a way that would produce markets that in turn would be governed.

HOLLYWOOD AND THE STATE

In contemporary U.S. international relations, film and television are deemed to represent "soft power" in partnership with the "hard power" of force and economics.[14] Hollywood's techniques of nationalism, from secreted state subvention to immense immersive interpellation, function in the service of "the disappearance of the body, the aestheticising of violence, [and] the sanitisation of war."[15] War, profits, and economic restructuring are obscured by the complex, multipoint nature of corporate, military, and entertainment interests and funds.

Nevertheless, the media's public-policy significance waxes and wanes. Republicans nearly put an end to official propaganda when they took control of Congress in the mid-1990s, dramatically diminishing funding and staffing as part of their dislike of artists and intellectuals, and in response to the end of anti-Sovietism.[16] But the reactionary geopolitics that followed September 11, 2001, engendered newly modish terms such as "public diplomacy" that suddenly appealed to the federal government, as it answered the plaintive cry of "why do they hate us?" with "why you should love us." The White House Office of Global Communications and a Policy Coordinating Committee on Strategic Communications were created to build trust of the U.S. overseas, stress common interests and ideologies, and influence elites. By 2003, the State Department's cultural budget was U.S.$600 million.[17] The new public diplomacy was supposed to transcend the material impact of U.S. foreign policy and corporate expropriation by fostering communication at a civil-society level, directly linking citizens across borders to "influence opinions and mobilize foreign publics" by "engaging, informing, and influencing key international audiences."[18] In the neoliberal style, this would somehow work in the interest of the U.S. government, but avoid that connotation.

Propaganda initiatives multiplied across a wide array of governmental bodies: the State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Broadcasting Board of Governors, the Pentagon, and the Open

Source Center.[19] The George W. Bush administration returned to doctrines of deterrence, the rational-actor model of mutually assured destruction that had warned the Soviets of what a nuclear attack would mean. This time, it was a counter-discourse to radical Islamism across the Internet that stressed the negative consequences of nonstate violence. The Bush doctrine was deterrence birthed in asymmetry[20]: it lacked the pragmatic, if grudging, respect accorded to rivalrous state actors, while amplifying the religionist's perverse fascination with fellow fanatics. The media message was at once collective—projecting a national image of a United States ready to intimidate and destroy—and individual, thanks to the immersive interpellation of narrative film techniques employed to propagate the faith. These were crucial components of the necessarily ongoing, incomplete project of naturalizing the power of the nation, a project undertaken through the diurnal and the cinematic, the banal and the spectacular.[21]

THE HISTORY

Of all the places seeking generation or regeneration through state strategy designed to stimulate industries, California should be the last on the list, given its claims to being at the very heart of neoliberal Hollywood—as per the figure that began this chapter. Yanquis take Hollywood's free marketeering as an article of faith, pouring scorn on European systems of media subvention in favor of a mythology that says Hollywood was created because of the desire to tell stories that bound the nation together and, less altruistically, to make money by fleeing the unions and frost of New York's Lower East Side in favor of the Southland's unorganized labor and bountiful sun. The rhetoric of private enterprise is so powerful that even those who directly benefit from the way that public-private partnerships drive screen drama willfully deny—or are unable to perceive—that a blend of corporate capital and state aid animates the industry.

Yet Hollywood is a veritable citadel of cultural policy concealed behind an illuminated sign of private enterprise, as we have shown in countering the dominant discourse with the idea of the New International Division of Cultural Labor. It explains that the film studios utilize runaway production, cheap and docile labor, state subsidies, treaties, government stimuli, and intellectual property to ensure their worldwide success.[22] So instead of drinking the neoliberal Kool-Aid, we followed the money, asking how film and television are actually financed. Where is the evidence? In movie and TV credits, in the trade magazines, in legal disputes that go to court and necessitate disclosure, in the balance sheets and annual reports of public film authorities, in the industry analyses put out by for-profit research firms (if you can afford them), in books about how to shoot offshore or finance your movie with taxpayers' money, and in the occasional papers or protests that come from unions, conservatives, or activists. Hollywood relies on

the state in a myriad of ways, some of them barely visible. It uses foreign sources of state money, about two hundred publicly funded film commissions across the U.S., Pentagon services, and ambassadorial labor from the Departments of State and Commerce.

A variety of conjunctural factors related to the global financial crisis that began in 2007 have simultaneously intensified and localized the runaway trend. The strength of foreign currencies encouraged film studios to keep their dollars at home, whereas the faltering economies of manufacturing and agricultural U.S. states drove governments to provide incentives for Hollywood to leave California for metaphorically sunnier if climatically cooler sites of public subvention. Because of this conjuncture of financial crisis and policy levers, California's share of U.S. studio-produced films, which was two-thirds in 2003, it was just a third by 2008.[23] But as we shall see, such participation is long-standing and often as political as it is economic.

The government has a long history in film production and control.[24] The notorious racist epic, *Birth of a Nation* (D.W. Griffith, 1915), was given official military support by order of the secretary of war and endorsed by the president, and the so-called Western genre is a triumphalist enactment of racialization and genocide.[25] From the moment the U.S. entered the First World War, theaters across the country saw speakers and movies that purported to testify to German atrocities, whereas films imported from the Central Powers were banned across the U.S.[26] Immediately afterwards, the Department of the Interior recruited the industry to the 'Americanization' of immigrants, screening Hollywood movies on ships bringing migrants.[27] Paramount Famous Lasky studio executive Sidney R. Kent soon referred to cinema as 'silent propaganda.'[28]

As early as 1912, policy mandarins were equally aware that where their films traveled, demand was created for other U.S. goods. The State Department set up a motion-picture section in 1916.[29] In 1918, Congress passed the Webb-Pomerene Act, which permitted overseas cinema trusts that were illegal domestically. This enabled an international distribution cartel for the next forty years. Export prices and terms of trade were centrally determined by the Motion Picture Export Association of America, which also worked to ensure blind bidding and block booking—methods by which a distributor obliges theater owners to exhibit unseen films and accept a package of films on all-or-nothing terms (you want Spielberg, you take Van Damme). Commerce Secretary Herbert Hoover praised the industry in the 1920s for putting forward "intellectual ideas and national ideals," for its trade earnings, "and as a powerful influence on behalf of American goods."[30] Will Hays, who worked closely with Hoover to ensure that the studios operated as an overseas distribution cartel to deal with recalcitrant foreign powers, asserted that "[t]rade follows the film,"[31] and advised the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency in 1930 that "every foot of American film sells $1.00 worth of manufactured products some place in the

world."[32] Joseph P. Kennedy, an Eastern-establishment mogul, acknowledged that "films were serving as silent salesmen for other products of American industry."[33] As a *quid pro quo*, Hollywood lobbyists of the 1920s and 1930s treated the U.S. Departments of State and Commerce as 'message boys': the State Department undertook market research and shared business intelligence, whereas the Commerce Department pressured other countries to permit cinema free access and favorable terms of trade. In this period the crisis of liberalism produced by the Depression was met with the Keynesian policies and institutional instruments that became the targets of neoliberalism in the last decades of the twentieth century. But the crisis of liberalism also helped to deepen and solidify the relation of Hollywood and the U.S. state, as propaganda and business aims merged.

In the 1940s, the U.S. opened an Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (OCIAA) to gain solidarity from Latin Americans for World War II. Its most visible program was the Motion Picture Division, headed by John Hay Whitney, recent coproducer of *Gone with the Wind* (Victor Fleming, 1939) and future secret agent and front man for the CIA's news service, Forum World Features.[34] The Office had at least one Hollywood film reshot because it showed Mexican children shoeless in the street, and was responsible for getting Hollywood to distribute *Simón Bolívar* (Miguel Contreras Torres, 1942) and make *Saludos Amigos* (Norman Ferguson and Wilfred Jackson, 1943) and *The Three Caballeros* (Norman Ferguson, 1944). Some production costs were borne by the OCIAA in exchange for free prints being distributed in U.S. embassies and consulates across Latin America. Whitney even accompanied Walt Disney and Donald Duck to Rio de Janeiro.[35]

During the invasion of Europe in 1944 and 1945, the military closed Axis films, shuttered the industry, and insisted on the release of U.S. movies. The *quid pro quo* for the subsequent Marshall Plan was the abolition of customs restrictions, amongst which were limits on film imports.[36] In the case of Japan, the occupation immediately changed the face of cinema. When theaters reopened after the U.S. dropped its atomic bombs, all films and posters with war themes were gone, and previously censored Hollywood texts dominated screens. The occupying troops established an Information Dissemination Section in their Psychological Warfare Branch to imbue the local population with guilt and 'teach American values' through Hollywood.[37]

The film industry's association at this time referred to itself as "the little State Department," so isomorphic were its methods and ideology with U.S. policy and politics. This was also the era when the industry's self-censoring Production Code appended to its bizarre litany of sexual and narcotic prohibitions and requirements two items requested by the 'other' State Department: selling the U.S. way of life around the world, and avoiding negative representations of any "foreign country with which we have cordial relations."[38] Meanwhile, with the Cold War underway, the CIA's

Psychological Warfare Workshop employed future Watergate criminal E. Howard Hunt, who clandestinely funded the rights purchase and production of George Orwell's anti-Soviet novels *Animal Farm*[39] and *1984*.[40] Producer Walter Wanger trumpeted the meshing of "Donald Duck and Diplomacy" as "a Marshall Plan for ideas . . . a veritable celluloid Athens," concluding that the state needed Hollywood "more than . . . the H bomb."[41] Industry head Eric Johnston, fresh from his prior post as secretary of commerce, saw himself dispatching "messengers from a free country." Harry Truman agreed, referring to movies as "ambassadors of goodwill" during his presidency.[42] The United States Information Service spread its lending library of films across the globe as part of Cold War expansion. John F. Kennedy instructed the service to use film and television to propagandize, and his administration funded 226 film centers in 106 countries.[43]

The title of a Congressional Legislative Research Service 1964 report made the point bluntly: *The U.S. Ideological Effort: Government Agencies and Programs*. That impulse has been renewed. Four decades later, union officials soberly intoned that "although the Cold War is no longer a reason to protect cultural identity, today US-produced pictures are still a conduit through which our values, such as democracy and freedom, are promoted."[44] Then there is the Defense Department. Since World War II, the Pentagon has provided technology, soldiers, and settings to motion pictures and television in return for a jealously guarded right to veto assistance to stories that offend its sensibilities.[45]

In short, out of the crisis of liberalism, the state found an unwavering ally in Hollywood, which became a model for the propagandistic simulation of U.S. culture and nationalism, as well as the bearer of the mythology of market freedoms even as its expanding fortunes came thanks to state support. Hollywood entered the neoliberal era perfectly matched to the paradoxical foundation of neoliberalism, giving Washington one of its own in the presidency of Ronald Reagan, who both personified and exalted neoliberalism's right-wing agenda. Hollywood's partnership with the state was solidified with growing militarization and the emergence of new digital information and communication technologies.

SILIWOOD

Today's hybrid of Siliwood (Silicon Valley and Hollywood) blends Northern Californian technology, Hollywood methods, and military funding. The interactivity underpinning this hybrid has evolved through the articulation since the mid-1980s of Southern and Northern California semiconductor and computer manufacture and systems and software development (a massively military-inflected and -supported industry until after Cold War II) to Hollywood screen content, as disused aircraft-production hangars became entertainment sites. The links are as much about technology, personnel,

and collaboration on ancillary projects as they are about story lines. Steven Spielberg is a recipient of the Pentagon's Medal for Distinguished Public Service; Silicon Graphics feverishly designs material for use by the empire in both its military and cultural aspects; and virtual-reality research veers between soldierly and audience applications, much of it subsidized by the Federal Technology Reinvestment Project and Advanced Technology Program. This has further submerged killing machines from serious public scrutiny. Instead, they surface superficially as Hollywood props.[46]

Simplistic textual reflectionism, which argues that the U.S. screen industries are free of state pressure and immune to nationalistic propaganda because cowboy-style heroes have not proliferated since 2001 as message boys of imperialism[47] misses the point. The industry sprang into step with the state after September 11, 2001, consulting on possible attacks and forming a White House Hollywood Committee to ensure coordination between the nations we bomb and the messages we export. Then there were the spies: the very week before the 2001 attacks on the U.S., the *New York Times* previewed the coming fall TV drama schedule with the headline "hardest-Working Actor of the Season: The C.I.A."[48] because three prime-time shows were made under the aegis of the Agency. And with NASA struggling to renovate its image, who better to invite to lunch than Hollywood producers, so they would script new texts featuring it as a benign, exciting entity? In the process, the profound contradictions between pursuing profit and violence versus civility get washed away, their instrumentalism erased in favor of dramatic re-enchantment as a supposedly higher moral purpose expressed in nation and valor.[49]

And there is a sordid link of research universities, Hollywood, and the military. In 1996, the National Academy of Sciences held a workshop for academia, Hollywood, and the Pentagon on simulation and games. The next year, the National Research Council announced a collaborative research agenda in popular culture and militarism. It convened meetings to streamline such cooperation, from special effects to training simulations, from immersive technologies to simulated networks.[50] Since that time, untold numbers of related academic journals and institutes have become closely tied to the Pentagon. They generate research designed to test and augment the recruiting and training potential of the culture industries to ideologize, hire, and instruct the population. The Center for Computational Analysis of Social and Organizational Systems at Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh promulgates studies underwritten by the Office of Naval Research and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA). DARPA refers to Orlando as "Team Orlando" because the city houses Disney's research-and-development "imagineers"; the University of Central Florida's Institute for Simulation and Training; and Lockheed Martin, the nation's biggest military contractor.[51]

In Los Angeles, the University of Southern California Institute for Creative Technologies (ICT) was set up as a means of articulating scholars,

film and television producers, and game designers. It was formally opened by the Secretary of the Army and the head of the Motion Picture Association of America, and started with U.S.$45 million of the military budget in 1998, a figure that was doubled in its 2004 renewal. ICT uses military money and Hollywood muscle to test out homicidal technologies and narrative scenarios under the pitifully complicit aegis of faculty from film, engineering, and communications.[52] Companies such as Pandemic (partly owned by that high-corporate moralist, Bono) invest. ICT also collaborates on major motion pictures, for instance *Spider-Man 2* (Sam Raimi, 2004), and its workspace was thought up by the set designer for the *Star Trek* franchise. ICT produces Pentagon recruitment tools such as *Full Spectrum Warrior* that double as 'training devices for military operations in urban terrain': what's good for the Xbox is good for the combat simulator. The utility of these innovations continues in combat. The Pentagon is aware that off-duty soldiers play games. The idea is to invade their supposed leisure time, weaning them from skater games and towards what are essentially training manuals.[53]

The Naval Postgraduate School's Modeling, Virtual Environments and Simulation Academic Program developed a game called *Operation Starfighter*, based on the film *The Last Starfighter* (Nick Castle, 1984). The next step, *America's Army*, was farmed out for participation by George Lucas's companies, *inter alia*. It was launched with due symbolism on the Fourth of July 2002—dually symbolic in that Independence Day doubles as a key date in the film industry's summer rollout of features. The military had to bring additional servers into play to handle four hundred thousand downloads of the game that first day. *GameSpot PC Reviews* awarded it a high textual rating, and was equally impressed by the 'business model.' Five years after its release, it was one of the ten most-played games online. As of February 2008, *America's Army* had nine million registered users. Civilian developers regularly refreshed it by consulting with veterans and participating in physical war games. Paratexts provided additional forms of promotional renewal. Americasarmy.com/community takes full advantage of the usual array of cybertarian fantasies about the new media as civil society, across the gamut of community fora, Internet chat, fan sites, and virtual competition. And the game is formally commodified through privatization—bought by Ubisoft to be repurposed for games consoles, arcades, and cell phones, and turned into figurines by the allegedly edgy independent company Radioactive Clown. Tournaments are convened, replete with hundreds of thousands of dollars' prize money, along with smaller events at military recruiting sites. With over forty million downloads, and websites by the thousand, its message has traveled far and wide—an excellent return on the initial public investment of U.S.$19 million and U.S.$5 million annually for updates. Studies of young people who have positive attitudes to the U.S. military indicate that 30 percent of them formed that view through playing the game—a game that sports a Teen rating; a game that forbids role reversal via modifications, preventing

players from experiencing the pain of the other; a game that is officially ranked first among the Army's recruiting tools.[54]

INDUSTRY SUBVENTION TODAY

In the twenty-first century, changes in the media and associated knowledge technologies have been likened to a new Industrial Revolution or the Civil and Cold Wars. The First World has recognized that its economic future lies in finance capital and ideology rather than agriculture and manufacturing, whereas the Third World has sought revenue from intellectual property rather than minerals and masses. Media and culture are increasingly touted in all societies as a route to economic development as much as cultural and political expression. Between 1980 and 1998, annual world exchange of electronic culture grew from U.S.$95 billion to U.S.$388 billion. In 2003, these areas accounted for 2.3 percent of gross domestic product across Europe, to the tune of €654 billion—more than real estate or food and drink, and equal to chemicals, plastics, and rubber. The Intellectual Property Association estimates that copyright and patents are worth U.S.$360 billion a year in the U.S., putting them ahead of aerospace, automobiles, and agriculture in monetary value. And the cultural/copyright sector employs 12 percent of the workforce, up from 5 percent a century ago. PricewaterhouseCoopers predicts 10 percent annual growth in the area globally.[55]

U.S. economic production in particular has been adjusting away from a farming and manufacturing base to a cultural one, especially in foreign trade. It now sells feelings, ideas, and money, health, insurance, and laws—niche forms of identity, aka culture. The trend is to harness the cultural skills of the population to replace lost agricultural and manufacturing employment with jobs in music, theater, animation, recording, radio, TV, architecture, software, design, toys, books, heritage, tourism, advertising, fashion, crafts, photography, and cinema.[56] The U.S. National Governors' Association argues that "innovative commercial businesses, non-profit institutions and independent artists all have become necessary ingredients in a successful region's 'habitat.'"[57] Right across the U.S., municipal, regional, and state funding agencies are dropping old funding and administrative categories of arts and crafts and replacing them with the discourse of the creative industries. The Association's 2009 report on the culture industries avows that:

> Film, television, and related media arts productions attract high-paying jobs and related businesses, but many of those jobs are being lost to other states or nations. In an effort to attract these opportunities to their own states, governors have enacted targeted film development strategies, including financial and tax incentives, film workforce development programs, and a wide range of business recruitment and promotional programs . . . Michigan, for example, has enacted a comprehensive

> incentive program designed to entice film projects to locate in the state. In April 2008, Governor Jennifer Granholm increased Michigan's film production tax credit from 20 percent to 42 percent and signed into law numerous incentives to stimulate statewide film activity, including infrastructure development tax credits, film and digital media investment loans, and a film and digital media worker job training tax credit . . . Another example of a state that targets the film industry is New York, which offers programs ranging from film production tax credits to a comprehensive database of production locations.[58]

If it's German money from the 1990s or the early twenty-first century funding a film, the chances are that it came from tax breaks available to lawyers, doctors, and dentists. If it's French money, it might have come from firms with state subvention in other areas of investment, such as cable or plumbing, that subsidize putting money into U.S. studios. If a TV show is shot in Canada, public welfare to attract U.S. producers is a given. Domestically, state, regional, and municipal commissions offer producers reduced local taxes, free provision of police services, and the blocking of putatively public way-fares. Accommodation and sales-tax rebates are available to Hollywood producers almost universally across the country, and such services even extend in some cases to constructing studio sites, as in North Carolina. The California Film Commission reimburses public personnel costs and permit and equipment fees, whereas the state government's "Film California First Program" covered everything from free services through to wage tax credits. If a movie or TV show is made in any particular state of the U.S., the credits generally thank regional and municipal film commissions for subsidies of everything from hotels to hamburgers.

As of mid-2009, forty-three U.S. states offered incentives to attract filmmakers. The relevant programs refund in-state production costs, including star salaries and offering rebates on state taxes that producers can sell to residents.[59] So *Gran Torino* (Clint Eastwood, 2008) was conceived as a story about the Hmong in Minnesota, where they are an organically distinctive group of residents. Its narrative setting was shifted to Michigan—where few Hmong reside—to take advantage of a subsidy amounting to just under half the picture's cost.[60]

There are negative reactions against these subsidies, deriving both from objections to support for film but not manufacturing, and to industry stimulation in general. Coin-operated pro–market think tanks are specialists in opposing such subvention. For example, the Heartland Institute disparages them as welfare for "some of America's most-affluent businessmen at the expense of taxpayers."[61] The Tax Foundation rails at "corporate welfare" that guarantees investors 15 to 20 percent returns on their investments and stimulate competition between states to provide more and more subsidies that are lapped up then forgotten by Hollywood once alternatives beckon, leaving minimal if any ongoing benefit.[62] Complaints are made that claims

for economic development do not stand up because film and TV are not as sizable as automobile manufacturing, and the preponderance of revenue from them lands in Californian pockets anyway.[63]

Such criticisms come from an elite of hundreds of coin-operated think tanks across the country that are funded by wealthy U.S. foundations and families. These organizations ideologize extravagantly on everything from sexuality to foreign policy. Ghostwriters make resident intellectuals' prose attractive as part of a project that is concerned more with marketing opinion than conducting research—for each "study" they fund is essentially the alibi for an op-ed piece. But they are actually onto something here. More measured studies, such as that of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston,[64] support their skepticism about the benefits versus the costs of tax breaks for movies as opposed to other forms of longer-lasting job creation that do not have adverse effects on tax receipts, and the risk that filmmakers who would have come to particular locations anyway suddenly enjoy landfalls at ordinary citizens' expense. Such issues duel in the bourgeois media with arguments about the glamour, tourism, and jobs that supposedly go with films as positive externalities.[65] At the same time, public programs have sometimes generated ongoing investment in new infrastructure—sound stages and skilled workers, for example—that provide ongoing attractions beyond temporary direct subvention,[66] and are claimed as part of encouraging "a 'clean' or 'environmentally friendly' industry."[67] As the debate continues, industry magazines offer guides on where to get the best government deals.[68]

Finally, it is worth seeing how closely the fiscal fortunes of Hollywood are linked to the complexion of the federal government. After the 2000 election, Wall Street transferred money away from the media and towards manufacturing and defense as punishments and rewards for these industries' respective attitudes during the election and subsequent coup. Energy, tobacco, and military companies, 80 percent of whose campaign contributions had gone to George Bush Minor in the 2000 elections, suddenly received unparalleled transfers of confidence. Money fled the cultural sector, where 66 percent of campaign contributions had gone to Al Gore Minor. There was a dramatic shift towards aligning finance capital with the new administration—a victory for oil, cigarettes, and guns over film, music, and wires. The former saw their market value rise by an average of 80 percent in a year, whereas the latter's declined by between 12 and 80 percent.[69] The sector is enormously dependent on its relationship to government.

CONCLUSION

We are now in a position to revisit the neoliberal fantasy grid from the beginning of this chapter. Its dubious claims have been exposed in the evidence we have uncovered. It's time to reconfigure the model and add to the store of knowledge we have about neoliberalism's malign fables.

NEOLIBERAL HOLLYWOOD
Massive state investment in training via film schools and production commissions, major diplomatic negotiations over distribution and exhibition arrangements, and Pentagon budgets
Governmental censorship
Copyright protection as a key service to capital along with anti-piracy deals
Monopoly restrictions minimized to permit cross-ownership and unprecedented concentration domestically and oligopolies internationally
Export orientation aided by plenipotentiaries
Market model but mixed-economy practice
Ideology of pleasure, nation, and export of Américanité
Governmental anxiety over the impact of film sex and violence on the population, as alibi for no cultural-policy discourse

Figure 1.4 Neoliberal Hollywood.

NOTES

1. "Uncle Sam Wants You!," 2008.
2. Foucault, 2008, p. 132.
3. Shapiro, 2007, p. 293.
4. Foucault, 2008, p. 217.
5. Ibid., pp. 218, 147, 145.
6. Ibid., p. 247.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., p. 67.
9. Ibid., p. 253.
10. Ibid., p. 226.
11. Ibid., p. 76.
12. Ibid., p. 216.
13. Hemphill, 2004, pp. 343–344.
14. Nye, 2002.
15. Der Derian, 2005, p. 30.
16. Miller and Yúdice, 2002.
17. Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy, 2005.
18. Council on Foreign Relations, 2003, p. 15; Gilboa, 1998; Brown, 2004.
19. Government Accountability Office, 2007.
20. Der Derian, 2005, p. 26.
21. Puri, 2004.
22. Miller et al., 2005.
23. "The Money Shot," 2009.
24. Hearon, 1938.
25. Shapiro, 2004.
26. Turse, 2008, p. 104; Andersen, 2006, p. 7.
27. Walsh, 1997, p. 10; Hays, 1927, p. 50.
28. Kent, 1927, p. 208.
29. Walsh, 1997, p. 10.
30. Quoted in Bjork, 2000, and Grantham, 2000, p. 53.

31. Hays, 1927, pp. 37–38.
32. Hays, 1927, p. 6, quoted in Miller et al., 2005.
33. Hays, 1927.
34. Stonor Saunders, 1999, pp. 311–312.
35. Powdermaker, 1950, p. 71; Kahn, 1981, p. 145.
36. Trumpbour, 2002, pp. 63, 3–4, 62, 98; Pauwels and Loisen, 2003, p. 293.
37. High, 2003, pp. 503–504.
38. Powdermaker, 1950, p. 36.
39. Batchelor and Halas, 1954.
40. Anderson, 1956; Cohen, 2003.
41. Johnston, 1950, pp. 9–12.
42. Quoted in Johnston, 1950; also see Hozic, 2001, p. 77.
43. Lazarsfeld, 1950, p. xi; Legislative Research Service, 1964, pp. 9, 19.
44. Ulrich and Simmers, 2001, p. 365.
45. Robb, 2004.
46. Directors Guild of America, 2000; Hozic, 2001, pp. 140–141, 148–151.
47. Douthat, 2008.
48. Bernstein, 2001; also see Cohen, 2001.
49. Behnke, 2006.
50. Lenoir, 2003, p. 190; Macedonia, 2002.
51. Macedonia, 2002.
52. Deck, 2004; Silver and Marwick, 2006, p. 50; Turse, 2008, p. 120.
53. Burston, 2003; Stockwell and Muir, 2003; Andersen, 2007; Turse, 2008, pp. 122, 119; Harmon, 2003.
54. "AA:SF Tops 9 Million User Mark!," 2008; Power, 2007, pp. 279–280; Turse, 2008, pp. 117, 118, 123–124, 157; Lenoir, 2003, p. 175; Gaudiosi, 2005; Nieborg, 2004; Craig, 2006; Shachtman, 2002; Thompson, 2004.
55. Miller, 2009.
56. Harvey, 1990; Miller, 2009.
57. Quoted in Miller, 2009., p. 196.
58. NGA Center for Best Practices, 2009, p. 14.
59. "The Money Shot," 2009.
60. Sternberg, 2009; Schein, 2008.
61. Northdurft, 2008.
62. Henchman, 2008.
63. McHugh and Hohman, 2008.
64. Rollins Saas, 2006.
65. Sullivan, 2007.
66. "The Money Shot," 2009.
67. Rollins Saas, 2006, p. 3; but see Maxwell and Miller, 2008a and 2008b.
68. "Uncle Sam," 2008.
69. Schwartz and Hozic, 2001.

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2 A Legacy of Neoliberalism

Patterns in Media Conglomeration

Eileen R. Meehan

Neoliberal institutions and ideologues have spent the last twenty-eight years restructuring local, provincial, national, regional, and global economies. Among developed nations, the process focused on dismantling legal and regulatory systems that developed from national policies rooted in Keynesian economics and the worldwide depression of the 1930s. Such policies recognized that governments and publics shared an interest in economic stability. In contrast, neoliberals championed a belief in autonomous, free markets. In this vision, the structure of free markets gave them an infallible ability to decide what was best. Within such markets, firms would always be innovative, prudent, honest, and focused on serving customers. Infallible markets, filled with corporate models of probity, needed no governmental oversight. For neoliberals, that justified deregulating Keynesian markets and privatizating government functions. From 1980 until 2008, neoliberal beliefs circulated as commonsense across corporate media regardless of an outlet's branding as liberal or conservative. Achieving status as commonsense, neoliberalism became the dominant ideology in most developed nations.

In 2008, failures in national and international markets for finance capital, speculation, and real estate helped trigger a global recession. In response, governments decreased their neoliberal interventions and began intervening instead to prop up failing companies and markets. In the United States, this was by no means a return to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal with its Keynesian interventions to get unemployed people into jobs and stall banks' foreclosures on homes and farms. Instead, President George W. Bush focused administrative efforts on bailing out financial companies, usually identified in the press as Wall Street brokerages and banks so big that they could not fail. This was part of the Bush administration's legacy for incoming president Barack Obama and, in retrospect, Bush's bailouts seem a logical extension of neoliberalism's preference for transferring public funds to private corporations. That said, when Obama took office, the United States was fighting two wars and facing crises in employment, health care, national infrastructure, transportation, real estate, and finance. With neoliberalism's failure to deliver infallible markets and honest corporations, one might think that Keynesianism would return to center

stage, bringing with it employment initiatives, overhauls of industries in crisis, and reassessments of neoliberalism's impact on economic sectors including the entertainment-information sector. As of this writing in the middle of 2010, Keynesian intervention had not happened.

This chapter examines structural issues that militate against a Keynesian reorganization of the entertainment-information sector in the U.S. economy. I focus specifically on the film, network television, and cable television industries. Although not in crisis, these industries have felt the impact of neoliberalism in terms of deregulation and the gutting of antitrust law. In order to clarify the extent of neoliberal reorganization, I turn next to a brief reprise of the movie and television industries from 1950 to 1979. Then, I sketch the neoliberal policies that erased separations in ownership across film, television networks, and cable television. Building on this foundation, I examine the form of media organization that became dominant under neoliberalism: the trans-industrial media conglomerate as exemplified by News Corporation, Time Warner, and the Walt Disney Company. I next consider National Amusements as a variation of the trans-industrial form and subsequently examine General Electric's (GE) NBC Universal (NBC-U). I conclude with a reflection on this legacy of neoliberalism and speculation on the possibility of change.

FILM, NETWORK TELEVISION, AND CABLE TELEVISION AS SEPARATE INDUSTRIES

From 1934 to 1979, law and regulation combined to keep film studios from owning broadcast networks, first in radio and then in network television.[1] From 1950 to 1979, law and regulation kept networks from owning cable channels and systems. These policies were largely justified by rhetorics of competition. This brief overview considers policies that kept the film, network television, and cable television industries separate.

Beginning in the 1920s, the Hollywood film industry was vertically integrated such that the major firms (studios) owned production facilities, distribution operations, and chains of theaters. The majors were Fox Film Corporation, Loews (which owned M-G-M), Paramount Pictures, RKO Radio Pictures, and Warner Bros.[2] In 1938, with Keynesian economic theory in favor, this integration came under legal scrutiny in *United States v. Paramount et al.* The final decrees in that case, issued in 1948, forced the major studios to divest themselves of their theater chains but still allowed studios to control production and distribution of films. Their continued control over the market for theatrically released films allowed the major studios to act as gatekeepers: the majors decided whether a film from a minor studio, independent producer, or foreign producer would be distributed across the United States in mainstream theaters. Later, the major studios' control over film distribution ensured that television networks would

not distribute their own films by reediting serialized dramas into movies for theatrical release.[3] The major studios' lock on the market for distribution remained in place until neoliberal policies erased this separation between film and television.

As Michelle Hilmes (1990)[4] demonstrated, the major studios had a profound interest in the emerging radio and television industries, which was blocked first by the Federal Radio Commission (FRC, established 1927) and then by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC, 1934). From 1938 to 1960, the FCC protected the market for ownership of television stations and networks in two ways. First, the FCC denied experimental licenses for television stations to major studios. This was important given legal precedents in the early days of radio: organizations that held experimental licenses retained their right to a broadcast frequency when commercial operations replaced experimentation. RCA and CBS could expect that experimental licenses for television stations in New York City or Los Angeles would automatically become commercial licenses in two of the most lucrative advertising markets. Second, from 1950 to 1969, the FCC discouraged experimentation in any form of television not based on radio, including ways to deliver films directly to television sets without network participation. This thwarted efforts by Paramount Picture's Telemeter, Skiatron Corporation's Subscriber-Vision, and Zenith's Phonevision to generate a form of television that functioned as a home theater. In this way, the FCC supported RCA, which owned two radio networks and started developing a television technology in the late 1920s, and CBS, which owned one radio network and began developing its version of television in the late 1940s.

Like vertical integration in film, RCA's duopoly came under legal scrutiny in 1938 when the FCC was chaired by James L. Fly, a supporter of Roosevelt's New Deal and civil libertarian.[5] Ordered to sell one network, RCA assembled its weaker properties into a new network, selling it to Alfred Noble in 1944. Dubbed ABC, the new network did relatively well in radio but had no preparation for television, which RCA and CBS were ready to launch. Committed to that launch, the FCC allowed RCA and CBS to broadcast radio programs simultaneously on radio and television. The policy was designed to allay the fears of advertisers reluctant to abandon radio for the more expensive medium of television. It also protected the investments of independent producers and network production units in successful radio programs while eliminating the need to create programs designed specifically for the new technology of television.

From 1960 to 1967, the FCC grappled with a second form of television: cable.[6] The cable television industry was comprised of individual companies owning multiple cable systems in highly populated areas.[7] These multiple system operators (MSOs) offered subscribing households a menu of television stations from distant markets and cable channels unconstrained by FCC rules on decency or network censorship. Sports and uncut movies were cable's main attractions. Networks argued that those systems would

siphon off their wealthier viewers, eventually forcing highly popular programming (like World Series baseball) to migrate from 'free TV' to 'pay TV.' The National Association of Broadcasters argued that local stations could be injured by the importation of stations carrying the same programs. The FCC passed regulations to protect local television stations, which directly protected the networks' owned-and-operated stations (O&Os) and indirectly protected the networks themselves. These regulations included requiring cable systems to carry local broadcast stations and to 'black out' imported stations that duplicated the programming on a local station.

Whereas FCC policies regarding cable became more supportive of that industry between 1960 and 1979,[8] the FCC still pursued regulatory regimes separating cable television and broadcast television. This was justified by competition: cable television and network television competed for viewers, which meant that viewers had more choices and were thus well served by having two television industries. During the period, however, neither form of television was universally available nor was cable universally affordable.

In all of this, the crucial word was *competition*. Allegedly, Hollywood studios, television networks, and cable MSOs all competed to attract viewers. That competition meant all three industries generated entertainment that appealed to every possible segment of the population. Ultimately, all of this competition was supposed to give audiences a vast menu of highly diverse media products. The mantra of competition and choice was repeated in news coverage, public relations campaigns, advertisements, entertainment programming, and trade publications. It was chanted by film studios, networks, cable MSOs, trade associations, and allied industries during hearings held by congressional panels, regulatory agencies, Supreme Court justices, and other governmental entities. This apparent competition provided an empirical basis for separating the film industry from the network television industry from the cable television industry.

SEPARATE INDUSTRIES AND SHARED MARKETS

In practice, however, matters were not so simple. Antitrust actions, legislation, and regulation allowed studios, networks, cable channels, and MSOs to intermingle in markets for television programming. Film studios could make television series or made-for-TV movies. Studios could sign co-production agreements with independent television producers. Networks and cable channels could license movies, television series, or made-for-TV films from studios. This disadvantaged independent television producers because they did not have the glamour, resources, expertise, track record, libraries, and clout of the studios.

Indeed, the studios had enough clout to create a hierarchy in which the emerging market for television programs in the 1950s was distinctly inferior to the market for films.[9] Whereas Hollywood studios made films with

big budgets and big stars for the big screen, the same studios made television series with small budgets, casting B-actors or unknowns, and recycling plots, props, sets, and stock footage. By renting sound stages and equipment to independent producers, the studios kept the independents' production values low as well. Film's superiority over television was reflected in the metonymic contrast of Hollywood and Burbank.

Trustbusters and regulators did tinker with the markets for television production and programming, trying to increase the number of producers and make markets more competitive.[10] In the 1960s, the Justice Department investigated networks' ownership of production units as a potential restraint on competition. Similarly, the FCC investigated the possibility that networks renewed series in which they had a financial interest in order to profit from licensing reruns.[11] In 1971, both investigations found these practices unacceptable. The Anti-Trust Division ordered networks to sell production units and the FCC issued rules banning networks' financial interest in programs and syndication. These and other actions reorganized the markets for television programming and production units such that the networks became gatekeepers. The networks decided which companies entered the market to pitch ideas, receive commissions, and produce series.[12] The resulting market was an oligopoly whose buyers—ABC, CBS, and NBC—handpicked the sellers. In that stable oligopoly, the three networks routinely included film studios as major players. Networks often required independent producers to coproduce projects with studios. Without such connections, aspiring producers had a difficult time getting into the market.

The emergence of the cable television industry created new buyers for programming and movies. However, major advertisers were wary of the new industry, which meant relatively low ad revenues for cable channels. As a result, most cable channels in the 1960s through the 1970s ran some mixture of old movies, old television series, imported programs, and inexpensive made-for-cable dramas, talk shows, game shows, etc.[13] The bright spots were sports programming and uncut movies, but censored versions of the latter ran on broadcast television before moving to cable. As a result, the market for cable programming was inferior to the market for broadcast television programming, with the film market superior to both. Still, in the cable market, studios licensed packages of films and television series to cable channels whereas independent television producers had another set of customers for old television series. Until 1971, even the networks could make money licensing programming to cable channels.

DEREGULATION AND INDUSTRIAL INTEGRATION

All of this began changing in 1980 as the Reagan administration took office, promising to eliminate onerous regulations and unleash the free market.[14]

Whereas FCC chairman Charles Ferris (1977–1981) had favored replacing regulation with competition by licensing more radio stations, President Reagan's choice for chairman, Mark Fowler (1981–1987), favored repealing FCC regulations on radio, television, and cable. Fowler eliminated regulations that mandated people's right to reply to ad hominem attacks, limited the amount of time sold to advertisers, required minimal amounts of nonentertainment programming, set technical standards, placed caps on the number of stations owned by a company, etc. Each subsequent FCC chairman pushed for further deregulation. In 1992, Congress began work on a bill to codify and further extend the deregulation of broadcasting, cable, and telephony. The Telecommunications Act of 1996, signed by President William Clinton, abolished all legal barriers that once separated those industries.[15]

In some sense, the Telecommunications Act simply recognized the fait accompli that started with the Reagan administration relaxation of antitrust restrictions and deregulation. In the entertainment-information sector, the Anti-Trust Division of the Department of Justice voided the *Paramount* decision in order to approve mergers and acquisitions fostering vertical or horizontal integration in each media industry.[16] The FCC rewrote regulations to encourage increasing vertical and horizontal integration. When companies broke regulations that discouraged such integration, the FCC rewrote them after the fact.[17] As a result, transindustrial conglomeration became dominant in the 1980s and remained the dominant form in 2009.

THE DOMINANT MODEL: THE TRANS-INDUSTRIAL MEDIA CONGLOMERATE

These conglomerates usually organized their holdings in two ways. First, in each media industry, the conglomerates were vertically integrated. In network television, full vertical integration required ownership of a production company, distribution company, O&O station, and network. Conglomerates arranged their holdings so that they had vertical stacks in every medium of interest: film, broadcast television, cable television, recorded music, newspapers, etc. Within each level of these vertical stacks, conglomerates often acquired multiple units performing the same function, thereby becoming horizontally integrated in that function. In network television, full horizontal integration meant owning multiple production companies, distribution companies, O&Os, and networks. As neoliberals erased the rules that once separated media industries, and that limited or discouraged complete vertical and horizontal integration within each industry, companies enthusiastically began merging, acquiring, and integrating media operations. Under deregulation, a single company could operate in as many media industries as it liked. Within each industry, the firm could vertically and horizontally integrate its holdings. Companies once centered in a

particular media industry restructured themselves as conglomerates whose holdings spanned multiple media industries—as trans-industrial media conglomerates within the entertainment-information sector of the economy.[18]

Perhaps the best-known trans-industrial media conglomerates were the Walt Disney Company, News Corporation, and Time Warner. Although each firm presented a slightly different pattern of holdings in the entertainment-information sector, all three owned vertically and horizontally integrated operations in film, network television, and cable television. All three were major players in the U.S. and global markets for movies and television. I will quickly sketch their holdings in film, network television, and cable television beginning with News Corporation, currently the largest media conglomerate and owned by Rupert Murdoch.[19] News Corporation had operations in the United States, South America, Europe, Asia, Australia, and New Zealand. We will focus only on the U.S. operations, beginning with film.

In the United States, News Corporation owned the Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, Fox 2000 Pictures, Fox Searchlight Pictures, and Blue Sky Studios (animation). Film distribution was generally through Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation. News Corporation did not own movie theaters. The company synergized its films, using Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment to repackage them as videos and DVDs, Fox Music to deal with soundtracks, and Twentieth Century Fox Licensing and Merchandising to promote them and earn secondary revenues. In film, then, News Corporation was vertically integrated in production and distribution, horizontally integrated in its ownership of four studios, and synergized through connections to other operations.

In television, News Corporation was vertically and horizontally integrated. The company owned three operations producing and distributing television programming: Twentieth Century Fox Television, Fox Television Studios, and Twentieth Television. Besides licensing some of its programming and films to other networks or cable channels, News Corporation ran its television programming on its Fox network and MyNetwork, which had both O&Os and affiliated stations. The Fox network owned seventeen O&Os; MyNetwork owned ten. Deregulation not only allowed News Corporation to own twenty-seven stations and two networks, but also to own two stations in each of nine markets: New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Dallas, Houston, Orlando, Phoenix, Minneapolis, and Washington, DC. These so-called duopolies were affiliated with either the Fox network or MyNetwork. Thus, News Corporation achieved complete vertical integration in broadcast television in its ownership of television production, distribution, O&Os, and networks. News Corporation achieved horizontal integration in its ownership of multiple O&Os and networks. These achievements were intensified, first, by News Corporation's duopolies—eighteen stations in nine markets—and then by each duopoly being split between the Fox network and MyNetwork.

For cable operations, News Corporation used its production and distribution arms to repackage films, recirculate broadcast programming, and generate cable programming. The company was horizontally integrated in the ownership of cable channels: Fox Business Network, Fox College Sports channel, Fox Movie Channel, Fox News Channel, Fox Reality Channel (which reran the company's reality television series), Fox Regional Sports Networks, Fox Soccer Channel, FSN (for Fox Sports Network), FX channel (reruns and original series), SPEED (auto racing), and FUEL TV (extreme sports). News Corporation participated in one joint venture in the U.S., owning 67 percent of the National Geographic Channel.

By integrating its production and distribution operations in film and network television with its cable channels, News Corporation achieved vertical and horizontal integration as well as synergy. Supporting these operations and building more synergy were News Corporation's Fox Music, Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment, and Twentieth Century Fox Licensing and Merchandising.

The general pattern of vertical and horizontal integration across News Corporation's holdings in film, network television, and cable television was repeated in the organization of both the Walt Disney Company and Time Warner, although with variations.[20] Like News Corporation, Disney and Time Warner had operations in film production and distribution. Disney and Time Warner made films under different studio brands, among them Disney's Miramax and Hollywood Pictures as well as Time Warner's Fine Line and Warner Bros. Pictures. However, the firms also manifested some interesting differences. In film, only Time Warner had achieved full vertical integration through Warner Bros. International Cinema, which owned or had interests in ninety multiplex theaters in Italy, Japan, and the United States.

In network television, Disney and Time Warner produced programming, using various brand names. Time Warner was a prolific producer of television series, many airing on networks owned by other companies. Both companies had distribution arms: Disney's Buena Vista Television and Time Warner's Warner Bros. Television. Each firm achieved vertical integration in television production and distribution as well as horizontal integration in production. However, their profiles in terms of stations and networks differed. Disney owned one major network (ABC) and ten O&Os. Time Warner and National Amusement's CBS co-owned a minor network, CW. Time Warner had no O&Os. Thus, Disney was fully vertically integrated in production, distribution, and networking as well as horizontally integrated in production and O&Os. In contrast, Time Warner's co-ownership of a minor network weakened its vertical integration and the firm achieved horizontal integration only in television production.

The particular ways in which Disney, Time Warner, and News Corporation achieved vertical and horizontal integration in network television varied but the overall pattern of such integration remained across the three firms.

A consideration of Disney's and Time Warner's cable holdings may suggest some reasons for their differences in ownership of stations and networks. Both Disney and Time Warner owned multiple cable channels but the ownership patterns differed. Time Warner owned the premier pay channels HBO and Cinemax; Disney had none. Time Warner's basic cable channels included six acquired from Ted Turner (Cartoon Network, TBS, TNT, Turner Classic Movies, and the news channels CNN and HLN) as well as truTV (previously the co-owned Court TV) and Boomerang (old cartoons). In contrast, Disney's basic channels included both wholly owned operations (like the Disney Channel, Toon Disney, ABC Family, and SOAPnet) as well as joint ventures (A&E, Biography, the ESPN channels, Lifetime, Lifetime Movie Network, and History).[21] Where Disney never ventured into MSO ownership, Time Warner had long owned the second largest cable system, which was spun off as Time Warner Cable in 2009. Although legally separate, Time Warner Cable's name suggested that the MSO was still committed to carrying Time Warner channels. In cable television, then, the overall pattern observed in News Corporation of horizontal integration through ownership of multiple channels and multiple production units as well as vertical integration through ownership of production, distribution, and channels recurred. Again, all three firms had divisions that supported corporate synergy ranging from Disney's book publishing to Time Warner's comic books, but always with a division dedicated to music, home entertainment, and licensing and merchandising.

These brief sketches of News Corporation, Time Warner, and the Walt Disney Company show a repeated tendency for each firm to vertically integrate production and distribution in film and television programming. Each company owned multiple production units making films or television programs, thereby horizontally integrating its holdings in production. In broadcast television, News Corporation and Disney capped off, so to speak, their vertical integration through the ownership of stations and networks, although each firm took a different approach. Time Warner provided an interesting contrast. Its ownership of movie theaters made it fully vertically integrated in film. In cable, Time Warner's apparent connections to Time Warner Cable suggested a continuing relationship that aped full vertical integration in cable. Lacking O&Os and a major network, Time Warner seemed weaker than Disney or News Corporation in television. Regardless of the individual firm's strengths or weaknesses, however, the pattern of vertical and horizontal integration across media industries held for all three companies.

Two major players remained in film, network television, and cable in the United States: GE, which owned NBC-U, and National Amusements, which owned Viacom and CBS. The ultimate owners of NBC-U, Viacom, and CBS were not typically linked to their holdings in newspaper coverage of these media operations. Because of the potential for National Amusements and GE to be overlooked, and because they both follow and depart

from the pattern of trans-industrial conglomeration, each company is profiled separately.

NATIONAL AMUSEMENTS, VIACOM, AND CBS: LINES OF CONTROL[22]

Like News Corporation, National Amusements was owned by a person, Sumner Redstone. But unlike News Corporation, National Amusements allowed none of its stock to be traded publicly. Thus, National Amusements filed no statements with the Securities Exchange Commission (SEC) reporting its primary business in film exhibition. However, in 1987, National Amusements acquired the majority of voting stock in Viacom, which continued to be publicly traded and to file financial reports with the SEC (e.g., 10k, 10q, 8k, etc). These occasionally provided information about Redstone or National Amusements. Redstone did not integrate Viacom (acquired 1978) or CBS (acquired 2000) into National Amusements, instead using National Amusements to exercise ultimate control over the acquisitions.

Redstone integrated CBS into Viacom, building a trans-industrial media conglomerate like News Corporation, Disney, and Time Warner. Then, in 2005, he split Viacom into the new Viacom and CBS, each publicly traded. In 2009, he sold much of his nonvoting stock in Viacom and CBS, as well as some theaters, in order to eliminate corporate debts.[23] As 10ks for the separated Viacom and CBS noted, Redstone personally controlled them through National Amusements and could make decisions that were not in their best interests.[24] These lines of control allowed National Amusements to coordinate its operations with those of Viacom and CBS thus replicating the structure of a single trans-industrial media conglomerate. To illustrate this, I will trace that structure starting with holdings in film.

Movie exhibition was National Amusement's main business as it owned "1,500 movie screens in the U.S., U.K., Latin America, and Russia."[25] These theaters, organized into chains, provided exhibition outlets for films made by Viacom's film production and distribution units. In 10k filings, Viacom described itself as financing, producing, and distributing "filmed entertainment"[26] through six operations: Paramount Pictures, Paramount Vantage (independent-style films), Paramount Classics, MTV Films, Nickelodeon Films, and Paramount Home Entertainment. Although Nickelodeon Films had company credits for such Nickelodeon television series as *SpongeBob SquarePants*, it was not clear if the rest of these units produced television programming. Whereas Viacom had ingested and then rid itself of the once-independent studio DreamWorks (live action operations, 2006–2008), Viacom retained distribution rights and ancillary rights for some co-productions made with DreamWorks. Viacom repackaged its own films through Paramount Home Entertainment, thereby integrating film production, distribution, and repackaging.

By adding National Amusements' theater chains to Viacom's film and home entertainment operations, National Amusements controlled sufficient properties in film production, distribution, exhibition, and repackaging to be fully vertically integrated. Horizontal integration was achieved through National Amusements' ownership of multiple theater chains and its control of Viacom's multiple operations in film production. Taken together, direct ownership and indirect control allowed National Amusements to act like a vertically and horizontally integrated film conglomerate. A similar outcome with respect to network and cable television was evident in National Amusements' control over and separation of Viacom and CBS.

Prior to the separation, Viacom was vertically and horizontally integrated in network and cable television. In the split, Viacom retained operations in film (as noted earlier), its film library, and most of its basic cable channels. CBS was given operations in television production, networks, O&Os, pay cable channels, and two basic channels as well as the television library. This way of splitting operations encouraged interdependence between Viacom and CBS. Viacom had films that CBS needed to circulate on its pay cable channels (Showtime, The Movie Channel, Flix, Showtime Pay Per View, etc.), CBS network, and co-owned CW network. CBS had television programs that Viacom could use on its basic channels including BET, Spike, Nick at Nite, TV Land, etc.

Other contractual relations encouraged synergy between Viacom and CBS. CBS rented production space from Viacom on the Paramount lot for CBS Television Services (previously Paramount Television). CBS's television series were repackaged onto DVDs by Viacom's Paramount Home Entertainment. CBS and Viacom advertised their operations and products on each other's operations and products. Viacom and CBS were also connected by the *Star Trek* franchises. In 2009, Viacom rebooted the *Star Trek* film franchise using characters from *Star Trek* (1966–1969) that were owned by CBS, which retained ownership of the five *Star Trek* television series.[27] Through National Amusements' control over both firms, National Amusements had the option of synergizing CBS's and Viacom's operations while maintaining CBS and Viacom as independent brand names.[28]

In terms of horizontal and vertical integration, the split left Viacom and CBS individually weaker.[29] Viacom retained horizontal integration in basic cable channels but lost horizontal and vertical integration in pay cable and network television to CBS. In basic cable, CBS got the CBS College Sports channel and 90 percent of the Smithsonian Channel, resulting in weak horizontal integration in basic cable and weak vertical integration in cable channels overall. CBS fared considerably better in network television: CBS Network, CBS Television Studios, CBS Television Distribution, and thirty O&Os as well as half of the CW network. Twenty-one O&Os affiliated with the CBS network, the remainder with CW.

Individually, then, National Amusements, Viacom, and CBS appeared relatively weak when compared to News Corporation, Disney, or Time

Warner. However, National Amusements' control over Viacom and CBS was strong enough to reshuffle the holdings of the old Viacom against its obvious self-interest and then to tie together two seemingly independent firms through relations of supply and demand, synergy, and contracts. In essence, National Amusements' control of Viacom and CBS could be exerted to ensure that their operations complimented, supported, and extended those of National Amusements. The result was a peculiar arrangement: two firms that appeared independent but were puppets of National Amusements. As long as National Amusements perceived that arrangement to serve its self-interest, the company would probably ensure that Viacom and CBS act like they were fully integrated into National Amusements. That gave National Amusements parity with News Corporation, Disney, and Time Warner.

NBC UNIVERSAL: MIRRORING THE GIANTS

Whereas NBC-U mirrored the organizational structure of News Corporation, Disney, and Time Warner, it differed from them and from National Amusements in that NBC-U was owned by two much larger conglomerates, GE (80 percent) and Vivendi, SA (20 percent). Here I trace NBC-U's structure as a trans-industrial media conglomerate and, in the subsequent section, contextualize NBC-U in terms of its majority owner.[30] I turn next to NBC-U's holdings in film, broadcast television, and cable television.

In broadcast television, NBC-U owned NBC Universal Television Studios, NBC Universal Television Distribution, NBC Entertainment (developed and scheduled series), NBC News, and NBC Sports, which had lucrative deals with the International Olympic Committee for games in 2008, 2010, and 2012. In networking, NBC-U owned both NBC and Telemundo, which targeted U.S. Spanish speakers. Of NBC-U's twenty-six O&Os, ten affiliated with NBC and sixteen with Telemundo. In five markets, NBC-U had duopolies à la News Corporation: NBC-U owned one NBC and one Telemundo station in New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, San Jose/San Francisco, and Dallas/Fort Worth. As a result, NBC-U vertically integrated television production, distribution, station ownership, and networks, and horizontally integrated networks and stations.

Prior to the Universal acquisition, NBC launched two cable channels: CNBC, specializing in consumer-oriented news, and MSNBC,[31] which was affiliated with NBC News. NBC also owned Mun2TV, which was connected to Telemundo. These moves suggested plans to synergize network operations and cable channels. With the Universal acquisition, the NBC gained channels like USA (men) and SciFi (science fiction). The new NBC-U bought and launched new channels as well. The result was an impressive lineup that included Bravo (arts),[32] Oxygen (women), Sleuth (mysteries), and UniHD showcasing Universal Studios movies and exploiting its film library. NBC also acquired Universal's operations in television production

and distribution. The acquisition increased NBC's horizontal integration in network and cable television. The Universal acquisition also put NBC in the movie business. Film production operations included Universal Pictures, Focus Features (independent-style), and Illumination Entertainment (family-oriented) with distribution done in-house. Universal Home Entertainment produced straight-to-DVD materials and repackaged both films and television series. Overall, NBC-U achieved varying degrees of vertical and horizontal integration in film, networking, and cable.

NBC-U exploited the synergistic possibilities inherent in its organizational structure. For example, sports coverage of the 2008 Beijing Olympics was spread across NBC, CNBC, MSNBC, Oxygen, Telemundo, UniHD, and USA. Universal Studios set the second installment in the Mummy franchise, *The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor* (Rob Cohen, 2008), in China. NBC-U cross-promoted *Dragon Emperor* and the Beijing Olympics in an extended advertisement intercutting clips from the movie with clips imagining the Beijing Olympics. The ad ran across NBC-U networks and channels as well as on its various Internet sites.

NBC-U's organizational structure closely resembled that of News Corporation, Disney, Time Warner, and National Amusements in the film, network television, and cable television industries. Each entity was vertically integrated in film production, distribution, and repackaging. National Amusements and Time Warner achieved full vertical integration through the ownership of movie theaters. Each entity was vertically integrated in broadcast television production, distribution, repackaging shows, and network operation. Only Time Warner lacked horizontal integration in O&Os; National Amusements, NBC-U, and News Corporation had so-called duopoly O&Os. In television networks, NBC-U, News Corporation, and National Amusements were horizontally integrated, with National Amusements and Time Warner co-owning a network. Only Time Warner had close ties to a major cable MSO, Time Warner Cable.

Each of these five entities was a trans-industrial conglomerate, transcending the old borders that separated film studios from television networks and network television from cable television. Each entity showed some degree of vertical and horizontal integration in film, network television, and cable. Each synergized operations in production, distribution, exhibition/access, repackaging, etc., for each medium. Of course, there were individual variations in the particular array of operations owned by News Corporation, Disney, Time Warner, National Amusements, or NBC-U. But those variations still fell into a pattern of vertical and horizontal integration within film, network television, and cable television. Further, each entity used its trans-industrial media holdings to build synergy across media industries.

Similarly, variations in ownership arrangements and type of ultimate owner had little impact on the form of conglomeration that each entity enacted. News Corporation, Disney, and Time Warner integrated their media operations under their respective names. National Amusements

preferred to control its media operations rather than assimilate them. NBC-U was owned by GE and Vivendi. Despite these variations, NBC-U, National Amusements, News Corporation, Disney, and Time Warner were all organized as trans-industrial media conglomerates.

As such, News Corporation, Disney, Time Warner, National Amusements, and NBC-U were clearly powerful companies that synergized their holdings across three important U.S. media industries. When we add in their global operations in those three industries as well as their other vertically and horizontally integrated operations—which variously included music, book publishing, magazines, newspapers, electronic games, websites, online services, theme parks, search engines, e-tail and retail outlets, radio, theatrical/live performances, consumer goods, satellites, mobile communications, sports, etc.—we realize that these five entities were truly giants in the entertainment-information sector of the global economy.

GENERAL ELECTRIC: DWARFING THE GIANTS

Whereas NBC-U was among those giants, its majority owner, GE, dwarfed them all. Besides its vertically and horizontally integrated holdings across the global media, GE ran extensive operations in research and development, which combined to form an invention factory. The company was a major force in world markets for energy infrastructure, technology infrastructure, consumer and industrial manufacturing and services, and capital and finance.[33] I will briefly describe each of GE's four nonmedia segments.

Under energy infrastructure, GE provided the equipment, services, and systems necessary to produce energy from oil, gas, coal, steam, wind, nuclear reactions, and the sun. Also included in energy infrastructure were technologies, products, and processes required to treat water so that it could be potable (including desalination), used in industrial applications (like mining), and reclaimed.

In its annual financial statement to the SEC (10k filing), GE described itself as "one of world's leading providers of essential technologies to developed, developing, and emerging countries."[34] The company identified transportation, "enterprise solutions," and health care as comprising its operations in technology infrastructure. Transportation dealt with specialized engines for land-based vehicles, products, systems, management services, and other services needed in railroads, transit systems, and in the oil and gas, mining, and marine industries. For purposes of brevity, I include GE's aviation operations in that category. Aviation operations focused on specialized engines, sensors, systems products, and services used in commercial and military aviation. Maintenance, repair, and rebuilding engines were themes in both aviation and transportation.

Under enterprise solutions, GE addressed issues in security and productivity including automation, computing, identification, nonintrusive testing,

monitoring, sensing, communication, and prevention of unauthorized intrusion, fire, or power failure. Just as aviation and transportation seemed to have some synergy so too did enterprise solutions and health care. The health-care operation involved nonintrusive medical imaging technologies, patient monitoring systems, information systems, research and manufacturing of drugs, filtration systems, cellular technologies, equipment maintenance and services, etc. Filtration systems seemed relevant to GE's expertise in water treatment.

GE's third segment focused on consumer and industrial manufacturing and services. This segment manufactured equipment and systems to manage electrical power as well as types of electrical lights and related equipment for business and residential applications. For consumers, GE marketed five brands of household appliances, some manufactured by GE and others outsourced. These products included refrigerators, gas stoves, and water filtration systems. GE's Monogram appliances were featured in NBC-U's reality series *Top Chef*.

GE's fourth segment focused on capital and financial services. In another bit of corporate synergy, financial services loaned money to companies or governmental entities buying or leasing equipment from GE's infrastructural operations. GE also participated in the global market for commercial real estate, making equity investments in real estate and loans for acquisitions and renovations. GE provided financial services to retailers including private label credit cards and loans. For individual consumers, GE offered bank cards, mortgages, car loans and leases, debt consolidation, personal loans, home equity loans, and savings instruments. Conceivably, an individual could buy a house using a GE mortgage, take out a GE home equity loan to remodel the kitchen, purchase GE appliances using a GE credit card, and, if misfortune struck, have GE consolidate the debt.

The sheer scale and integration of GE's operations dwarfed those of News Corporation, Disney, Time Warner, and National Amusements. But, like these media conglomerates, GE vertically integrated its segments in energy infrastructure, technology infrastructure, consumer and industrial manufacturing and services so that each offered equipment, systems, services, maintenance, and management. Unlike the media conglomerates that spanned industries, GE's operations spanned the energy, technology, manufacturing, and finance sectors of the economy. That made GE a trans-sectoral conglomerate in which a trans-industrial media conglomerate was embedded.

TOO BIG FOR REFORM?

As we look back at the five major entities that control U.S. network television and that were among the proverbial 'heavy hitters' in U.S. film and cable television, we must ask ourselves: are Disney, GE, National Amusements, News Corporation, and Time Warner too big for reform? Our main

precedent, the Keynesian reforms of 1938, which ultimately forced the studios to sell their theaters and RCA to sell one radio network, addressed companies that were considerably simpler than these five conglomerates. To address trans-industrial media conglomeration in Disney, NBC-U, National Amusements, News Corporation, and Time Warner, a modern Keynesian would need to disentangle vertically and horizontally integrated operations within individual media industries and across multiple industries. Addressing GE's trans-sectoral integration and concentration would be yet more complicated given GE's historic place in the center of the U.S. military-industrial complex.

However, recent developments regarding NBC-U are cause for both concern and hope. In November 2009, rumors circulated that GE would sell NBC-U to Comcast, the top ranked cable MSO in the U.S.[35] On December 3, GE and Comcast announced a joint venture merging Comcast's cable channels and internet properties[36] into NBC-U.[37] The resulting company, called NBC-U, would be owned 51 percent by Comcast and 49 percent by GE. The proposed joint venture would give Comcast full vertical integration in network television; partial vertical integration in film; horizontal integration in station ownership; and intensified horizontal integration in cable channel ownership. Comcast's cable systems were excluded from the deal but Comcast and GE shared a vested interest in giving the new NBC-U's cable channels privileged access to Comcast's cable systems. With that shared interest and Comcast's 51 percent of NBC-U, lines of control would connect NBC-U and Comcast's multiple cable systems in a manner reminiscent of National Amusement's ownership of movie theater chains and control over film production and distribution.

Whereas these developments are worrisome indeed, governmental responses suggest that the deal will not automatically be approved using neoliberal justifications. In the House of Representatives, Maurice Hinchey (D-New York) and Herb Kohl (D-Wisconsin) were among those criticizing the proposed joint venture. Kohl stated that "(a)ntitrust regulators must ensure that all content providers are treated fairly on the Comcast platform."[38] Whereas the sentiment was a welcome change from the neoliberal belief that companies should do as they wish, it did not address the larger issue: most of those content providers were owned by trans-industrial media conglomerates. Hinchey also attacked the proposal, mirroring Kohl's concern that Comcast's NBC-U would block content providers that it did not own.[39] Hinchey also raised the issue of trans-industrial media conglomeration:

> Today, just five companies own all of the country's broadcast networks, 90 percent of the top 50 cable networks, produce three-quarters of all prime time programming, and control 70 percent of the prime time television market share. These same companies . . . also own over 85 percent of the top 20 Internet news sites . . . Further consolidation

> would shortchange the wide array of ideas and content needed to keep the American people informed about their elected officials. This acquisition must be stopped.[40]

With Hinchey heading the congressional caucus on the Future of American Media, his words may signal a shift towards more critical thinking in some parts of Congress as Senator John Kerry (D-Massachusetts) and others have promised close scrutiny.[41] Speculation that the proposed merger would be delayed for a year due to potential investigations by Congress, the Federal Trade Commission, Anti-Trust Division of the Department of Justice, and FCC has been matched by speculation that GE and Comcast will make concessions in order to achieve their goals and that most of their goals will be met.[42]

NEOLIBERALISM'S LEGACY?

The trans-industrial media conglomerate may well be neoliberalism's legacy for the entertainment-information sector. This form of conglomeration has been achieved by companies like Disney, News Corporation, and Time Warner through the assimilation of other firms into themselves. National Amusements produces the same effects by combining owned operations with controlled operations. Comcast currently seeks to emulate that approach in contrast to GE, which embedded NBC-U within itself. Regardless of format, the achievement of trans-industrial conglomeration by these few ultimate owners creates an impression that the conglomerates are so big that nothing can be done to change them. That impression was reinforced by neoliberal ideology, which attributed these behemoths to the infallible wisdom of the market, and neoliberal policies that encouraged firms to vertically and horizontally integrate across media industries.

But, as reaction to the Comcast/GE joint proposal suggests, that impression may not be entirely accurate. The antimerger discourse is certainly a break from the Reagan-through-Bush past. Like the Obama administration thus far, this counter-merger discourse suggests that the liberals and progressives, who buoyed Obama's candidacy, may regain some measure of influence in public action, policy, and discourse. After nearly three decades of neoliberal dominance, neoliberals might find that surprising.

But surprising events have happened in the United States and in every corner of the globe. Following Gramsci, I conclude that research on neoliberalism and conglomeration provides reason for pessimism. Again, in Gramsci's footsteps, I also conclude that the remarkable events of Obama's election, the congressional efforts to legislate economic interventions, including health-care reform, and the questions rising regarding the GE-Comcast merger are reasons for optimism. Let us hope that pessimism will inform optimism in a manner that produces progressive action.

NOTES

1. Apparently, the federal government did not perceive the Radio Corporation of America's creation of RKO problematic. In 1928, RCA bought a very minor studio, the Film Booking Office of America, from Joseph P. Kennedy and also purchased the Keith-Albee-Orpheum theater chain. Thus, RCA owned a major studio, distribution operation, and theater chain, becoming fully integrated vertically in film. This gave RCA an outlet for its Photophone technology, which projected film with sound. RCA's system had been blocked by AT&T's Western Electric system, which was more widely adopted (Danielian 1939). By 1940, RCA had removed itself from RKO.
2. The minor studios were United Artists, Columbia Pictures, and Universal Pictures.
3. The Walt Disney Company was a very minor studio in the 1950s and one of the first to make television programs. Disney produced an anthology program for ABC's prime-time schedule (variously titled including *The Wonderful World of Disney*) and an after-school series, *The Mickey Mouse Club*. Both featured serialized dramas. Disney repackaged some of them and released them as films (e.g., *Davy Crockett*) through its distribution operation, Buena Vista. Although networks owned some of their serialized programming, reediting for theatrical release and subsequent theater release blocked as long as the studios controlled film distribution.
4. Hilmes, 1990.
5. Barnouw, 1990.
6. Mullens, 2008.
7. This form of cable television replaced Community Antenna Television (CATV) systems, which served remote areas where television signals were hard to get. CATV systems were mom-and-pop businesses that captured broadcast signals and delivered them by wire to a small number of households.
8. Mullens, 2008.
9. Meehan, 2008.
10. Cantor and Cantor, 1992.
11. The practice was called *syndication* and involved licensing a program to individual stations on a market-by-market basis. Until the FCC's rule was in place, networks and stations agreed that a series needed five years' worth of episodes to go into syndication.
12. Gitlin, 1983.
13. Meehan, 1984.
14. McChesney, 1999.
15. Blevins, 2007.
16. Meehan, 1991; Wasko, 1995.
17. National Amusement's purchase of CBS for Viacom led the FCC to change rules limiting companies to owning one network and capping the percentage of audience that a company's O&Os could reach at 35 percent. This allowed Viacom to own the CBS and UPN networks and to simply combine CBS's O&Os with Viacom's O&Os.
18. Bettig and Hall, 2003; Meehan, 2005; Kunz, 2007.
19. All information on News Corporation is taken from its 10k filing for 2008 (News Corporation 2009a) and its Annual Report 2009 (News Corporation 2009b).
20. Information on Disney was taken from its 10k filing for 2008 (Walt Disney Company 2009a) and *Disney Facts 2008* (Walt Disney Company 2009b).

Information on Time Warner originated in its 10k filing for 2008 (Time Warner 2009a) and its Annual Report 2008 (Time Warner 2009b).

21. ESPN channels were owned by Disney (80 percent) and Hearst Corporation (20 percent) as were the two Lifetime channels (50–50 percent). History and Biography were split between GE, Hearst, and Disney (37.5 percent each). A&E, Biography, History, Lifetime, and the Lifetime Movie Network were subsumed under A&E Television Networks in August 2009 (Walt Disney Company 2009).
22. Information regarding the three firms' structure and alliances was taken from National Amusements, 2009; CBS 2006, 2009; Viacom, 2006, 2009.
23. Meg and Eller, 2009.
24. CBS, 2006; Viacom, 2006.
25. National Amusements, 2009.
26. Viacom, 2009.
27. The film was *Star Trek* (2009), directed by J.J. Abrams. The five television series were *Star Trek* (1966–1969); *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987–1994); *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (1993–1999); *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995–2001); and *Star Trek: Enterprise* (2001–2005).
28. Kunz, 2009.
29. Flint, 2009.
30. All information on NBC-U was taken from GE's 10k filing and annual report (GE 2009 a, 2009b) as well as from NBC-U web pages on its film and television operations (respectively, NBC Universal 2009a, 2009b).
31. MSNBC was briefly co-owned with software giant Microsoft.
32. Bravo was repositioned as a reality series channel, with many series focused on strife at work: *The Restaurant* (chef versus backer), *Blow Out* (hair stylists), *Work Out* (personal trainers), and *Flipping Out* (housing speculators).
33. All percentages are rounded off and so will not add up to 100 percent.
34. GE, 2009, p. 5.
35. According to the National Cable and Telecommunications Association (2009), an industry trade organization, the top three MSOs were: Comcast (23,891,000 subscribers), Time Warner Cable (13,048,000), and Cox Communications (5,316,100).
36. These included, respectively, E!, Style, Golf, etc., and Fandango, iVillage, Daily Candy, etc.
37. Goldman and Pepitone, 2009; Comcast, 2009.
38. Goldman and Pepitone, 2009.
39. Hinchey, 2009
40. Ibid.
41. Tessler, 2009.
42. Cf. Bartash, 2009; Kang, 2009; Shields, 2009.

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3 Twenty-first Century Neoliberal Man

Deborah Tudor

NEOLIBERAL CULTURE; NEOLIBERAL GENDER

During the neoliberalization of the 1970s, "ruling elites moved, often fractiously, to support the opening up of the cultural field to all manner of diverse cosmopolitan currents. The narcissistic exploration of self, sexuality, and identity became the leitmotif of bourgeois urban culture. Artistic freedom . . . . led to the neoliberalization of culture."[1] Neoliberal culture expressed itself through a philosophy that rests upon transference of authority from "official" (government) sources to private experts in fields ranging from psychology (self-help) to fashion, weight loss, and career planning. This shift also occurs through media presenting "information, evaluation, and reproach" aimed at solidifying a culture in which the individual bears sole responsibility for his or her own personal and professional welfare.[2] In this process of shifting from individuals embedded in social class to untethered self-disciplined individuals, neoliberalism revoked but also reinvigorated white patriarchy—a feature that is also played out in several contemporary media texts.

Star Trek 2009, also called NuTrek, and *Dexter* exemplify the new representations of gender emerging from the fictionalized intersections of business, the military, science, and family relations. All include prominent supporting or colead roles for women, and generate a series of gender transformations that frequently make the female roles seem more significant than they are. Assuming that femininity and masculinity exist in a reciprocal relationship, I will analyze these texts to reveal the ways in which neoliberalism demands and accommodates shifts in gender definitions, masquerading them as progressive cultural positions. Neoliberal masculinity has appropriated certain formerly feminist positions to mask itself as a far more egalitarian relationship.

In gender terms, this operates on the basis of compromises made between masculinized power centers and feminist ideas. Neoliberal masculinity is premised upon accommodations and compromises between feminism, particularly the white bourgeois kind, and capitalism, a compromise that has fundamentally changed the nature of masculinity itself. Whereas many texts

offer a return to stability based in a largely white patriarchy—neoliberalism has, as many argue—normalized a white neoliberal masculinity that can quite easily coexist with certain pragmatic feminist ideas; for example, "opening the paid labor market to women"[3] without having to reorganize the patriarchal nature of the workplace. This along with the fact that child rearing and housework remained female-identified spheres of labor resulted in the unacknowledged labor of women in the home being joined to labor in the workplace for a 24/7 workday for women. Whereas women have gained partial acceptance in the public spheres of work, little about the nature and structure of the workplace itself has changed. In this way, the presence of female characters in workplace dramas signals an egalitarian workplace, whereas the narrative consigns these characters to primarily girlfriend roles. This limits their authority and power to the traditional one of female ascendancy through romantic control of a man.

Theorists discuss this merger as part of the phenomenon of postfeminism. Writers such as Susan Faludi, in her 1991 book *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women*, which addresses the ways that conservativism undermines feminism, and, notably, Angela McRobbie have dealt with the issues surrounding the marginalization of feminism. McRobbie argues that feminism now exists in a web of very public conservative family values pushed to the forefront during the George W. Bush administration, and a widening array of choices, a "liberalization in regard to choice and diversity in domestic, sexual, and kinship relations."[4] These are presented as very individualized choices. She also makes the point that feminism has transformed into a type of "Gramscian common sense," and at that level, can be easily revoked as something old, no longer needed.[5] I see this Gramscian transformation as a critical part of the way gender formulation works in a neoliberal cultural sphere.

This Gramscian transformation produces a gender model in which masculinity and femininity exist relationally through the morphing of feminist notions into already accepted common sense, and adapting this common sense into the notion of masculinity. Neoliberal men interact with women as if both were already liberated individuals, assuming that no attention need be given to power differentials in professional or personal relationships. This is based upon notions of the exceptional (although this is has greater weight in determining feminine representations) and the individual.

Star Trek (J.J. Abrams, 2009) provides a striking example of a restoration of white masculine power (something that has never really been absent from media) modified by this neo-Gramscian transformation of feminism. *Star Trek* reboots a franchise owned by Paramount Pictures and is carefully calculated to refer to its "canon" images and characters while offering enough generic action film cues to broaden the audience outside of the *Trek* fan community. The prequel focuses on events leading to the assignment of the original television series' *Enterprise* crew: Captain Kirk, Mr. Spock, Lt. Uhura, Mr. Sulu, Mr. Scott, and Mr. Chekhov. The narrative presents

these events as a fast-paced action-adventure film in which the crew fights a generic threat to the Federation, an interplanetary political organization including Earth. This economic requirement of producing a genre film with broad appeal gives the film a real stake in reviving masculinist power. To do this, the film returns to a point just at the franchise's origins, where a young James Kirk takes command of the *Enterprise*. This constitutes a return to the "Edenic past" of the franchise, and restores a feminist-inflected version of original representations of masculine power and control on-screen.

This is not a return to the reassuringly authoritative figures of Kirk and Spock; however, this representation cites those figures while making them considerably younger, less experienced, and superficially more egalitarian. This strategy resonates strongly with neoconservative values that flourish under neoliberalism economic regimes, and that complicate gender analysis.[6] The original series did not feature any women in Starfleet high command positions, although it did feature a onetime appearance by a Romulan female ship's captain. Later spinoffs and prequels featured women captains like Captain Kathryn Janeway of *Star Trek: Voyager* and Captain Erika Hernandez of the prequel series *Enterprise*. *Next Generation* featured two women doctors, Dr. Crusher and Dr. Pulaski, as well as security chief Tasha Yar and ship's counselor Deanna Troi. *Deep Space 9* featured Major Kira Nerys and science officer Jadzia Dax.

In the original series, the suppression of women in command was more overt than NuTrek. In "Turnabout Intruder" (1969) Kirk states that women are not allowed to captain a starship, making explicit the subordinate status of women, characterizing this as "unfair," which seems to point to a more egalitarian masculinity. Later in the episode, he states that Janice, the woman in question, has been driven mad by her hatred of her own femininity. In fact, she has been driven to anger by years of working in a sexist institution that fails to recognize her talent.[7]

In NuTrek, no women are seen in command of ships, and on one occasion, when Kirk and Spock leave the bridge, seventeen-year-old Ensign Chekhov is given command, despite the presence of several women lieutenants on the bridge, including Uhura at the communications station. This is an almost invisible moment of sexism, as Lt. Uhura's station is at the rear of the bridge concealed behind a computer screen. If we compare the series and the new film overall, there was considerably more complexity to the original *Star Trek*'s treatment of women. NuTrek operates more subtly on the issue of women in command, assuming that feminism has already been institutionalized, so there is no overt hostility toward women characters. Instead, they are moved to the margins of the frame and of the narrative, producing a neoliberal social narrative that relies on a neo-Gramscian shift of feminism into a "commonsense" position.

Another common narrative trope of the original series depicted a woman officer who is almost immediately ready to betray the ship and her comrades, if the villain of the week is charismatic enough. Episodes featuring

Khan ("Space Seed") and the God Apollo ("Who Mourns for Adonais") are two examples.[8] Other episodes featured no-nonsense women officers such as Lt. Rahda, a South Asian onetime helmsman, or African American Lt. Charlene Taylor, chief engineer during one episode. The 2009 film presents images of a masculinity that appropriates and negates feminism, rendering it irrelevant, thus relegating the few women to more traditional, conservative places in the narrative. This point is explored in the following.

THE PLACEMENT OF WOMEN

If my total analysis simply dwelt on resurgent white patriarchy, it would seem much like hegemonic masculinity recentering itself through the adoption of neoliberal values of individualism. The textual positioning of women provides another twist in the gender model. Women become present but largely invisible in terms of narrative impact, and this gives more visibility to male authority. One of the contradictions of neoliberalism occurs in the relationship between production and consumption. Whereas males are encouraged to buy grooming and fashion products, in order to be good consumers, production and control of commodities remains masculine. Men may embrace the previously derided feminized position of consumer, but women remain restricted in terms of assuming positions of authority, as in the "glass ceiling" phenomenon. I think it is precisely the economic demand on men to purchase personal products that creates a pushback effect on the production side. Men may purchase hair products, but the authority and control of a masculinist society prevents men from being overly "feminized."

In *Star Trek* Uhura is nearly the sole black face onscreen, and bears a double burden of representation, as female and black.[9] In the neoliberal gender scheme of merging masculinized power structures with feminist ideals, Uhura is depicted as the smartest, best linguist and communication expert in Starfleet Academy. She rejects Kirk's advances at their first meeting, and throws him out of her dorm room when she discovers him hiding under her roommate's bed. All of these character traits indicate a confident, accomplished, intelligent female officer, who is not undercut by pursuing male companionship at all costs.

It is instructive to compare Uhura to another postfeminist, fictional neoliberal career woman: Bridget Jones. She's a smart, sympathetic character, who sabotages her professional career in pursuit of a more central goal of marriage and children.[10] Uhura's apparent professionalism makes her seem altogether different from Bridget until we discover that she and Mr. Spock, her teacher at the academy, have been lovers and are continuing their relationship on board the *Enterprise*. The point here is not the fact that she has a lover, but the film's restriction of her role to that of love interest after a few opening scenes establishing her intellect. This is the issue: Uhura cannot simply be an accomplished bridge officer, but has to be represented as

a "woman" as well. This is typical of postfeminist gender relations and the compromise of neoliberalism with feminist ideals. Starfleet is depicted as an "equal opportunity meritocracy" in which women are judged equal to men. However, what characterizes this gender formation is its neo-Gramscian transparency, the assumption that feminism is no longer needed as a critique of power.[11] The transformation of feminism into an accepted part of institutional "common sense" works through the neoliberal emphasis on individualism. If equal advancement is now open to formerly marginalized groups of women, then feminist critique of institutions and cultural objects becomes unnecessary, and, to a degree, shameful and retrogressive. Individuals under neoliberalism are responsible for their own success or failure on the job, and in their personal lives as well.

The relationship between economically driven changes in the populace and the workforce under neoliberalism relate closely to the representation of women in the workplace. Because flexible capitalism both allowed and demanded gender shifts in the workforce,[12] this dynamic of allowing and demanding gender reconfiguration functions through the apparent incorporation of feminist values. However, this accommodation of neoliberalism to feminism is not total; women's positions are vulnerable in significant ways.

The costuming of Starfleet cadets and officers also raises a complex issue about neoliberal representation. Almost all women officers on the *Enterprise* wear the very short miniskirted uniform of the original series. A few women officers appear in slacks, but the tiny skirts dominate, matched with knee-high boots. To really tease out the implications of this garb we need to consider the shift of signification that has occurred between the original appearance of the miniskirt and its revival here.

In the 1960s, some interpreted the miniskirt as a signal of women's sexual liberation that could be read as a self-confident assertion of one's own comfort with their body. Nichelle Nichols, Uhura in the 1960s series, stated she regarded the miniskirt she wore as "liberating,"[13] as part of the women's liberation movement. In the ensuing decades, feminist media and cultural critical theory developed an analysis of clothing and the sexual liberation rhetoric related to patriarchal culture. Whereas I cannot recapitulate the entire argument here, it is crucial to note the emphasis this critique places upon the construction of women's images as a venue for masculine pleasure. This leads us to the twenty-first century, and a culture imbued with images of "Girls Gone Wild" flashing their breasts and using the rhetoric of empowerment to explain it. A concomitant phenomenon is the emergence of more sexually explicit female images in advertising, notably underwear ads. Sisley and Armani underwear ads feature women in scanty brassieres and pants, sitting on the side of a bed, legs spread, or with both hands placed between closed legs. McRobbie argues that these ads work through a presentation that invites an ironic response, a 'we get it and we're too cool to be bothered' reaction from women). She identifies a generational shift in the way women perceive media texts, citing the prevalence of an

ironic, gender-educated framework that demands silence in order to meet generational standards of "cool" and sophistication.[14]

The need to maintain an air of cultural sophistication therefore suppresses feminist critique. Few critical voices have discussed costuming in this film, and fans that have raised it on *Star Trek* bulletin boards receive apathetic or mildly hostile responses. Posters at one site raised issues with the ways the film marginalized her, including reducing her to Spock's girlfriend, having her role on the *Enterprise* be a very marginal one, and objectifying her with the miniskirt. One response to the original post demonstrated a lack of interest: "Is there really anything wrong with having Uhura standing around saying 'Hailing frequencies open' though? Y'know, any actual problems other than feeling sorry for the actress?" Further down the thread, this answer appeared: "Female characters in a franchise that is supposed to be about an egalitarian future should not be depicted as basically being high-tech secretaries. They should take as active of roles in the plot as male characters." Mild hostility toward the whole topic also emerged: "I'm so tired of people complaining about Uhura in this movie. She got at least as much to do in the movie as Sulu or Chekov."[15] Other bulletin boards devoted to the film had some variations of this discussion, but none so lengthy (that I found) as the one cited here.

The so-called "ironic" objectification of women constitutes another way that women under neoliberalism "bear" masculinity. By acceding to a distanced view of their own bodies, women actualize masculinity. There is value in owning a healthy view of your body, of being comfortable in your skin, but this position is complicated by the visual objectification of women occurring in web images and videos, film, underwear ads, reality shows, makeover shows, and other genres.

The larger concern for feminists is tracing and combating the emergence and diffusion of this so-called ironic objectification. The postfeminist discourse about the body, which owes so much to psychoanalysis, Foucault, and postmodern theorists, reduced the materiality of the objects of study to elements of discourse, a theoretical trope that Theresa Ebert addresses in her discussion of a shift in feminist theory that erases materiality enables or is concomitant with a shift from feminist critique of patriarchal power centers and structures to more individualized theory less centered on social issues and political classes.[16]

The sleight of hand that removes "society" from equations of power and refocuses on the individual becomes easier if cultural critics turn their gaze away from institutions and more toward individual fulfillment. It is now, in our culture, an individual's fault if she is not pretty, skinny, or smart enough to land a job she wants, or to get the man she wants. Instead, critiques must turn to the culture of individual self-improvement that operates across genders, sexual orientations, and age-groups, which demands individuals shoulder the responsibility for failure. Without eliminating agency, which differs from the totalizing neoliberal emphasis on individual responsibility—critiques

of the culture of beauty, or masculine power, of institutional bias enable a clearer consideration of oppressive social forces structuring people's lives. Neoliberalism appropriated feminist rhetoric and shifted it to individuals, eliminating social aspects of critique. This movement has suppressed a large part of its critical value while appearing to maintain a type of cultural openness. If we eliminate the notion of social structures, then it is pointless to analyze gendered images in dialectic with each other.

In the real world, female neoliberals like Margaret Thatcher, the first woman prime minister of England, appropriated notions of freedom and individuality to separate themselves from political classes. Although she experienced several incidents of gender discrimination, she discounts these entirely, preferring to see herself, and other successful women, as exceptions to the rule. The neoliberal individualism she espoused denies the possibility of women as a political class.[17] In this way, political parties and their spokespersons function, as Gramsci said, to disseminate conceptions of the world.[18]

In *Star Trek*, there is clearly a relation between the emphasis on the individualized male melodrama, particularly of Spock, and the limitation of Uhura's scenes to "girlfriend" episodes. Feminism is both present and submerged in this neoliberal text through the assumption that female equality is so normalized that nothing further need occur with a woman character: simply hang some credentials on her character and plug her in a minor role as a girlfriend, wife, or mother.

The reciprocal relations of gender under neoliberalism create a space for masculinity to acknowledge feminist ideals, such as equality in the workplace, or to accept women as legitimate authority figures. Femininity also works reciprocally, acknowledging masculinity ideals. This process produces representations of women who are successful in the workplace but still functioning as subordinate figures, still primarily focused on romance, or whose appearance remains sexualized. Crucially, this operation allows males to appear egalitarian while still commanding positions of higher authority, or of the voice of reason in the workplace.

This reciprocity evidently creates no space in outer space for gays, lesbians, bisexuals, or transsexuals. *Star Trek* has yet to feature an openly gay character in any of its television or film versions, although there are apparently gay characters in some of the *Star Trek* novels. Whereas there has been considerable speculation about certain *Trek* characters, including Kathryn Janeway and Seven of Nine (*Voyager*), as well as a long tradition of slash, these are all productions of fan speculation and fan fiction.

THE ENTERPRISE'S YOUNG MEN

Scenes of Kirk and Spock's problematic childhoods create a causal link to their adult actions. A young Kirk destroys an antique Corvette that apparently belongs to an older male relative or stepfather. Young Spock

fights viciously with bullies who call his father a "traitor" and his mother a "whore" and who taunt him for being half-human. An oedipalized narrative situates Kirk as a reckless young man whose problems with authority stem from his father's death while commanding a starship. Spock's issues are also related to his father, a Vulcan who married an Earth woman, setting up his biracial son for scorn and harassment from Vulcan children. Even the attack of the villain is that of an individual terrorist whose acts stem from an intensely personalized response to a planetary disaster, a "supernova" that destroyed his home planet, and with it, his pregnant wife.

Crucially, both Kirk and Spock succeed on their own individual merits. The head of the Vulcan Science Academy congratulates Spock for achieving intellectual distinction despite his unfortunate circumstances, i.e., his human mother. This statement marks Spock as an exception, an outsider, implying that he succeeds without the support of cultural or familial networks. Kirk also succeeds alone, as the film implies that he has a largely absent mother and a hostile stepfather. A Starfleet captain notes that he is a "genius," despite his troubled youth. Kirk boasts he will complete the four-year Starfleet Academy program in three years, which he does. He alone questions the value of a difficult command simulation, and sabotages it in order to demonstrate that it is a bogus test of capabilities. The sabotage makes him an even greater exception, the only cadet to pass the test, albeit dishonestly.

Despite this emphasis on the individual, Kirk and Spock clearly form a male character dyad; this grouping forms the basis of the narrative structure of any particular version of *Star Trek*. Kirk is a conventional "rebel" with issues stemming from the loss of his father virtually at the moment of his birth. Spock's biracial nature reads differently now from the 1960s; it speaks to the emphasis on the culture of biracialism that emerged in the 2008 election through endless examination of Obama's degrees of "blackness" or "whiteness."

This version of Spock may be more emotional than the original Spock. It is a difficult call due to the complicated nature of Spock's portrayal in the television series. The one definitive difference lies in new Spock's ability to express emotion without the rationalizations offered in the television series. The original Spock did become involved with women occasionally but almost always was under the influence of drugs, or otherwise affected, in order to show the audience that emotion is not part of his normal behavior. The reimagined Spock, however, shows a range of emotion: romantic desire, anger, and bereavement without any of these rationalizations.

This Kirk differs significantly from the previous portrayal. The character has been reimagined as someone to whom group values of discipline, honesty, moral authority, military or academic ethics matter little, but to whom instinctual individual actions and self-confidence are paramount. Kirk and Spock both exhibit anger and a brutal fighting style during the film; however, Kirk is applauded for his aggressive masculinity by being rewarded with the captaincy of the *Enterprise*, whereas the film leads the audience to

see Spock's displays of anger, when goaded by Kirk, as inappropriate. The most extreme of these displays leads to his removal as acting captain, thus rewarding Kirk for the very quality judged negatively in Spock.

Spock's outburst measures negatively against his intellectual background, in comparison with Kirk, who appears as a more rounded authority figure, that is, a white man with exceptional managerial skills, an ability to inspire others to follow his leadership, and an intelligence not prominently on display much of the time. Spock's intellect poses a problem because he promotes analysis that stands in the way of immediate, impulsive, heartfelt (emotional) action. When Kirk opposes Spock's plan to rendezvous with the rest of Starfleet ships not destroyed by the Narada, he creates a dyad of analysis/action, thought/deed, and enacts the "looking without leaping" quality that Pike admired and saw a need for in Starfleet. The film has already foreshadowed the fact that Kirk's impulsiveness will be the right path to follow, and in light of that, Spock's cautious analysis and lack of preemptive action against the Narada seems just plain wrong.

The success of the *Enterprise*'s battle with the Narada rests primarily on tactics developed by Chekov and Spock. Kirk participates, but his role is to rescue Captain Pike, his symbolic father figure, while Spock uses a small spaceship to actually destroy the drill threatening Earth and, ultimately, the enemy ship. Yet the film ends with Kirk alone being rewarded with a medal, a promotion to captain, and permanent command of the *Enterprise*. This is presumably a reward for making an impulse call to fight the Narada alone.

This whole narrative process recenters authority on a white man of action, and reinforces the primacy of the white male by slavishly reproducing the character range of the original series, situating the sole female officer of any importance primarily as a girlfriend of one of the heroes. After a scene where Uhura tells Captain Pike of her discovery of the Romulan destruction of the Klingon fleet, the bulk of her on-screen time comprises interactions with Spock in the role of his girlfriend.

The 1960s *Enterprise* bridge crew looked progressive for the time, with a black woman in charge of communications, and an Asian American helmsman, whereas Spock represented an acceptable (alien) face of biracialism. The series as a whole featured a fairly diverse range of ethnicities. While rewatching the original series, I noted numerous appearances by African American, South Asian, and Hispanic officers and crew, albeit most in minor or onetime guest roles. To reestablish that degree of progressiveness, the current film would have had to broaden the representation of characters' racial, gender, and sexual orientation significantly to acknowledge the increased contemporary public presence of diversity, and our greater adherence to it as a basic value.

This would have entailed reimagining characters more radically such as a female, black, or Hispanic Kirk. The film's representation chimes nicely with our neoliberalized culture, in which the bourgeoisie gives lip service to

diversity while working very hard to maintain a white, masculinist class hierarchy. Unlike *Battlestar Galactica*, which rebooted a 1970s television series with a significantly altered set of characters, *Star Trek* chose to obey its prime directive, "Protect the Franchise," by keeping the major group of characters within a demographic that would appeal to the audience that they sought.[19]

Keeping the characters reassuringly similar to the ones in the original series allows the film to recirculate a proven generic formula, without making too many changes that would destroy the *Star Trek* "brand." There was significantly more profit at stake in the rebooting of *Star Trek* than in the reboot of *Battlestar Galactica*. An origins story allows for much younger characters than their 1960s counterparts, appealing to new generations of moviegoers. The producers sought a balance of the familiar and the new to pull in hard-core Trekkers but to widen the film's ability to play to younger audiences and non–science fiction fans, who would hopefully see this as a young, hip, action film, a ploy encapsulated in one of the film's television spots, titled "This Is Not Your Father's *Star Trek*."[20]

DEXTER AND NEOLIBERAL SELF-DISCIPLINE

Dexter, a Showtime series about a serial killer who works as a blood spatter analyst for the Miami Police Department, offers another narratological way to normalize feminism, thus allowing masculine desires to operate rather freely. Through pretense, Dexter seems to conform to female desires for egalitarian relationships with sensitive, nurturing men.

Dexter was orphaned at an early age when he witnessed his police informant mother's brutal murder with a chain saw. Harry Morgan, the police detective running the informant, adopted Dexter. Realizing early that his adopted son was a sociopathic killer, he taught him to use this urge as a way to rid society of criminals that the justice system could not convict. He gave Dexter a code that requires him to conform outwardly to social mores; he taught him to smile in photographs, to ask a girl to a prom, to have a drink with work pals, because these are the things that normal people do. He taught Dexter how to make clean kills, taught him safe body disposal methods, and, generally, how to keep his secret well hidden. We learn of the code through a combination of flashbacks, visits from Harry's ghost, and from Dexter's internal monologue.

Over the course of the show, Dexter's character has evolved from a cold but superficially charming and funny serial killer—but only of bad guys—to someone who has acted the part of caring brother, friend, and husband so well that he senses the beginning of real emotional connections. Dexter must make himself into the image of a man who accommodates feminist desires, and he must use internalized self-discipline to achieve that image. Dexter's narrative features a repeated trope of conflict between the internal, murderous Dexter, known as the "dark passenger," and external,

solid worker, husband, and father. This dual life causes problems; often family or work crises interrupt Dexter's meticulous plans for disposing of his kills. During one execution, wife Rita calls with a request that he get medicine for their sick baby. Dexter continues the kill but cannot dispose of the body, so he hides it. As he drives home with the medication, sleep deprivation from nights with a new baby hits him, and he wrecks his car. He must now watch helplessly from the gurney as police examine his vehicle, which still contains his "kill kit" of tools, duct tape, plastic sheets, and other accessories. He gets away with it this time, but the most recent season put him on a trajectory toward a very serious collision of the two aspects of his character. Each incident on this trajectory reveals the conflict between conflicting drives as dangerous and impossible to reconcile.

Dexter operates in a context where masculinity has reconfigured itself under neoliberalism. He pathetically tries to make himself believe that his contradictions can be reconciled in happiness, even as the evidence of his failure to reconcile his fractured desires mounts around him. He accidentally murders an innocent man, a violation of his code. His attempt to execute a serial killer fails and his wife is murdered. Season Four ends with Dexter seeing his infant son sitting in a pool of the murdered wife's blood, an event eerily similar to Dexter's own childhood witnessing of his mother's murder. This event signals that the problems in Dexter's attempt to become a model of bourgeois masculinity have just been brutally passed to another generation through the results of his own miscalculations. His attempts to deal with his inner passenger and to use that passenger for constructive murder (of unconvicted killers) have failed.

Dexter maintains a secret life hidden beneath a convincing surface persona. He works hard to deny that he is connected to society through relations with family and friends. He works hard to discipline himself into a bourgeois worker. He does not succeed in this, *but nevertheless this represents an attempt at neoliberal masculinity.* This requires putting family, lovers, wives, and friends at a distance. He is not quite successful at that; as certain moments in the show reveal their slippage, and the emotional and spiritual costs of conformism and self-discipline cause fractures that eventually destroy the family relations they constructed.

THE SERIAL KILLER, HIS WIFE, AND HIS SISTER

Dexter enacts neoliberal gender construction in several ways. Most slyly, Dexter represents an extreme version of neoliberal privatization of public services, as he often disposes of killers that the Miami Police Department fails to catch. I find this aspect of the show quite amusing, almost as if the writers were winking at the audience about the current trend to privatize city services. Dexter is also a self-created persona, produced through the type of neoliberal individualized self-discipline.

More importantly, Dexter's relationships with women highlight neoliberal strategies that create space for feminism while denying its relevance. Dexter is perhaps the most complicated text I discuss; despite the series' attempts to undercut female characters, Lt. Maria LaGuerta, Dexter's commander, and Det. Debra Morgan, Dexter's stepsister, possess deep complexity that resists marginalization.

Debra Morgan begins the series as a vice cop but works her way up to homicide detective. She embodies a certain type of tough female cop, having a very foul mouth, excellent firearm skills, and an athletic build that she works hard to maintain. She makes mistakes, however, and a running joke is Deb's poor boyfriend choices. The worst of these mistakes occurs when she dates the man who turns out to be the Ice Truck Killer, one of the show's luridly named villains. She manifests great strength in her recovery from her lover's attempt to murder her, struggles through post-traumatic stress syndrome, and demonstrates intelligence, determination, and courage on the job. Debra wants Dexter to "be a brother" and she works to enhance their closeness. The sociopathic part of Dexter sees this as a burden placed upon him by bourgeois family ideals. He draws upon Harry's code to deal with it, talking himself through family encounters so he can seem normal. He continually denies an attachment to Debra but his actions undermine the truth of these statements.

Dexter's relationship with his girlfriend, later wife, Rita is where the neoliberal gender formations coalesce most strongly. Rita is a rape victim whose initial value to Dexter is as a cover for his inability to care for others. Her lack of interest in sex suits him as well. He avoids sexual intimacy because he fears that he cannot hide his true self during sexual intercourse. Dexter plays the devoted, sensitive man to perfection, telling Rita to take her time to heal. This display makes Rita fall deeply in love with him, and their relationship progresses to marriage and a baby. Deb and Rita allow Dexter to role-play an enlightened man, someone who has apparently internalized certain, though not all, feminist values, and lets him give minimal emotional involvement to them until some crisis strikes.

Dexter's emotions emerge when Rita and Deb are threatened. When Dexter's sociopathic lover tries to kill Rita and the children. Dexter finds himself driven to protect them by killing her. Dexter also steps in to murder the Ice Truck Killer who turns out to be his long-lost biological brother, when he tries to kill Deb. Dexter refuses his brother's offer of a relationship based upon their shared love of killing. Instead, he goes after him to keep him from murdering Deb.

Dexter's core relational emotions come into play only when a woman he cares for is threatened. This is not necessarily a result of his sensitivity but of the character's reversion to the generic masculine behavior. Dexter is most real when he is killing; that is his true self, as he claims in his voice-overs.

Dexter's camouflaged serial killer is an ambiguous but intriguing site for a critique of masculinity. His character could be read as a critique of

feminization of men, that is, that of the ways society forces the raw, tempestuous, testosterone-filled male to a docile role of emasculated husband and father. Or it can be read as a more feminist critique of the unwillingness of males to domesticate themselves as they become adults. Scenes in which Rita demands sexual attention and help with the baby can support these readings. However, audience sympathies lie with Dexter. His point of view is paramount to this series, and the audience has privileged access to his memories, his visions of his dead father, and his internal dialogue. We literally watch and hear Dexter's self-discipline in action during those scenes. We get that with no other character. Dexter also has the best lines, a type of mordant social commentary that provides much of the show's appeal.

We see Rita from his point of view, and the actor playing her (Julie Benz) has numerous scenes of exaggerated wifely concern and annoying maternal playfulness. She drives a post-concussion Dexter to work, singing "Karma Chameleon" to the baby in the backseat while shaking a little feathered toy to get his attention. She also shakes the toy in Dexter's face and sings to him. Dexter keeps up a smiling response until the second Rita turns away. Then his facial expression shifts into one of scary annoyance. Before another workday morning drive, Rita tells Dexter, she has Bananarama's greatest hits. Dexter in voice-over puns that "It's going to be a cruel summer."[21]

Dexter's violence is horrifying, but within the textual system, justifiable and even enjoyable to the audience. The series positions Dexter as an attractive protagonist, whom the audience does not want to get caught; regardless of how many victims he dumps into the ocean. We know that he only kills criminals, and we are complicit in the vigilantism of the show. The series cleverly makes the audience approve of a private citizen taking justice into his own hands to serve his personal demons.

Dexter also presents the figure of neoliberal personal responsibility. He alone must strive to maintain his façade; deal with the criminals society cannot catch, and protect "his" women. Cultural institutions exist all around him but Dexter alone bears the responsibility for helping himself (under his own twisted understanding, that is).

GLOBALISM

Star Trek is a global text in several senses: its political economy points toward a film constructed as a revival of a franchise that had never been global. The *Enterprise* crew is marked and marketed as a revival of a historic group icon of utopian diversity. To be truly diverse, Paramount Studios, the producer of *Star Trek* and the owner of the rights to the television series and earlier movies, would have to shift this representation closer to contemporary notions of diversity. The anodyne representations of gender and race and the elision of class in this film are subsumed under a visual rhetoric of intergalactic

togetherness that largely lacks true diversity. The film lacks Hispanics, blacks, whether diasporic or indigenous African; in fact, there is an almost complete absence of Earth citizens from the southern hemisphere and women in key narrative positions. The film chose the galactic over the global!

This substitution of limited, spurious diversity for an open, heterogeneous reimagining suggests a paradigmatic neoliberal strategy of suppressing issues of race and gender across national boundaries. The Federation's open society is rather confined and does not seem particularly utopian. But this is *Star Trek*'s primary strategy: the future is so bright that issues of difference are irrelevant. *Star Trek* makes a claim to globalism through the substitution of fictional off-world races, notably Vulcans. Other off-world peoples appear in the film in nonspeaking roles—can there be a subaltern extra-terrestrial? However, it must be noted that this film did not do well overseas, indicating that its appeal to utopianism works better in the U.S. where we like our globalism diluted and ethnocentric.

The weak appearance of global culture and diversity can be tied to the need to hit the foreign markets, a strategy that also rationalizes the film's action-adventure template. *Star Trek* films have never performed well outside the United States, except for Germany, and the films have a reputation for being dialogue heavy and short on action. The philosophical and literary references used in earlier *Star Trek* films, themselves largely pulled from Western history, are absent. Uniformly young, attractive actors play the leads, in the hope of pulling in a younger demographic. Despite these changes in format, the film did not do well enough overseas to put *Star Trek* into the $500 million dollar box office, or "superhit" category.[22] These changes in strategy are typical of the franchise's management. Eileen Meehan has studied the political economy of this franchise in depth. She notes that *Star Trek* films from the very first were a series of bad decisions aimed at franchise protection rather than quality filmmaking,[23] and the lack of subtext in this film continues that institutional history.

DIVERSIONARY TACTICS

Star Trek has a long history of a claim to utopianism. However, NuTrek uses off-world aliens as a way to paper over its lack of real diversity and construct a sham global utopianism in an organization whose leadership seems almost exclusively male and largely white. Social class is never alluded to, although there are clearly technocrats, bureaucrats, and laborers in this future society. The film shows us a working class in the spaceship yard in Iowa, and hints at a divide between elites and nonelites, setting an early scene of a pre-Starfleet Kirk and Uhura in a bar near this shipyard. This silence is in keeping with a neoliberal product; there is no society, class doesn't matter, and there is nothing but the individual. This silence on class is an important part of the neoliberal narrative.

The film takes place largely on the iconic starship *Enterprise*, a fitting locale because neoliberalization deploys the language of freedom and free enterprise. As the "flagship" of the Federation fleet, the name also symbolizes unvoiced imperial ambitions, which contradict the film's overt declaration that Starfleet is a "humanitarian and peacekeeping force." A type of complacency hovers over the Star Trek universe; no one ever questions their mission or their right to "boldly go where no man [changed to no one] has gone before." This tagline eerily recalls Earth empires, which looked upon the continents they found in their voyages as unclaimed, empty new worlds. Within this highly charged symbolic setting, an individualized male melodrama occurs that suppresses consideration of the political culture of the Federation, or Starfleet. It is a narrative that features an accomplished woman officer but one whose presence alone appears as a signifier that feminism has accomplished its goals.

The ideology of neoliberal capitalism operates through such diversionary tactics, and the cultural products produced under neoliberalism narrativize these operations in ways that seem natural. This is of course, classic ideology as distinct from discourse, which is a problematic frame for analysis of these issues. Theresa Ebert notes, "Discourse blurs the hierarchies of power, we cannot distinguish the powerful from the powerless, the exploiting from the exploited. It represents the social in such a way that all persons are at the same time powerful and powerless, exploiting and exploited, a social in which the privileges of the upper class are mystified".[24]

CONCLUSION

This chapter demonstrates the internal contradictions of a neoliberal ideology of masculinity constructed through a social narrative. The ways in which gender is contested under neoliberalism cannot be easily summarized, but this chapter maps the more evident stress points: individualism, reciprocity, and exceptionalism. Whereas Kirk, the less-developed character discussed here, provides an example of the neoliberal corporate man who never questions the organization or its goals, and who is determined to succeed quickly on his own and at any cost, Dexter is a more complicated figure. His secret life speaks to a "lone-wolf" status, a romantic trope he uses to describe himself. He has a highly elaborated façade created through neoliberal-type internalized self-discipline. This surface conceals crimes and ethical transgressions of identity theft, adultery, and murder. He considers himself solely responsible for creating a self in line with hegemonic value systems, live a detached life as an observer and imitator of cultural behavior. Dexter remakes himself constantly to appear in the mold of hegemonic masculinity, and suffers emotional stress, fear, and anger because of the pressure of maintaining this image. By revealing the fissures imposed on his life through the constraints of neoliberal masculinity, this text offers

at least a mild critique of neoliberal ideology, and demonstrates the costs of living in the twenty-first-century neoliberal world.

NOTES

1. Harvey, 2005, p. 47.
2. Sender, 2006, p. 135.
3. Arnot, David, and Weiner, 1999, p. 51.
4. McRobbie, 2009, p. 412.
5. Ibid.
6. Apple, 2001, p. 115.
7. Although the original series did not feature women in command of Starfleet ships, an episode of season 3, "The Enterprise Incident" (9/27/1968) featured a Romulan starship captain, Liviana Charvanek (Joanne Linville). In the final (to date) *Star Trek* television series, the prequel *Enterprise*, this prohibition of women captains was eliminated and the series featured the aforementioned Captain Hernandez of the starship *Columbia* in two episodes in 2005 and 2006.
8. In "Space Seed," the *Enterprise* discovers a twentieth-century genetically enhanced crew of supermen and women in suspended animation aboard their old spaceship, including the murderous dictator Khan. The *Enterprise*'s historian, Lt. Marla McGivers, falls for Khan and collaborates with him to take over the *Enterprise*. "Who Mourns for Adonais?" features a lieutenant identified only as "Carolyn" who falls in love with the god Apollo, whom the *Enterprise* crew discovers during an away mission. She temporarily "forgets her duty" and sides with Apollo in the struggle between Kirk and the Olympian.
9. Tyler Perry appears in two brief scenes, and a few black crewmen work aboard the *Enterprise*.
10. McRobbie, 2009, p. 412.
11. Ibid.
12. Sender, 2006, p. 146.
13. Beck, 1991.
14. McRobbie, 2009, pp. 417–418.
15. Anonymous comment, September 5, 2010, on "*Star Trek* character Uhura," *TrekBBS*.
16. Ebert 4.
17. Tudor, 1997, p. 138.
18. Gramsci, 1971, p. 335.
19. *Battlestar Galactica* recast a prominent "playboy" character, Starbuck, as a woman played by Katee Sackhoff. Boomer, originally a black man, became an Asian woman who was a secret Cylon, and Hispanic actor Edward James Olmos played Commander Adama this time. The one curious lapse in the picture of diversity in this series was its minimal casting of blacks. One bridge officer, Dualla, and one Cylon, Simon, were the most prominent black characters in the series.
20. Cadillac also used this advertising tagline in the 1980s. The recirculation of it here only emphasizes the studio's view of the *Star Trek* movie, and the franchise, as a branded product; they capitalize on the brand while promoting its difference for a new generation of spectators.
21. "Cruel Summer" is the name of a Bananarama song as well as a comment on the circumstances.

22. Pascale, 2009. http://trekmovie.com/2009/10/05/star-trek-finishes-theatrical-run-with-385m-full-boxoffice-analysis/
23. Meehan, 2009.
24. Ebert 8.

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Part II

Latin America

4 Cuban Cinema

A Case of Accelerated Underdevelopment

Michael Chanan

A CINEMA OF DEFIANCE

There was an island in the sun. They had a revolution. They created a new society, dedicated to social justice—and to making films (and music and other arts). It would be a new kind of cinema, which would transcend both the formulaic escapism of the Hollywood genre movie, and the bourgeois individualism of the Western European art film. It might be low budget and imperfect, like the country's economy, but it would vindicate cinema by revolutionizing the modes of both production and representation, thus freeing up the imagination and bringing a fresh eye to the social and historical reality in front of the camera. Remarkably little of the new Cuban cinema was straightforward propaganda. The operative principle was the dictum uttered by Fidel Castro in his speech of 1961 known as "Words to the Intellectuals": "Within the Revolution, everything; against it, nothing." [1] Cuban filmmakers would question whether reality as it appeared on the screen was a true reality, and whether that reality was good enough. Cinema is the perfect place for this kind of aspiration. Not only the foremost popular art of the twentieth century but in transcending social distinctions like class and culture, cinema is a form of collective dreaming that deposits its images in the cultural subconscious of the whole society.

When the Cuban revolution launched a project to create a new national cinema, in defiance of both Hollywood and economic practicality, the historical moment was not unfavorable. With new nations emerging from colonial rule around the globe and a growing sense of rebellion among the postwar generation in the First World, there was a sense of hope in struggle across the world. If geopolitics were governed by the Cold War, a third force emerged in the 1950s in the shape of the Non-Aligned Movement, created at the Bandung Conference in 1955, comprising the nations that came to be known as the Third World, in which Cuba would subsequently become a key player. In the Second or Communist World a year later, Khrushchev denounced Stalin, and soon began to forge new relations with Marxist movements in what we now call the South. The Kremlin welcomed Cuba into the Communist bloc partly because the Caribbean island provided

them with a bridge to the Third World. In the First World, meanwhile, the heartlands of capitalism, postwar reconstruction was in full swing—in Britain, Prime Minister Macmillan told the nation in 1955, "You've never had it so good"; and when Washington tried to enlist British support for their embargo against Cuba, the reply was a polite refusal: the Americans were told that Britain was an overseas trading nation, and would not suffer interference over its trading policies. [2]

In those days, terms like *neoliberalism* and *globalization* had not yet been coined, yet a new sense of global consciousness was already in evidence, developing unevenly and full of ambiguous tensions. The result in part of what Lenin, in a pamphlet of 1916, too hopefully called "Imperialism, —The Highest Stage of Capitalism," and then of two world wars in less than half a century, a new global sensibility now comes to be succored in the public sphere by the rapid spread of new mass media, but in a highly distorted form, because it is the North that controls the flow of information and images. Cuba had been an early entrant into this modern world of media and communications, and between the world wars came to serve the U.S. as a kind of offshore testing laboratory for trying out new technologies and techniques in the fields of media and communication. The future telecommunications giant ITT (who offered the CIA one million dollars to 'destabilize' the Popular Unity Government in Chile at the beginning of the 1970s) grew out of the underwater telephone cable between Cuba and the U.S. opened in the mid-1920s; radio broadcasting was introduced in 1926, by which time Cuba already had a small record industry. The following decade Cuban advertising agencies were producing copy for American products in Central America, to which Cuba was also selling its own music and radio shows. In cinema, however, it was far too small to compete with Mexico, which benefited from a large domestic market, and until the revolution, film production in Cuba was mostly an appendage of the Mexican film industry with a few excursions by Hollywood (one of the last being Errol Flynn's own last and terrible movie, *Cuban Rebel Girls* in 1959, with Flynn as a war correspondent helping Castro to overthrow Batista). However, in 1950, Cuba was one of the first Latin American countries to see the introduction of television.

Many of the artists and intellectuals who found themselves working in these fields were far from compromised by the experience; on the contrary, they would later appear in the lists of the revolutionaries, like T.G. Alea and Julio García Espinosa, who worked on a Mexican-produced cinema newsreel; the documentarist Santiago Alvarez, who worked in the music library of a radio station; or the photographer Korda, who took the famous iconic picture of Che Guevara, and whose métier was originally fashion photography. Some of them even found ways of insinuating their rebellious messages into the media unbidden, including documented incidents reenacted by Fernando Pérez in *Clandestinos* (1987) in which the urban underground, acting in support of the rebels in the mountains, mounted

demonstrations in front of television cameras at a baseball match, and even invented an advertising campaign for the revolutionaries under the guise of launching a new product. The guerrillas in the mountains also showed a sharp appreciation of the usefulness of the media. Fidel himself had first-hand experience of radio, and Radio Rebelde was an important arm of rebel propaganda. They also knew the value of the foreign press, inviting *New York Times* correspondent Herbert Matthews to interview Fidel in his hideout, thereby giving the lie to Cuban government declarations of his defeat. As Che Guevara observed soon after the rebels ousted Batista, "At that time the presence of a foreign journalist, preferably American, was more important to us than a military victory." [3]

Television followed and extended the cinema in picturing the four corners of the world, a process that intensified in the mid-1960s with the introduction of satellite communications, which allowed for the global transmission of television signals. But cinema is already the paradigm of a modern international art form, from the very moment of its debut in the 1890s when the Lumières set the pattern by sending their agents around the world not only to introduce their invention in practically every major city of the day but also to bring back 'exotic' imagery to tantalize their rapidly growing audiences back home. Because no country in the period leading up to World War I was able to satisfy the huge demand from its own domestic production, the film trade was international. The growing dominance of Hollywood after the war, on this reading, is a function of the same international character but inside out: it is precisely because cinema is international in its reach that the American film cartel was able to become a monopolist vis-à-vis the rest of the world. Nevertheless, strong national industries prospered in a good many countries on several continents, wherever conditions allowed them to take advantage of linguistic barriers, cultural pride, and a sizable domestic audience of their own. (The trick was to keep budgets down in proportion to the expectable returns from the home box office, because foreign earnings could not be assumed; but a good many countries devised methods of providing support their own film industries, of greater or lesser efficacy.) Some of these industries imitated the Hollywood model on a smaller scale, but as often, Hollywood's aesthetics—its dramaturgy, rules of montage, the generic happy ending—were challenged by successive waves of artistic innovation, beginning with Italian Neorealism at the end of World War II. Come the 1960s and the filmmakers at the new Cuban film institute joined the new wave cinemas of Latin America and Europe (especially the French) in common cause, and a small stream of new Cuban films created waves among film audiences across the world—or at least, wherever they had a chance to be shown. Films with titles like *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (1968), *Hanoi Martes 13* (1967), and *Lucía* (1968) by Alea, Alvarez, and Humberto Solás respectively—directors who have earned a proud place in the history of cinema, all now with two dates after their names.

Alvarez spoke of himself and Cuban cinema as a product of "accelerated underdevelopment." [4] I interpret this as a peculiar condition in which a definitive ideological and political break has been made with the past, propelling the society into the promise of a new future, but the country continues to suffer the consequences of its preceding neocolonial deformation, and economically it remains incorporated into global trade only at the margins. In the cultural sphere, however, the story is a little different, that of a small country on the fringes, isolated and defiant, which despite half a century of blockade by the empire in the north, was never cut off from the cultural currents abroad in the world, but on the contrary, has contributed to them. Today it's music, but Cuban cinema in the 1960s is the first example, which brings an immediate rider: its growing renown abroad was a recognition of its character as a new *national* cinema, just as its success at home was a reward for its sense of *cubanía*, of being Cuban.

There is always a great puzzle, when talking about cinema in national terms, over where the national lies and what it comprises. In Hollywood they think the cinema they make is universal, whereas in fact it's the national cinema of the U.S. Most of the cinema that dominates most of the screens throughout the world is American—yet any film made anywhere has the potential to achieve a worldwide audience. This is the lifeblood of the international film festival, not just for the distributor seeking product but even more for the filmmakers showing there, who thus enter and draw succor from an international community. Everywhere, filmmakers measure themselves up against international cinema (from everywhere, not just America) without necessarily placing themselves beyond the national. In the case of Latin America, this puzzle takes a particular form because of the special tension that exists between national identity and Latin American identity. Linguistic union, the shared history of the *conquista*, of wars of independence, of economic imperialism by the Anglo-Saxons (British in the nineteenth century, the U.S. in the twentieth)—these factors are present in every country south of the Rio Grande. The result of this supranational culture has been that sometimes the most intensely local subjects are praised for their reflection or expression of a continental sensibility. And when it comes to Cuba, we get the added tension of an island that in 1959 was turned from the gem of the Caribbean into embattled isolation, because they challenged and insulted the hegemony of the empire in the north. And not just in the political and economic domains, but also the imaginary of the cinema screen. As a new cinema rapidly emerges—the creation of the film institute, the ICAIC, was the first cultural decree of the new regime—what you quickly begin to see is a radical project for the reconstruction of the collective or social memory, which like everywhere else, is always bounded by national experience.

Havana in the 1960s began to exercise a magnetism on the leftist artistic intelligentsia around the world, which was celebrated in the Havana Cultural Congress of 1968, and the freedom and originality of the new

Cuban films had much to do with this effect. This was also the year in which Julio García Espinosa wrote a crucial manifesto, "For an Imperfect Cinema," which reflected the Communist island's unique position but was also taken up more widely. Espinosa called for a cinema that would resist the temptation of technical perfection (which after ten years now began to lie within the reach of the Cuban filmmakers), arguing that it would be self-defeating: they could never afford what it took to produce that kind of cinema, and worse still, because cinema of that kind only induced audience passivity; instead he advocated a more experimental, in fact, a Brechtian cinema, which resisted convention and upset orthodox representation by demonstrating its own methods of construction, opening up spaces for real involvement and public participation.

RELATIVE AUTONOMY

Cinema spans the economic and the cultural in a form that is paradigmatic for the entire culture industry (the name ICAIC acknowledges this: Instituto Cubano del Arte y Industria Cinematográficos—the Cuban Institute of Film Art and Industry). The relation, however, between art and industry is not symmetrical. Economic power buys cultural space, but through exposure at film festivals and in the film magazines (the two main forms of publicity in those days), the cultural impact of marginal cinemas, despite their relegation to the fringes of international distribution, can sometimes be out of all proportion to their rentability. Such was the impact of the new Cuban cinema, in defiance of the attitude of international distributors that it was merely propaganda. And in a sense it was excellent propaganda—on behalf of the relative autonomy of the cultural sphere. For whereas Cuba was incorporated economically into the Soviet trading bloc Comecon, culturally it remained an exotic outsider, which always retained its Latin American, Afro-Caribbean, and Third World identity.

In this perspective, the trajectory of Cuban cinema is at the same time both anomalous and exemplary. It is exemplary because audiences eager to see the cinematic representation of their own living reality in its moment of upheaval flocked to watch the small but steady stream of new Cuban films, for several years bucking the international trend of falling cinema attendance. Indeed, the audience expanded, as new mobile cinemas took films to remote parts of the island. At the same time, with new Hollywood films officially unobtainable (they always managed to get some in through the back door), the Institute imported films from everywhere else—Europe East and West, Latin America, Japan—with the wholly positive result that a radical alteration took place in the island's film culture as Cuban audiences came to see a greater diversity of world film production than anywhere else in Latin America. And they thrived on the diet, guaranteeing the popular success of the annual Havana Film Festival initiated in 1979.

(Which doesn't mean they ceased to have regard for American cinema; quite the contrary.)

But compared to film production anywhere else in Latin America, it was anomalous. The ICAIC grew out of the film unit that the Rebel Army set up rapidly after the seizure of power to make documentaries explaining policies in key areas like agrarian reform (Alea and García Espinosa were among the directors). The new institute was subsidized by the government, but enjoyed a notable degree of autonomy. Its founding president, Alfredo Guevara, was a member of Fidel Castro's inner circle, where he argued for a cinema of art, not propaganda. The Institute would not be controlled by government bureaucrats but self-managed by the filmmakers; later it would come under the Culture Ministry, rather than the Ideological Office of the Party Central Committee, which controlled broadcasting and the press. Subsidy meant it was free from the immediate pressures of the market, and Alfredo Guevara publicly defended the filmmakers' stylistic freedom to the utmost. There was no attempt to impose stylistic models, least of all Soviet-style socialist realism, which Cuban filmmakers found aesthetically unconvincing and even anathema, and nor was the ICAIC to be in the business of making genre movies that simply swapped the goodies and the baddies (although they inevitably made some of those too). As a result, in the words of Gerardo Chijona, a second-generation ICAIC director, Cuban filmmakers were "the spoiled children of Latin American cinema." [5]

Foreign commentators (of the left as well as the right) have often found it difficult to believe that a state film institute in a Communist country could possibly be as independent of authority as this. And of course it's true that those who ran the ICAIC were generally Party members—although again contrary to the outsider's reductivism, the Cuban Communist Party was itself an institution of diverse opinion. The objection that if it isn't censorship, then it's self-censorship, which also, of course, goes on in an institution like, say, the BBC—one learns the rules of the game—is too hasty. In the words of Ambrosio Fornet, who is both literary historian and screenwriter, referring to Fidel's formula of 1961, "The fact is that, in the context of a state of siege, aesthetic discourse, perhaps because of its own polysemic nature, delights in the license of this 'inside' where everything—or almost everything—is permitted." Nor are the limits ever fixed, because "the 'everything' permitted is not a permanent right but an arena of conflict that must be renegotiated every day, with no quarter granted to the bureaucracy and with the temptation of irresponsible whimsy firmly resisted." [6]

Comparison with the BBC might seem unlikely, but the British broadcaster is another peculiar media institution often poorly understood abroad, where it is often believed that the BBC is an extension of the government in Westminster. But it isn't quite that—it is not a state broadcaster, directly controlled by the minister on duty, but a public service, a public corporation licensed by parliament but operating according to what is called in Britain 'the arm's-length principle': a major part of the cultural-ideological

apparatus of the state that is nonetheless trusted to run itself, precisely because it's controlled by the right people, government appointees who in the end can always be counted on. The Cuban film institute is remarkably similar. Again the arrangement is good propaganda on behalf of institutional autonomy, because it generates a high degree of trust on the part of the audience—opinion polls repeatedly report that they trust the BBC far more than the politicians. It also has other benefits, including a certain freedom to experiment in the full glare of the public (which the BBC also once used to do).

The conventional view is that in the Communist state the political public sphere ceases to exist, and the cultural public sphere is reduced and denuded by direct censorship, the direct arm of state patronage, and sanction. In Cuba, this happened to radio, television, and the press, but not to cinema, which produced a succession of films that pushed at the edges and expanded the limits of permissible speech, often by ingenious and irreverent means. Whereas the island's broadcasting and the press were controlled by the ideologues, cinema became a unique cultural space that functioned as a kind of surrogate public sphere and thus a major site of public discourse. However, such independence is often politically difficult to sustain, and in Britain the BBC has periodically come under very public attack by the government of the day; the same has happened on occasion in Cuba to the ICAIC.

Nevertheless, it was not mere rhetoric for Cuba to call itself 'the first free film territory' in Latin America. From the start, the ICAIC opened its doors to collaboration with filmmakers from abroad. The 1960s saw a stream of both features and documentaries by directors from a dozen different (European and Latin American) countries. These filmmakers brought with them the widest range of influences, styles, and practices from which the young Cuban filmmakers were eager to learn. They would soon be followed by filmmakers from across Latin America fleeing repression, for whom Havana became a second home. The refugee filmmakers found themselves within an institution unique in their experience, with its benevolent control over practically the entire film industry and one of the most prestigious cultural organizations in the country. But the result was a paradox: around the world Cuban cinema became a standard-bearer of new wave Latin American cinema—wherever radical cinema counted, names like Alea, Solás, and Alvarez were on people's lips—yet these films were actually produced under conditions that were entirely untypical of the rest of the continent. And at home, with no obstacles to distribution, Cuban filmmakers enjoyed a uniquely close relationship to their public (their audience was huge: second only to that of a speech by Fidel Castro) and in Fornet's account, they were able "to return to the spectator—the new protagonists of history—the multiplied image of their own transformative capacity." [7] Abroad, however, their succès d'estime notwithstanding, international distribution was something they secured only with difficulty.

The film institute was centrally funded on a fixed annual budget. For seven million pesos (a fraction of the budget for a Hollywood blockbuster), they managed to produce a handful of features every year together with a weekly newsreel, forty or more documentaries, and even some animated cartoons. By the early 1980s, when García Espinosa took over as president of the ICAIC, film audiences had begun to decline, like everywhere else, with the spread of television and growing competition from other forms of diversion. Determined to maintain the Institute's prestige, he encouraged a new generation of directors by promising more films on lower budgets. What emerged was a new genre, what might be called the critical social comedy, which met with huge popular success, with titles like *El pajaro tirandole a la escopeta* (*Tables Turned*, 1984) by Rolando Díaz, and Juan Carlos Tabío's *¡Plaff!* (1988). But the Institute's momentum would come up against a barrier at the start of the 1990s, which brought crisis to the filmmakers as it did to the whole Cuban economy, when Communism in Eastern Europe collapsed, leaving Cuba in desperate isolation.

STREET FILM-MAKING

The film institute started the decade with a political crisis of its own when an absurdist comedy about bureaucracy, *Alicia en el pais de las maravillas* (Alice in Wondertown) by Daniel Díaz Torres, was branded counterrevolutionary and withdrawn from exhibition. According to the personal account of García Espinosa, a curious thing happened. The storm was whipped up by the then head of the Party Ideological Office, who had VHS copies made of the film that he sent to various people to goad them into action. The result was that when the film was withdrawn, more VHS copies began to get passed around (of poor quality because they were often third or fourth generation—my own copy is one of these; one of the benefits of digital video is that the copies can be equal to the original). The Party official, said García Espinosa, had not understood the logic of video, that it not only multiplies the circulation of copies but renders it uncontrollable.[8] García Espinosa himself perceived valuable possibilities in the arrival of video in 1980s Cuba, including a string of ICAIC-sponsored *videotecas*; and in 1993 he shot a no-budget feature film, *El plano* (*The Shot*) on video at the Film School in order to show it could be done—a lesson that would soon turn out to be well taken.

The *Alicia* affair ended with García Espinosa stepping down and Alfredo Guevara returning as the Institute's President, but when the Soviet Union fell—the news of the coup that ousted Gorbachev arrived in the middle of a meeting of the commission investigating the troubling film—no one could have stemmed the tide. The ICAIC's future was extremely bleak. Production was severely curtailed. The weekly newsreel was discontinued, documentary production heavily cut back, and Cristina Venegas calculates that over

the ten years 1991–2001, only thirty-one features were made (none at all in 1996), compared with one hundred over the previous decade. [9] Technicians and actors soon began to emigrate or seek short-term jobs abroad. The Institute followed other entities into a new regime of self-financing operations—no more central budgeting—and survival therefore depended on finding finance from outside the country through co-production.

The Cubans now found themselves in much the same position as other Latin American film industries, thrust into a globalized cultural marketplace where they all competed with the same niche product for the same international co-production funds—which were mostly European—and where the interests of the co-producers did not by any means match their own. Faced with the Institute's internal loss of dynamic, the first problem for the filmmakers who were once in the vanguard of revolutionary culture, was suddenly having to learn how to hustle for themselves; then came the difficulty that new partnerships brought new ways of working, and (as Ariana Hernandez-Reguant puts it) a clash between "old socialist ethics and capitalist practices" [10]—in short, Cubans on fixed internal salaries working alongside foreigners earning high sums in dollars, a condition that unsurprisingly demoralized the Cubans further. And on top of that, the problem of the script, of a film that satisfied the susceptibilities of co-producers for whom, whereas Cuba held a certain fascination, *cubanía* was reduced to an exotic add-on. [11]

The result was both a reduced production program and a growing proportion of films designed to justify the co-producers' interests by exploiting the island's exotic image, providing local color as a background for low-budget genre movies. The film institute tried to strike a balance that was often upset by the need to construct a story that explained the presence of a Spanish or a German or whatever nationality the actor. A few directors held their own, and with Spanish funding, Alea made the most successful film of his career—*Fresa y chocolate* (*Strawberry and Chocolate*, codirected by Tabío), in which a young Communist university student is picked up in an ice cream parlor by a gay photographer. The film's plea for tolerance and dialogue touched deep social wellsprings. Fernando Pérez solved the foreign actor problem brilliantly in his surreal *La vida es silbar* (*Life Is To Whistle*, 1998) which raised the stakes of his already accomplished artistry to a new symbolic level, showing that Cuban cinema was still alive and kicking.

But something else was also happening, not on the big screen but the small one, with the emergence of a new audiovisual culture in the neighborhoods. As Lisa Maya Knauer observes, the legality and availability in Cuba of the 'small media' of domestic usage—audio- and videocassettes, CDs and DVDs—has fluctuated over the years, and there have always been inequalities of access to means of audiovisual production (cameras, editing desks, computers, Internet access). [12] But small media are easily carried and thus imported privately by family visitors from *allá*, 'over there'—and often the

equipment to play them on as well—and they readily circulate informally. As a result, whereas the blockade became, on both sides, an obsessional fetish of U.S.–Cuban relations, it failed to cut the island off from the latest products of the global corporations, whether hardware or software. Knauer reckons that visitors from New York already carried records and tapes back and forth in the 1970s, which soon included audiotapes and later videotapes of rumba and religious music, a traffic that increased after the Mariel boat-lift of 1980. Thus, beneath the radar of the mass media, state controlled in Cuba, commercial in the U.S., the small media generated a new popular genre of communication between the different moieties of a split community. Knauer argues that such traffic demonstrated a strong desire at a popular level to sustain a sense of Cuban identity that could negotiate the political divide independently of official discourses on either side. A renegotiation of *cubanía*. We should also observe that the Cuban experience is not atypical, but quite the contrary, because the small media the world over provide for new informal means of communication between home and diaspora.

By the 1990s, and the new wave of emigration by the *balseros* (rafters), Cuba had a flourishing informal sector that traded in home-burned CDs and unauthorized video rental (colloquially known as *bancos de videos* or video banks), along with illicit activities like the supply of illegal satellite dishes. In other words, Cuba was not to be excluded from the new audiovisual technology any more than it had previously been isolated culturally, and in the 1990s, just as the official film culture was entering into crisis, the new generation was embracing the new audiovisual technology. They did so out of necessity: as Ann Marie Stock puts it, in her recent study *On Location in Cuba*, talent and successful graduation from university or art school or film school (the ISA as well as the EICTV) did not at this time of economic collapse translate into a job, because the country's largest employer, the state, was broke. Lacking a professional home, they were out on the streets. "To break into filmmaking, they would have to pound the pavement." [13] And they did so, becoming adept at what was colloquially known as *resolviendo* and *inventando*, or in colloquial English, ducking and diving, and in short, just as in other countries, Cuba began to develop an active independent video sector. Inevitably, digital convergence led them on a path that led to the Internet, where today it is possible to find a good many examples on video sites like YouTube, as well as a growing band of bloggers. It is true that they face the problem that Cuba's Internet service suffers restrictions both internal and external. Internally there is surveillance, whereas from outside, the U.S. refuses them an underwater cable link (a new one is now under construction with Venezuela). Consequently, many of these videos and blogs are not hosted on the island. Stock suggests that the official attitude of the state is nowadays much more relaxed than it used to be, whatever the anti-Castro propagandists claim, but this seems to apply to the videographers, who are regarded as belonging to the

cultural sphere, whereas bloggers, who are seen as illegitimate journalists, are sometimes harassed.

One of the important players on this scene has been the EICTV, the international film school whose students, most of them coming from other Latin American countries and going out onto the streets to film short documentaries, began to tackle subjects that were novel and challenging; they began to break taboos, and the Cubans found this infectious. The EICTV is an NGO, but support also comes from state-sponsored cultural associations like the Asociación Hermanos Saíz; the writers and artists association, UNEAC, to which it's affiliated; and the ICAIC itself, which nowadays runs an annual festival for the independent sector. There are also other NGOs in the field, like the Movimiento de Video, mainly devoted to amateur video and dating back to 1988, and the Ludwig Foundation of Cuba, mainly devoted to video art. And then there's the ISA (Instituto Superior del Arte)—Cuba's other film school. In 1999, a documentary called *Secuencias inconclusas* (*Unfinished Sequences*) by Amanda Chávez, a student graduating from the audiovisual department, portrayed the conditions at the ICAIC in no uncertain terms. Coincidentally (or maybe one of those coincidences that, as Adorno would say, is not entirely a coincidence) the Institute's president, Alfredo Guevara, resigned shortly afterwards to concentrate on running the international film festival; his successor, Omar González, was the first head of the ICAIC who was not a filmmaker but a professional cultural administrator. His policies have been liberal, even if not very effective.

Stock dates the birth of what she calls 'street filmmaking' to around 1990, although not surprisingly, given the context, it took a few years to gain momentum. The term is a loose one, because this is a movement whose output ranges from video art for galleries and clubs to short items for television, not excluding very low-budget drama. Rather what it designates is a certain spirit that defies the easy and reductive assumptions of foreign journalists, with their lazy picture of Cuba as a country caught in a time warp, vestige of the Cold War, victim of American intransigence but forever suffocating under an ideological conformity that no one any longer believes in except for an aging leadership. However, as Stock sees it, whereas the street filmmakers do not tend to see themselves as part of the old project of revolutionary cinema in the same way as their elders and predecessors, they are nevertheless quick to credit Cuba's rich film tradition as a significant source of inspiration; especially its tradition of exuberant experimentation. Their attitude to revolutionary politics is often ironic, impatient, and dismissive of the political rhetoric that Cubans call *teque*, but this doesn't make them counterrevolutionaries: they don't need to oppose the system of governance, because if they are within it, then according to the old principle everything is permitted—but has to be fought for and constantly renegotiated.

Street filmmaking functions to a great extent outside the institutional structures, yet their stance towards the industry is not an oppositional one. In fact, the two sectors overlap, and their intersection results in video films

like *Monte Rouge* (2004), a comedy sketch by the humorist Eduardo del Llano poking fun at Cuba's secret police. Del Llano has industry credits as cowriter of several ICAIC films, including the troublesome *Alicia en el pueblo de Maravillas*, but also more regular co-production fare like *Kleines Tropikana* and *Hacerse el sueco* (both Daniel Díaz Torres, 1997 and 2000); not to mention *La vida es silbar. Monte Rouge* was made with the unofficial support of people in the film institute. What then upset the authorities—although this hasn't stopped del Llano's progress—is that the film was soon being seen in Miami, where they claimed it was a clandestine piece of work.

Stock settles on the designation 'street filmmaking' after considering other terms people have used for works of the video generation, including *cine aficionado* (amateur), and *cine submergido* (submerged, underground, alternative). It is all of these, and more. And it isn't just a movement of the young. There is the veteran ICAIC director Enrique Pineda Barnet, who saw how domestic copying and homemade media are easily exchanged between the communities on either side of the Florida Straits, and in 1997, demonstrated how to turn this into a minor art form with his experimental short, *First*, designed to be seen in both Havana and Miami at the same time (it has since been seen around the world). A prime example of what Stock calls "a conception of *cubanía* characterised by transnational linkages and responsive to global processes." [14]

Not long afterwards, another director of the first generation, Humberto Solás, who had once wielded the largest budgets in Cuban film production, came to the conclusion that the only way forward was to completely change tack. With the ICAIC in the midst of a funding crisis, he shot *Miel para Oshún* (*Honey for Oshún*) in 2001, and other films subsequently, on DV. He saw this as a solution both individual and collective, and gave support to the call for 'no-budget' cinema. Reviving a term used across Latin America in the 1960s, in 2003 he founded a Festival of *Cine pobre* (cinema of poverty) in the town of Gibara on Cuba's northeast coast, an unlikely location far from the center of official film culture in Havana, but the town where he'd found colonial streets for a scene in *Lucía*, and used again for a location years later in *Miel para Oshún*. By the time he died five short years after founding the festival, the event had become a magnet for the independent video movement and expanded into a lively and diverse arts festival.

Among the younger generation is the example of Pavel Giroud, whose output before graduating to feature films included installations, music videos, commercials, and promos for clients ranging from Cuban beers to Cubana Airlines to the Spanish Cultural Centre. [15] What is happening here is that a combination of conditions, including the growing tourist industry and the penury of Cuban television, created need on the one side and opportunity on the other for independent producers eager to earn a modest income to support their own free creation. In one account I've been given, Cuban television played an unplanned role in solving the problem for

the independent video artist of how to make a living. Just as desktop video began to be taken up by a new generation of aspiring filmmakers, the state broadcaster, the ICRT, found itself lacking production resources and short of content, and thereby open to suggestion. It worked like this. A client, who might be a musical group, a theater company, a government department, or a magazine, wants some publicity, or has a campaign to run, or would like to disseminate its activities. If they went directly to television, the response would be, "very interesting, but we don't have the resources." But someone came up with the idea of offering them ready-made material, and the television people said, "Okay, we'll have a look." The result is now a regular supply of items ranging from thirty-second spots to the short programs that Cubans call 'videoclips.' Television is happy because they get free content. The clients are happy because they get wider publicity at a very reasonable cost. The videographers are happy because they're able to make a modest living and just about finance their own work.

One last example, perhaps the most emblematic, and another film made as a graduation piece for the ISA. Dedicated to "Cuban families wherever they may be," *Video de familia* (*Family Video*, 2001), by Humberto Padrón, is a dramatization of what Knauer calls the audiovisual remittance—in its purest form, the home video-letter, addressed to missing family members, in this case filmed by a family that has gathered in Havana to make a video to send to the eldest son in the United States—father, mother, grandmother, and the absentee's two siblings. Because this is a home video, they all address the camera directly, thereby drawing the viewer into the family's private space in an entirely novel way, leading up to the moment when the sister lets slip that her absent brother is gay, provoking the horrified repudiation of the father's old-style Communist homophobia. It's a very clever work indeed, which I'm tempted to read in the kind of Lacanian terms favored by Slavoj Žižek. That is, the response of the father, who of course represents the big Other, is to declare his absent son persona non grata in the family home, in other words, to banish him from the symbolic order. But this is a somewhat redundant gesture, because the absent son has done that already by removing himself to the United States. In short, the family as allegory of the nation.

REALIGNMENT

My contention is that the trajectory of Cuban cinema and its transformation into a new audiovisual public sphere is not just instructive but in a certain way exemplary. By extending and increasing participation in public expression, it demonstrates, sometimes in surprising ways, but in a manner comparable to what is variously seen elsewhere, the same potential of the small media of audiovisual culture to produce a democratizing effect. The result everywhere is a challenge to the political system, not necessarily by

direct provocation but through opening up a parallel public sphere born of new forms of participation and interaction. This is a process that is also at work in the interstices of the metropolis, and that the established body politic is bound to find disturbing.

Crucially, the independent video movement in Cuba is part of a wider realignment of the political culture. According to the political scientist Rafael Hernández, editor of the polemical journal *Temas*, because the 1990s was hit by crisis, there has been widening debate in different media on a whole range of previously taboo subjects—from discrimination or the black market to the debacle of socialism in Eastern Europe—producing a diversification of discourse across a range of participants, including writers, artists, social scientists, teachers, community leaders, churches, professional associations, NGOs, environmentalists, religious figures, political leaders, and ordinary citizens.[16] This is a process in which (just like everywhere else) digital communications demonstrates a capacity to subvert the vertical control of the official media, and this has contributed to a significant shift in ideological position taking. The state retains control over the public media, but there is now another sphere that operates through both email and the circulation of digital media.

A striking demonstration of the new situation occurred early in 2007, when Cuban television broadcast a series of apologias for forgotten figures from the early 1970s, culminating in an interview with a certain Luis Pavón, who was in charge of the National Council for Culture during the period that Fornet later dubbed *el quinquenio gris*, the five gray years, an episode that the program omitted to address. Almost immediately emails began to circulate starting among artists and intellectuals criticizing the producers. By 2007, according to official figures from the Ministry of Communication and Informatics, Cuba had 260,000 computers online (mostly in institutions, schools, universities, youth associations, etc.), and nearly one million email accounts; there were fourteen hundred registered Cuban domains, and sixty-seven registered e-magazines. At one point in this e-campaign, I was told, the circulation list reached some fifteen hundred names (each of whom, of course, sent the messages on to others). [17] A public debate was held under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture, with scores more people turning up than the hall was capable of accommodating, even after the venue had been moved; and in the end the television station was forced to admit that the programs had been a mistake. As Hernández pointed out to me, that people felt free to participate in this electronic debate, knowing full well that it was being monitored by the authorities, was a clear indication that the balance of ideological forces had already shifted definitively away from the hard-liners, the Communist fundamentalists nowadays known, with typical Cuban humor, as the Talibans.

Hernández dated the beginning of the *apertura* or opening to the mid-1990s, when the term 'civil society' reentered Cuban political speech. A concept that had disappeared from orthodox Marxist discourse in the

Soviet Union was now acknowledged in the highest echelons of the Party, finding its way in 1996 into a report by none other than Raúl Castro, which referred to *la sociedad civil existente en Cuba* and *la sociedad civil socialista cubana*—in effect an acknowledgment by the state that society is not homogenous and monolithic, and the official ideology need not treat it as such any longer. This, then, is the political context that has allowed independent video to thrive, making links across an increasingly connected world, in which, as Stock puts it, the old dichotomies that separate 'us' from 'them' and 'here' from 'there' must be jettisoned. [18] The result might be seen as a new form of García Espinosa's idea of imperfect cinema, which flourishes outside the marketplace or around its edges, and now, in the interstices of cyberspace. But this is not only what is happening in Cuba. What makes the growing links of cyberculture possible is a technological infrastructure created and dominated by global corporations whose products penetrate the market in Cuba despite the blockade, either legally or illegally. But we are all in the thrall of the same gods of virtual heaven, whether in actually existing communism or actually existing democracy.

NOTES

1. Fidel Castro, 1972, p. 276. For the circumstances of this speech and their relation to cinema, see Michael Chanan, 2004, pp. 133–141, which should also be consulted the historical detail summarized in the present chapter.
2. Christopher Hull, 2009.
3. Chanan, 2004, p. 114.
4. Chanan, 1980, p. 2.
5. Quoted in Cristina Venegas, 2009, p. 38.
6. Ambrosio Fornet, 1997, pp. 11–12.
7. Fornet, 2007, p. 127.
8. Personal communication.
9. Venegas, 2009, p. 38.
10. Ariana Hernandez-Reguant, 2004, pp. 2–3.
11. See Venegas, 2009, p. 41; for a fine study of the co-production process at large, see Libia Villazana, 2009.
12. Lisa Maya Knauer, 2009, p. 167.
13. Ann Marie Stock, 2009, p. 15.
14. Ibid., p. 13.
15. Ibid., p. 181.
16. Rafael Hernández, talk at Florida International University, October 22, 2009, and email message to author.
17. Personal communication from Desiderio Navarro.
18. Stock, 2009, p. 16.

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5 Politics and Privatization in Peruvian Cinema

Grupo Chaski's Aesthetics of Survival

Sophia A. McClennen

One of the foundational tenets of neoliberal economics is that it seeks the privatization of all government functions. The case of the Peruvian film collective Grupo Chaski offers an opportunity to study the ways that political filmmakers have responded to the challenges of neoliberalism, which invariably privatizes vital public issues in the same ways that it privatizes national industries.[1] Founded in the early 1980s, Grupo Chaski emerged in a context of neoliberalism, state violence, guerrilla resistance, and massive urban growth. Focusing on the experiences of the most disenfranchised sectors of Lima society, Chaski has been dedicated to revolutionizing all components of the filmmaking process. From the group's inception, they have consistently worked on creating alternative modes of exhibition at the same time that they have sought to make their films available to the public via commercial releases, television screenings, videos, and other more mainstream distribution outlets.

The work of Chaski is noteworthy for its multipronged approach to politically progressive filmmaking that includes production, distribution, and exhibition. In addition, their three most well-known films were a tremendous success both within Peru and in the international community. Their first film, *Miss Universo en Perú* (*Miss Universe in Peru*, 1982), is a documentary that juxtaposes the 1982 Miss Universe pageant in Lima with the lives of lower-class Peruvian women. Their first feature film, *Gregorio* (1984), traces the effects of urban migration on a young boy from the Andes who joins a group of street kids only to later be rejected by them. Their second feature film, *Juliana* (1988), focuses on the life of a thirteen-year-old runaway girl who disguises herself as a boy in order to be part of gang that performs music for money. Each of these films attracted a massive audience relative to other similar types of film projects. For example, by 1990 *Gregorio* reached over one million viewers on the big screen in Peru, 7.5 million had seen it on Peruvian television, and dozens of millions had seen it on television worldwide.[2]

This chapter begins by placing Chaski's work within the sociopolitical context of Peru during the 1980s. This section offers background on Chaski's founding members and describes how the group both participated

in and challenged Peruvian debates about culture and identity. The second section moves from context to specific analysis of their films and what I call their "aesthetics of survival." In the third section, I close with an analysis of Chaski's renewed activities since 2004, when they began working on a project of local, grassroots distribution and exhibition, a process they call "microcines."

CONTEXT

The context of the film project of Grupo Chaski lies at the intersection of a number of Latin American filmmaking trends and sociopolitical developments. The first clue to the way that their work links Peruvian history and Latin American filmmaking is their choice of name. The group's name is in Quechua, the native language of the Incans, and it means "messenger." During the Incan empire the *chaskis* were messengers that carried information between communities. Oswaldo Carpio, one of the key early members of the group, gives this explanation for their choice of name: "Por hacer películas desde adentro, asume el nombre de los antiguos comunicadores del imperio de los incas, los Chaskis, sistema que funcionó y que puso la COMUNICACIÓN al servicio de todo un pueblo."[3] (Because we make films from within, we use the name of the ancient communicators of the Incan empire—the Chaskis. The Chaskis were an efficient system that put COMMUNICATION at the service of an entire people.[4]) Without question, one of the primary goals of Chaski has been to make films that communicate about Peru to Peruvians. Building on the long legacy of intellectuals like José Carlos Mariátegui and José María Arguedas, who vigorously worked to defend the rights and improve the social status of Peru's indigenous communities, Chaski politically confronts the long history of racism and exploitation that has characterized the status of Peru's indigenous cultures.[5]

A series of key social factors influenced the work of Chaski. First, the legacy of colonial structures that had oppressed, enslaved, and abused the indigenous populations for the benefit of the Spanish-descended elite, otherwise known as the *criollos*, continued to play an enormous role in debates about social inequities, identity politics, and political repression. These tensions relate to a second important factor: the emergence of the militant Maoist revolutionary group, Sendero Luminoso, or Shining Path, in the early 1980s and the government's violent military response. Influenced by Maoist Marxist theory, Sendero Luminoso wanted to replace bourgeois social structures with a peasant revolution that would also incorporate Incan forms of life. Their approach, though, was extremely violent and the military responded with even more violence. As a consequence of the aggression in the rural areas of Peru and also as a result of the increasing turn to neoliberal free market economics that would be exacerbated during

the regime of Alberto Fujimori leader of Peru from 1990 to 2000, these years also witnessed massive migration to the city of Lima.

One important aspect of Chaski's films, consequently, is their focus on urban spaces and their interest in a broad, heterogeneous demographic of oppression that dismantles the indigenous as a monolithic category—a practice that links their work to that of filmmaking collectives across the globe that have directly confronted the connections between racism, urban realities, and social inequity. Chaski's reconsideration of the identity politics attached to Peruvian marginal communities may be accounted for, in part, by the variety of perspectives and experiences of the founding members: Stefan Kaspar studied communications in Biel and Berna, Switzerland, where he also worked as an independent journalist until 1978. He then traveled to Peru to work on a film project on urban migration. Four years later he participated in the foundation of Chaski. Another founding member was Fernando Espinoza. Espinoza was an equally energetic force behind the creation of Chaski as he struggled against not only wider urban oppression, but also adamantly supported the rights of Afro-Peruvians. His dedication to highlighting the marginalization of Afro-Peruvians added an important perspective to Chaski's approach to filming the challenges of city life.[6] Espinoza was also instrumental in recruiting Alejandro Legaspi to Chaski. Legaspi arrived in Peru from Uruguay in 1974 when he was forced into exile by the Uruguayan dictatorship. As a boy he had worked on a number of films and had been influenced by the work of the New Latin American Cinema, especially that of the Argentine directors Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino. Serving as one of the main directors for Chaski's films, he brought to the group a poetic vision combined with a clear commitment to politically relevant filmmaking. Another key perspective was added by María Barea, who had worked as a producer with Luis Figueroa, one of the founding members of the Cine Club Cuzco, and also with Jorge Sanjinés and Grupo Ukamau on *El enemigo principal* (*The Principle Enemy*, 1972). Prior to forming Chaski she had directed *Mujeres del planeta* (*Women of the World*, 1982) and had already established herself as a director committed to filming women's issues from a feminist perspective.[7] The founding members of Chaski brought together a rich background in filmmaking and a dynamic interest in merging progressive politics with a social commitment to the disenfranchised. This vision required Chaski to rethink the traditional parameters that had guided identity struggles in Peru prior to the massive urban migrations. The contrast of the rural with the urban and of the indigenous with the *criollo* elites that had shaped decades of debate about Peruvian identity politics no longer obtained in the hybrid, complex societies that were emerging as a consequence of massive waves of migration.

As Jesús Martín-Barbero notes, Lima presents one of the most extreme examples of urban migration in the 1980s.[8] The rapidly changing social landscape called for new ways of thinking about progressive action, political

resistance, and the politics of national identity. Afro-Peruvians and Asian Peruvians and Andean highlanders struggled together in the land grabs that would eventually result in new communities like that of Villa El Salvador, which was formally established as a district of Lima in 1983. Sensitive to the integral role that women were playing in these social movements, Chaski's films attempted to reflect the changing nature of what José Matos Mar calls "a new pattern of solidarity."[9] In a 1990 document intended to reevaluate the successes and failures of Chaski, Carpio noted that Chaski's work was a direct response to the population explosion of Lima. Even if they had wanted to focus solely on the problems of Andean cultures, he explains, they would have been unsuccessful because they did not have the knowledge base. Carpio indicates two key points of interest for Chaski regarding the urban explosion of Lima. First, the group was interested in the extraordinarily intense degree of socio-physical change that was affecting the urban topography of the city, placing the mestizo in the center of Lima's new identity. Holding to the notion that cinema is one of the most significant forms of culture capable of reflecting and shaping national identity, Chaski hoped to intervene in the historical marginalization of the majority of Peruvians by challenging the hegemony of dominant Peruvian culture and offering an alternative cinematic narrative of identity.[10] According to one document defining their goals, they wanted to "servir de canales de expresión de aquellos sectores excluidos del sistema de comunicación"[11] (serve as a channel of expression for those sectors excluded from the system of communication). Their work was dedicated to "el desarrollo de una conciencia cívica en los sectores populares, sobre la problemática nacional"[12] (the development of civic consciousness among the marginalized majority in order to promote attention to the problems of the nation).

In addition, the waves of migration pointed to significant social problems that demanded a critique beyond questions of ideology and identity. The migrations were a direct consequence of political violence and an economic crisis that was devastating the agricultural economy. Caught between the violence of the Sendero Luminoso, the state violence in response to Sendero, and the neoliberal economic practices of the Peruvian government, many Andean members of rural communities fled for the cities. In the context of the increasing authoritarianism of everyday life, Chaski advocated for democracy, the development of civic agency, and the opening of spaces for the cultural expression of marginalized sectors. They were opposed to "toda forma de autoritarianismo e intolerancia"[13] (all forms of authoritarianism and intolerance). Chaski, then, had two major themes that dominated their work—a constructive effort to reshape the historically hegemonic narrative of national identity and a politically progressive project dedicated to exposing the sociopolitical structures that ruled Peru.

Chaski rejected the dominant narratives of Peruvian identity offered by both the government and by Sendero. Moreover, they discarded the nostalgic and romantic characterizations of indigenous culture that tended to

create heroic images of oppressed people. Instead, they moved outside of the reigning categories of political identities. Chaski's films do not idealize the disenfranchised, nor do they cast them as helpless victims. One example of this practice is the documentary short *El taller más grande del mundo* (*The Largest Shop in the World*), which focuses on the work of the mechanic Don Lucho. After being unable to find work in an established car shop, he decided to open his own shop on the street. Before long, he had hired a number of mechanics and had such an excellent reputation that people preferred coming to him over going to conventionally established mechanics. Chaski emphasizes in Don Lucho's story the ways that the marginalized "survive" through flexibility and perseverance. Their lives are a constant negotiation between their needs, their desires, and the possibilities afforded by Peruvian society.

Chaski explains that they are committed to cinematic works that reflect the economic, social, and cultural reality of Peru with the participation of the marginalized sectors as both actors and protagonists.[14] Throughout their documents they return to the idea that their work is connected to developing protagonists for the people whose cinematic protagonism and similarity with the characteristics of the community will lead the audience to recognize themselves in the characters on-screen and then engage in civic action. In this sense, Chaski's self-image as social messengers indicates their interest in highlighting the process by which communities identify themselves as social agents and their commitment to exposing the material and ideological forces that attempt to limit those processes.

Chaski's commitment to intervening in the politics and ideologies that were shaping Peruvian society in the 1980s and their belief that culture and communications play an essential role in the shaping of social consciousness necessarily led them to confront the politics and practices of the Peruvian media industry. At the time that *Gregorio* was released in the mid-1980s, 99.5 percent of all films screened in Peru were foreign. They indicate one of their primary goals as developing an alternative politics of commercialization "frente a la hegemonía transnacional"[15] (in order to challenge transnational hegemony). This goal led them to work with distribution (commercial and alternative), trade unions, and other areas of film training, legislative advocacy, promotion, marketing, and film production. Chaski's approach to the culture industry is noteworthy given that they have simultaneously attempted to change the laws governing media communications in Peru, while also trying to function within them and around them.

In a move that parallels Néstor García Canclini's argument that state support is both essential and problematic for the development of local culture industries, they have consistently considered public advocacy for state support of filmmaking as a central part of their work at the same time that they have always been suspicious of state interference and wary of state ideology. Their recent work with a number of philanthropy groups like Ashoka and organizations like UNESCO, and their collaborations with European

funding sources like the German television channel ZDF, further indicates the ways that they seek funding according to the structures available. In the neoliberal model, support for national culture comes not from the state but from private organizations. In keeping with their refusal to depend on the state, Chaski has received funding from international groups and also from local Peruvian philanthropists.[16] At the same time, though, they are working on antipiracy laws.[17] The practice of Chaski provides a model for flexible advocacy in the complex structure of global communications.

THE AESTHETICS OF SURVIVAL

The context of Chaski's collective film project reflects three major shifts in the possibilities for socially progressive filmmakers in Latin America. First is the rethinking of left strategies after the experiences of the 1960s and 1970s, away from violent militancy towards democracy, and away from clear-cut paths of resistance to more complicated, nuanced appreciations of micro-rebellions. Second is the changing shape of the media industry: the rise of television, the deregulation of the film market, and increased access to new media technologies. Third is the reconsidered notion of personal identity and of social agency. Whereas former theories of the marginalized imagined this class as either hopelessly victimized and/or essentially heroic, groups like Chaski advocated for a new aesthetic for filming marginalized communities, one that simultaneously emphasized the strength and resilience of the marginalized while also pointing to the concrete ways in which neoliberal economics, entrenched racism, and capitalist ideology created material conditions that threatened these communities to inevitably assimilate or face self-marginalization.

According to Chuck Kleinhans and Julia Lesage, who saw Chaski's films in 1986 at the Havana Film Festival:

> All of this kind of narrative development and characterization might distress a critic stuck in the standard Marxist political and aesthetic categories of fifty years ago. [. . .] As Grupo Chaski has analyzed it, the models of fully developed capitalism have to be rethought to account for the Third World. This implies a different aesthetic as well, one which doesn't simply see the poorest people as desperate or as a negative example, but which acknowledges the unemployed poor's strength in the face of harsh circumstances and their role as an essential component of revolutionary transformation.

Thus, Chaski's films reflect a new political aesthetic that heralds a transition in the ways that progressive filmmakers imagined their work. According to Martín-Barbero, Latin American spectators, who are inundated with U.S. mass media, do not passively absorb the images of U.S. television and

film that they regularly consume. He explains that the 1980s witnessed a transformation in Latin American debates about national identity that called for rethinking the notion of civil society and reconceptualizing the idea of a "political subject."[18] Martín-Barbero's theory of cultural mediation is especially salient in the case of Chaski. The paradigm of the spectator as either a passive victim or a liberated revolutionary fails to account for the complex ways that communities respond to alienating images. As a way of rethinking these categories, Chaski has developed what might best be called "an aesthetic of survival."[19] Two of the most significant features of this aesthetic are the development of social protagonists, what the collective refers to as *personas-personajes*, and the emphasis on spectatorship as a process of knowledge-recognition, or *conocer-reconocer*.[20] Whereas each of their films reflects these aesthetic strategies, the following analysis traces their appearance in their three most well-known films: *Miss Universe in Peru*, *Gregorio*, and *Juliana*.

Miss Universe in Peru

María Barea hastily organized Chaski's first film, *Miss Universe in Peru*, when she recognized that Lima's hosting of the pageant offered Chaski an excellent opportunity to create a social documentary about gender, social inequity, and Western "values." In a brilliant use of Eisensteinian montage theory, the documentary juxtaposes images of the pageant with images of girls and women watching the pageant. The contrast between the European features of the contestants, especially when these hail from Latin American countries, and the indigenous features of the spectators highlights the ways that conflicting value systems cause social damage. Kleinhans and Lesage note that the film's explicit feminism and anti-imperialism ask the spectator to consider: "What does this celebration of European standards of beauty and consumption have to do with the majority of Peruvian women?" The film further exposes other sources of conflicting views of Peruvian and Latin American identity when it contrasts the voices of the Peruvian elite and pageant officials against those of indigenous women organizing a protest of the pageant. These contrasts serve to show how official state-sponsored culture promotes racist, neocolonialist, and sexist ideologies that fail to account for the Peruvian "nation."

Three additional features of the film provide salient examples of Chaski's aesthetic. The first might best be referred to as the *establishing shot of the neoliberal landscape*—a technique they use in many other films as well. Chaski often composes crane-like, overhead views of their particular cityscape of choice, mainly Lima.[21] These shots, though, serve the opposite function from the standard technique in dominant cinema. Typically such a shot establishes an authoritative, masterful perspective that shapes a coherent narrative. The use of the shot by Chaski, however, deconstructs this trend by showing the cracks in this narrative. As we hear voices by the

Peruvian elite describing how the pageant will help to promote a view of the Peruvian nation to the world, we see the landscape of Lima dominated by foreign corporate images, such as neon signs advertising Coca-Cola or Pan American airlines. Given the angles of these shots, these corporate images are often shown to loom over the masses of people in Lima's urban setting. The technique is subtle and effective.

The second key aesthetic practice reflects the complex gender politics of the film. Clearly one main goal is to critique the obvious racism, patriarchy, and sexism behind beauty pageants and to contrast the pageant with the lives of everyday Peruvian women. The first part of the film establishes this critique in clear terms. The eloquence and political engagement of the community activist women that are interviewed contradict the stereotype that these women are weak victims who are easily appropriated by dominant society. On the contrary, these women are examples of Chaski's commitment to filming social protagonists. By presenting them as individuals engaged in struggle, Chaski reveals their power to resist while simultaneously exposing the challenges they face. But the film refuses to hold to a class-driven binary between the pageant contestants and the women activists. In one interview a woman activist explains that the pageant serves to distract the public from the very real challenges facing Peruvian society. Then, in keeping with the complex ways left struggles have tried to work across lines of oppression, the women recognize how their feminism links them to the women in the pageant. As Kleinhans and Lesage explain: "We see a vibrant and articulate Quechua woman organizer argue that the contest demeans every woman participating in it because the contestants are not only privileged, but also smart and talented, yet made to look like dolls." Later, as though the words of the organizer scripted the moves of the filmmakers, the contestants are interviewed. Their complaints about the long hours and harsh conditions of their work serve not only to demystify the aura of the beauty queen, but also to establish tentative lines of solidarity between them and the lower-class women activists.

The third and most significant aesthetic technique is a shot reverse shot repeated in motif throughout the film. A television broadcasting images of beauty contestants, advertisements, or news announcers cuts to the image of a woman with indigenous features watching those images. She is in center frame in a medium-close-up that reveals only her body surrounded by blackness. Her face shows little expression. The images of the contestants and the advertisements that follow them display all of the grotesque trappings of capitalist media culture. The contrast between these images and that of the woman are so extreme that they create an intense dialectic of social conflict. The montage of these images offers a powerful critique of Western ideals of beauty, of consumer society, and of the ways that these images both attract and reject the Peruvian marginalized majority. But Chaski's aesthetic pushes the critique even further by adding a few key twists to this form of political montage. First, they hold on the face of the

indigenous-featured woman longer than one might expect. This slowing down of editing time coupled with the unclear expression on the woman's face and the absence of context for her viewing produces profound unease in the viewer. Unlike the images on the television that proceed at a rapid rate primed for facile consumption, the image of the woman resists standard viewing techniques.

Remembering that the intended audience for this film was a population similar to that of the woman framed in the darkness, we can then note how this technique is an example of Chaski's aesthetic of knowledge-recognition, or *conocer-reconocer*. The shots provide the viewer with information, raise their consciousness of the contradictions that rule Peruvian society, and then move to a process of recognition. Chaski emphasizes repeatedly that one of their main goals is to provide images of reality and to offer information that challenges official discourse. Consciousness raising, though, is only the beginning of the audience's critical process. The means to political filmmaking for Chaski is to ask the viewer to see themselves in relation to the images. They elaborate on this in the following way: "Esto se expresa en la posibilidad de que el espectador reflexione, tome conciencia, asuma un sentido crítico, y que sobretodo la comprenda, se comprometa con ella y busque actuar en su transformación."[22] (We hope that the spectator will reflect on reality, become conscious of it, and will assume a critical stance. Above all we hope the spectator will understand reality, will commit to it, and will look to be active in its transformation). Chaski's emphasis on recognition over identity politics as a source for political engagement and social transformation is in keeping with a similar critical move made by García Canclini, who, following the arguments of Paul Ricoeur, argues that it is better to "emphasize a politics of *recognition* over a politics of identity" because "recognition permits a dialectic of same and other."[23]

The Spectator Shot

One way Chaski provokes the process of recognition is by repeatedly screening images of native spectators. In addition to the motif of the woman watching the pageant in *Miss Universe*, *Gregorio* has a scene where a group of street children watch a Hollywood movie full of violence and sex and *Juliana* has a scene where Juliana is watching a *telenovela*.[24] These scenes are complemented by various occasions when the audience watches the gaze of Gregorio or Juliana as they observe advertisements, shop displays, video games, billboards, magazines, or other forms of neoliberal media culture. The technique of the *spectator shot* allows Chaski to highlight the pervasive existence of mass media culture and the problematic ways the consumption of this culture influences the Peruvian people. When the viewer watches a spectator watching alienating images of mass media, a series of critical reflections emerge. First is the obvious sense that the spectator that appears on-screen is demeaned and alienated by the media it consumes, but the

almost immediate connection between the spectator watching the film and the image of the spectator within the film does not allow that impression to persist. It is instead followed by recognition, by the translation of the experience viewed on-screen to the experience of the film viewer, and also by the critical apparatus that distinguishes both the affinities and the distance between the spectator on-screen and the viewer watching the spectator. In this way the audience both identifies with the image of the spectator and refuses that identification. Merging a technique of distanciation with one of recognition, Chaski creates an intricate web of relations to media processes that does not allow for perfect associations and representations of power dynamics. The viewer recognizes the lure of media society with its offer to distract from practical reality while also being repulsed by it. By reflecting the viewing of media as a process, one that is alienating but not necessarily devastating, Chaski exemplifies Martín-Barbero's description of the consumption of media as mediation.[25]

TOWARDS A SOCIAL BILDUNGSROMAN

Added to the aesthetic effects of screening spectators, in their two feature films Chaski framed their child protagonists in specific shots that create a social *bildungsroman* where these children's identities are caught between the alienating forces of society and their desire to develop their own sense of self. Both *Gregorio* and *Juliana* focus on the stories of two children who face extraordinary obstacles to their survival. Living in a hostile world and virtually abandoned by their parents (their fathers are dead and their mothers seem incapable of caring for them), Gregorio and Juliana are forced to take care of themselves. Both of them undergo radical transformations as a result.

Gregorio must abandon his Andean way of life, including his language and mode of dress, in order to adapt to life in the city. His family is forced to migrate to the city because they are unable to survive in the Andean village of Recuayhuanca. Prior to Gregorio's departure we see him working, enjoying nature, and learning from his grandfather. As he leaves on a truck to join his father in the city, we see him facing backwards towards the sierra in an obvious sign of loss. Here the *bildungsroman* is troubled by forced migration and Gregorio is shown to be the passive victim of social forces. Once the family arrives in Lima they encounter the shock of urban life and Gregorio's father, Jacinto, chastises his mother, Juana, for continuing to speak in Quechua.

The economic hardships of the city force Gregorio to immediately seek work as a shoe shine boy, forcing a rapid immersion in urban life that requires him to mature practically overnight. In one crucial scene he approaches a group of street performing boys. While enjoying the show, he becomes the butt of one of their jokes due to his migrant status and

indigenous looks. He immediately leaves in shame, his first moment of urban community shattered by the reinforcement of his outsider status. Meanwhile his father's health is deteriorating and he can no longer work, causing the family to be forced to abandon their apartment and participate in the land grab of Villa El Salvador, where they live in a shack made of straw and are forced to alternately battle the sands that the winds blow into their home and the constant police raids that terrorize the community. Shortly after, his father dies. Once his mother begins a relationship with another man, Gregorio feels abandoned. The street performer boys who had initially mocked him soon become his friends and he spends more and more time with them, returning home later and later with less and less money to offer his mother. Eventually his conflicts with his mother lead him to move in with the boys, who live in an abandoned bus. With the boys he takes drugs, plays video games, goes to the movies, looks at porn magazines, and steals, but he also has a sense of community that he had not had since arriving in Lima. After a robbery in an amusement park causes the group to scatter, he takes the stolen money to his mother. When she refuses it he spends it on himself. Later when he sees the boys again, they beat him up, telling him "no sirves para esto, quítate" (you are no good at this, get away). At the end of the film, he has returned home but he will never be the naïve boy he was when he came to Lima. The last scene presents Gregorio describing his experiences in an interview that has been shown in pieces throughout the film. His final words are "a veces tengo ganas" (sometimes I wish). Indicating the ways that the film is a narrative of becoming, Gregorio has not only learned how to survive in the city, he has learned how to express his desires.

Ricardo Bedoya compares *Gregorio* to De Sica's *Sciuscià* (*Shoeshine*, 1946) and *Juliana* to *Miracolo a Milano* (*Miracle in Milan*, 1950) suggesting that *Gregorio*'s documentary realism gives way in *Juliana* to a utopic, marvelous ending, but that both films also have many parallels.[26] Juliana lives in greater comfort than Gregorio and is at home in the city, but her abusive stepfather forces her to run away from home. Because her options as a young girl on the street are not appealing, she hopes to join Don Pedro's group of street performers where her bother Clavito also lives, but to be accepted she must disguise herself as a boy. The disguising of her gender adds narrative tension that was absent in *Gregorio*, but this element does not overtake the central theme of the challenges that poor young children face in Lima. After being admitted to the group, she is shown working hard singing on buses for money and trying to avoid the regular punishments of Don Pedro's Fagin-like personality. Like the gang that Gregorio joins, the solidarity among the "boys" is fragile, devolving into racist slurs against the two Afro-Peruvian boys and breaking down into cliques. But, in contrast with *Gregorio*, rather than bonding over drugs, they bond over music, responding to the harshness of their lives with jam sessions where they create music that they will perform later on the buses. Similar to *Gregorio*,

documentary-like scenes allow the boys to tell their stories, which often include abusive, alcoholic parents, or the sudden death of a father. In keeping with the lighter nature of *Juliana*, they also recount their dreams, a tactic they use when they are depressed, frightened, or sad.

Eventually Juliana's gender transgression is discovered. When Don Pedro threatens to beat her, the boys come to her defense and they all flee. The end of the film has them staying in a beached ship, living off of the money they earn singing on buses. The final scene presents their dream of a bus that travels throughout the city and has a "nice" driver. All of the passengers are their loved ones. The dream converts a hostile space that they see as threatening into a womb-like space of collective comfort and compassion. Most importantly, the dream ending allows Chaski to remind the audience that these young children not only worry about survival and companionship; they also have desires and fantasies. Unlike Gregorio, who literally had to find his identity, Juliana had a sense of herself and her dreams from the start of *Juliana*. Her *bildungsroman*, to the degree that the term applies to this film, relates to her learning how to negotiate between her needs and her possibilities without abandoning her dreams. In both films, though, the development of these children's personal identities counteracts the neoliberal trend to privatization, where the state and its citizenry have no commitment to the disenfranchised. Here the development of these children as persons challenges the neoliberal model of seeing in these street children nothing but disposable life, commodities with no use value. The mere insistence that these children are people who have the right to dream and to desire undermines the neoliberal mantras that would discard not only their dreams but their very lives.

NOT SO DISTANT DREAMS

Chaski's most recent phase of activity has focused on the *microcines* project and the documentary *Sueños lejanos* (*Distant Dreams*, 2006). According to their website: "EL MICROCINE es un espacio de encuentro y participación donde se exhiben películas que fomentan valores, reflexión y sano entretenimiento. Es gestionado por líderes de la comunidad que son capacitados para desempeñarse como promotores culturales que buscan la autogestión y la sostenibilidad."[27] (THE MICROCINE is a meeting place and a space for community participation where films are shown that promote values, reflection, and healthy entertainment. They are organized by community leaders who are trained as cultural promoters. The goal is to empower them to be able to sustain the projects on their own.) The *microcines* project expands on their earlier work with alternative forms of distribution and exhibition while also taking advantage of advances in digital technology. As Paola Reategui explains in a 2007 document describing the early years of the *microcines* project, the

viewing practices and possibilities of the Peruvian public have radically changed the screening opportunities for Latin American cinema. Neoliberal economic policy has resulted in a national film industry controlled by an increasingly smaller number of transnational corporations. The biggest change, one that García Canclini notes in relation to Mexico as well, regards the reduction in movie house screens and the shift in their location.[28] Reategui notes that from 1990 to 2007 Peru went from 240 movie theaters spread out across the country to thirty-five multiplexes (with 150 screens), of which thirty are in Lima with only five movie theaters in the rest of the country. The location of these theaters is typically close to supermarkets and malls and 95 percent of tickets are sold to U.S. films. Ticket prices have risen, making them out of reach for the majority of the population and many lower-class communities have completely abandoned the custom of attending public film screenings, favoring instead home screenings of television or video. Film viewing has been reduced to "centralismo, exclusión, discriminación, consumo pasivo, dominación económica y cultural"[29] (centralism, exclusion, discrimination, passive consumption, economic and cultural domination).

Alongside these increasingly dire prospects for Peruvian filmmaking and socially committed media, though, the rise in digital technology and the lowering costs of projection equipment opened a space for intervention. Seizing this opportunity and building on their years of experience with distribution and exhibition, Chaski conceived of an innovative way to reconnect progressive films with marginalized communities via *microcines*. In a transition from Chaski's earlier work with exhibition and distribution, the *microcines* project envisions far greater collaboration with communities and far greater local initiative. The goal is to establish throughout Peru, and eventually throughout Latin America, small, local screening locations where it is possible to see films by and about Latin Americans at reasonable prices. These screening sites are already existing community spaces that can be converted into theaters easily. Tickets are purchased for about two *soles* or less than one U.S. dollar and audiences typically range from fifty to two hundred. Proceeds go to the local *microcine* organizers, to pay local taxes, to pay modest exhibition rights for the films screened, and to support Chaski.[30]

Table 5.1 Distribution of Microcine Income

Breakdown of Ticket Sales	
Local Taxes	10%
Microcine (Exhibitor)	45%
Chaski (Distributor)	45%
Breakdown of the 45% that Goes to Chaski	
Producers and Screening Rights	70%
Distribution (Chalski)	30%

Key to the success of the *microcines* is the development of local organizers. Whereas Chaski is pleased to organize local screenings, the *microcine* project is interested in developing a more integral notion of film and community—one that depends on the *microcine* as a locally driven cultural space. Their goal is to not only reacquaint Peruvians with Latin American cinema and with the practice of attending pubic screenings, but also to promote the film experience as a moment of reflection, debate, and critical exchange. To this end, they organize workshops to train community organizers that cover a range of issues including how to promote screenings, how to use screenings as a means to discuss and debate topics of importance to the community, how to develop critical media literacy skills, and more. The outside funding they have received has helped to cover the costs of buying projection equipment, organizing initial screenings, and running workshops.

Another major component of the project relates to their dedication to expanding their catalogue of films for distribution and to working to develop "kits" that package groups of films together. Each "kit" includes one short, one feature, one documentary, and one film for children. It is accompanied by a copy of their magazine *Nuestro Cine* (Our Cinema) with information about the films, a guide to promoting the screenings, and a screening license. By 2007 they had developed seven "kits" and had over sixty films for digital distribution. The array of films available varies from gritty documentaries to more mainstream-style features like those of Francisco Lombardi, but the common thread that links all of these films is that they each exemplify their goal of "cine latino para gente latina" (Latin American film for the Latin American people). "El Grupo Chaski defiende desde sus inicios, una actitud y una metodología ante un cine responsable, inmerso en lo cotidiano, con personajes auténticos y con la experiencia social compartida de todos los días. Es allí donde se encuentra las bases de sus conceptos, fundados en la expresión de lo real, lo auténtico, lo social."[31] (Since its founding Grupo Chaski has maintained an attitude and a methodology of responsible cinema, one that is immersed in the everyday, that has authentic characters and that reflects the shared social experience of daily life. Our work is based on an expression of the real, the authentic, and the social.)

In some ways globalization has had an ironic effect on the success of Chaski. After over twenty years of working to reach a Peruvian audience by the turn of the twenty-first century the possibilities for alternative filmmaking seemed grimmer than ever. When Chaski began the *microcines* project there were only thirty-five movie theaters in the country and the experience of watching films on the big screen was reserved for a small minority of the population. But just as globalization has meant the homogenizing of media culture, it has also brought technological innovation that has opened a space for alternative media access. Digital technologies and flexible distribution rights have allowed Chaski to match in numbers the exhibition venues

(but not yet the screens) of commercial theaters. Chaski currently supports thirty-five *microcines* throughout Peru and six more in Latin America. The *microcines* project has proven that it is possible to circumvent the centralization of media access, creating a true alternative to the neoliberal model. The *microcines* project has also considerably expanded the local participation of communities, who now take an active role in their film experience from the moment of promotion. Moreover, the considerable exposure that Chaski has on the Internet via their own website, on video sites like YouTube and Daily Motion, and through bloggers and Peruvian film sites, further indicates the way that their project has benefited by the development of internet technologies that were unavailable to them in the 1980s.[32]

In the context of this resurgence, Legaspi, who was teaching a course on documentary at the Pontificia Católica Universidad de Perú, had asked all of his students to bring in a documentary to analyze. One student brought in an early Chaski documentary short that Legaspi had directed entitled *Encuentro de hombrecitos* (*Encounter with Little Men*, 1988). What struck Legaspi during the post-screening conversation with students was the fact that rather than discuss the techniques used in making the documentary, the class's focus was on what had become of the little boys.

Proving to a certain extent the success of Chaski's aesthetic commitment to using film as a medium through which Peruvians could connect with Peruvians, the students were immediately engaged with the people on the screen rather than mesmerized by the filmmaking apparatus. After the class Legaspi began talking about trying to find the boys, who would be in their thirties, and shooting a documentary about how their lives had changed. Once they had found the boys, Legaspi was intrigued by the fact that one of them—El Gringo—had remained in the Lima district, Agustino, all of his life, whereas the other—El Negro—had traveled extensively both outside of and within Peru. Contrasting the two ways that the boys had lived over the past twenty years with the dreams they had had as young boys, Legaspi imagined *Sueños Lejanos* as a documentary that would trace the changes in their personal lives and in Peruvian society. Mixing footage from the original documentary, especially the scene where each boy describes his dreams for the future, with archival footage of historical events during those years, Legaspi's goal was to create "ventanas a la memoria"[33] (windows to memory). And, in keeping with Chaski's aesthetics, these memories both reinforce the sense that the boys are representative of a larger social group at the same time that they expose their individual identities and the different paths their lives have taken. Many of the shots are taken from moving buses or taxis that are meant to capture the protagonists' point of view as they are looking out at the Peruvian landscape, indicating, like the walking shots of *Gregorio* and *Juliana*, the ways that the majority of Peruvians engage in daily displacements that are both forced and willful.

The project received funding through an award by CONACINE, the Peruvian national film board, in 2006 and was released in the fall of 2007.[34]

Shortly after its first screenings in Peru, it was screened at the International Documentary Film Festival in Amsterdam, one of the biggest and most important festivals of its kind in the world. Most importantly, the film had the benefit of the circuits of Chaski's distribution. Whereas the commercial venues for films such as these will always be a struggle, one site of exhibition is guaranteed: the *microcines*. As a film that promotes reflection on the process of making documentaries about Peru's marginalized class and that reflects on the film project of Chaski, the ultimate triumph of *Sueños lejanos* will be the way it offers local Peruvian audiences yet another opportunity to use the film experience as a means to engage in recognition, reflection, and critique.

NOTES

1. Much of the analysis of Chaski's film collective in this chapter draws on my essay, McClennen, 2008.
2. Carpio, 1990, p. 6.
3. Ibid., p. 2.
4. All translations are mine.
5. For more on these issues see Polar, 1994, and Starn, 1995.
6. Espinoza died of a heart attack on July 21, 2002, while filming the last scenes of a documentary on the role of African descendents in Peru. Titled *El Quinto Suyo* (Their Fifth One), the film references the Incan empire's division into four geographic and political regions. The film's goal is to add a fifth region to this story, one "en el que los Afroperuanos nos incluimos como parte de la historia del Perú, porque nosotros . . . también tenemos una historia que contar" (in which Afro-Peruvians include ourselves in the history of Peru because we . . . also have a story to tell; see http://www.cimarrones-peru.org/video.htm).
7. Barea has continued to be an active feminist filmmaker and has worked with Women Make Movies. In 1989, she co-founded the women's film group WARMI Cine y Video, with which she produces and directs documentaries. Her films include *Andahuaylas—suenen las campanas* (1987), *Porcon* (1989/1992), *Porque quería estudiar* (1990), *Barro y Bambu* (1991), *Antuca* (1992), and *Hijas de la guerra* (*Daughters of War*, 1998).
8. Martín-Barbero, 1987, p. 198.
9. Quoted in Martín-Barbero, 1987, p. 198.
10. Hegemony and subalternity are concepts that flow throughout Chaski's texts.
11. Grupo Chaski, 1986, p. 3.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Terms like "reality" may be out of fashion in some circles today, but it is important to note that for Chaski the capturing of reality has been an essential part of their effort. Given the distortions emanating from official discourse and the mass media, they feel a tremendous need to correct the prevalence of these misrepresentations with versions of the practical details of everyday life of the marginalized majority. In the struggle for representational politics, Chaski has viewed their work as both a corrective to official

distortions and as a revelation to social sectors that only appear on screen as caricatures or stereotypes.

15. Grupo Chaski, 1986, p. 4.
16. For a list of their current sources of support, see http://www.grupochaski.org/index.php?id=581,0,0,1,0,0/.
17. It may not seem immediately obvious why antipiracy struggles would be important to Chaski, but independent local filmmakers can be even more vulnerable to pirating than major studio productions that can earn revenue in a variety of ways. Chaski has been committed to struggling for antipiracy because they feel that it is an important way to make smaller budget projects viable.
18. Martín-Barbero, 1987, p. 208.
19. Whereas this term does not appear directly in their work, they repeatedly emphasize the theme of survival as central to their project. One of their most popular series of documentaries is entitled "retratos de sobrevivencia" (portraits of survival). It would be interesting to consider Chaski's aesthetic of survival in relation to Glauber Rocha's aesthetic of hunger.
20. Both of these terms appear in various Chaski documents. My analysis will reflect their version of these concepts and elaborate on them as well.
21. Given their budget it is likely these are actually shot from apartment rooftops, balconies, etc.
22. Chaski Group, 1989, p. 2.
23. García Canclini, 2001, p. 13.
24. In an intertext with these scenes their new documentary *Sueños lejanos* opens with a scene where two men watch a documentary of themselves as boys that Chaski shot in the 1980s called *Encuentro de hombrecitos* (*Encounter with Little Men*).
25. Martín-Barbero, 1987, p. 187.
26. Bedoya, 1992, p. 278.
27. "Información de Microcines."
28. García Canclini, 2001, p. 99.
29. Reategui, 2007, p. 6.
30. Ibid., p. 16.
31. Ibid., p. 10.
32. See, for example, the site for *Cinencuentro* (Filmencounter) (http://www.cinencuentro.com/) and the blog for the independent movie house, the *Cinematografo*, in the Barranco district of Lima (http://elcinematografodebarranco.blogspot.com/), both of which regularly cover the activities of Chaski. There is a two-part interview with Alejandro Legaspi posted by *Cinencuentro* on the Daily Motion site (http://www.dailymotion.com/videos/relevance/search/alejandro+legaspi/1). View their promotional video about the *microcines* project here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PX2ErN5dqLs.
33. Legaspi, 2005, p. 4.
34. Information available in promotional materials.

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6 Form, Politics, and Culture

A Case Study of *The Take*, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, and *Listen to Venezuela*

Mike Wayne and Deirdre O'Neill

The Zapatista uprising in the Chiapas district of Mexico, on January 1, 1994, was timed to coincide with the day the North American Free Trade Agreement came into effect, further integrating Mexico into the free trade imperatives of the U.S. Confronted by the Mexican army, the subsequent revolt was largely conducted as a media and propaganda war against the Mexican state designed to mobilize national and international public support. It was an early and effective demonstration of the power of the Internet.[1] Their example inspired a new wave and mode of struggle against neoliberal capitalism, both within and outside Latin America. Their slogan *Ya basta* (enough is enough) became popular amongst the new anticapitalist movements emerging in the West.[2] This entwining of politics between Latin America and the West became a crucial dynamic after 1994. Film was and remains an important medium in which information and representations about Latin America circulated back into a Western public sphere struggling to escape the stranglehold of its own corporate media and its agenda. In this chapter, we focus on three films that testify to the enduring importance of Latin America in the international struggle to break from neoliberalism. The films are Kim Bartley and Donnacha O'Briain's *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* (2002), Naomi Klein and Avi Lewis's *The Take* (2004), and our own film, *Listen to Venezuela* (2009). *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* and *Listen to Venezuela* are both focused on the revolution that has been happening in Venezuela since the first election of President Chávez at the end of 1998. *The Take* focuses on Argentina and the mushrooming of worker occupations that swept the country after the political and economic crisis of December 2001 and early 2002.

All three films are 'Western' productions, made by people who do not live in Latin America but were drawn to it because of the important radical political processes going on there. These political processes are not only connected with but also recast resistance to neoliberalism going on in the West. This connection is one reason why the 'outsider' status of the filmmakers behind these films does not in itself invalidate these representations of what is happening inside Latin America. What is important is that producers and

audiences reflect critically on the dominant models of production and interpretation that they have internalized from their wider society and culture. We argue that there is a disabling contradiction between the progressive content and aims of much Western documentary production emerging out of the antiglobalization struggles, and their cultural forms and modes of address. These cultural forms and ways of addressing the audience uncritically internalize the assumptions and parameters of capitalism. This contradiction is particularly problematic in the case of *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* and *The Take*, which focus on potentially revolutionary situations. Both films have played important roles in alerting Western publics to the alternative political projects emerging in Latin America and it is entirely plausible to argue that their relatively wide dissemination and impact might have been hampered if they had tried to work with less familiar approaches and methods. Nevertheless, it is also important to engage in the politics of form and be aware of the problems of continuing to use models and methods closely associated with the culture of capitalism. Ultimately, this is part of a wider question that goes beyond documentary filmmaking, and pertains to the relationship between radical social and political change on the one hand, and cultural change on the other. How deep can social and political change go if broader cultural patterns, ways of relating and behaving, and modes of seeing and understanding have not themselves undergone a 'revolution'?

POLITICAL CONTEXT

The 1990s saw a dynamic interaction between Latin America and the West around the emergence of a new politics that posed the question of new forms of organization, agency, and political power. The broader context for this new politics was the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc of Stalinized 'socialist' countries and the triumphalism of neoliberalism as it pushed into territories formerly closed off to it, including the massive new market of China. An older political practice associated with parties (hierarchical and bureaucratic in nature) and acquiring *national* state power was thought to have been exhausted. A new politics grounded in what came to be known as the social movements emerged as alternative vehicles for political practices. They had different modes of organizing (not based in political parties, towards whom they were often hostile) and they had different aims. Chief among these was a rejection of seeking to acquire state power as a means of addressing social inequalities. "To struggle through the state," wrote John Holloway in a book that was an influential philosophical exposition of the new politics inspired by the Zapatistas, "is to become involved in the active process of defeating yourself."[3] Instead the social movements mobilized around more specific issues and aims (in Latin America, land, water, unemployment, natural resources) and fought their battles very often

using a discourse of rights rather than revolution.[4] The complex relations between asserting human rights in this or that particular area or issue and the need to transform the totality of social relations came to be 'resolved' in favor of a series of 'single issue' politics that at best had a loose network of informal and sporadic links between each other. If the weakness of these social movements was their retreat from the notion of revolutionary social change, their strength was their dynamic grassroots activism, their internationalism, the heterogeneity or 'multitude' of the social agents who became involved in a diverse range of issues,[5] and, crucially, their success in *repoliticizing* vast swathes of everyday life that neoliberalism wished to make into "uncontestable foundations of civil society (such as property, the market, the work ethic, the family, and scientific truth)."[6] These movements thus helped put the question of the *forms* of power embedded in social and cultural relations back on the agenda with renewed vigor. However, with their emphasis on plurality, autonomy, and specificity, older, overarching notions of social change associated with Marxism, such as the concept of the social totality, came to be seen as antithetical to the new politics. In the West, this fissure between the social movements and the older politics of social change has begun to look increasingly as an unresolved problem rather than the beginning of a new politics that can actually combat the multipronged assault on human needs promoted by neoliberalism. As John Sanbonmatsu argues:

> The question is whether it is possible or even desirable to try to arrive today at a new paradigm of critique and practice, one able to articulate a non-reductionist concept of totality . . . To be sure the well organized social movement can still turn out tens or even hundreds of thousands of protestors in the streets, resulting in a five second blip of coverage in the national news media. Yet to the viewer at home, such demonstrations leave only fleeting impressions. The viewer 'sees' only one 'protest'—one more seemingly self-interested spectacle of expression among too many others to count—protests, moreover, that apparently have nothing to do with one another . . . Rather than illuminating a *totality* of social relations that has led to pervasive conditions of injustice, they provide only discrete, 'serial' moments of representation—fleeting furies signifying nothing.[7]

However, in Latin America, from the late 1990s onwards, a convergence took place between the politics of the social movements and that older politics of parties and their struggle for the acquisition of state power. Venezuela and Bolivia are the principal examples of this convergence. In this convergence, each side of the political equation—the social movements and the political parties/state power—pose questions for the other: the social movements have been the foundation for generating a strong grassroots politics based on participation and plurality and expanding the concept of

'the political' into social and cultural life generally. In Venezuela, concepts of building a 'horizontal' society rather than a 'vertical society' are part of the popular discourse, as is the notion of building a 'protagonistic' democracy (built into the new Venezuelan constitution of 1999) that goes beyond some of the limits of traditional representative democracy.[8] Conversely, the older political parties confront the social movements with the necessity of acquiring state power to leverage social change and defend that change against antidemocratic forces within the country (i.e., the oligarchy) and outside it (i.e., U.S. imperialism). This convergence is not a harmonious one, however. There are, of course, all sorts of tensions, contradictions, and struggles within the Venezuelan revolution between (and within) the state and the social movements. These tensions are apparent at every level of Venezuelan society, but one of the most obvious and important areas is in the field of culture, representation, and identity.

The Take

Latin America has attracted many Western documentary filmmakers in recent years because of the important political events and processes that have been happening in various countries. What the Latin Americans appear to have that the West does not is effective political agency. This does not mean that the kind of debates and political processes that characterized the anticapitalist and antiglobalization movements have not also impacted on Latin American politics. As noted, the Zapatista movement in Mexico spearheaded a new 'antipower,' antiparty, politics. But this has been combined to varying degrees with greater challenges to the structures of capitalism than in the West. One example of this was the crisis in Argentina during December 2001 and the early months of 2002. Here the imposition of the neoliberal model led to a financial crisis and a political crisis and a quasi-insurrection against the governing elites. As in the West, there was a strong 'antiparty' element to the revolt that was instead powered by a diverse array of groups, such as the popular assemblies that sprang up to administer local needs, the *piqueteros* (the unemployed workers groups) who blocked the roads, the middle-class *cacerolazos* with their pots and pans protests outside the private residences and public institutions of the elites, and the emergence of an occupied factories movement where workers took over the running of factories abandoned by their bosses.[9] It is this movement of occupied factories that forms the focus of Naomi Klein and Avi Lewis's *The Take* (2004).

As the filmmakers themselves note, they came to Argentina because they were looking for concrete alternatives to neoliberalism that seemed to be lacking in the West. The film has a strong feel for the political significance of the bottom-up, grassroots form of direct action by workers, but in many ways the film's engagement with the situation is hamstrung by some of its methods and the position of its two journalist filmmakers who

act as mediators between the workers movement and the North American and Canadian audiences the film is primarily pitched at. On the issue of mediating between a Western audience and the Argentinean reality, *The Take* is at great pains to reassure its target audience that what is unfolding in Argentina will be 'acceptable' to them. So the film has as its central protagonist someone who is least likely to offend ingrained pro-capitalist habits. The worker whose story we follow is Freddy, admittedly a leading figure within a new workers' collective that is trying to establish itself on a legal basis. But he is notably 'apolitical.' His discourse concentrates mostly on the humanistic concerns of dignity and the situation of his own family generated by unemployment. In fact, the focus on Freddy's family encourages an emotional engagement with the issues, not in itself a bad thing, but it marginalizes the political and intellectual dimensions of the struggle. A single interview with Freddy's family (his wife and kids) around the dinner table is cut into the documentary throughout the film. This reappearance of different moments from the same interview is somewhat in contradiction with what is otherwise a chronological unfolding of the dramatic action and events. Yet it is necessary to underpin the humanistic ideology of the film and literally domesticate the material for a Western audience. The consequence of this repeated return to the family sphere is that the worker is situated very much in the private space of the home and outside the public space of the workplace. Yet it is the collective space of the occupied factory where reality is changing on a collective basis. In the private space of the home, Freddy's wife complains that with her husband unemployed for a long period, they have not been able to take the children to McDonald's and she has not been able to buy makeup. Thus, the film constructs Freddy's wife, by selection and prioritization, in the traditional role of consumer, even though in an aside, she mentions that she has been supporting the family as a wage earner herself. However, her job (the film never tells us what she does) is in the conventional capitalist job market and this indicates a problem with the occupied factories movement: it is tiny compared to the capitalist market that surrounds it with all the consequent pressures and imperatives to make a profit that brings.[10] Such problems, however, remain very much outside the scope of the film.

The film uses a dominant narrative model, with parallel narrative strands to generate 'cliff-hangers' between different events as we cut back and forth. In one strand, we follow the attempts to establish the new workers cooperative as the former boss waits in the wings and the judge seems unsympathetic to their case. In another strand, we follow the political events as former Prime Minister Carlos Menem, who wholeheartedly embraced the neoliberal model during the 1990s, seeks reelection. As Menem, defying all political logic, races ahead in the polls, the future looks bleak for the occupied factory movement. As one worker states, Menem's interests and the bosses' interests are identical. In fact, much of the more pointed political commentary from the film's social actors tends to come from interviewees

who are marginal to the narrative. A third narrative strand that emerges towards the end follows the fortunes of the Brukman factory, which was the first factory to be occupied when the crisis broke. This gives it a symbolic importance so that when the state evicts the workers, the whole occupied workers movement appears to be on the brink of defeat as Menem closes in on the presidency.

Now, on the one hand, these parallel narratives do a good job of making connections between different examples within the occupied factory movement and between the fate of the movement and the political sphere, or at least the sphere of electoral politics. But on the other hand, the careful plotting of a dramatic curve so familiar from Hollywood movies takes the audience into a comfort zone, offering a reassuring path whereby the spectator knows that the events will unfold in such a way that all the answers to the key questions (questions essentially of a *plot* rather than political nature) will be given by the end of the film and according to an emotionally uplifting conclusion (there have been several scenes of people crying or on the verge of crying during the film). And this is exactly what happens. We have a traditional 'happy ending' with Menem losing the presidential elections to Nestor Kirchner (a left-leaning social democrat), the occupied factory achieves legal recognition and becomes a collective, and the Brukman factory is returned to the workers.

As part of the traditional methods of construction the film uses, there are many instances where the social actors have been clearly asked to reconstruct or construct scenes. This leads to some painfully self-conscious workers acting scenes out for the benefit of the filmmakers. The final image is probably the most significant example of this. Freddy leads his children into the factory as they all play a game balancing along a raised curb. The children are looking repeatedly back at the camera, confirming the staged quality of the scene. In itself, the staging is not necessarily a problem—but it speaks of the energy the filmmakers put into constructing a conventionally happy final image that fails to do justice to the ongoing nature of the struggle to sustain the occupied factory movement in the context of a predominantly capitalist economy and state.

The Revolution Will Not Be Televised

The problems we have raised in relation to *The Take* were ones that we struggled with when making our own film *Listen to Venezuela*. How do you represent a process as complex, collective, and contradictory as a revolution? We felt that many of the dominant models for filmmaking were problematic when trying to engage with this question. To take an example, the method of direct cinema involves observation of people and processes in a naturalistic photographic style that attempts to capture the immediacy of events as they unfold in something that feels like 'real time' and within a unity of space. *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* utilizes this

approach (although mixed with others, such as exposition by a narrator). It was designed to be a 'fly-on-the-wall' portrait of the Venezuelan president, Hugo Chávez. This film played a hugely important role in highlighting the attempted coup against the democratically elected government of Chávez. The subsequent profile the film achieved internationally was a bitter blow to the Venezuelan oligarchy, who depend on international media indifference or hostility to events in Venezuela to considerably broaden their room for maneuver. In its original conception, the film would have been no more than an interesting portrait of the president—but when the reality of the Venezuelan process came crashing into the Miraflores Palace during the coup, the filmmakers found the events in front of the camera radically charged with a new social content as the conflicts within the country dramatically exploded. Otherwise the film would have suffered from the traditional weaknesses of observational cinema whereby a focus on the immediacy and the appearance of real events unfolding in front of the camera without staging or intervention by the filmmakers eclipses contextualization, analysis, and the work of construction vital to understanding. These weaknesses are reinforced by the focus on the president himself (a recurrent feature of much journalism on the Venezuelan revolution) at the expense of an exploration of the mass movement Chávez is a product of.

A useful concept here is that of focalization, which refers to how films (fiction or documentary) provide cognitive and emotional 'routes' through a narrative by anchoring us close to particular characters.[11] The opening of the film evinces a tension between a focalization on Hugo Chávez and a more collective focalization anchored in the Venezuelan people. The film begins with the camera in the crowd, moving around some drummers and people dancing. There is a sense of excitement and exuberance from the crowd and we quickly find out that this is linked to the presence of Hugo Chávez—at this point functioning very much as a representative of the people/country. Here Chávez is seen wearing a tracksuit in the colors of the Venezuelan flag, which mirrors the Venezuelan flags people are waving. A series of shots follows, compressing different instances of Chávez touring the country on the back of a truck. With the crowds getting larger and larger, the sequence culminates in a mass rally, which he addresses at night. Here he talks about alternatives to the free market and the fact that he personally has had to withstand huge international pressures. This succinctly sums up two major interconnected themes: the struggle to develop policy alternatives and the dangers of doing so.

The next sequence seems to confirm Chávez's claims about facing international pressures by showing a series of clips from Western, mostly American, broadcast news programs covering the April 2002 coup. The clips include a White House spokesman evidently happy at the prospect of Chávez being removed, and another news clip with the voice of an American newsreader (over Venezuelan oil rigs and fields) talking about 'hopes' that the end of the Chávez government will bring 'stability' to the Venezuelan oil industry.

This is interspersed with the credit sequence and a dramatic Western rock music score. We then return to September 2001, where a narrator talks in the first person about having arrived in Venezuela to make a documentary about the 'controversial' but also 'charismatic' Hugo Chávez. The 'flash-forward' to the coup has given us a dramatic glimpse of where the narrative is going. Plot will indeed be more important in the film than a broader social analysis. Meanwhile, the narration begins to anchor the focalization of the documentary more firmly around the figure of the president. Immediately we again go 'out and about' with Chávez and his entourage but this time we are a little more removed from the crowds. The camera is on the inside of the presidential cars and the airplane of the Chávez team. So the location of the camera is rather more formal and privileged than the back of the trucks in which we initially saw Chávez during the pre-credit sequence.

The film was made possible because Chávez was very aware of the importance of communicating the reality of the Venezuelan revolution to an international audience. And the film is about the difficulty of communicating that reality both *within* Venezuela where a hostile private media is closely linked to the old oligarchy and internationally, where the Western media generally align themselves with the foreign policy perspectives of Washington. At another level, we see Chávez himself trying to communicate with Venezuelans, in person, via his weekly television show where he receives calls from ordinary Venezuelans, and in his exhortations to his ministers to use the media to communicate government plans and achievements. We also see the Venezuelan people desperate to communicate with Chávez. But there is a tension between this theme of trying to overcome institutional barriers to communication and the form of the film itself. The structure and focus of the film is wrapped almost entirely around the person of Hugo Chávez. This focalization closes off our cognitive and emotional access to the collective that makes the revolution possible. In this, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* does not itself 'televise' the revolution. The crowds do not appear to be political subjects but are cast mostly in terms of adoration and gratitude in relation to Chávez. It is not that this is untrue. Chávez is genuinely loved by many of Venezuela's poor, but they are also political subjects as well, with some understanding of the political significance of the break that Chávez represents with the governments of the past. The sense that they have an active role in making this revolution is very weak. The people are represented as waiting for help, supplicants to Chávez. This imbalance between the way the film represents the people and its concentration on the figure of Chávez seriously underplays the powerful democratic grassroots nature of the revolutionary process going on within the country. In doing so, despite the film's evident sympathy for what is happening in Venezuela, there is more than a hint in these scenes that Chávez is a familiar Latin American stereotype, a 'strongman' and a populist leader underpinned by a homogenous mass of apolitical supporters.

THE VENEZUELAN REVOLUTION

The revolutionary process in Venezuela has some of the characteristics of the anticapitalist struggles that emerged in Latin America and the West in the 1990s. There are multiple groups and foci that have been responsible for driving the revolution forward. The popular organizations in the *barrios* (the poor neighborhoods) that are now currently trying to develop the community councils (local organs of direct democracy) have played a pivotal role. There are various parties on the left supporting what is known as 'the process' (i.e., the revolution) but also student groups, cultural organizations, workers groups, and other agencies at work as well. At the same time as evincing a powerful grassroots momentum to the revolution, there was also a breakthrough at the level of state power with the election of President Chávez in 1998. More than anything else, the antipower philosophy of the Zapatistas in Mexico during the 1990s, which was echoed in John Holloway's book *Change the World without Taking Power*, was shown to be inadequate by the example of Venezuela. In Venezuela, the capturing of state power opened up the possibility of initiating massive institutional changes that have undoubtedly empowered the impoverished majority. Not least has been the impressive redistribution of oil wealth that has financed access to health and education on a large scale.

At the same time, the grassroots organizations have been influenced by critiques of party and state power articulated by the antiglobalization movements, and exhibit a healthy skepticism towards the state. Indeed the state is highly contradictory. Whereas it provides powerful levers and means for redistributing wealth, it has a long history of corrupt practices that predate the 1998 election of Chávez. On top of that the state is staffed by bureaucrats, professional politicians, and the middle class, whose commitment to genuine revolutionary transformation of power is often doubtful. Thus one of the key conflicts within Venezuela is not only between those who support Chávez and those who support the oligarchy, but *within* the revolutionary process itself, between the more radical grassroots base of the revolution and the more conservative parts of the state apparatus.

This tension between a more conservative state apparatus and more radical and independent grassroots initiatives is manifest in the difference between the Villa del Cine (Cinema Village), the national film studio, and various grassroots media projects developing popular participation and radical perspectives in radio, television, print, and independent documentary film. Vive TV, for example, although a well-funded state broadcaster, is modeled on the small local TV stations such as Catia TV, whose mission is to articulate the voices and perspectives of the ordinary people (usually of a darker color than the elites) marginalized by the private television stations. Vive therefore recognizes the need for changing the institutional practices of television as well as developing new approaches at the level of form. A Vive information leaflet argues: "In revolutionary television, not only content has to be revolutionary:

there is no revolution without a revolution in the aesthetics. Consequently, Vive TV searches to make adequate its ideology with its form: revolutionary contents also need revolutionary forms."

This sensitivity to the question of form and a vision of cultural transformation is decidedly lacking in the Villa del Cine. The Villa was set up in 2006 explicitly to be a kind of Venezuelan 'Hollywood' studio—making films with national 'content' but very much within conventional generic and narrative formats. Symptomatic of the Villa's cultural orientation is the eighteen million dollars promised to the American actor Danny Glover for his planned historical epic on Haitian revolutionary leader Toussaint L'Ouverture. Whereas the subject chimes with the revolutionary context of Venezuela, the approach of the planned film, a big-budget spectacular with Hollywood film stars (such as Don Cheadle, Wesley Snipes, and Angela Bassett), simply mimics the dominant model of filmmaking. The decision to partly fund Glover's film (which to date has not been able to raise the rest of the budget from U.S. or European backers) was controversial within Venezuela, where many argued that such state support should be ploughed into national productions. But the deeper problem is that the films that the Villa does produce display little engagement with the cultural politics of form and representation. To take one example, the big-budget historical epic *Miranda Regresa* (2007), a biopic about the eighteenth-century independence hero Francisco de Miranda, uses dominant Hollywood-style narrative and generic conventions to tell its story. As a result the film reproduces a conventional individualistic optic on historical change, which marginalizes the collective struggles of the people and mystifies the roots of new political ideas and ideals, making them instead the sole property of a 'great man.'

PRACTICAL METHODOLOGY

We arrived in Venezuela in February 2008 on a Leverhulme Scholarship that would allow us a unique opportunity to live and work in the country for a year. Like other Western filmmakers, we wanted to see this revolution first hand and we wanted to contribute to it in any way we could. We were teaching film theory and practice at the Bolivarian University. We also taught at the Miranda Centre for Information (CIM), which was created as a space to foster dialogue, debate, and analysis of the revolution for both Venezuelans and foreigners. We also taught at an independent documentary school in Caracas and we taught young children filmmaking in the barrios. We had intended to make a short documentary about the grassroots media scene. However, our project quickly became more ambitious. The sheer scale of the changes taking place and the complexities that radical social change involves amazed us. The people we met and the contacts we made became part of a chain reaction of meetings, acquaintances, friends, etc., who became central to gaining access to so

many of the different sectors and spaces of society. This relatively long period of immersion in the Venezuelan context meant that people knew us, or knew people who introduced us to them. This built up trust and helped deepen the quality of the responses we elicited from people in interviews.

So film is the outcome of many interpersonal encounters and the better and deeper those interpersonal relations, the better and deeper a film can be. For example, as a result of working in the barrio, we were invited to film a quasi-religious traditional celebration of music and dance by young children in the local plaza of La Pastora, a barrio in Caracas. We knew the children (we had taught them) and so we spent the day with them as they prepared their costumes and then filmed them dancing in the plaza as the sun went down. Normally filmmakers would miss such 'events' unless they were lucky enough to happen across them and even then there are questions about whether people would trust outsiders to simply start filming.

How we utilized this dance was also a product of our relatively long immersion in Venezuela. We crosscut the dance with the voice-over of a defrocked American priest talking about the role of religion in Venezuela, in particular the difference between the noninstitutional religion of the popular classes and the institutional Catholic church of the middle and upper classes, which is largely hostile to Chávez and the revolution. Where the voice-over talks about the religious feeling of the masses (which is expressed largely outside the established institutions of the Catholic Church), we use images from the dance, and where the voice-over talks about the religion of the middle and upper class, we use shots of tombstones and monuments from graveyards. The gray and cold stone associated with the established religion contrasts with the lively movement and colors of the dance scene. In other words, the dance scene was not used as part of a 'linear' story (e.g., about a particular community or group, the children) but was used to build up a cross section of social relations. This cross section reveals how class divides religion and that there is no unified meaning to the Catholic discourse on God. Of course, the ideological content of this discourse, even in its popular expression, poses problems for revolutionary change, even as many of its themes can be appropriated to a politics of sharing, justice, and solidarity (as Chávez himself has done). At the same time, the deinstitutionalized religion of the popular masses on show here gives a clue as to the autonomy and initiative within their cultural resources that have been drawn on to make the revolution possible. It takes time to absorb the material you shoot and reconfigure it in this more dialectical way with other material, and we were fortunate to have this time. However, you need not only time, but a methodology of aesthetic construction that aims to bring out the dialectical potential in the material shot, namely, the social and political relations and struggles at work in reality.

Figure 6.1 Religion and the popular classes.

Figure 6.2 The institutionalized religion of the middle class.

THE DIALECTICAL IMAGE

What mode of consumption a film encourages in the watching audience is a political question. Audiences are not only learning about a particular topic/content when they watch a film, there is also a pedagogy involved in *how they* watch and use the medium of film itself. We wanted our film to be

watched in a different way from the dominant models, we wanted to challenge habitual ways of looking and seeing and encourage the audience to critically decode images and sounds. A revolutionary film is one that gives agency back to the audience because it opens a space to question taken-for-granted models and values. We do not know whether we succeeded in this but that was the intention.

For inspiration we looked to the traditions of radical cinema. Sergéi Eisenstein's theories of revolutionary cinema came out of a context of immense social changes in the first years after the Russian revolution and the overthrow of the centuries old Tsarist regime. In this context Eisenstein tried to develop a theory of film form that was congruent with a period of social upheaval and change. Eisenstein developed a theory of editing that stressed how editing stirs up and agitates the spectator's mind, conceiving each cut as a 'shock' or stimulus at the level of rhythm, tone, composition, and juxtaposition. Eisenstein's other ambition was to bring together the sensuous/emotional impact of the image with an intellectual and conceptual dimension to expand the spectator's consciousness of social relations.[12] This required rejecting the linear, continuity editing then becoming dominant in Hollywood.

Inspired by left cultural practitioners such as Eisenstein, the philosopher Walter Benjamin coined the phrase 'the dialectical image' to identify a distinctive revolutionary approach to social and historical reality. The dialectical image interrupts naturalized modes of seeing and hearing (with their seamless coherence) and it interrupts linear conceptions of history or narrative. It works by 'constellating' or arranging spaces in such a way as to reveal concealed social relationships. For Benjamin the dialectical image also works along a temporal axis, juxtaposing past and present in order to recover what has been forgotten and repressed.[13] The dialectical image is 'dialectics at a standstill' meaning a vivid perceptible configuring of the disjunctures, contradictions, and relationships of social life.[14] Awareness of disjuncture and connections at the level of film form and composition can begin a process of questioning and decoding representations. The dialectical image tries to enable a cognitive shift in the viewer; it begins a process that starts with the film but can be applied beyond the film to social relations generally.

Our film was influenced not just by the political modernism that came out of Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, but also by the radical traditions that emerged in Latin America in the post–Second World War period during the era of decolonization and anti-imperialist struggles. This was another time when radical cinema flourished. Amongst the numerous manifestos produced by filmmakers, the essay by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino stands out as the most systematic attempt to theorize a new revolutionary filmmaking practice. Their essay, "Towards a Third Cinema," developed a critique of the main versions of institutionalized cinema at that time. First Cinema was the dominant commercial cinema, whereas Second Cinema

was essentially the art cinema for a middle-class audience that was carved out by national states as protection against Hollywood's hegemony.[15]

Aware of the limitations of these respective forms of cinema and their overall modes of practice (production, distribution, and exhibition), Solanas and Getino set out to formulate the principles and aims of a different, properly revolutionary cinema, a Third Cinema. Their experiences and the conclusions they drew from the making of their own film, *Hour of the Furnaces* (1968), was the basis for their critique. Their film aimed to provide a sweeping account of the roots of the Argentinean crisis in this period: political, economic, social, cultural, etc. The film struggles to create a cinematic language capable of expressing these realities. In doing so, *Hour of the Furnaces* rejects a linear narrative and is instead organized into a set of thematic chapters. It rejects individual characters in favor of a collective if differentiated protagonist, a feature of many Third Cinema films, both in Latin America and Africa.[16] It brings sound and image into a discordant relationship of irony and counterpoint and it has, and this is a distinctive trait of many radical Latin American documentaries of this period, a heightened sense of the symbolic and metaphorical possibilities of the image, the ability of the image to provide a vehicle for decoding the abstract social relations of capitalism. The possibility of producing the dialectical image is heightened in a context of social struggle, where, through praxis mass consciousness, it becomes receptive to new modes of thinking and doing.

LISTEN TO VENEZUELA

These were the debates that we had in mind as we engaged with the problem of how to make a film about a revolution. The film we made is structured around a series of chapters such as politics, community, media, education, culture, and elections, among others. The chapters are self-contained (making it possible to screen sections of the film within forums that have limited time) but the film as a whole builds up a collage-like account of how these different areas inform and connect with each other. The education that is provided, the media that is available, the culture that is being produced, the community's role in governing their lives, etc., are all fronts in the struggle to change society.

One of the key strategies of the film is to separate the voices of interviewees from their image, and instead cross their voice with a sequence of images other than the face or even the immediate environment of the speaker. Because interviewees often did not provide the visual track of the film, we needed to find other images. We were necessarily pushed into an extensive visual research project, collating and organizing images that in turn pushed us deeper into the fabric of society and its history. This, of course, included footage generated by our own filmmaking but we also collected already existing representations, such as photographs (both archive

stock photos of politicians and 'authored' photography of 'the people'); political cartoons; drawings; animation; television and film archive; graffiti; murals; posters; and statues (which are pictures in stone). These cultural representations made by Venezuelans are a sign of the massive social changes brought about by the Bolivarian revolution. These changes require a cultural expressiveness that can match the emerging political participation and representation. Layering the film with these other 'found' images gives the central theme of class struggle a crucial cultural dimension: namely, that the struggle is fought out in the battle of ideas, in the struggle to change perception and challenge habitual modes of thinking that prevent new ways of looking at the world emerging, new approaches to social problems, new modes of behavior and interaction evolving. This ideological struggle is becoming increasingly important within the Bolivarian revolution, and is one of the most critical fronts in the battle for social change.

Because these already constituted images are themselves a comment of some kind on some aspect of Venezuelan social reality and the revolution, they often require only a little bit of work to generate some dialectical point. For example, the chapter on education focuses on the Bolivarian University, which was set up in 2003 by presidential decree to provide a tertiary level education to the masses who had been hitherto excluded by a private education system. Three young women are interviewed on the university campus sitting in front of a multicolored version of the famous and iconic image of Che Guevara. The women are talking about how they would have had no chance of studying for a degree without the Bolivarian revolution with the image of Che as a backdrop. This is a simple example of the dialectical image. The iconic image of Che has become widely appropriated within a mass culture on everything from T-shirts to coffee mugs. In the process, the politics of

Figure 6.3 A simple dialectical image.

revolutionary change that Che actually believed in and fought for has often become unmoored from its historical origins. In addition, Che has acquired certain associations connected with the image of the guerilla fighter, a romanticization of the macho revolutionary and of violence and sacrifice that erases the political ideals behind the action, as the second part of Steven Soderbergh's film *Che* (2008) largely does. Here, in the context of the Bolivarian revolution, and the Bolivarian University, that iconic image is reconnected with the practical political goals of emancipation and how that is changing the lives of those previously excluded from education and their own society.

A more complex example of the dialectical image is found in our chapter on 'Memory.' An important strategy of Third Cinema has been to recover the untold and erased stories of the past, keeping alive a popular memory in combat with official accounts of the past or simply the sheer amnesia promoted by consumer capitalism.[17] Prior to the election of Hugo Chávez in 1998, Venezuela had been held up by the West as an example of a successful capitalist society that was something of a political exception in the Latin American context because of an unbroken run of 'democratic' governments since 1958. However, the profound social and economic inequalities in Venezuela were not addressed in this period, merely contained. This containment included the activities of a formally 'democratic' but extremely violent state that banned political parties, oppressed any signs of dissent and resistance, imprisoning, torturing, murdering, and disappearing its perceived enemies. In this chapter then the film recovers some of that history, but in a dialectical way. The chapter begins with a montage of the big shopping malls in Caracas. Venezuela's oil wealth has meant that a sizable middle class has been living very well for many decades and this has spawned a Western-style commercial sector of corporate brands and expensive stores. On the sound track, however, we hear a voice (not yet connected to a face) talking about how in the 1960s, inspired by the success of the Cuban revolution, the speaker and other 'dreamer boys' took up a revolutionary struggle against the corrupt governments of the period. The image track displays not just consumerism, but how in Venezuela that consumerism has an explicit orientation towards North America: with 'Fifth Avenue' signs, road traffic signs, and other icons of North American urban life (such as fire hydrants and a mock Brooklyn Bridge). But the main symbol of North America evident here is, bizarrely, a large replica of the Statue of Liberty. This image underpins the North American orientation of the Venezuelan middle class in counterpoint to the voice speaking of a Latin American identity. This is crucial given that, historically, Venezuela's oil economy has been largely integrated into the needs of American oil corporations. But there is also a juxtaposition within the image of the symbol of political freedom, now appearing in this temple to consumerism, that reveals how the ideals of political freedom that once animated bourgeois ideology have been reduced to the freedom to shop (one can even read a certain sadness in the visage of the Statue of Liberty in this context).

This reduction is again brought out by the contrast with the voice-over, which is talking about the struggle for real substantial political freedom. However, before we even hear the voice-over, we see a series of black-and-white photographs of faces staring directly at the camera superimposed over the scenes of the shopping mall. The black-and-white photographs evoke the past in contrast with the present time of the shopping mall. These ephemeral faces appear to be haunting the shopping mall, as indeed they might, because we later learn that they are the faces of the murdered

Figure 6.4 Liberty reduced to the freedom to shop.

Figure 6.5 The dead haunting consumer capitalism.

and disappeared. This sets up a tension within the memory sequence between the amnesia of consumer capitalism and the struggle against forgetting. As the voice-over continues, the film cross-dissolves from the mall to the face of the speaker (Enrique) whose interview is located at San Carlos, formerly a military jail where political prisoners were held. This space, now converted into a community center and museum by former prisoners (one of the many grassroots initiatives going on in Venezuela) contrasts with the shopping mall to which the film returns a little later, cross-dissolving from Enrique (talking about the importance of *remembering* what happened at San Carlos) to a window display in which an expensive handbag is situated inside a birdcage. The irony is that this surrealist image has been created by capitalist culture (as Benjamin argued) and has unconsciously revealed another kind of prison, another kind of entrapment: the soft cage of consumerism, the prison house of status and exclusivity and the dangers of living in a continual present, without a real past or a different future.

CONCLUSION

Today we need to find alternatives to the model of neoliberal capitalism. In Venezuela the type of social movements that emerged in both the West and Latin America in the 1980s and accelerated into an anticapitalist politics in the 1990s have combined with the politics of the 'old type.' In this situation, both the 'content' of power has been seized (at the level of the state) but the 'form' of power is also being reimagined and reconfigured, with bottom-up grassroots processes emerging from the social movements. At the level of culture, too, we need not only new content (different kinds of representations) but different forms that can break with the restricted cognitive and emotional range of dominant approaches. What is happening in Venezuela is not, of course, a model that can be picked off the shelf and applied everywhere else, but it is a gigantic experiment in trying to develop an alternative to neoliberal capitalism. The dominant corporate media in the West are trying very hard to isolate the Venezuelan revolution from the Western public or give them distorted and one-dimensional views of it. This is why alternative representations of what is happening in Venezuela are vitally important both for the future of the Venezuelan revolution and for the possibility of developing alternatives to neoliberalism in the West. At the same time, we must also engage in the question of transforming dominant modes of representation, to expand our cognitive and imaginative capacities and develop the cultural resources necessary to really break with capitalism.

Listen to Venezuela is available for purchase from the film's website at: http://www.listentovenezuela.info/.

NOTES

1. John Downing, 2001, pp. 217–227.
2. Mike Gonzalez, 2001.
3. John Holloway, 2005, p. 214.
4. Gonzalez, 2001, p. 155.
5. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, 2000.
6. Claus Offe, 1985, p. 820.
7. John Sanbonmatsu, 2004, p. 197.
8. Gregory Wilpert, 2007, pp. 56–60.
9. Anna Dinerstein, 2002.
10. Juan Grigera, 2006, p. 227.
11. Robert Stam and Ella Shohat, 1994, pp. 205–208.
12. Sergéi Eisenstein, 1998.
13. Walter Benjamin, 1999b, p. 248.
14. Benjamin, 1999a, p. 462.
15. Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, 1997.
16. Teshome Gabriel, 1989.
17. Mike Wayne, 2001, pp. 109–112.

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Part III

Asia

7 Market Socialism and Its Discontent*

Jia Zhangke's Cinematic Narrative of China's Transition in the Age of Global Capital

Xudong Zhang

LIMITS OF CHINESE MODERNISM

Post-Mao Chinese cinematic modernism, China's ticket to "modern world cinema"—a polite name for global culture market—came into being through repudiating the socialist-realist studio-theatrical tradition. In historical hindsight, what was considered "new" in the 1980s was only new symbolically and retroactively, because the cinematic language and stylistic innovation practiced by the Fifth Generation filmmakers like Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou did not seem to possess much shock value in a technical or merely historical context of world cinema or international modernism. Rather, the new was nearly always measured politically vis-à-vis the preexisting frames of everyday life, aesthetic taste, value system, and socio-material conditions inherited from Mao's China that had been pronounced old, obsolete, and in need of radical reform. Modernism, in this regard, was evoked, mobilized, and deployed more like a confirmation of universal time defined by the global market, whose economic and political substance and specificities can be grasped with some clarity only in the 1990s when the Chinese moment of high modernism quickly morphed and dispersed into a grab-bag mixture of postmodern variations of assorted local/global genres, from the kung fu movie, TV sitcom, to the uniquely Chinese visual spectaculars such as the 2008 Beijing Olympia Opening Ceremony.

However, it would be a simplification to regard Chinese modernism as merely a sentimental footnote to the prevailing modernization ideology of Deng's China. The intense Western gaze in the last decade of Cold War (brought to a sudden end with the Tiananmen crackdown in 1989 and the implosion of Soviet Union in 1991) had produced a cultural-historical drama that virtually restaged the entire history of bourgeois civilization, from the Renaissance to Theatre of the Absurd—all within a single decade. Such compression and condensation of ideas, styles, and value judgments were bound to produce a new formal and ideological intensity in its own right and at a heighted level of aesthetic and philosophical fetishism. Whereas

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this artificially fortified formal space propped up the imagined cultural space of the Chinese New Era, it also made itself—unconsciously but objectively—available to the unresolved collective energy, utopian idealism, and subjectivity of Mao's revolutionary and socialist era. Such formal-historical complexity, however, did not seem to allow a patient, thick description and explanation of what has been going on in concrete historical time and its multiplicity and differentiation in concrete social-material space. Differently put, the creative energy registered under the rubric of Chinese modernism never clearly separated itself from the two predominant institutions whose conflict as well as overlap define its historic window of opportunity, namely, on the one hand, the institution of international High Modernism appropriated solely in abstract, apolitical fashion of the cult of Form and the fetish of the Author and above all as a technology for formal and aesthetic intensity; and, on the other, the reformist state whose modernization agenda, ownership of the moral legacy of the revolution, and political-discursive monopoly over the entire national space formed an ideal (objectively speaking) pressurized cabin—in terms of both its incorporation within and resistance to universal time—in which a "local" (defined vis-à-vis the global) modernism managed to overcome its various disadvantages and poverties to complete a rapid climb to stylistic autonomy and professional prestige, both within and beyond the nation-state.

The "mysterious" success story of the Fifth Generation always had its detractors and critics, to be sure. The socialist realist tradition, however, never mounted any effective, even merely coherent, resistance, as its habitual reliance on bureaucratic policies and discursive officialdom rendered it discredited and irrelevant in the great post-Mao political-aesthetic debate. Rather, from the very beginning, the deficiency and even fraudulence of the new modernist aesthetic was seen, as plainly as the emperor's new clothes, in a much more pedestrian and immediate sense, namely, as its inability or unwillingness to "tell a story" (*jiang gushi*). In other words, its elevated style, capable of reifying into something "timeless" failed at the level of representation and narrative because the self-expression of the neo-Enlightenment intelligentsia seemed far too busy chasing its dreams and utopia and launching metaphysical critiques of various Chinese and socialist traditions to care about concrete experiences produced by its very own times, much less to come up with intimate narratives and representations that touch and inspire a nation to reflect upon the ongoing epic social transformation. The vacuity of stories in the Fifth Generation revealed a poverty of experience in form, which stands in stark contrast to a riot of bewildering experiences in content. To this extent, Chinese modernism serves as a paradoxical allegory for the "empty, homogeneous time" at the historic-philosophical core of a successful period of modern Chinese history marked by the upheaval of market economy with all its abundant material and symbolic wealth.

Throughout the 1990s, as the critical, reflexive intellectual energy of 1980s Chinese modernism became increasingly diverted to coping with the

upheavals of the market economy at home and absorbed into the global discourse of the post–Cold War liberal democracy and free market abroad, its political and cultural niche within the national theater of social and ideological change and conflict became more and more precarious and indefensible. The Tiananmen Incident (June 1989) and its aftermath rendered everything vaguely critical or nonconformist a real or potential political dissent vis-à-vis the new technocratic state, which had to be muffled if not summarily suppressed by state censorship. The access to international film festivals, which itself had always been a privileged license granted by the state, only seemed to ensure the reception of the works of Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou in the early 1990s as political allegories of a repressive regime, which deserved to be censored or banned in the domestic market. But even this harsh administrative and controlling measure turned out to be sentimental in the face of full-throttle globalization and marketization in China toward the end of the 1990s. In this process, with a few fleeting exceptions, in which some gestures at exploring a new reality with a self-consciously innovative cinematic language were made (with Zhang Yimou's *The Story of Qiu Ju* being the most memorable), the lingering force of post-Mao Chinese modernism found its fate all but sealed in a false, indeed farcical dichotomy. It either persisted in the form of a nostalgic gaze at its earlier self, such as Chen Kaige's *Mei Lan Fang* (2008), a lesser version of his 1994 Palm d'Or winner *Farewell My Concubine*, with, predictably, an artistic talent's obsession with art standing for all kinds of cultural and moral certainty; or it embraced unapologetically the total instrumentalization of its "sculptural consciousness" represented by the cinematography of early Zhang Yimou, which culminated in the latter's role in directing the visually spectacular 2008 Beijing Olympia's Opening Ceremony and the 60th Anniversary of PRC parade and evening gala, winning him the dubious title as the chief "interior designer/contractor" of the state.

THE BREAK OF THE "SIXTH GENERATION"

The arrival of Jia Zhangke and his fellow "Sixth Generation" filmmakers since the mid-1990s was in every sense a response to that situation. In the place of a fantastic, ideological symbolic unity of modernization, they staged allegorical fragments of a broken, disoriented reality. Whereas the Fifth Generation sutured together a mythological whole—embodied by the vast empty shots of a pristine, ahistorical landscape, from "yellow earth" to "red sorghum" to the icy mountain ranges in Tibet—with the cinematic language of late modernism, the Sixth Generation was eager to show the shabby, formless fabric of everyday life at the county level where socialist underdevelopment meets the onslaught of marketization, producing a ghostly landscape filled with wandering souls and the scattered body parts of shattered dreams, suppressed rage, disappointments and despair running so deep that they, like a chronic disease, become part of the quotidian

routine of normalcy. Youthful rebellion and hopelessness on the margins of Chinese modernization (that is, far away from the glamour of Shanghai, Beijing, and Shenzhen) is a predominating theme in Jia Zhangke's early films. The dissolution of whole families and the demolition of entire neighborhoods and communities; the destruction of the natural and social environment; and the loss of individual and collective memories and modes of life all constitute the leitmotifs of his later films.

Indeed, there seems to be a systematic and methodical sociological approach in Jia Zhangke's movies, whose thematics could all too easily be taken up as a list of topics for an academic conference on problems of contemporary Chinese development: its human cost (alienated youth in *Xiaowu* and *Unknown Pleasure*; migrant labor and population relocation in *Still Life*, *The World* and *24 City*); its social and cultural cost (the erasure of collective memory, the destruction of families and communities, the flattening of culture and value, the shrinkage of time-space in *The World*); the environmental cost (the violation of nature and pollution in *Still Life*); etc.

Whereas the real or imagined "Western Gaze" in Fifth Generation film production prefigured a metaphysical image of China as a whole—as trope of backwardness or newfound social desire, its introverted version and rejection among the Sixth Generation filmmakers gave rise to a melancholic contemplation of the decidedly glamourless everyday forms captured in between the more stable, more romanticized norms of Chinese rural and urban life. A more differentiated observation of contemporary Chinese daily life is not only necessitated by, but also reflects the more disparate, uneven, and polarized society; as a new visual-symbolic regime it also required a paradigmatic transformation of the way the camera confronts reality. It's no accident that Jia Zhangke's rise paralleled that of the New Documentary Movement: both returned to the street level, descending from the aesthetic height of "modern world cinema" and new national mythology; both required the fragmentation in cinematic or narrative articulation so as to stay in touch with a brute reality that exists below the radar screen of modernist form-making. Even though the two phenomena operated at different levels in the social registry and aesthetic frame of reference, they share something decidedly in common: the air of underground filmmaking, of countercultures, small circles, and niche markets. If this is what it takes to gain an intimate look at an uncharted terrain inaccessible to the self-important modernist-intellectual discourses of the 1980s, embracing this "art-house, small-circle documentary style" also comes with its downside as a price to pay for its nimble freedom: the unwillingness or inability to engage the masses or virtually anything with a mass appeal, whether melodrama or genre movies, and thus a self-imposed isolation and obscurity that follows a critical, nonconformist perspective of an alienated native son whose growing frustration with and distance from his own environment lends the films a touch of visual detachment verging on utter extraneousness. "Representations of lower-class life only high-culture audiences can

understand" or "lamentation of urban demolition funded by the developers/demolishers" are then part of the irony not lost even on Jia Zhangke's proponents and supporters. *24 City*, for instance, is funded by the very developers of the 24 City project featured in the film, for some, a virtually embedded commercial.

Born in 1970 in the city of Fenyang, Shanxi Province (in northwest China), Jia Zhangke's conversion to filmmaking was as chance an encounter as it was relatively late. Son of a high school Chinese teacher and a grocery shop saleswoman, he grew up in a semirural, semi-urban environment relatively insulated from the allures of the outside world. When explaining to interviewers why pop music features so prominently in his films, he points to the utter lack of culture and entertainment in any shape and form throughout his childhood and early adolescence. Jia recalls, "After dinner, the four of us [his parents, his sister, and himself] just sat in the room, having nothing to do and nothing to say, until it was time to go to bed": thus the liberating effect of the arrival of Taiwanese, Hong Kong, and Japanese pop songs and Hollywood films and the ways in which they became intimately intertwined with his personal memory. He was once a good break-dancer, coming close to being able to support himself financially through gigs and street shows, a result of having seen *Break Dance* over a dozen times.

In 1990, while training to be a graphic designer in Taiyuan, the capital city of Shanxi, Jia Zhangke accidentally saw Chen Kaige's *Yellow Earth* (1984) and decided overnight to become a filmmaker. This conversion was followed by two failed attempts at getting into the Beijing Film Academy, which finally accepted him into its Literature Department in 1993. The choice of studying film theory rather than directing was simply because he figured it would be easier to get in. Always willing to acknowledge that he is but a product of his environment, and that this environment always presents multiple choices and multiple possibilities, he once speculated that had he not become a filmmaker, he might well have ended up either a novelist (he has published some essays and stories in literary magazines of Shanxi Province and even had an invitation to join the provincial Writers' Association, thus becoming a salaried writer), or a painter (as part of apprenticeship he lived with other would-be artists on the outskirts of Taiyuan, gaining a firsthand experience of living dangerously on the margins as a "aimless roamer"[*mangliu*] and urban vagabond, sharing the streets with migrant laborers, subjected to random police searches in the middle of the night), or even a private coal mine owner in the coal country of Shanxi, knowing full well that of all occupations in contemporary China, this last one has come to epitomize the lawless and heartless predatory exploitation of man and nature in contemporary China.

For the generation that came after Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou, the task is not another visual-linguistic coup within the regime of the senses and imagination, but, rather, to gain a sense certainty vis-à-vis a concrete, irreducible reality that will in turn define and give substance to a new

cinematic language and personal style. For Jia Zhangke as a Beijing Film Academy student, this reality is perceived, first of all, as the disappearance of all reality in Chinese filmmaking. Of all the Wednesday double features of newly released Chinese films he saw while studying at BFA, he concluded that "none whatsoever had anything to do with me, or with the real experiences and situations of living Chinese men and women."[1] This epiphany prompted his decision to "do it by myself," that is, to "struggle for a right of discourse" (*zhengduo huayuquan*) to "represent the life concealed by the silver screen."[2]

In the decade that followed, Jia Zhangke found himself "always ready to rush off to the street with a camera" in search of a reality—any reality outside the visual, discursive, and administrative regimes of post-Tiananmen China in the 1990s. It is worth noting that one can find similar impatience, outrage, and motivation in Fifth Generation filmmakers while they were students at Beijing Film Academy, always ready to break free from the ossified clichés of "socialist realism" by calling it a lie. In Chinese cinematic modernism's new social being, the social intellectual utopia of the initial years of Chinese socialist reforms both anticipated and projected a new photographic ontology (a Bazin-inspired idea with its dialogue with Italian neorealism in the immediate post-WWII context).[3] As it withered, with all its visual and political implications, a new reality must be defined afresh at the heart of the disappearance of reality, not as a new ontology or myth (of modernization, of new enlightenment, of the intellectuals, or of a harmonious, mutually beneficial relationship between the socialist state form and the capitalist economy), but as a critical discursive capture of the multiplicity of reality and its inherent contradictions.

XIANCHENG AS VISUAL POLITICS

For the newcomers in Chinese filmmaking the new is therefore not defined in terms of "post-Mao," but rather in terms of the collapse of the aesthetic and intellectual regimes of the self-styled "New Enlightenment" of the 1980s, of which the modernist cinema was an integral part, and which came to be wrapped up in the thick mythology of a bureaucratic market economy during the 1990s. What this new generation faced on the threshold of the post–New Era is not a changed or distorted reality but indeed the complete absence of reality as a result of total rationalization of the social sphere by the monopoly of power, capital, and their attendant mercenary culture industry and framework of values. The 1980s modernism was, in retrospect, not a negation of this totality, but merely exploited its internal unevenness and contradictions for a fast-track aesthetic and professional success—an escape masquerading as heroic transcendence. The tough part of the work, namely, a full, frontal confrontation with reality, remains to be done but without the valorization of the modernist cinematic language,

whose aesthetic properties are exhausted and whose political poignancy is squandered or ignored.

The breaking of the ideological totality at the end of the 1980s and the intensified disintegration of the "reform consensus" throughout the 1990s finally resulted in a fragmentation of Chinese society in every dimension and domain such that a "discovery" of reality could no longer meaningfully envisage a new unifying totality. Rather, a search for "reality" must start with a cognitive mapping of the contradictory multiplicity of realities that, thus captured, are open to the critical, discursive interventions of socially and politically concrete personal histories, positions, interests, identities, and consciousness, whether dormant or emergent. Jia Zhangke's work can be understood most effectively in this context as a cinematic discursive invention pertaining to a particular layer or topology in the fragmented social sphere. And the particular milieu that defines the "physical reality" undergirding Jia Zhangke's visual-political impact is *xiancheng*, or the county-level city.

It should be noted that, with respect to Jia Zhangke's film production, *xiancheng* is not a description but a full-fledged concept. The name does not refer to its technical administrative definition ("the site of a county," governing townships but in turn governed by districts or district-level cities), but includes both county-level cities such as Fenyang (Jia's hometown and setting for both *Xiaowu* and *Platform*, it rose from township status to that of a county-level city in the early 1990s) and larger district-level provincial cities and industrial centers like Datong (the setting of *Unknown Pleasure*).[4] One may find the following journalistic observations on Fenyang as it is made visible through the prism of Jia Zhangke's films:

> The objective spatial properties of *xiancheng* would include the following: Demolishing-spawn rubbles standing next to characterless streets and buildings; deserted coal mines and highways; large unused areas; modern dance shows on a flatbed truck competing with village operas and mad disco dances; sleepy pool houses, video parlors, and the decayed, empty train station; lottery sales all over the places, indifferent, monotonous and yet stirring, even demagogue-like, a sound typical of an age of mental absent-mindedness and restlessness; the lonely, despirited pedestrians walking in the dust that thickens the air; odors of foods; or other nameless odors. . . . This is the hometown without famous ancient architectural relics or logos of modern kitsch, and yet a spatial structure with poetic significance.[5]

The peculiarity of *xiancheng* as a type of social landscape lies in its omnipresence in socioeconomic, geographic, and sociological senses, as well as its underrepresentation in film and literature. Focusing on *xiancheng* is, consciously or not, zooming in on the underbelly of Chinese reform and Chinese socialist modernity in general. As part of "urban China,"

xiancheng sets itself apart from the fantasyland of a pristine and authentic, custom-bound rural China, with its substantive benefits from early reform years (due to the household-based production system and the rise of food prices) and its stable, village-based social and ethical structure. All of this was in very short order torn asunder by the reach of market forces, creating a massive loss of arable land and exodus of the rural population to rapidly expanding urban industrial and service-industrial centers). On the other hand, a *xiancheng* is decidedly not an urban, metropolitan center, but rather the opposite of urbane sophistication, fashion, high-paying whiter-collar jobs, and access to national cultural and political power and to international, global capital and ideas, all of which are lived realities in national cities such as Beijing and Shanghai and provincial capitals in coastal or major industrial areas with rich economic, cultural, or tourist resources (the names of Nanjing, Hangzhou, Xi'an, Guangzhou, and Chengdu come immediately to mind). In terms of material or symbolic capital, *xiancheng* is proletarian China, par excellence. In terms of urban forms and their visual representation, *xiancheng* is usually found to be shapeless and unattractive, exposing spatial and social organization based on necessity and with no prospect of transcendance. In other words, this is the in-between, generic area where the daily reality of contemporary China is laid bare, much to the inconvenience of the symbolic or allegorical sublimation of China as an image, an idea, a world-historical standard-bearer sought by the socialist realists and modernists alike. To anyone who is condemned to having to look at its social fabric closely, *xiancheng* in the hinterland is an aching reminder of all the failings and compromises of socialist industrialization, of postsocialist reforms, and even of the sweeping market forces, whose forces and edges, brutal as they were in the more even, homogeneous space of the Chinese countryside or big cities like Beijing or Shanghai, turned out to be half-measures at best when confronted with this dull, unruly reality. But Jia Zhangke's films are neither moral condemnations on the crushing material or cultural poverty of *xiancheng* nor nostalgic apologies for one's personal history bearing its fateful imprints. If there are any traces of sentimentalism, it is the emotional residue or surplus of past memories, lost in time and now regained through filmmaking, whose Proustian ritual-worthiness lies in its ability to document and, while doing so, enables the filmmaker to touch upon not one particular moment of the past but a chain of moments before and after it as well.

With no clean-cut boundaries or clear distinctions, whether between rural and urban, between industrial and agricultural, between "state" and "non-state," and between high culture and low culture, *xiancheng* becomes a meeting place of all current or anachronistic forces but without any contending party's ideology or utopia triumphing over others in a decisive fashion. Either too overdeveloped (such as the huge state-run coal mines in Datong, forming the semi-visible background of *Unknown Pleasures* in the form of the run-down workers' dormitory in which the protagonist lives

with his mother) or too underdeveloped (such as the rudimentary service sectors developed in China all over the place in the 1990s—small teahouses and restaurants, public baths, hair salons, restaurants, karaoke clubs, pool houses, and brothels in Jia Zhangke films), different modes of production or consumption present in this context find in *xiancheng* not a showcase for their material accomplishment and ideological appeal, but, rather, their burial ground. Jia Zhangke arrived at the center stage of contemporary Chinese filmmaking as the filmmaker of *xiancheng*, and *xiancheng* experiences and images define his work so thoroughly that he later felt compelled to rise above it. Jia's first attempt at doing so is *The World*, set in Beijing. But the world represented in this film is seen by many as in fact a *xiancheng* within the global city and the nation's capital, for the World Theme Park on the outskirts of Beijing is at once a migrant laborers' village and a *xiancheng* version of imagined globality. Indeed, the ultimate mockery of the film is not on the Disney-style, miniature World, but Beijing or China itself as a giant *xiancheng* whose concrete, contradictory realities coexist with a virtual, mirage-like unity.

Xiancheng is the sociological, if not biographical, origin of Jia Zhangke's cinematic language, which, once invented, serves as a nimble, effective, and defiant tool in discursively subverting the stale modernist holdover and the enveloping monopoly of the Hollywood-style commercial blockbuster. In terms of this "discovery" of reality, *xiancheng* is not located merely at some ethnographic "street level," nor is it simply a cinematic dialect. Rather, in Jia Zhangke's oeuvre it is a state of being, an existential mood, and a political ontology waiting to burst into the linguistic-discursive world of self-expression and representation to claim for itself a rightful place with a suppressed rage. This is the reason why it is never too productive to try to reduce Jia Zhang's film production to a new sociologically, even class-defined agency or identity, such as "small folks" (*xiaorenwu*), or "those on the margin" (*bianyuan*), or the "underprivileged group" (*ruoshi qunti*), or "the bottom" (*diceng*). That would be either giving too much or too little credit to Jia's filmmaking practice, which is only rarely aligned with a class- or economic-centered analysis of the social situation, but is instead more engaged in finding a legitimate perspective, voice, or position from which to capture a reality that is simultaneously slipping away from experience and coming back to haunt and overwhelm it at an abstract, mythological level. While seeking this legitimacy of the self, Jia Zhangke's world of visual discourse continues to reveal the illegitimacy of various dominant discourses of representation and propaganda. But Jia's films do so without committing themselves to a fixed position, politically or aesthetically; rather, their work is made possible by a deliberate mobility and reflexiveness—in terms of physical location, group identity, vis-à-vis the state and capital (in the form of inventors, distributors, and censors), and in relation to prevalent intellectual and critical discourses, even though it appears often to devote itself to those who are rendered immobile by the prevailing social, economic, and

ideological forces in a structural sense—whether they are being eradicated from their roots and driven ever deeper into the alien land of capitalist economy is a different matter.

When asked whether he thinks his films represent the Chinese reality, Jia answers by saying that his films represent one of the Chinese realities; and that what he has learned from his own decade of filmmaking experiences is that China is presenting increasingly multiple realities. Rather than trying to capture a totality or "completeness" (*wanzhengxing*), Jia seeks to "break its silence" and to show the "facial expressions" of this "giant economic entity" (Zhangke 2009, p. 68)—often by making audible and visible what is muffled or blurred and what is forgotten altogether. At the end of *Xiaowu*, the audience sees Xiaowu, handcuffed to a light pole like a stray dog captured by an animal shelter, expressionlessly staring back at the passersby gathering around and staring at him. But this memorable scene of immobility in the minute context reveals precisely the mobility of Xiaowu as a migrant laborer surviving in *xiancheng* as a pickpocket, only his is a mobility people too conveniently ignore and too readily deny when "necessary." *Xiaowu* the film is thus this invisible and inaudible body of experience called "Xiaowu" turned into language, as an idea, a representation, and a discourse—of mobility, action, emotions, and expression (even if an expressionless one). The same concern and interest can be seen in *The World*, whose representational and discursive center is not the theme park (it only serves as a prop), but rather stories of mobility and immobility (ending with the dead, hardened bodies of its two protagonists), whose trajectories or "routes of flight" create traces of human expression—as signs of experiential and emotional intensities—bursting from behind the crushing dullness and indifference of *xiancheng*, the hollow mirage of fantasyland, and the death mask of alienation. To trace these human traces, to follow his protagonists doggedly as they roam across different, sometimes unbridgeable social terrains, is the documentary, even detective ambition of Jia Zhangke's cinematic style.

JIA ZHANGKE AND THE NEW DOCUMENTARY MOVEMENT

Xiancheng, despite its unassuming, unattractive appearances, is a war zone both in the socioeconomic sense and for its impact on the visual registers of contemporary China, in which the most brutal battles of a historical transformation are being fought, out of sight and silently. Just as *Xiaowu* is widely credited by critics for its "discovery" of *xiancheng*, demolition (*chai*) is credited by the filmmaker himself for the becoming visible of small-town experiences as a visual-political construct and as an allegory. For Jia Zhangke, *xiancheng* is not at all merely a film set, a background, or an object of representation. Rather, it is an ongoing *event* that visual-politically defines his filmmaking as a will to documentary that must be

carried out by "going back to the scene" (*huidao xianchang*). The "scene," to be sure, refers not only explicitly to the familiar, even omnipresent scenes of demolition, relocation, and construction in urban centers as well as the adjacent areas between city and country (*chengxiang jiehebu*) in China today, but more implicitly to the scenes of the crime and violence of the Chinese 1990s, whose beginning can be traced back to Tiananmen Square in June 1989. "Going back to the scene" thus inevitably assumes the position of not only a documenter trying to recover lost personal and collective memories from a rebellious and failed youth, but that of a victim obsessive-compulsively wanting to go back to "the scene" just to live it once again, as if to prove that the lived moment, unabsorbed by memory and conscious, is, rather, an ongoing, continuous traumatic event. The scene, in other words, is a sociopsychological idée fixe clinging to the heart of happenings, in which concrete experiences and lives are lost and gained, and in which the real, however fragmented and unbearable, can be once again confronted and captured from a cinematic "writing degree zero."

Jia's age and small-town upbringing may provide a biographical clue for his desire to go back to the "scene," but he would still need a cinematic-discursive device with which to get even closer to and to make consciously alive what only exists *in itself* but not *for itself*. That cinematic-discursive device he found in the idea of the documentary parallel to and nourished by the New Documentary Movement (*xin jilupian yundong*) of the Chinese 1990s, and in the new technology of digital video camera (DV).

The New Documentary Movement became prominent in the early 1990s and mid-1990s, along with a few Chinese independently produced documentary films that were recognized at international film festivals, notably the Yamagata Festival. Its roots, however, can be traced back to the transient moment of intellectual freedom in China in the mid-1980s and late 1980s, which permitted the "educated youth," mostly poets and painters, to pursue ideals and search for a different lifestyles and realities outside the state or newly emerging market institutions and channels. The first independent documentary filmmakers were so-called "aimless roamers" gathered in college dorms and small inns in remote provinces, with Wu Wenguang's *Roaming in Beijing—the Last Dreamers* (*Liulang Beijing—zuihou de mengxiangzhe*) as one of their first manifestos. Utopia in faraway places was quickly annihilated by intensified commercial and technological expansion to nearly every corner of Chinese society in the 1990s. The initial dreamers, or their surviving remnants, now aimed at the "lowest social stratum" (*diceng*, literally meaning "bottom layer") as a site for their strivings for the construct of visual and experiential *vérité* beyond the empty cliché of bureaucratic discourse or the numbing bombardment of the commercial media. To that extent, the new or independent documentary movement was not pursued professionally as a genre or format, but instead was guarded religiously as the last ground for truth, thinking, critique, and idealism that, as Lu Xinyu rightly observes, betray its 1980s' intellectual birthmark.[6]

Jia Zhangke's filmmaking obviously shares with the independent documentary movement the fervor for rediscovering reality at its most concrete, profane, irreducible registers, which means turning his gaze away from visual metaphysics of "yellow earth" or "red sorghum," and the phantasmagoria of Chinese big cities. In this sense, *xiancheng*—as opposed to, say, deeply rural or radically urban locales often featured in New Documentary works—is for Jia Zhangke a political choice and narrative design, rather than a visual or existential inevitability. It also overlaps with New Documentary Movement in its propensity to "going back to the scene" by means of a "documentary"-informed camera position and movement; long-take shots; sustained use of interviews that, belatedly, came to the fore only in Jia's 2009 film *24 City*; and simultaneous sound recording. Thirdly, the protagonists in all of Jia Zhangke films are virtually the same group or subgroup of people—unemployed youth and urban wanders, migrant labor, street performers, laid-off state enterprise workers—that occupy center stage in independent documentary works. In fact, *Platform*, in a way the true autobiographical beginning of his filmmaking and the only Jia Zhangke film whose period of representation is the 1980s, portrays precisely the mode of life of the "roaming artist" type, albeit in the setting of *xiancheng*.[7] Referring to himself as a "cinematic migrant labor" during the precarious early days of his career, Jia Zhangke consciously sets his camera at the eye level of his protagonists, which is to say sometimes as low as that of the squatting Xiaowu. Following or circling around his characters, the camera moves in and out, stands still in their midst as a component of their daily world, waiting to be ignored or, better still, accepted as a documenter. Thus a more equal relationship between the viewer and the viewed is established, and together they form a pact in the name of the "right of discourse" vis-à-vis the multiplicity of reality, vis-à-vis the becoming kitsch of the intellectual elite, and vis-à-vis the ruthless, silencing force of the state and the market. That is the definition of the "independent" in independent documentary movement in China since the early 1990s.

As Walter Benjamin observes in the 1930s, the emergent social subjectivity must strive for its redemption of and by technology, or there is no redemption at all.[8] The visual technology that has become handy, indeed indispensible for the independent, democratic search for freedom and a "right of discourse" and for a socially and politically meaningful way of documenting the present is found in DV as the liberating alternative to a rented professional film camera. DV, inexpensive and easy to handle, gives rise to an unprecedented degree of popularization of visual technology and the multiplication of individual perspectives, positions, and expressivity. Wu Wenguang famously describes how he was "salvaged [*zhengqiu*] by DV":

> I was saved in a completely relaxed state of mind. Paying a hefty price for the rental equipment makes you feel bad and want to finish the whole project in seven or eight hours. You would also have to do

> postproduction in a rented studio, which often prohibits smoking. I am a chain smoker at work, but whenever I went out for a cigarette I felt I had just burned through another 400 yuan. . . . Since 1998 I have been led by DV to a completely free state of mind, or perhaps I should say I have utilized DV to such an extent that I can do whatever my mind and heart please.[9]

Jia Zhangke's 2002 film *Unknown Pleasures* (*Renxiaoyao*) was wholly a DV production. "I shot whatever I saw, completely relaxed and unprepared. It was like an adventure, a wandering without a script," said Jia about his experience of shooting the film in Datong. Dubbed the "angriest of all Jia Zhangke films," *Unknown Pleasures* tells the story of two adolescent sons of laid-off workers who plot and carry out a bank robbery that ends in comic disaster. It would be hard for the viewer to see the boredom, aimlessness, repression, frustration, humiliation, and barely hidden fury that permeates the movie in terms of known or unknown "pleasures" without appreciating the liberating sense of freedom, afforded by DV, with which the film is made. Flat and fragmented, hazy, and sometimes bordering on incoherence and unintelligibility, the visual narrative of *Unknown Pleasures* (the third and last in Jia's so-called "Hometown Trilogy," following *Xiaowu* and *Platform*) feels as if it is woven together by an intruder inside a dreamland who does not have to worry about getting caught. DV turned out to be not only suitable for capturing raw, fresh visual encounters with Datong, which excited Jia Zhangke, but to his delight, it was also ideally suited for "shooting things that are abstract"—a "most valuable" asset. Jia explains:

> Most people travel along a given order, moving forward like a river. The advantage of DV, however, is that it allows you to step in while keeping an objective distance, tracking the rhythm and heartbeat of this trend, staring at it, following it, all the while conducting a rational observation. . . . That allows me to add a surrealist layer on top of the super-realist foundation of my previous work. I felt I became an essayist with a digital camera and not a filmmaker. I believe DV will usher in a revolutionary change in the film industry. It is conducive to helping filmmakers shake off the yoke of traditional conventions and formulas to engage in their work in a pressure-free fashion; and it will allow a reentry into filmmaking by those who are out of work due to the constraints of financial and material conditions.[10]

Jia's observations on concreteness and abstraction, sensual immediacy and distance, emotional involvement and "rational" reflection are important, as the aesthetic and political ambition of his film and the New Documentary Movement is precisely to forge a new alliance between objectivity and thought in their respective autonomy as they are violently separated by radical transformations of Chinese society created in by the state-sanctioned

market forces. It would not be an exaggeration to say that DV allows the new generation of filmmakers to cut deeply into the body of social life and roam between its internal organs, a capacity Walter Benjamin describes via a comparison between film and painting—a comparison that allows us to contemplate the revolutionary implications of this new technology. As DV plunges into its adventure by following the immediate reality in its minute concreteness, the cinematic essayist holding the camera with one hand can still scribble down what he sees and thinks with the other hand, so to speak, thus retaining a critically important distance, freedom, and autonomy unbound by the apparatus of the traditional professional film camera as a virtually immobile institutional system. A more "prosaic" (in the Hegelian sense of the "world of prose") space is thus created in between the material immediacy and socially given in their radical multiplicity, on one hand, and, on the other hand its opposition and negation in reflexive, critical consciousness, albeit in fragmented and shifting forms. It is in this newly invented topology of cognitive mapping that a crude aesthetics comes into being along with the vital historical and human experiences activated and captured by its gaze. This is the reason why the harsh contours of Datong, a coarse industrial town built on the edges of the Gobi, excites Jia Zhangke with its radical reification, its energy and restlessness amidst its faceless crowds, and with the unnamed fury manifest by its unhinged youth. Whereas the Chinese title "renxiaoyao" suggests a Daoist kind of untamable freedom (with direct allusion to Zhuangzi's poetry/philosophy), the concrete excitement might as well stem from an incipient DV technology and its promise to permit a cognitive victory snatched from a sleepwalk-like adventure into the land of indifference and reification.

POETICS OF VANISHING

If the Fifth Generation films, as specimens from the heroic or mythological period of Chinese modernism, are all about emergence and coming-into-being, Jia Zhangke's films seem to doggedly stick with one theme: vanishing. In Jia's own language: "Some beautiful things are quickly disappearing from our lives."[11] The vanishing of friendship, mutual dependence, love, and, eventually, family ties; the vanishing of an entire community (the thirty-thousand-employee state factory, a "work unit" compound with more than one hundred thousand people, including spouses and dependents in *24 City*), and even an entire city (the ancient city of Fengjie in *Still Life*); the vanishing of myth (Three Gorges as a collective reference point, as it is "documented" in classical poetry and represented on Chinese currency), idealism, dreams, or a mere disguise/cover-up of the naked, shapeless reality; the disappearance of security (and thus any sense of security), dignity, sense of belonging, direction (and sense of direction), and "principles or norms" (*zhunze*); not to mention the extinction or near extinction of social species or subspecies

such as the socialist culture workers (epitomized by the head of the singing and dancing troupe in *Platform*, played by the Beijing poet Xi Chuan, who simply drops out of the scene after the "privatization" of the troupe); or the kind of dreamers as "aimless roamers" due to the disappearance of their habitat. If the 1980s modernist experiments had their deepest dreams in norm-building, then Jia Zhangke can be called a cinematic poet of norm demolition, of the impossibility of keeping anything intact, and of the silent violence endured helplessly by a silent population. Disappearance and demolition as an ontological image in the mind's eye gives rise to and undergirds the visualization of hectic, anxious, and chaotic transitions or transience or aimless running around (staged in the middle of *Xiaowu*) that characterize the basic grammar and rhythm of movement, human, physical, or social, in all Jia Zhangke films, which refer to one another to form a persistent documentation of the colossal loss of identity and meaning in post-contemporary Chinese society. Boredom and emptiness in fact are the central subject matter being studied in Jia Zhangke's early films, represented by *Xiaowu*, which remains for many critics his best film. In his more recent films, starting from *The World*, Jia Zhangke seems to be searching for a way to cinematically thematize—itemize and allegorize—the social content of (or socially sanctioned distractions from) this boredom and emptiness, from a theme park rendition of globalization to ruthless surgical operations on nature, to urban demolition and real estate development. Becoming intellectual or critical of the filmmaker is not always viewed approvingly as a promising turn for someone who can barely conceal his shock and rage when gazing at his hometown behind the camera.

As a filmmaker trained in the Literature Department, Jia Zhangke shot his early films from his own notes in the place of a completed script (he is known for never having finalized or completed the script of a film before the film itself was completed). To this extent, he seems to fit the stereotypical image of a "film poet" in the most derogatory sense: an illustrator of ideas and thoughts arbitrarily drawn from outside any cinematic logic. The spontaneous, jolted, uneven, harsh, and free-flowing style exemplified in "hometown trilogy" is not only an explicit homage to Hou Hsiao-Hsien, one of Jia Zhangke's heroes, but also, a conscious way to compensate and sometimes overcompensate for the dreaded appearance of "intellectualism." But from the very start, Jia Zhangke's filmmaking could not possibly be separated from his thinking, and vice versa. Thinking, in the context of Jia Zhangke's films, is not about deep analysis of a historical situation, or an idealistic venturing beyond, or about devising philosophical schemes. Rather, it is first and foremost driven by particular social anxieties or syndromes that cry out for help. This allows Jia Zhangke to draw a line between his cinematic "thinking" and what he regards as two big problems of Chinese modernism of the 1980s variety: poeticizing crude life experiences; elevating them into the height of legend, fairy tales, and mythology; and "thinking on behalf of everybody," an intellectual self-indulgence,

grandiose, and hegemony that place a privileged "I" or "We" at the center of the universe, which renders the corners of life insignificant or too trivial to be seen. To that, Jia Zhangke quotes a line as his motto from his poet friend Xi Chuan: "Crows solve crows' problems, and I solve mine" (*wuya jiejue wuya de wenti, wo jiejue wo de wenti*). Independence, self-representation, humility, and a devotion to the concept of equality are necessary for Jia Zhangke to document the growth or Bildung of an underdeveloped story of formation—like Xiaowu in *Xiaowu*, who does not know how to sing or dance, who calls himself an artisan and yet does not have any skills other than pickpocket—with all its vivid details and memories, its slowness and serenity, its pleasure and gravity.

The problems Jia Zhangke faces as his own include, first of all, an ethics of truth vis-à-vis truth claims of falsehood, which he had grappled with along with his fellow travelers in the independent documentary movement in the larger context, all the while taking aim at his more immediate professional predecessors with the lineage of "modern cinematic language," namely, the Fifth Generation. (He openly despises the works of Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige in the 1990s.) His rejection of those claims brings him "closer to life" where, paradoxically, the trappings of falsehood intensify. Jia Zhangke does not provide an answer, nor in fact does he seem to have a solution. This turns his films into a series of unending, indeed unendable, experiments in the more radical sense, as the pursuit of truth now opens up a protracted, unsettled dialogue or interaction between theory and practice, between subject and object, and between one and many. The provisional appearance of Jia Zhangke's films point truthfully to their conditions of possibility as well as their intellectual premises.

But of all things vanishing in front of our very eyes, none is as certain and frightening as the oblivion of the hometown in both personal and collective, actual and symbolic terms. Xiaowu still has a home in the village to return to, even though it is that home that he is determined to escape from to begin with. By contrast, in *Platform*, set in the 1980s, the theme is unmistakably "on the road." The Fenyang streets on which the filmmaker roams are still as dense and packed as those of any other inhabited town where people go about their usual business and attend, with care and single-mindedness, to their quotidian routine. Even though it was the work of demolition in the town of Fenyang that prompted Jia Zhangke's desire into wanting to document his hometown life, as memory and as an ongoing transformation in one, there was still *a lot* to be demolished, and it is the images of bicycles, tractors, and shabby one-story buildings that make concrete the idea of *home* as but an aesthetic and ethical appearance of a lingering socialist mode of production. In *Unknown Pleasures*, however, as the socialist workers' dorms and other public spaces stand in their ghostly anachronistic isolation, large open spaces have been created and brought into view, often in the form of flattened neighborhoods, dusty construction sites, and broad, glistening, endless highways. The disintegration of the socialist organization of labor,

privatization of collective ownership, and sweeping commercialization are still contained within the personal parameters of "growth" and "experience" in *Platform*, but they quickly overwhelm the phenomenological framework of a 1980s *Bildungsroman* and demand a more concrete and ruthlessly historical approach. It takes a kind of administrative and business efficiency with which whole cities or city-equivalent communities are demolished or relocated (documented in *Still Life* and *24 City*), or an entire "world" of mirage and phantasmagoria is erected (in *The World*) to register on the personal and collective consciousness this question: What does it mean in general to witness one's hometown being labeled "to be demolished"?

STILL LIFE

The curious English translation of "Sanxia haoren"—literally meaning "the good people of the Three Gorges"—as "still life" (or *jingwu* in its technical conversion back into Chinese) points to Jia Zhangke's literary interpretation of his own film. Winner of the 2007 Golden Lion at the Venice International Film Festival, *Still Life* marks Jia Zhang's international and professional recognition and places him in a position to elaborate his approach to filmmaking defined vis-à-vis the Fifth Generation. In a director's sketch about the film, Jia Zhangke writes:

> One day I stumbled into an uninhabited room and saw the belongings of the bygone host lying on the desk, covered with dust. All of a sudden it dawned on me that this is the secret of still life. The setting had not been changed for years; everything was covered by dust; an empty wine bottle by the window; the decorations on the walls—suddenly, everything acquired a poetic melancholy. Still life represents a reality neglected by us. Even though it preserves the deep traces of time, it remains in silence and thus keeps the secret of life.[12]

It is no secret that *Still Life* the movie begins with the camera, following Han Sanming looking for his wife, entering the scene—the Three Gorges area as a natural wonder, the site of the biggest hydropower station in the world and one of the largest projects of development-related population relocation—in the way similar to a stranger stumbling into an empty, uninhabited room. The two-thousand-year-old town Fengjie, along with its natural surroundings, is portrayed in the film as a city in the act of vanishing—demolished ("dismantled, dynamited, and flattened" [*chaihui*, *baozha*, *tanta*]) into the empty background constituted by "deafening noises and flying dust," literally sinking under the rising water level. As over a million people are vacated from their homes, the camera roams to and fro, as if searching for signs or proof of life at a surreal site of archeological excavation, but one in which one's own lifeworld as well as that of

one's contemporaries is to be unearthed. The melancholic contemplation brings about a fixed, harrowing sight, with omnipresent character *chai* (to be demolished) and red signs painted on urban structures marking the projected water level, which serves as a constant reminder, a "cry for rescue," transmitted at the spot of a social disaster quietly but inexorably taking place, an incident that must be measured on natural-historical scales (Chernobyl eerily comes to mind—both, incidentally, have to do with power, hydro or nuclear, and with state planning).

In *24 City*, "still life" comes in the form of Factory 420 in Chengdu, a huge military equipment producer established in 1958 in the heydays of the Great Leap Forward, sold to a real estate developer in 2008 for demolition and the building of high-end condominiums (the factory itself was to be relocated in the outer suburbs of Chengdu). "Chinese socialism as an experiment has ended at the economic level," concluded Jia Zhangke, "what I am facing is the memory of this experiment and the ways in which the workers' experiences and lives had been affected under that system."[13] Based on more than 130 interviews with the 420 employees and retirees, the film turns out to be more "fictional" than most Jia Zhangke films in that a collective institutional history is crystallized in the personal narratives of three women workers, two of whom are played by famous Chinese actresses, Joan Chen, Lu Liping, and Zhao Tao (who has been in every Jia Zhangke film since *Platform*). This "fictitious concentration," deemed necessary by the filmmaker, serves as but a discursive "voice-over" that anchors and frames the documentary gaze of the camera, which seeks to weave together two threads of "still life" images from two domains of contemporary Chinese society: that of state-supported institutions soon to go into oblivion, consisting of meeting halls, buses, factory floors, and public space in the communal apartment compounds; and that of private everyday life, consisting of living rooms, kitchens, and personal possessions. What the film presents is not a—however deliberate—collection of still life from the repressed past and the vanishing present, but rather various visual, audio, or discursive tunnels and passageways connecting the bustling surface of contemporary Chinese cities to the darker, subterranean world of "personal stories."

The obsession with still life in this particular sense also reveals an impulse to document the "laborers coming and going in front of the camera" (p. 167) who stand as an afterimage of the bygone host of the empty room or social theater. It is an "homage" (*suran qijing*) paid to those whose existence is as silent as a still life. The forced migration in *Still Life*, in its documentation of involuntary, restless mobility (also documented in *The World*, in which everybody is on the move—from small towns into big cities, from Ukraine to Beijing, or from Beijing to Ulan Bator, of all places in the world), points back to Jia Zhangke's traumatic obsession with immobility, with those who are stuck in the provincial cities and towns that defined his formative years. In "Shadow and Light of 2006" Jia Zhangke writes

about his unplanned, impulsive trip back to Datong to meet up with his buddies without any advance notice:

> Arriving around mid-night, I took a taxi and went straight to a small restaurant . . . As I expected, all my buddies were there, as they had *nowhere else to go*. They gathered at this restaurant every day, killing time over drinking and gambling. They never had to make an appointment to see each other.[14]

Having nowhere else to go, Jia Zhangke and his Shanxi buddies decided to visit abandoned movie theaters in the coal mine district of the city. Stumbling into the dark, empty theaters, some already turned into warehouses, Jia Zhangke's sketches read like his director's notes or scripts:

> As a group of vagabonds we went along looking for traces of former movie theaters or workers' clubs and found them still standing in the sand storms of the Gobi desert. Some of them wore glass-less windows like open wounds, others just sat there in silence, as if still in disbelief regarding what had happened. I was struck by the thought that the faces of contemporary Chinese in the past decade or so had never been truly portrayed on the screen, their happiness and sorrows, their life's drama disappearing into nothingness. Nobody cared about those who still live in the workers' dorms nearby, about their souls and their spiritual need.[15]

One may wonder if this is, after all, what drives Jia Zhangke's filmmaking in the most personal, private, and yet most socially and politically engaging sense. The desire to document, to represent, to remember, to pay respect and homage, as a contemporary and latecomer all in one, to the vanishing, the immobile, and the silent constitutes a rescue mission with a critical edge. Jia Zhangke the public intellectual may refer to this as an effort at "understanding the moral state of being of our nation" (*mingbai minzu de jingshen xianzhuang*), but Jia Zhangke the private film poet always dedicates his work to "the brothers who are just about to repeat the same routine of eating and drinking, to endure the same solitude and emptiness."[16]

Still life as a concept borrowed from painting seems to provide the following functions or possibilities for Jia Zhang's filmmaking as a poetics of vanishing and a documentary of rescue all at once. It offers an ultimate epistemological category and operational framework with which to arrest a process of rapid, ruthless change and rearrange its dispersing, vanishing fragments into a sequence of enduring visual evidence. What is disappearing in front of us, through the cinematic frame of still life, now becomes a concrete substance of "what has been" that negatively, critically fills up a phenomenology of void, aimlessness, and oblivion. The phenomenological reduction and suspension of history in the form of still life is not merely a

technology that makes things too large for human experience and perception able to come within reach and easy to handle, for the stillness and void thus achieved for the benefit of concentration inevitably becomes a focal point toward which all images, sounds, and stories converge. The harrowing monotony of the sound of demolition in *Still Life* opens itself up to all kinds of sound and light, music and language that a new chronicle of collective experience will likely find a useful cue or stepping-stone. It is no accident that the documentary core of Jia Zhangke's early films has finally had its debut in his most recent films, *24 City*, which consists of interviews and a more deliberate—through the work of editing, and aided by fiction—effort at constructing a gallery of still life from the history of the People's Republic. The melancholy that dominates *Still Life* is here replaced by earnest talking and listening. After all, the poetics of vanishing is achieved through a documentary of the present, which strives for a poetics of being—being not in the simple optimistic or utopian sense, but in the agonized sense of an ongoing battle on the frontier of global capital and imperial control. As *xiancheng* becomes China on a national scale, China becomes *xiancheng* on a world-historical scale. What is at stake is no less than the meaning of one's collective social being, for which "hometown" is not the last line of defense, but rather the most immediate and visceral locale through which other, more socially and politically concrete longings are expressed. Jia Zhangke's still life actively seeks hidden stories as captions that accompany those images; and these hidden stories always imply a human voice and human face.

The ending of *Still Life* portrays the migrant laborers leaving Fengjie as a town about to become subterranean, for an unspecified next stop in search of work and livelihood. Behind them, between two condemned buildings, a man walks the tightrope against the background of gloomy sky. To ask what is present in Jia Zhangke's films is to ask where they are going and what kind of a future they can strive for ("Where Does the Future Lie?" [*Weilai zai nali?*] is the title of the theme song played at the end of *24 City*). As unclear as the answer might be, one thing is certain: They cannot stand still. If the future lies in the promise of a forward momentum, even in the Hegelian sense that it is the bad that creates history (whereas the good remains unproductively benign and constant), one must seek a source of legitimacy for that or any forward momentum in the larger context of history and human experiences. From Fenyang to Beijing and back to the "scenes" of silent battles, Jia Zhangke's films expand on his "hometown trilogy" while following an expanded notion of hometown that is both political and personal. "The sounds of hometown calm me down," said Jia Zhangke in an interview. As long as his films let in the sounds and images from the streets and direct them into a form pertaining to the memory and reconstruction of that larger (and more concrete) historical and human context, they will continue to speak to the audience in a way so very few contemporary Chinese films seem to be doing.

NOTES

1. Jia Zhangke, 2009a, p. 66.
2. Ibid.
3. Whereas his fascination with Ozu and Hou Hsiao-Hsien is often cited by his critics, Jia's earlier exposure to and lasting influence by Italian neorealism is worth noting. According to Jia, *Selected Film Scripts of Italian Neo-Realism* was the first film book he ever bought. De Sica's *Bicycle Thief* is among his all time favorites. Cf. Lin Xudong, Zhang Yaxuan, and Gu Zheng, 2003, pp. 114–115.
4. Fenyang, with a population of four hundred thousand (as of 2005) and a citywide GDP of 7.7 billion yuan (as of 2008), is around the average of more than twenty-four hundred counties or county-level cities nationwide. Datong, on the other hand, has a population of 3.2 million and a citywide GDP of 57 billion. The per capital income of urban Fenyang residents is 10,738 (U.S.$1,580, as of 2008), compared to Datong's 16,655 (U.S.$2,450, as of 2008). In contrast, Shanghai by 2008 had a population of 18.9 million. According to a recent *Bloomberg/BusinessWeek* report, Shanghai's GDP, at U.S.$218 billion by the end of 2009, has surpassed that of Hong Kong, even though its GDP per capita, at U.S.$10,713 by the end of 2009 is only slightly more than one-third of that of Hong Kong. That is to say, an average Fenyang resident's annual income is about 15 percent of his counterpart's in Shanghai, and only 5 percent of his counterpart's in Hong Kong. See http://www.businessweek.com/news/2010–03–04/hong-kong-s-economy-surpassed-by-shanghai-as-china-advances.html.
5. Wang Xiaodong, 2009, p. 72.
6. Lu Xinyu, 2002, p. 68. Besides Wu Wenguang, Li Xiaoshan, Kang Jianning, and Duan Jinchuan are often mentioned as the most prominent documentary filmmakers from this movement.
7. Jia Zhangke reveals in the interview included in the New Yorker Films DVD version of *Platform* that he wrote the script for it in 1995, but had to wait until after *Xiaowu* to work on it, starting in 1999; and that this film is an autobiographical account of his *Bildung*—his education, formation, and apprenticeship—in the 1980s.
8. Cf. Walter Benjamin, 1968, pp. 217–252.
9. Quoted in Yuan Yanping, 2008, p. 23.
10. Ibid., p. 24.
11. Jia Zhangke, 2009b, p. 25.
12. Jia Zhangke, 2009b, p. 167.
13. Jia Zhangke, 2008, p. 42.
14. Jia Zhangke, 2009b, p. 170.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.

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8 "Leitmotif"

State, Market, and Postsocialist Film Industry under Neoliberal Globalization

Ying Xiao

INTRODUCTION

Since the late 1970s, mainland China has undergone a sea change with a decisive turn from socialist governance and centralization to postsocialist marketization and privatization. Market as a new cultural logic and a dynamic integration of transnational capital fostered around the neoliberal axis become the major forces reshaping a wide range of economic, political, and cultural lives in postsocialist China. With China increasingly predicated upon the flourishing market rationality and its restructured relationships to the global capitalist system, a theory of neoliberalism thus becomes a resourceful tool and instrumental method to understand the significant political and social changes of postsocialist China and the pivotal transformations in the film circle as well.

Many scholarly studies on neoliberalism in China tend to invoke this neoliberal model to describe a new condition of market-driven productivity and a new tide of consumption revolution in postsocialist China.[1] But an important point is also made that, unlike the West, the neoliberal market reform in China has been substantially and always associated with the state imperatives in the sense that from its inception to implementation to expansion the Chinese state plays a dominant and authoritative role. It can be argued that to a great extent, Chinese neoliberalism represents a state ideology or a technology of "governmentality" in Foucauldian terms that justifies and identifies with the market power and the very social transition in postsocialist China.[2] For anthropologist Lisa Rofel, it moreover signifies a psychological and social condition, within which new forms of desires and anxieties, subjectivities and humanities are intricately produced and circulated.[3] In *Desiring China*, an essential and focused deliberation on neoliberalism in contemporary China, Rofel examines the issues of gender politics, public culture, and everyday life in the context of neoliberal reform. The ethnographic mapping of Chinese reconfigurations in relation to neoliberalism, albeit in a comprehensive endeavor, tends to leave the poetics and aesthetics of neoliberalism in cinema and other forms of audiovisual arts insufficiently touched, with the exception of her final and

cursory glance at two films—*The Postman* (*Youchai*, directed by He Yi, 1995) and *Living Elsewhere* (*Shenghuo zai biechu*, directed by Wang Jianwei, 1999). As she points out, these two particular films, in a hyperrealistic fashion, present a critical view of the neoliberal postsocialist practice and its pathological effects on urban subjects and migrant workers. Both were primarily circulated around underground venues and have limited distributions in China, as opposed to the success they garnered on the international film circuits.

Departing from this originative line by Rofel, yet in a deliberate attempt to interrogate this traditional assumption of the binaries between artistic/commercial, alternative/mainstream film, public culture and everyday life/official narrative, this chapter will take an inverse position to launch a sociohistorical reading and close analysis of "Leitmotif" (*zhuxuanlv*) film, a heavily state-sponsored film genre shaped by both the market and state mechanisms in the postsocialist reform. Very little has been done historicizing and theorizing this market-sensitive film genre in the neoliberal postsocialist context, a significant theme marginalized by the festival-oriented scholarship of Chinese film studies in the last past decades.

Leitmotif, a characteristic Chinese film formation with an explicit musical reference by its name, is a newly formulated state-subsidized film project that has experienced unprecedented growth and popularity at the turn of the new century. A privileged and highly figurative term that is often linked with state sponsorship and political intervention, the category of Leitmotif poses complex questions for cultural critics, film historians, and theorists of mass media. Generally seen as conforming and didactic, one may ask: what is the value in studying such blatantly propagandist films? How does a critical study of this genre enable us to rediscover the continuing significance of ideology criticism to cinescape, reevaluate the positioning of propaganda in cinema in the current milieu as it is intertwined in a convoluted way with the mechanisms of nation-state, neoliberalism, and global market? Moreover, whereas China has officially adopted an open-door policy, market reform, and a series of structural adjustments, the state is still reluctant to let loose its ideological and political controls. As a cultural product of these nuanced, often contradictory principles and rationales, how does Leitmotif reflect and bear witness to this economically liberal but politically conservative climate with "Chinese characteristics" in the late socialist era?

As Chinese film signifies one of the first ventures to incorporate a capitalist business model and represents China's fin de siècle aspiration and anxiety to "link up with the tracks of the world" (*yu shijie jiegui*),[4] the cinematic display encoded by nationhood, historical reflexivity, and transnational imaginary has also become one of the defining features of Leitmotif films, such as in *Bethune: The Making of A Hero* (*Baiqiu'en: yige yingxiong de chengzhang*, directed by Phillip Borsos and Wang Xingang, 1990); *Red Cherry* (*Hong Yingtao*, directed by Ye Daying, 1996); *Red River Valley* (*Honghegu*, directed by Feng Xiaoning, 1997); *Opium War* (*Yapian zhanzheng*, directed by Xie

Jin, 1997); *My 1919* (*Wode 1919*, directed by Huang Jianzhong, 1999); *Grief over the Yellow River* (*Huanghe juelian*, directed by Feng Xiaoning, 1999); *Shadow Magic* (*Xiyangjing*, directed by Hu An, 2000); *Purple Sunset* (*Ziri*, directed by Feng Xiaoning, 2001); and *Charging out Amazon* (*Chongchu yamaxun*, directed by Song Yaming, 2002). These Leitmotif films are often considered as the Chinese blockbusters in that genre abundantly borrows and deliberately appropriates the images and neoliberal practices from Hollywood hits. Through a case study of the box-office winner in 1999, *Grief over the Yellow River* by Feng Xiaoning, this chapter attempts to address the following concerns: How do the key concepts of neoliberalism, such as free trade, global market, and universal humanity, find thematic resonance in Leitmotif films and help anchor cultural belongings and national consciousness on new grounds? In what ways does this institutional and textual emulation manage to refashion and resell a sense of nation-state in the market age, as the party-state is confronted with a severe challenge of social unrest, political disillusionment, and credibility crisis? Particularly, what role does the narrative paradigm that prevalently features the East-meets-West play in the formation and marketing of this new film genre particularly, a form of cultural imaginary in general? This cinematic encounter and configuration, I argue, represent a specific, often sophisticated way of reconstructing China as a neoliberal entity technically, textually, and aesthetically. It has become a plural and fraught site in which a more complex and ambivalent picture of the neoliberal world order and China's self-reflexive image are projected on the screen and heard over the soundtrack simultaneously.

"LEITMOTIF AND DIVERSITY": STATE, MARKET, AND CHINESE FILM INDUSTRY REFORM DURING THE POSTSOCIALIST PERIOD

A coinage growing out of the Western Romantic tradition, Leitmotif as a specific music idiom can be traced back to Richard Wagner's idea of "motifs of reminiscence," which is by definition a central, characteristic, and recurring musical theme that has a strong connection to a particular character, time, setting, and scene. The classical Romantic convention that emphasizes leitmotivic structure, theme writing, and symphonic orchestrations had a dominant impact in classical film score.[5] In the Chinese circumstances, *Leitmotif* is a borrowed term figuratively referring to a national film practice characteristic in postsocialist China, with the goal of satisfying both the political interest of "depicting the major trends of the reforms and the historical era" and the economic demand for "market" and "diversity."[6] In other words, it is a metaphoric adoption that intends to resurrect and anchor the continuing significance of state ideology in the neoliberal cinematic context.

An essential component of the slogan "Foregrounding Leitmotif, Persisting in Diversity" (*tuchu zhuxuanlv, jianchi duoyanghua*), the concept of Leitmotif was initially brought up at a meeting of the principals of national film studios in March 1987 to guide a full scope of artistic practices in the postrevolutionary period. Originating in the heyday of the market reform, "Leitmotif" has been often paired with "Diversity," symptomatic of the conflation of the socialist conventions and neoliberal spirits of "market fever" and "culture fever" (*wenhuare*)[7] in the late 1980s. A pragmatic response to the profound change under the new market condition, this narrative also appears to encapsulate a range of ruptures, tensions, and contradictions within the reform itself. In particular, it was formulated to correspond to the alert of a campaign against "bourgeois liberalism" (*zichan jieji ziyouhua*) in early 1987. Writing an article that was collected by *China Film Yearbook 1990*, Liu Cheng, who later produced a Leitmotif film, *Kong Fansen* (1995), indicates that "bourgeois liberalization" is one of the most harmful tendencies in the films of the late 1980s, as "we found more representations of hooligans, enemies, spies, and prostitutes on the screen . . . but less class analysis of characters and . . . fewer positive depictions of workers and peasants."[8] Liu argues that in order to purify the film market and save films from the "spiritual pollutions of bourgeois liberalization" (*zichanjieji ziyouhua de jingshen wuran*), the political directions of cinema need to be redressed and its pedagogical function reinforced. Many other articles on the future direction of Chinese cinema shared a similar point of view.

Under such circumstances, it becomes natural that a notion of Leitmotif was propagated from the top down as a regulative device subsequently applied to the film sector. Overseen by the state, many films were tailored to the depiction of the positive Party image, great achievements of the reforms, and the glorious events and leaderships in history:

> At first stage, we are interested in using the definition of "Leitmotif' as a classifier of genre, to explore and promote the realistic themes of agriculture and industry reforms and images of new leaders. But after practice, we found that it is far than enough to underwrite the significance of 'Leitmotif' in terms of genres and subject matters. It should be elevated to the spiritual level, namely, an overriding spirit and voluntary consciousness in the artistic practice to embody and advocate the reformist, socialist and patriotic ethos of the time.[9]

As indicated above, film officials have shown their strong support for Leitmotif not only by establishing its leading roles among film genres, but furthermore through the sanctifying process, in which it has been iconized as "a spirit of creation" overdetermining the form and content of mainstream filmmaking in the new era. The category of Leitmotif thus can be extended to include "any films that have positive and healthy content and are exquisite in quality."

Whereas the notion of "Leitmotif" has been officially sanctioned since the late 1980s, it didn't thrive on the Chinese screen and evolve into a full-blown genre until the next decade. It was not until the 1990s that Leitmotif films experienced enormous popularity and unprecedented growth. The anniversaries related to the key events of the Chinese revolution from 1991 (the seventieth birthday of the Chinese Communist Party), to 1995 (the fiftieth anniversary of the victory of Sino-Japanese War), to 1999 (the fiftieth anniversary of the PRC's founding) were frequently cited as the direct causes that contributed to the flourishing of this genre. Besides these, another pivotal link should also be taken into account, namely, the structural change and marketization of the Chinese film industry. Deeply embedded in a neoliberal scenario, the Chinese film industry reform, I argue, significantly parallels the trajectory of Leitmotif film.

With "a series of 'deepened' (*shenhua*) reforms, or more thorough marketization," the Chinese "socialist film system began its tortuous metamorphosis into a (quasi-capitalist or state-capitalist) industry."[10] A bold and thorough effort to substitute the neoliberal capitalist mode for the state-planned economy took place, first in the distribution-exhibition sector. By specifying the distribution being taken care of by the studios themselves and market as the primary source to determine ticket price, instead of having China Film Corporation set prices as previously, the 1993–1994 reform was a decisive take to emancipate studios from the CFC's distribution monopoly. Moreover, as the reform pushed the film institutions towards a greater extent of economic independence, government involvement in the form of financial support was greatly reduced. As a result, capital investments from private avenues both domestic and foreign were involved, which opened the floodgates to a new wave of "co-production." Film companies were established with private funding, and independent film producers who are remotely or no longer under state control appeared. In a transition to a capitalist business mode, the neoliberal entrepreneurial spirit was ushered in to take postsocialist Chinese film onto a different track.

Whereas the overall institutional reform was steering towards greater autonomy and diversity, the state, with an economically liberal but politically conservative stance, was still reluctant to completely unleash the film system into the market. By the mid-1990s, the increasing political pressure and conservative cultural environment resulted in the implementation of a set of restrictive policies on literature and arts, such as the "Five Ones Project" (*wuge yi gongcheng*)[11] launched by the Central Committee's Ministry of Propaganda and "9550 Project"[12] imposed on filmmakers specifically. Primarily aimed at reasserting the pedagogical and ethical functionality and regaining top-down control of film and media production, the institutional reform of 1995–1996 was an important move to overtly privilege Leitmotif films, thereby propelling its immense popularization in the mid-to-late 1990s.

Starting from the early 1990s, filmmakers began to undergo a tortuous divorce battle with the state, and gradually assumed the entrepreneur role, more closely responding to market forces rather than the government mandates. This change can be seen in the Fifth Generation filmmakers who, after building their fame in the 1980s with a heavy reliance on state financing, began to place priority on audience and the market. These semi-independent films, now primarily financed by private investment and Western capital, had to nevertheless punctiliously seek a balance between market and state. Chen Kaige's *Temptress Moon* (*Fengyue*, 1996) and *The Emperor and the Assassin* (*Ciqin*, 1999), and Zhang Yimou's *The Road Home* (*Wo de fuqin muqin*, 1999) and *No One Less* (*Yige dou buneng shao*, 1999) are good examples of the shift of the Fifth Generation, who, in the post-1989 period, turned to the market liberal yet politically cooperative tactics, and sometimes even overlapped with the official rhetoric of Leitmotif films.

Another equally important scenario is the Sixth Generation, whose films were made outside the official production system and nearly inaccessible to the general audience in the mainland. The succession of a film being banned, attracting the attention of a "liberal" Western world, and returning home with international accolades (hence the lift of the official ban) may illustrate an alternative mode of market rationality in the non-Western contexts, or a form of "neoliberalism as exception," to borrow Aihwa Ong's formulation.[13]As Ong forcefully argues, neoliberal interventions in postcolonial, postsocialist situations articulate a different relationship between market mechanism and state sovereignty from the Western liberal democracies. To put it in another way, neoliberalism that promotes individualism and entrepreneurialism is repositioned, reterritorialized, and reconfigured in the sites of transformation where neoliberalism itself is not the general feature of "governmentality." Meanwhile, when the self-governing and self-enterprising values are translated into a particular milieu, these new arrangements and reterritorializations of capital, labor, and knowledge are quickly merged into the global market to form a new cycle of neoliberal movement. This neoliberal exception logic well explains the preceding phenomenon and the increasingly varied, contingent, and ambiguous space within which Chinese cinema resides. Since the end of the Cultural Revolution, when a neoliberal ethos took root in a large scale of socioeconomic and cultural domains, many independent artists have surfaced from the underground to join the mainstream market. In a very interesting way, making a nationally controversial yet internationally recognizable film has become a shortcut to entry into the mainstream. A bunch of films with a staple of "edge" or "margin" targeting at international film festivals and small audiences in art-house cinema are products of this exceptional logic of neoliberalism.

By contrast, a notion of "New Mainstream Cinema" (*xin zhuliu dianying*) was formulated concurrently among a group of young filmmakers

in Shanghai. Keen on the market power and fast-changing environment neoliberalism has engendered, they began to advance a new form of cinematic practice that embraces self-enterprise and market-driven modes of governing. In "New Mainstream Cinema: A Suggestion on Domestic Filmmaking," the first work to undertake a comprehensive exposition of "New Mainstream Cinema" theory, Ma Ning begins with the premise that unlike the Sixth Generation's alternative film that placed much emphasis on the stylistic and aesthetic experiment, "New Mainstream Cinema," being a mediator between the marginal and mainstream, is intended to form and develop "the innovative low-budget commercial film." Future directions are suggested in this manifesto: (a) as a discursive strategy to save the national film industry from the crisis, accelerated and exacerbated by globalization and Hollywood's market penetration, independent filmmakers are encouraged to move out from the peripheries towards the center and possibly align with the official apparatus; (b) it requests state sponsorship with the budget of 1.5 million to 3 million yuan (approximately 0.2 to 4 million U.S. dollars), whereas filmmakers as individuals should take other matters into their hands with greater autonomy and less restrictions; (c) this model, neither preoccupied by the political and ideological orientations nor indulged with an avant-garde and polemical edge, is instead committed to the commercial appeals, clinging closely to the concerns of mass audiences. Interestingly, "New Mainstream Cinema," formulated under the rubrics of neoliberalism, is an explicit call for the middle ground where film-as-business and filmmaker-as-entrepreneur will be securely anchored and mutually defined by market and state. It is also a rewriting of "Leitmotif and Diversity" in the face of the challenge from the shrinking national film industry and the invasion of Hollywood globalization at the turn of the new century.[14] However, some of the problems emerging from this model cannot be ignored. It is hard to know, first of all, whether or not the proposition that attempts to win over both the official acknowledgment and market profit is feasible in the long run. As a matter of fact, the plan was aborted soon after and most of the films in the blueprint were never completed. Secondly, it was unclear and little was explained about how this solution operates in relation to and in negotiation with the two opposites—Leitmotif and alternative films.

HOLLYWOOD NEOLIBERALISM, CHINESE BLOCKBUSTER, AND THE GLOBAL/LOCAL DIALECTICS

Given its vast output, Leitmotif film has occupied a preeminent place in the contemporary Chinese culture industry. According to Li Yiming's estimation, in the mid-1990s, Leitmotif films reached 20 percent of the annual output, whereas other kinds of entertainment films totaled 75 percent and art films 5 percent.[15] The proportions of Leitmotif continued to grow in the second half of the 1990s and reached their peak at the dawn of the new century, when

the PRC was to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary. Not only were these films labeled "A Tribute to the Nation," but they were also seen as a milestone signifying the resurgence of mainstream, political film in the postrevolutionary period. The direct or indirect intervention from the state agencies cannot be underestimated. Leitmotif film as a propaganda machine is highly monopolized by the state almost in every aspect of its operation. Not only is it produced, packaged, advertised, and promoted by the official apparatus, but also a great deal of box office is ensured by work units and social groups who are collectively organized to fill up the theater seats.

As one of the earliest Western scholars who writes about Chinese film, Chris Berry was highly critical of the contrived and dictated popularization of Leitmotif, pointing out that its massive productive and relatively high box-office return shall no elude some of their "conservative" objectives: "denying difference and blocking changes."[16] "This return to revolutionary history is an attempt to reunite precisely those fragments . . . The People's Republic is shattered into by the shock of Tiananmen."[17] Whereas it is true that this new paradigm exhibits a certain setback from the diversified, liberal discourses of the 1980s, the rise of Leitmotif nonetheless suggests a fundamental turn in the new age. The development is evidently perceivable, as it incorporates the market force and neoliberal sensibility into the new formula on both economic and aesthetic terms.

The "changes" or "progress" are twofold. First, as Chinese society has become more diverse and interactive with other parts of the world, another hue has been added to the vast canvas of rewriting national history, namely, a growing fashion in the Chinese film industry to make films with the subject matter of East–West cultural clash and reconciliation. In other words, it is a trend within the genre of Leitmotif to offer an alternative view on modern Chinese history by foregrounding the dynamics between nation-building and transnational-imagery construction in ways not previously explored. Second, although the ideological-propagandist function of such films continues to be prioritized over their entertainment value, studios' concern for box-office return has pushed Leitmotif films towards adopting a market-driven formula, a formula that purports to emulate and is specifically inspired by the commercial success of Hollywood cinema.

The socioeconomic impact of Hollywood imports is another crucial aspect, in that a large corpus of Leitmotif films, is often, if not exclusively, discussed in comparison with its Hollywood counterparts, labeled as "Chinese blockbusters" or "big pictures" (*dapian*) as such. This coinage, by implication, has suggested a business pattern that is attributive or similar to Hollywood as much as its divergence is attuned to the local sensibilities. Two factors are reported to contribute to this singular synthesis: the recession of the Chinese domestic film industry and the simultaneous erosion of Hollywood blockbusters. Starting from the mid-1980s, the Chinese domestic film market continued to decline, whereas Hollywood began its reentry into China under a revenue-sharing arrangement from 1994.

The annual output of the domestic films of 1995 was around one hundred films per year, which received only 30 percent of the box-office revenues, whereas the other 70 percent went to ten big imports (six from Hollywood). The shadow of Hollywood loomed larger over the Chinese film industry in 1997 and 1998. *Titanic* and *Saving Private Ryan* accounted for about one-third of the total box office in Beijing and Shanghai. To prevent a further collapse of the domestic market, Ministry of Film Radio and Television and the Ministry of Culture issued a joint circular in the spring of 1997 to mandate the allocation of two-thirds of screen time to the domestic films, especially "quality films," namely, the quintessential national films in the mold of Leitmotif. China Theater Chain, was accordingly built to guarantee quality domestic films with the best and most screen time. More importantly, a series of ad hoc measures were taken to relieve the tax for these film exhibitions and to increase the average budget of a domestic feature from 1.3 million yuan (approximately U.S.$0.15 million) in 1991 to 3.5 million (approximately U.S.$0.4 million) in 1997.[18]

The widespread, crushing impacts that Hollywood neoliberal products had on the Chinese film industry is a double-edged sword: it led to a cinematic space loaded with tensions and anxieties, yet simultaneously provoked a rise of Chinese blockbusters, activated and made possible by the very new openings to Hollywood and global capitalism. "The idea of the 'blockbuster' has been appropriated into local critical discourse, to refer not only to American blockbusters but also to local productions considered blockbusters," writes Chris Berry in another essay, "'What's Big about the Big Film?': 'De-Westernizing' the Blockbuster in Korea and China."[19] *The Opium War* (*Yapian zhanzheng*, directed by Xie Jin, 1997) represents Berry's idea of a "localized blockbuster with Chinese characteristics" in its thematic concerns—the historical account of Hong Kong and free trade in a contemporary vein (which serves as a seasonable reflection of the handover of Hong Kong and China's accession to the WTO at the turn of the new century); stylistic strategy—a historical epic; big budget—one hundred million yuan (approximately U.S.$13 million); big visual effects—spectacular on-location shooting with ten of thousands of casts and crews (it strikingly employed a transnational group, including three thousand foreign actors); along with the most advanced film equipment and technology of the time. This film signifies a conflation of two different subgenres, according to Berry, the "giant film" (*jupian*) and "big film" (*dapian*). Such a rhetorical distinction seems to be somewhat problematic, because a large number of "blockbusters" share with "giant films," I would argue, similar generic characteristics such as narrative forms, social conventions, and the ascribed cinematic functions. Both draw on the resources of historical epics and serve political purposes. Moreover, it is hard to split them in terms of origins, for both of them could date back to the early 1990s in which "Revolutionary History Films with Significant Subjects" (*zhongda geming lishi ticai de yingpian*) flourished.

The year of 1991 witnessed a significant growth of Leitmotif films with depictions of key leaders and historical landmarks of Chinese revolution, for instance, *Decisive Engagement* (*Da juezhan*, directed by Wei Lian); *The Creation of a New World* (*Kaitian pidi*, directed by Li Xiepu); *Mao Zedong and His Son* (*Mao zedong he tade erzi*, directed by Zhang Jinbiao); and *Zhou Enlai* (*Zhou enlai*, directed by Ding Yinnan). Primarily dealing with party leaders, historical events, and critical moments of socialist triumph over foreign, capitalist controls, these films were promoted as a special version of blockbuster that foregrounds Chinese nationalism and collective consciousness via various forms of government support. First, an abundant supply of finance, labor, and production equipment was generously provided by the government. Secondly, in the distribution-exhibition sector, the government promoted these films by requiring the affiliated institutions, work units, and schools to purchase tickets for their members as either a form of "political study" or "social welfare." The third method to cultivate Chinese blockbusters was to elevate their artistic or aesthetic status by bestowing a series of film awards on them. Since the early 1990s, Leitmotif films have become the major recipients of numerous Chinese film awards such as the Golden Rooster Awards and Hundred Flowers Awards, the most prominent nationwide prizes set in the film category. The Huabiao Awards, an important government award supervised by MRFT and the Ministry of Culture, has showed an even stronger preference for Leitmotif films. Almost every year since 1990, the Best Picture has been invariably awarded to a Leitmotif film.

"Aimed at repackaging (or fetishizing) the founding myth of the Communist Party and socialist legacy in an age riddled with ideological and moral uncertainty,"[20] Leitmotif films constitute a new and integrated paradigm to both address Hollywood neoliberalism and mediate the socialist discourse in an alternative and revisionist manner. Even though setbacks were found and doubts were expressed as to whether or not such a state-monopolized circuit of manufacturing, wholesaling, and distribution is feasible in the long run, Leitmotif films, forged under the blockbuster hallmark, have seen progresses that allowed studios to make profits and approach mass audiences in a more accessible way. A noteworthy development is that, in addition to the didactic imperative and market motivation, this film genre is molded after a higher artistic standard. According to one of the renowned Fifth Generation directors, Wu Ziniu, who started to make a retreat from his former marginal position into the mainstream arena in the 1990s, "Leitmotif films should not be misunderstood as shallow, vulgar works merely illustrating government policies." Rather, talking about his experimental Leitmotif film—*The National Anthem* (*Guoge*, 1999), he intended this piece to be a kind of "New Mainstream Cinema" that would engage its audiences with an aesthetic improvement, a visual enjoyment, as well as a celebration of "patriotism and national spirit," which have been achieved in some of the Hollywood productions—a form of "Western Leitmotif" in

his view. Specifically, Wu cites *Forrest Gump* (1994) and *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) as the prototype of what he called "Western Leitmotif," for both seek to promote "the American spirit" and "various American public opinions and ideologies."[21]

In this light, it should come as no surprise that the optimal model that a lot of Chinese filmmakers and critics frequently refer to is in fact a mode of Hollywood neoliberal pictures where market rationalities, ideological needs, and artistic values are proficiently fused together. A close look at Feng Xiaoning's *Grief over the Yellow River* (*Huanghe juelian*) in 1999 will help illustrate my point. Considered as one of the most important Leitmotif films and a representative of Chinese blockbusters, it was the number two box-office winner among domestic productions and was selected by the Chinese government to the Oscars for the competition of the Best Foreign Language Film in 1999. The film, however, failed and remained less well known in the international market. In the following section, I will compare this China-made war epic to *Saving Private Ryan* and *Titanic*, two of the most lucrative films in motion-picture history, on the aspects of visual representations, narrative structures, publicity strategies, and cultural impacts, and argue that *Grief over the Yellow River* is a Chinese neoliberal variation with rich intertextual references to its Hollywood counterparts.

(TRANS)NATIONAL IMAGINARY AND NEOLIBERAL NEGOTIATION: A CASE STUDY OF FENG XIAONING'S VISION OF "CHINA THROUGH FOREIGN EYES"

Constructed as an essential propagandist medium in the post-Mao era, Leitmotif has moved simultaneously towards market liberalism and the transnational circuit while maintaining its political edge. In *What's Happened to Ideology?*, Lydia Liu, through her stimulating study of a popular televisual text of the 1990s, *Beijing Sojourner in New York*, asserts that the two different discourses of transnationalism and postsocialism are mutually embedded in the contemporary Chinese situation, thereby they must be treated as a simultaneous process. "Postsocialism by no means constitutes resistance to transnational capitalism, although it is a direct response to it; however, the existence of residual socialist thought, state apparati, and historical memory do complicate the ways in which transnationalism and its critique operate in a postsocialist context."[22] Just as transnationalism and postsocialism are no longer seen, in Liu's proposition, as the binaries with the origin in a simple geographical West–East divide, neoliberalism should be understood as a plural, contested process wherein diverse spaces, histories, and national identities are projected and mediated.

This complex negotiation between postsocialism and transnational neoliberalism is best demonstrated in Feng Xiaoning's trilogy of "China

through Foreign Eyes" (*Yangren Yanzhong de Zhongguo*)—*Red River Valley* (*Honghegu*, 1997), *Grief over the Yellow River* (*Huanghe juelian*, 1999), and *Purple Sunset* (*Ziri*, 2001). Not only is it symptomatic of the resurgent Chinese nationalism in a postsocialist context, but also it has become a multiple and fraught site in which a more complex and ambivalent picture of the neoliberal world order and China's self-reflexive image are projected on the screen and heard over the sound track simultaneously.

Following the sensational reception of *Red River Valley, Grief over the Yellow River* is the second sequel in Feng Xiaoning's trilogy. It draws on the similar resources of what has been called "the revolutionary war pictures" and rewrites historical memory and East–West cultural clash through a well-designed "blockbuster" tool. The story is set in the closing days of World War II in the Chinese hinterland where an American pilot's plane is hit by Japanese, but fortunately rescued by a Chinese shepherd boy and a unit of the Communist-led 8th Route Army. The central plot primarily revolves around how to save him and escort him to Yan'an, the Chinese revolutionary cradle as well as the symbolic home in the Chinese collective cultural imaginary. In the end, a team comprised of three Communist soldiers, including a beautiful Chinese army nurse, An Jie, who the American pilot Irving falls in love with, all sacrifice their lives in this mission. The film starts and concludes with Irving, who now becomes a grandfather returning to the Yellow River and the Great Wall to memorialize the Chinese heroes. This, to a great extent, resembles the thematic and stylistic strategies of *Saving Private Ryan*, where an elderly Ryan comes back to Normandy and stands before the captain's grave marker to tell him that he has lived the best way he could. In the same manner, *Grief over the Yellow River* is a refurnished version to nostalgically recollect the war and make public history into private memory. Likewise, through the deliberate deployment of subjective flashbacks and voice-over narrations, a question of great significance that runs throughout *Saving Private Ryan* finds its peculiar resonance here: what is the value of human beings?

The film explores a number of possible answers, particularly through a detailed delineation of the marked convergence and divergence of the Eastern and Western ethics with regard to life value and the related notions of "sacrifice" and "surrender." An intriguing sequence is exquisitely designed to present the East–West cultural clash by showing Irving's involvement in a fierce quarrel with Heizi, the male Communist protagonist in the film. Upon Irving's request of surrender to the enemies for the sake of stopping hurting other people in vain, Heizi responds, "We would like to die rather than surrender." The deep focus on Heizi at the background and the cross-cuttings between these two figures in juxtaposition with their verbal arguments on the sound track effectively display the discrepancy and cultural differences. In contrast to Chinese ideology, which champions and glorifies the collective interests and the honor of the nation, Western society and culture are distinctively represented as the ideal of liberty and freedom that

gives most credit to the individuals. When the battle between these two factions almost reaches a deadlock, An Jie, acting as moderator, enters to cut off the fight and reinstate the balance through her elaborate explanation of the cultural gap.

This preceding text demonstrates how the Chinese state and its citizens in the 1990s, driven by neoliberal marketization, engage a historically momentous enthusiasm for self-reflexivity and draw their dynamic energies from global encounters. At the heart of these encounters and self-reflections lie complex negotiations of gender, class, national, and moral standards. If this particular scene addresses a neoliberal call to free human subjects from socialist "universality" and search for an "individual" and "private" humanity, the whole narrative then precisely echoes a postsocialist allegory of modernity in which people's sexual, economic, and political self-interests are not only positively embraced and channeled on the national level but also reproduced across national borders to become cosmopolitan in a neoliberal globalized world.

Apparently, *Grief over the Yellow River* is a cinematic text in response to the provocative debates and heated discussions after *Saving Private Ryan* was released in mainland China in 1998 (which set the top box-office record of the year, glossing around one hundred million yuan, approximately U.S.$13 million). Moreover, as a war epic loaded with heterosexual and transnational romance, it is an exemplary piece that borrows the ideas and practices of another big hit from Hollywood and efficiently transplants them to local circumstances. The particular image of the female protagonist framed by a full-circle panorama and positioned within the breathtaking mise-en-scène of the surging river, posing between flying over and embracing the water, is immediately recognizable as a deliberate reworking of the signature shot of *Titanic* (1997). Almost a commercial miracle in the mainland film market, *Titanic* set the box-office record with 359.5 million yuan (approximately U.S.$44 million). Aside from its integrated neoliberal market ethics, a number of external factors played in *Titanic*'s box-office triumph and smashing success. Upon his return from a visit to the United States, China's President Jiang Zemin urged Chinese filmmakers to study and follow the example of *Titanic*. The film was interpreted as a good mix of romance and class conflict. In Jiang's view, it provides a prime model of the integration of entertainment value and pedagogical goal in contemporary filmmaking. The Chinese highest official's enthusiastic endorsement stimulated almost a full range of promotion of *Titanic* and consequently turned the film into an unprecedented national cultural event whose influence goes far beyond the movie theater.[23]

To ride on this sweeping wind, it is no surprise that *Grief over the Yellow River* bears a great deal of affinities to *Titanic*. An iconographic image of the female protagonist and the close-up of the melodramatic romance of a transnational couple in the posters and DVD covers' designing are intended to boost its publicity and bring the film to the spotlight of Chinese cultural life. In addition, the Chinese title, meaning "a desperate love on the Yellow

Figures 8.1–8.4 DVD covers and film posters of *Grief over the Yellow River*.

River," would, on the one hand, readily remind viewers of its American counterpart—another version of the unfulfilled and tragic love story on the ocean; on the other, the underlying text of "Yellow River," an embodiment of Chinese civilization, with its sharp contrast to the blue ocean, a unique symbol of Western culture in the Chinese imaginary, would furthermore assist its audiences to identify the film as a Chinese version of *Titanic* that accommodates at once the rhetorics of Hollywood global flow and the localized flavor.

In this regard, *Grief over the Yellow River* seems to be a visual comment on how Hollywood mega-productions penetrate the Chinese

Figures 8.5 and 8.6 DVD cover and film poster of *Titanic*, directed by James Cameron, 1997.

popular consciousness and reappear as hybrid coherent entities in the postsocialist context. Enjoying the widest release and earning phenomenal critical acclaims across the nation,[24] this film together with Feng Xiaoning's previous hit *Red River Valley* shall be considered as the "China-produced big pictures" or "Chinese blockbusters" that may fit into Chris Berry's account. Not only do they belong to this designation by virtue of their "bigness"—big budgets,[25] big stars,[26] big effects,[27] big publicity, big box-office return, but also they are in response to and dialogue with Hollywood films with similar themes. In an interview with one of the most widely circulated film journals, *Popular Cinema*, Feng Xiaoning explains:

> At the end of 1995 when Chinese film industry suffered from a great depression, the major concerns of officials in Shanghai Film Studio was not only constrained by profit-seeking, but more importantly the experiments that purport to stimulate film market through big investments with prime artistic qualities has ushered in a new model of blockbuster of our own. All these factors have considerably contributed to the success of *Red River Valley*.[28]

As the first sellout in Feng's trilogy, *Red River Valley* is a Leitmotif project recounting an important incident in modern history—the British-Tibetan war in 1904. The film is essentially composed of two parallel visual images and sound tracks. A Tibetan boy, Gaga, grows up and moves along with the trajectory of the whole incident. Conversations are barely heard in the first portion of the film, which portrays the Han–Tibetan relationship. Yet the crystal clear blues, whites, greens, and cheery reds that constitute the color theme and the jubilant laughter that punctuate the Tibetan boy's nostalgic and reminiscent voice-over convey a sense of joy, intimacy, and human harmony. The second microstructure is a mimicry of the stylistic travel writing, with a third component—the Westerners—merging into and breaching the previous balanced relationship between the Han Chinese and Tibetans. In this part, it is the Englishman Jones who dominates the tale, both by his actions and his subjective points of view in a form of voice-over. Jones's voice is distant and poignant as he somberly reads letters to his father, his principal confidant who is visibly absent yet audibly accessible through the sound track. The complex feelings of perplexity, dis/replacement, and dis/reintegration as a consequence of his close exposures to the clash of two different cultures pervade this bittersweet transnational journey.

Whereas this cinematic representation of nationalism and national identity relies on one particular genre—historical epic, the second strategy dwells on gender politics, particularly through the construction of transnational practices of sex and desire that delicately embody the sensibilities and proprieties of neoliberalism and cosmopolitanism. Although interpreting the war as inevitably resulting from the encounter between two different civilizations, the film proposes and advocates the ideal of cultural harmony through mutual understanding and respect, and more provocatively, through transcultural affection and romance. This type of intercultural relationship and transnational practice is theorized in Pratt's term as the "contact zone"—"the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict."[29] In a pioneering and critical diagnosis of travel writing, Pratt examines how a quintessential Eurocentric and orientalist scenario has constructively shaped and underlined this intercultural love paradigm:

> It is easy to see transracial love plots as imaginings in which European supremacy is guaranteed by affective and social bonding; in which sex replaces slavery as the way others are seen to belong to the white man; in which romantic love rather than filial servitude or force guarantee the willful submission of the colonized.[30]

A similar pattern of cultural identification with and exploitation by the Western order can be found in a large body of Chinese Leitmotif films

and Feng Xiaoning's trilogy especially. In *Grief over the Yellow River*, this formulaic relationship takes place in the vast and landlocked yellow earth where an American is sent to China to "help" Chinese people during World War II and the airplane crash arranges such a rendezvous. An Jie, the Chinese Communist nurse, framed in fully lit shots, sometime prominently under high-key lighting, is portrayed as a glamorous and virtuous goddess in the mise-en-scène, and is repeatedly referred as an "angel" literally and figuratively throughout the film. She is the iconic mother-sister-lover who provides kindness, caring, companionship, erotic passion, or even self-sacrifice to the Western missionary. More strikingly, such a transnational engagement on the screen between the two protagonists, Ning Jing (who played An Jie) and Paul Kersey (the actor for the role of Irving), and their longtime collaborations have sparked an offscreen romance and interestingly paralleled their love relationship in the post–Cold War, neoliberal-dominated reality.

All these textual and intertextual nuances seem to affirm a long-standing geopolitical hierarchy called "Western hegemony," or, to borrow Pratt's words, the constitution of an ingrained "concubinage system," which is in fact "a romantic transformation of a particular form of colonial sexual exploitation."[31] It can be argued that a conflicting sentiment of love and hate and the ambivalent depiction of the Westerners at once as enemies and lovers have become universal themes in this specific genre. As such, a double vision with a certain extent of ambiguities has characterized the imagery of the West in Leitmotif films. *Red River Valley* presents two leading Western figures. The portrait of Rockman, the British Commissioner to Tibet, is sketched as cunning, treacherous, and devious, which primarily follows the clichéd narrative in most revolutionary epics; whereas his interpreter/correspondent Jones is contrastively depicted as more conscientious and humane. Several scenes and sequences juxtapose the vitality and openness of the West, along with its brutality and arrogance. Rockman, albeit directly accused as the major cause of the war, is presented with a more complex personality rather than as one-dimensionally villainous. In the climactic scene, the crosscutting alternates the close-ups between Rockman's gaze and his Tibetan friend/rival. The lit lighter, a previous gift from him that incurs and ultimately ends the war, has been framed in the center a few times. A recurring motif of the film, the lighter is a metaphor of friendship and civilization as well as a destructive force. The end of the film is introduced by a melancholic piano score—the recurrent "main melody" of the film, interwoven with a montage of the flashbacks that recollect the idyllic past and the wounded memories of war. The final shot that shows Rockman's regretful and tearful confession "you and I should have been friends" upon witnessing all the tragedies gives a humanist touch to his presumably negative character. In this light, the British intervention with the Tibetan/Chinese business seems to be mainly motivated by a neoliberal aim to compel the Tibetans/Chinese to open up free trade, a prominent

Figures 8.7 and 8.8 The crosscuttings between Rockman and the Tibetan protagonist Geshang in *Red River Valley*.

theme that has its cinematic repercussion in another 1997 Leitmotif film, *The Opium War*.

CONCLUSION

Red River Valley, with its double imagery and double vocal track, reflects the double dynamic of Western reconfigurations and Chinese self-representations that permeates a large number of Leitmotif films. A corporate piece of government propaganda and Chinese blockbuster, the film was made and circulated in conjunction with a set of transnational capital, political sponsorship, and, most of all, the social-cultural life the neoliberal reform had produced. After the film was released in 1997, a considerable majority of review was directed to laud the film for its enthusiastic nationalism, revolutionary romanticism, and open-mindedness to the neoliberal transnational world. To follow this paradigm, *Purple Sunset*, the third piece in Feng's trilogy, recasts the transcultural journey and encounter into another remote forest in northeast China. The film continues and extends Feng's stylistic experimentation with flashbacks, voice-overs, and multilingual sound tracks. The central characters are a small group left stranded in the forest at the end of World War II: a Chinese male peasant, a Russian woman soldier, and a Japanese schoolgirl. They have to depend on each other to find their way out of the forest, despite their different nationalities, political interests, social identities, and languages. Like Feng's previous works, a philosophical and at times platitudinous reflection on humanity and mutual understanding becomes the underlying message and leitmotif of the film.

Primarily funded by Shanghai Yongle Film Company, *Red River Valley* and Feng's other epics all seem to support an emergent entrepreneurial spirit in negotiation with the governmentality of the state. The films'

commercial success is symptomatic of how the neoliberal principles of market and profitability in general, and the mass entertainment value of film in particular, have been woven into China's postsocialist reality. When the market becomes the new hub and regulation force, a large number of profit-oriented film businesses appear and mushroom in the postsocialist landscape. Many of them, however, like Shanghai Yongle Film Company, Beijing Forbidden City Film Company, and Yima Film Company, are joint ventures of private management and local government ownership. At this point, we should remind ourselves that the neoliberal capitalist concepts of "free market" and "privatization" cannot be indiscriminately applied to China. Instead, Feng's films and the similar works that are discursively grouped under the rubric of Leitmotif—a state-sponsored and market-driven transnational product—are best indicators of a new neoliberal formula in the postsocialist milieu. This convergence has been aptly phrased by historian Rebecca Karl as "a state-market-world linkage."[32] Comparing a 1997 Leitmotif film, *The Opium War*, with its revolutionary predecessor, *Lin Zexu*, made in 1959, Karl points out that although modern Chinese history seems to be nostalgically recalled in many recent Leitmotif films, this type of revisionist historiography and a reflection of the relationship between market and Chinese modernity bring new momentum to many contemporary cultural practices in the age of neoliberal globalization.

The double political and commercial stakes, nevertheless, play into the Leitmotif's complicit position. Some doubts were raised to question its blockbuster rationality tinted with a propagandist tone, market hegemony that takes a neutral guise, and the representational strategies that identify with the orientalist ideology. The problem lies in the narrative structure and sound track as well. *Red River Valley* represents the complex relationship between Han, Tibet, and the West through the mediation of a Tibetan boy's vision and voice in parallel with that of a British soldier. Both Mandarin and English are chosen to carry important dialogues, whereas the indigenous Tibetan primarily spoken in the assumed geographic area is nonetheless muted and barely heard in the film with the exception of a few musical and dancing scenes.

Whereas Leitmotif film has been widely circulated in the Chinese mainstream at the turn of the new century, the question of whether or not cinema can be both political, commercial, and artistic remains a debatable topic. Not only is Leitmotif, often interchangeable with "cinema of propaganda," an unsettling and polemical construction, but also the "neoliberal" discourse that this film category is complexly associated with is constantly changing, remolded and even interrogated in the postsocialist environment, another contradictory and contingent process.

As the U.S. economy is now stranded within financial crisis and the global capitalist system is suffering from severe recession, Li Minqi and some other theorists assert that this current downturn and "demise of

the neoliberal globalization" just in time anticipate and pave the way for a new upsurge of state-regulated capitalism. And China, who once again survives through this economic storm, serves as a good role model.[33] Does this mean that a particular mode of postsocialist neoliberalism that has been normalized and internalized within the Chinese structure may in turn become an alternative and supplementary solution to free market capitalism? Or is this perhaps a prime time and great opportunity to be seized upon by the Chinese film industry, whose growth has been at once beneficially fostered and been dauntingly hindered by Hollywood's neoliberal expansion?

As is seen, Leitmotif and the neoliberal-based philosophies, sensibilities, and interventions dominate the film circle and govern the social reality and everyday life in postsocialist China. Through this exemplary reading of Leitmotif, my chapter suggests that the historical, theoretical, and contextual understanding of neoliberalism and Chinese cinema is inseparable from the evolving landscape of postsocialist culture industry and should be always situated at the intersection of state-market-transnational. Zhang Yimou's *Hero* (*Yingxiong*, 2002) and one of the most heavily invested pictures in Chinese history, *The Founding of a Republic* (*Jianguo daye*, made in 2009 to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the PRC), are two epitomes of Leitmotif in the recent era. With significant reliance on the state sponsorship on the one hand and transnational stars and capitals on the other, these Chinese blockbusters signal the maturity of what has been called a "state-market-world" synergy and may embody the neoliberal infiltrations from the East. How does and will this Chinese reconfiguration contribute to and rebuild the neoliberal sociopolitical order in general, and the world film market in particular? This remains to be seen and invites further exploration.

NOTES

1. For the relevant discussions, see David Harvey, 2005; Minqi Li, 2004; Aihwa Ong, 2006; and Hui Wang, 2004.
2. Michel Foucault, 2000.
3. Lisa Rofel, 2007.
4. Zhen Zhang, 2001.
5. For further analysis, see Claudia Gorbman, 1987; Jeff Smith, 1998.
6. See Ting Xue, 1995.
7. The so-called "culture fever" is a heated discussion of the ideas, theories, and methodologies about modernity. It emerged in China in early 1985, blossomed into a nationwide socio-cultural movement in the following years, and was brought to a sudden end with the crackdown of Tiananmen Square in 1989.
8. Liu Cheng, 1990, p. 23.
9. Jianlong Zhai, 1991, p. 8.
10. Zhen Zhang, 2007, p. 11.

11. With an order that each province must create one "extraordinary" work in each of the five categories—film, television, literature, music, and theatrical performance—every year, the "Five Ones Project" of 1995 was built to place a number of new regulations on censorship, co-production, taxation, and the protection of the ratio of domestic films, along with the installation of certain official awards.
12. The reinforcement of a conservative film policy was advocated at a conference of Chinese filmmakers in March 1996 in Changsha. On the conference, a project named "9590" was launched to reinvigorate domestic film production by enhancing the quality of films. The goal was said to produce fifth "quality films" (*jingpin*) within the five years of the "Ninth Five-Year-Plan," an average of ten per year. When it came to the question of what was counted as "quality," Ding Guangen, Minister of the Ministry of Propaganda, stressed in his talk, "Films should have the function of making audiences love the Party and their socialist country, rather than arousing their concern and dissatisfaction; film should advocate justice prevailing over evil rather than pessimistic sentiments, and should bring happiness and beauty to the audiences rather than wasting their time on absurdity and fabricated plots." Four major parameters of "quality" films were listed and particularly supported by the Ministry of Radio-Film-Television: history, children, peasants, and the army, in contrast to some films that did not fit into Ding's standard of "quality films," such as Wang Shuo's *I Am Your Dad* (*Woshi ni baba*, 1996) and Feng Xiaogang's *Living a Miserable Life* (*Guozhe langbei bukan de shenghuo*, 1996). Both of them were ordered to be aborted during shooting or banned after production. See Jiazheng Sun, 1997, p. 8.
13. Aihwa Ong, 2006.
14. For discussions on "New Mainstream Cinema," see Ning Ma, 1999, 2000; Jialing Song, 2006.
15. Yiming Li, 1998.
16. Chris Berry, 1994, p. 45.
17. Ibid., p. 49.
18. Ying Zhu, 2002.
19. Berry, 2003.
20. Zhen Zhang, 2007, p. 2.
21. Ziniu Wu, 1999.
22. Lydia H. Liu, 1998, p. 14.
23. Jian Hao, 1998.
24. *Red River Valley* was the second-highest grossing domestic film in 1997, garnering the Best Picture of Hundred Flowers Awards of the year; *Grief Over the Yellow River*, with the box-office of twenty million yuan and also the winner of a series of Golden Rooster Awards in 1999, was selected by the Chinese government to compete for the Foreign Film category for the 2000 Academy Awards.
25. *Red River Valley* was produced with a budget of twelve million yuan, *Grief Over the Yellow River* with a budget of 3.8 million yuan, compared to the average of 2.5 million yuan per feature in mainland China.
26. Both films starred Ning Jing and Paul Kersey.
27. These two films offer a series of breathtaking and magnificent sceneries of Yellow River, Yellow Earth, and Tibetan Plateau.
28. Mei Feng, 1997.
29. Mary Louise Pratt, 1992, p. 4.
30. Ibid., p. 97.
31. Ibid., p. 96.
32. Rebecca E. Karl, 2001.

33. For further discussion, see Minqi Li, 2008; Immanuel Wallerstein, 2008.

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9 From Exploitation to Playful Exploits

The Rise of Collectives and the Redefinition of Labor, Life, and Representation in Neoliberal Japan

Sharon Hayashi

In his landmark essay, "The Essence of Neoliberalism," Pierre Bourdieu defined neoliberalism as the deregulation of financial markets to stimulate and protect corporations, where "all collective structures that could serve as an obstacle to the logic of the pure market" are called into question.[1] *Neoliberalism* as understood by Bourdieu is a term that references the ongoing delegation of responsibility for health care, education, and general welfare to the individual by states and corporations in the era of globalization. Under the veiled discourse of the "free market"—or individual "freedom of choice"—public services are eradicated and public spaces eliminated.

After the collapse of the speculative bubble economy in the early 1990s the Japanese government spent sixty-five trillion yen on six economic stimulus plans in an attempt to resuscitate the flagging economy. By the mid-1990s, however, a decisive shift towards easing and eliminating government regulation in order to promote corporate growth replaced the strategy of mobilizing funds for public works.[2] The administration of Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto (1996–1998) embarked on a program of six major reforms carrying out deregulatory measures in the fiscal structure, social welfare system, financial system, public administration, economic structure, and education system. Hashimoto invoked the rhetoric of freedom to offload what up to that moment had been responsibilities of the state and corporations onto citizens.[3] While deregulating the financial system and loosening labor laws, Hashimoto warned the effects of this new freedom would entail "the suffering and endurance of population." Under the banner of "individual freedom of choice" (*kojin no sentaku no jiyū*) and "personal responsibility" (*jiko sekinin*) the burden of the recession was off-loaded onto individual citizens.[4] Society was divided into winners (*kachigumi*) and losers (*makegumi*), which isolated 'losers' and made them responsible for their own predicament. Poverty was viewed as the result of bad decisions or a lifestyle choice on the part of an individual rather than as a direct consequence of a global market based on capitalist accumulation and the deregulation of the labor market.

Neoliberal rhetoric found a convenient scapegoat in the figure of the freeter. In the late 1980s freelancers who chose to remain outside of the

corporate system and continued to work part-time after graduating from college were labeled freeters (*furītā* from the English *free* and German *arbeiter*). In 1991 the Ministry of Labor first classified freeters as part-time workers between the ages of fifteen and thirty-four years, who were unmarried women and men and who expected to hold their jobs for less than five years. The "free" in freeters denoted a certain freedom from the rigors and expectations of enterprise society. As labor laws have been systematically loosened to benefit companies wanting to replace their full-time regular workers with less expensive temporary employees, being a part-time laborer has lost its countercultural stance and is for the most part no longer a choice. The "free" in freeters has come to signify the freedom of employers to pick workers from a rising pool of freelance workers for jobs that are increasingly contract-based and without the benefits of lifetime employment. By the mid-1990s even though it was no longer possible for many youth entering the job market to find increasingly scarce full-time positions, freeters were castigated for their reluctance to work hard and their so-called "decision" to pursue careers outside of corporate Japan Inc.

Freeters who came of age in recessionary Japan received the derogatory moniker of the "lost generation (*rosu gene*)."[5] Their lack of work ethic and counterproductive lifestyles were viewed as further perpetuating the financial crisis. Those unable to support themselves on part-time wages who lived with their parents were immediately labeled "parasite singles." Likewise the subcultural youth forms associated with freeters that appeared during the decade were denigrated as mindless forms of consumerism and often isolated as the cause for youth violence. Gross exaggerations in the press of the phenomenon of compensated dating (*enjo kosai*), the exchange of sexual favors for brand-name goods by young girls, signaled the moral laxity of youth. Likewise, otaku culture was blamed as the motivating force behind crimes such as the gruesome mutilation of four young girls by Tsutomu Miyazaki in 1998–1999 when the criminal's penchant for girls' comics, Lolita complex (*rori con*) animation, and soft-core porn magazines was discovered.[6]

In addition to blaming youth for contributing to the recession and the downfall of social values, the lost generation narrative also propagated a false understanding of the causes of the recession itself. In this misguided narrative the 1990s are considered a "lost decade" because neoliberal reforms were not properly implemented after the end of the speculative bubble, thereby delaying economic recovery and causing stagnation through the 1990s. The charismatic figure of Prime Minister Jun'ichirō Koizumi (2001–2006) was cast as the central protagonist of this narrative, and his carefully cultivated image of a political maverick largely formulated a positive spin on neoliberalism as a dynamic American-style economic reform against the wishes of a largely inflexible and outdated Japanese political and corporate establishment.[7] Although Koizumi's flagship neoliberal project of privatizing the world's largest bank, the Japan Postal Savings system, did not even begin to take effect until after he left office in 2007, Koizumi

was immediately heralded as a neoliberal savior of the Japanese economy when the economy showed slight signs of recovery in 2003.[8] The Koizumi-as-neoliberal-savior-of-the-lost-decade narrative, however, eclipses a global and historical understanding of monetary policies that created the speculative bubble in the late 1980s and the ever-widening income gap in Japan today.

The bubble can best be understood as a form of "financial engineering" (*zaiteku*) or "stock market Keynesianism" that was deliberately created to avoid an economic downturn when the yen was revalued.[9] Around the time of the Plaza Accord in 1985 Japan was forced by the U.S. and other members of the G7 to reduce its massive trade surplus with North Ameirca by raising the value of the yen against the dollar. The shifting of U.S. debt onto the Japanese economy resulted in a strong yen that ended the expansion of Japan's manufacturing-centered export-oriented economy.[10] In order to avoid an inevitable economic downturn, the Ministry of Finance reduced interest rates and encouraged banks and brokerage firms to channel the resulting flood of easy credit to stock and real estate markets. The sharp increase in liquidity and land prices provided the paper wealth that bankrolled corporate investment and consumer spending and kept the economy expanding. When land prices reached astronomical levels, the government tightened monetary policy and began regulating real estate sales, which led to the collapse of the speculative bubble.[11] Banks saddled with nonperforming loans were bailed out by the government, but individuals were not. Much like the collapse of the U.S. stock and real estate markets in 2008, the 1990s financial crisis in Japan cannot be understood simply as a national phenomenon but is part and parcel of global capitalism that "has come *literally* to depend upon historic waves of speculation, carefully nurtured and publically rationalized by state policy makers and regulators."[12]

How does one counter the "lost generation" narrative of neoliberalism that not only occludes the causes of the recession but uses the rhetoric of personal responsibility to shift the burden of the recession onto the individual? Despite the assault on collective structures that marks the rise of neoliberalism, new political and social collectives have been responding creatively to the deepening financial crisis and to the increasing control and surveillance of public space. The recent resurgence and rethinking of collective action has found its cultural-political expression in the cinema. Three films from 2008–2009 point to the contradictions inherent in the gap between the rhetoric and policies of neoliberalism. Each film interrogates a specific aspect of neoliberalism, either by diverting the rhetorical structure of neoliberalism for other purposes or following neoliberal policies to their logical and contradictory conclusions. Can print and film capitalism be used in the service of the dispossessed? How can the ideology of personal responsibility be turned into a manifesto for individual agency within collective action? How do policies of deregulation become transgressive when applied to non-neoliberal aims? While pointing out the contradictions of

neoliberalism, these films attempt to provide new definitions of labor, life, and collectivity for the present moment.

FROM EXPLOITATION TO PLAYFUL EXPLOITS

In 2009 filmmaker SABU (Tanaka Hiroyuki) filmed *Kani kōsen/The Crab Cannery Ship* (2009), a black comic version of a 1929 proletarian novel about the inescapable exploitation of workers on a crab-canning factory ship operating near Soviet waters. Subject neither to international maritime law nor factory regulation, the workers toil in the hellish bowels of a factory ship under a brutal and authoritarian company manager who expects the workers to sacrifice their lives in order to maintain production levels. Given the changed conditions of today's precarious workers, a proletarian novel written over eighty years ago is an unlikely choice for a film script. How can a novel about exploited workers who toil under brutal conditions together in a factory ship be superimposed on the present situation of a new class of largely dispersed part-time and dispatch workers? And why would a proletarian novel be chosen to serve this purpose?

The film, like recent manga versions of the story, capitalizes on the "Crab Cannery Ship boom" of the previous year that saw sales of Takiji Kobayashi's proletarian classic novel rise to more than five hundred thousand copies in 2008 alone from an average of five thousand copies a year. The "boom" was the result of a fortuitous convergence of the long-standing efforts of leftists publishers and activists, the sensational attention of the mass media, and the resonance of the novel for irregularly employed dispatch and contract workers who now form over a third of the Japanese workforce.[13] One of the key players in this revival was the young, rightwing punk-rocker-turned-labor-activist Karin Amamiya, whose book, *Let Us Live! The Refuge-ization of Young People*, quickly become a manual for understanding the contemporary conditions facing today's precarious proletariat or precariat (*purekariaato* from the Italian *precario + proletariato*).[14] Since the 2007 publication of *Let Us Live!* the term *precariat*, originally adopted from European and North American precarity movements to describe the vulnerable position of exploited flexible labor, has gained increasing currency.[15]

Amamiya cuts a striking figure in her Gothic Lolita (*gosu lori*) outfits and possesses a fluency with varied media and subcultural forms—she was the lead singer of a punk rock band, is a recognized writer in several genres, and has become a frequent collaborator on film projects with her partner Yutaka Tsuchiya, the founder of the video collective Video Act.[16] Her fluid negotiation of the normally bounded worlds of the Old Left, the New Left and the New New Left opened up a dialogue between distinct forms of cultural expression that accompany these worlds. In a conversation with established novelist Genichiro Takahashi, published in the progressive daily

newspaper *Mainichi Shimbun* on January 9, 2008, Amamiya remarked on the similarly desperate situation of young workers in the contemporary moment to those depicted in Kobayashi's 1929 *Crab Cannery Ship*. The resulting chain of print and televised media coverage led not only to the revival of the novel but also to an unprecedented surge in Communist Party membership as over one thousand mostly young precarious workers began to join the party every month.[17] Cleary the present-day precariat found something to identify with in the proletarian narrative. Through the skillful negotiation of various subcultural and mass media forms, print capitalism was deployed in the unlikely service of a proletarian novel that led to the equally unlikely 2009 film remake of the *Crab Cannery Ship*.

SABU (Tanaka Hiroyuki), who is credited as both director and screenwriter of the 2009 film, took ample liberties with the original in order to update it for the contemporary moment, unafraid of deploying anachronistic shiny vinyl costumes, modern haircuts, and an electronic bullhorn. SABU's *Crab Cannery Ship* differs dramatically from the slow, unwinding socialist realist film adaptation of the same novel by Sō Yamamura from 1953 that won the Best Cinematography award at the Mainichi Film Concours. The visually stunning sets of SABU's 2009 version are indebted more to portrayals of human subjection to the mechanical found in Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936) or Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927). The factory ship's oversized machinery dominates the human form, squeezing out every last ounce of the worker's energy to churn out tiny tins of canned crab. On top of the modernist-style sets, sound plays a much more distinctive role as both the site of abuse and source for possible action. The electronic bullhorn is used to verbally threaten and wear down the workers but when the workers decide to unionize and threaten to strike, electronica steampunk industrial sounds express the workers' agitation in a kind of aural rather than visual agitprop. Much of the film's pace is driven by sound rather than the Eisensteinian dialectical montage that one might expect from a *Battleship Potemkin*–esque narrative of mutiny.[18]

Although different in style from the socialist realism of both the novel and the 1953 film version, the 2009 *Crab Cannery Ship* is unmistakably a narrative of political awakening and organization. The naïve and motley crew of workers drawn from different rural areas of Japan at the start of the film seem unlikely to unionize. In their desperation to escape the hell of factory ship life they allow Kimura, a charismatic fellow worker, to convince them that they will find bourgeois paradise in the afterlife if they hang themselves together. After the nearly fatal prank, Kimura, along with another worker, jumps ship and is picked up by a Russian vessel where he experiences the utopic camaraderie of nonhierarchical worker–boss relations, invited by Russian sailors to eat, drink, and dance to his heart's content. The taste of Russian utopia, no doubt far from the reality of Russia in either 1929 or 2009, inspires Kimura to decisive action and he returns to the cannery ship to organize the workers into a union that uses the threat

of strike to make demands for better working conditions. The foregrounding of Kimura's actions, as an individual, albeit acting for the benefit of the group, differs from the collective hero of the original novel.[19] SABU's emphasis on Kimura as a character suggests how he wanted to modify the novel for the present moment. "Rather than class warfare, it's about how to break free of your current situation, and what you have to become to do that, and that you have to decide that for yourself. I wanted to properly push the importance of making your own decisions to the forefront."[20] The film asserts individual consciousness against the dialectical class consciousness of the original novel, and attempts to turn the isolating and criminalizing neoliberal rhetoric of personal responsibility into a call for individual consciousness within a collective.

SABU's use of sound in the last scene foregrounds the importance of individual decisiveness for collective action. Kimura's insurrection fails when the company brings in the Imperial Navy to retake the ship from the mutinying sailor-workers. Emboldened by the military support, the company manager shoots Kimura dead and forces the workers back to their stations. Yet Kimura's death provides the opportunity for the political awakening of each member of the group. The authoritarian company manager brutally beats one of the weaker workers into unconsciousness. After a moment of silence, a loud mechanical noise from the ship's bowels awakens the worker and his eyes suddenly jolt open. He struggles to his feet and throws his gloves defiantly to the ground. A comrade helps him stay on his feet as he starts walking decisively towards the company headquarters of the ship. Although he does not speak, the voice-over on the sound track is immediately attributable to him as an internal monologue, "We were wrong. We shouldn't have chosen a representative. We are all representatives of ourselves." Had the director chosen to have the character speak the lines out loud to his fellow workers, the character would have become the voice of the group, another Kimura. Yet the line formulated as internal monologue suggests it is an individual decision. He is neither being told what to do nor does he tell others how to act.

As if coming to this moment of political consciousness individually but collectively, each of the workers suddenly leave their work stations and come together to raise the bloodied flag of solidarity—three clearly delineated hands clasped in a circular mechanical bolt. Again the rhythmic steam-press-like sound of the ship accompanies their deliberate action, further emphasized by slow-motion cinematography. Whereas the collective is shown acting together, each of the individuals seems to have made the decision to act on his own, each individual worker coming to this decision in his own mind. Collective action here is shown as the sum of individual decisions to act rather than as a call to act by one leader. The ending suggests a wariness of the political vanguard of the Old and New Left as imagined by the New New Left and proposes a form of collective action that restores agency to the individual. The film ends on a close-up of the bloodstained

flag of solidarity as the voice-over continues, "Yes, once more!" depicting the continuing struggle where workers must rise up again and again individually, but together. Clearly this moment of proletarian solidarity speaks to a contemporary precariat but how does the precariousness of today's situation lead to unionization and the recognition and restoration of rights? How does individual consciousness lead to collective political action?

Although the ideology of postwar enterprise society centered around the white-collar salaryman had always failed to acknowledge the flexible labor of women, students, part-timers, and contract laborers, the number of nonregular workers in the late 1990s still accounted for less than a quarter of Japan's workforce. The loosening of the 1985 Worker Dispatch Law in 1999, and again in 2004, opened the labor market up to the temporary staffing industry. By 2008 over a third of Japan's workforce was comprised of nonregular workers. Largely treated as disposable labor (similar to the planned obsolescence of electronic goods), most short-term contract workers and temporary staff do not have recourse to the rights and benefits of full-time workers because of the strident measures set in place by anti-neoliberal loyalists. Disposable labor's situation is further exacerbated by the fact that both the corporate and government welfare systems are geared for the full-time lifetime worker. Temporary and short-term contract workers who have not held their jobs for at least a year are ineligible for unemployment benefits and many are laid off before the end of their contracts without penalty for their employers.[21] The dire plight of temporary workers exacerbated by the weakening of labor laws was only recognized when five hundred unemployed and homeless temporary workers and over sixteen hundred volunteers converged on Hibiya Park in central Tokyo from December 31, 2008, to January 5, 2009, to form the New Year's Tent Village for Temp Workers (*Toshi-koshi haken mura*). New labor organizations catering to the specific hardships faced by temporary workers set up support systems for the workers. As a result of this occupation, widespread calls for a more adequate safety net and regulation of corporations forced the government to extend unemployment benefits to those who had worked more than six months and to pressure companies to expand the ranks of its regular employees. Prime Minister Taro Aso urged corporations to go back to a model of full-time workers stating, "Regular employment is best."[22] Whereas the acknowledgment that corporations and the government must play a role in the amelioration of living standards of precarious workers was welcome, Aso's comment betrayed a nostalgia for enterprise society centered around the postwar ideal of the salaryman.

The New Year's Tent Village points towards a new trend in labor activism that recognizes the changing reality of labor and the changing face of the laborer, which is much more inclusive than the government's ideal salaryman or the proletarian working class. Whereas the Communist Party of Japan has enjoyed a resurgence in popularity, the ranks of Tent Village and other new labor organizations have been increasingly filled and led

by dispossessed youth. The General Freeter Union (*Furītā Rōdō Kumiai*), which played a central role in the New Year's Tent Village activities, developed out of PAFF (Part-time, Arbeiter, Foreign Worker, Freeter), an organization whose initials stand for new kinds of laborers left out of many previous unions.[23] The term *freeter* is now being reclaimed to signify a much more diverse group of irregular workers that include NEETs (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), the homeless, the unemployed, and the underemployed.

This younger generation of labor activists has focused its critique on both the government's neoliberal policies that benefit corporations at the expense of flexible labor and the increased surveillance and privatization of public space along with the ejection of homeless from these spaces. Parks have played a central role in the battle for public space as a free gathering place for the dispossessed and increasingly spatially dispersed workers. Public spaces are increasingly disappearing in the neoliberal landscape of Tokyo. In 2008 over sixteen hectares of land in Tokyo was designated as privately owned and operated "public space" whose management the government had turned over to corporations. In order to defray the costs of public space, municipal governments are privatizing public space. In 2008 Shibuya ward in central Tokyo sold the naming rights of one of the most popular parks in the city for political rallies, Miyashita Park, to the Nike Corporation. In order to shoulder the costs of the construction and maintenance of a planned skater park, an entrance fee to the "public park" will be charged. Since the official announcement of the deal in August 2009 Miyashita Park has been occupied by homeless activists and artists who refuse to allow a neoliberal agenda to determine who constitutes the public and who public parks will serve or exclude. The occupations of both Hibiya Park and Miyashita Park asserted the rights of those normally excluded from public discourse. As a center of political activism, parks not only serve as a refuge for the disenfranchised but also function as important cultural spaces where film screenings and other cultural events are held.

Tokachi Tsuchiya screened his first feature documentary *Futsū na shigoto ga shitai/A Normal Life, Please* (2008) at the New Year's Tent Village in Hibiya Park. The film documents the exploitation of a thirty-year-old cement truck driver, Nobukazu Kaikura, who is forced to work an average of 552 hours a month without receiving overtime pay or social insurance. Originally hired by a union as a cameraman to document the harassment of the cement truck driver, Tsuchiya was so outraged by what he witnessed that he felt compelled to make a film exposing the system of subcontracting by the Sumitomo Osaka Cement Company that led to the inhuman conditions Kaikura faced.

In one of many interviews that show Kaikura driving his cement truck, he relates how he and many of his fellow drivers accepted their exploitation as "just the way things are" before realizing their rights. They never questioned the fact that in a worsening economy, the costs would be passed

down through the subcontracting chain. They also had no choice but to accept the dangers of the job given the lack of regulation over the industry. The fact that fatalities occurred when drivers were forced by the commission system and threat of firing into working while sick and into overloading their trucks beyond safety limits was seen as an accepted practice that could not be changed. One interview with a safety official confirms the government's tacit acceptance of the situation when he admits that although safety load limits exist, the final decision on load limits rests with companies, thereby rendering safety regulations completely ineffectual.

Despite the dangerous working conditions and low pay Kaikura only approaches the union when the sub-subcontracted firm that employs him switches from an all commission system of payment to an amortization system that places the entire burden of fuel costs, truck leases, and repairs on individual drivers. Although the regulation of the industry is lax, firms subcontracted by well-known companies are even less bound by labor laws and regulations. When this new illegal system is imposed on drivers, making even bare subsistence impossible, the over-exhausted and underpaid Kaikura turns to the Solidarity Union of Construction and Transport Workers of Japan (*Rentai Union*) in order to be able to survive. Like many workers he is both reluctant to lose his job and is oblivious to his rights.

Although not physically beaten as the factory workers in the *Crab Cannery Ship*, Kaikura is consistently subjected to abuse and threats by his employer. He is so physically exhausted by his job he develops Crohn's disease and must be hospitalized. Kaikura is compelled to quit the union once after being offered a small sum of money but later rejoins the union when he realizes it is the only means for him to stop his abusive employer. The stress from threatening visits to his home by company thugs partially contributes to his mother's death. The firm's thugs even disrupt his mother's funeral where they physically assault Kaikura, the union leaders supporting him, and the filmmaker.

Tsuchiya edits the footage he shoots into a compelling and sympathetic narrative but the footage also has direct legal consequences. Footage of the funeral assault is turned over to the police and used to press charges against the sub-subcontracted firm. When the parent company refuses to take responsibility for the actions of the sub-subcontracted firm that employs Kaikura and refuses to speak with union leaders, the union and the filmmaker set up a screening of the funeral footage, projecting it onto a large mobile screen stretched out in front of the company headquarters. Afraid of the bad publicity that the "screening" might bring, the parent company relinquishes and agrees to both negotiate with the union while quietly terminating its dealings with the sub-subcontracted firm. The firm is forced to temporarily dissolve, but merely starts up again under a new name. Tsuchiya's film exposes the structural exploitation of the deregulated subcontracting system and the ways in which it perpetuates itself with tacit governmental approval.

As a direct result of the efforts of the union and the footage shot by the Tsuchiya, Kaikura is compensated and finds a regular job that allows him to lead “a normal life.” The original Japanese title of the film roughly translates as “I want a normal job (*futsū na shigoto o shitai*).” The English translation, *A Normal Life, Please*, suggests that a normal life is not possible without a normal job. Here a regular or normal job is not defined as white-collar work but simply as a job where hours worked are compensated, job security is guaranteed, and social insurance is provided. The film uses a discourse of normality to argue for workers’ rights but also for workers’ responsibilities to claim those rights.

Although Kaikura is portrayed sympathetically throughout the film, the director’s first impression of Kaikura is of a spineless and cowardly worker who would soon quit the union when pressured by his bosses. Throughout the filming the director realizes his initial contempt for the truck driver is unfounded and Kaikura proves not only to persevere but goes on to set up a union at his new workplace. The director frames the film as a tale of political consciousness that follows a worker’s discovery of his rights—when Kaikura recognizes his rights to unionize is he able to realize those rights and share them with others.

On another level, the screening format reinforces the enlightenment narrative of the film. Whereas the film has shown in mini-theaters and abroad at festivals, most of the screenings across Japan have been at community centers for unions and other local organizations. The director uses the limited distribution of the film—the film has yet to be officially released on DVD or broadcast—as an opportunity to accompany the film to each screening. Tsuchiya hopes that the film will inspire those who are exploited to stand up for themselves and unionize, and views the post-screening discussions as an integral part of the process. The screening of the film held at the New Year’s Tent Village provided an opportunity for workers to discuss their own experiences of exploitation. One dispossessed worker revealed he had worked an average of six hundred hours a month. Tsuchiya’s reaction was one of disbelief—not that the worker had been forced to work twenty hours a day but that he had done nothing about it. For Tsuchiya, the right to collective bargaining guaranteed by the Japanese postwar constitution must be exercised by all individuals who are exploited. Whereas the rhetoric of personal responsibility is used to criminalize poverty, Tsuchiya argues that personal responsibility needs to be recast as individual agency for the collective improvement of labor conditions. Although the system of in-house unions that operates in the interests of corporations rather than workers has dominated the postwar landscape of Japanese labor politics, Tsuchiya believes that labor organization in the present moment must begin with dispersed individuals recognizing and rectifying their situation within collective support networks. He thus ends his film with a “gift to the younger generation,” Chapter III Article 28 of the Japanese postwar constitution in simple white lettering on a black background: “The right to organize collectively,

the right to bargain collectively, and the right to act collectively are guaranteed." Tsuchiya believes that it is only through collective bargaining and organizing among the dispersed contract and dispatch workers who make up a third of Japan's workface that labor conditions can improve. Inspired by his own involvement with unions and video collectives—the camera he used to film the documentary was bought with the severance pay he received from a video editing companying he worked at for two years—*A Normal Life, Please* builds upon the political and cultural networks that have sustained political organizing and political video activities in Japan.

Whereas *A Normal Life, Please* focuses on the exploitation of workers and the possibilities offered by union organizing, Yuki Nakamura's documentary *Shiroto no ran/Amateur Revolt* (2008) moves away from exploitation to focus on the playful exploits of the Amateur Revolt collective. In contrast to the desire to live "a normal life," the members of Amateur Revolt do not want to be determined by their exploitation by corporations. Instead of taking on temp jobs or becoming contract laborers, they have set up a collective of small storefronts in the Kōenji area of Tokyo, carving out a section of an old shopping street where the prolonged recession has made rents affordable. Since the opening of the first electronic recycling shop in 2005 by the founder of the collective, Hajime Matsumoto, over fourteen used clothing and other shops, cafés, and event spaces have been added. Members of the collective are trying to redefine the term *freeter* to mean "free workers," who are not necessarily completely free of the economic system, but whose identities and culture are not wholly determined or circumscribed by their relation to economic exploitation.[24] Other loose collectives across Japan have been inspired by Amateur Revolt to set up similar shops whose aim is not profit but collective space and enjoyment.[25]

Inspired by street rave demonstrations that began in 2003 to protest the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq, Amateur Revolt holds street demonstrations that speak to the concerns of its mainly late twenties to thirties demographic.[26] Nakamura's documentary contains footage of the 2005 "Gimme back my bicycle demonstration," the 2006 "Make rent free demonstration," and the 2006 "Anti-tax on secondhand electronics demonstration." The first demonstration protested the clearing of bicycles and installation of pay parking lots for bicycles in front of train stations that has increased the transportation costs of freeters struggling to live on part-time salaries. The anti-rent demonstration was staged to register a disenchantment with the labor policies of the government that the protesters see as leading directly to the downsized part-time labor force not being able to afford rent. And when the government announced a tax on the sale of recycled electronics, Amateur Revolt lobbied against the tax that directly benefits electronics manufacturers responsible for the planned obsolescence of electronics goods. Although not adverse to a system of taxation, the collective challenges the inequity of taxes that target lower-income segments of the population while benefiting corporations.

In contrast to earlier rave demonstrations held strategically across the city and comprised of anonymous crowds, Amateur Revolt protests have all been launched and based in the Kōenji neighborhood. Alongside these larger demonstrations, the film also documents *bashop* (a contraction of the Japanese *ba* or place and the English *shop*), smaller and more frequent occupations of public space for everyday activities like collective dining and drinking. These impromptu gatherings are inspired by 1970s happenings in the neighborhood that drew on ideas of Situationism and critiques of everyday life. In these earlier happenings, the playwrights Rio Kishida and Shūji Terayama worked to disrupt the dominant organization of city-social space with large-scale street theater pieces like "Knock." They distributed maps and plotted performances in fifty-five different locations in residential Tokyo, ranging from bathhouses to parks to street corners, and also knocked on people's doors, in a performance that took place over thirty hours. In contrast to the highly orchestrated Knock performance, *bashop* gatherings share a sense of temporality with the flash-mob—the time and dates of gatherings are circulated on the Internet and through cell phone messages rather than through the post or distribution of flyers.[27]

Whereas the Situationist aim of disruption and reclamation of everyday space also remains the same, the present focus differs. Amateur Revolt strategically uses smaller-scale protests to foreground the increasing police surveillance and regulation of public spaces. On February 24, 2006, members of the collective held a three-person demonstration. Protests of more than two persons are required by law to be registered with both the city ward office and with police. Although the protesters warned city officials and police of the small size of the demonstration, a van of riot police was sent to keep the protesters in line. The footage of the protest highlights the bureaucratic nature of police surveillance, where undercover police and riot police follow the three protestors along their preprogrammed demonstration route. At one point the three protesters take a break in the park while exasperated police try to give them directives about the proper way to carry out a political demonstration. They angrily chastise the protesters, "You're not supposed to take a break in the middle of a protest to hang out in the park! You're supposed to be shouting out slogans for what you believe in! Don't you know how to protest!" The footage of the protest makes visible the kind of surveillance and regulated political economy we are subject to in our daily lives but it also reveals the underlying norms of what constitutes a protest. This moment in the video exposes what Jacques Rancière calls the 'distribution of the sensible,' a map of how the visible, the intelligible, and the possible are structured.[28] In other words, it highlights how perception itself is structured: what can be seen, what can be heard, and what can be done. Whereas public parks are being deregulated and privatized, the activities one can perform in them are being increasingly regulated to comic levels.

Similar to *A Normal Life, Please*, where footage is used to enforce legal action or corporate responsibility, images in Nakamura's documentary have a double and simultaneous life on YouTube. The clip of the three-person demonstration was first circulated on YouTube before being screened at an Amateur Revolt event and refilmed for the documentary with the commentary of the three protestors. Lacking the strong narrative arc of political consciousness of either *The Crab Cannery Ship* or *A Normal Life, Please*, *Amateur Revolt* is composed mostly of these edited clips loosely based around the activities of members of the collective. Rather than expose exploitation, the clips document various political activities and antics that question the boundaries of representation. What is at stake in the images that form *Amateur Revolt* is a politics of representation. Here I follow the two definitions of the word *representation* that Gayatri Spivak outlines in her essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak examines the two notions of "representation" in Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire—representation as portrait in the artistic or philosophical sense on the one hand, and representation as proxy or "speaking for" on the other. [29] These YouTube/documentary images of Amateur Riot question the notion of representation on both levels. As a representation of the collective, the fluidity between the documentary and YouTube images ensures the portrait of the collective is never fully contained by the documentary narrative. The clips circulate on YouTube and function well beyond a portrait of the collective.

In terms of representational politics as well, the collective rejects being represented by a system of official politics that refuses to represent its interests. In order to expose the fallacy of representational politics while reclaiming public space normally reserved for official politics, Amateur Revolt decided to put forward a candidate for the Kōenji ward office in Tokyo in April 2007. Candidates for public office are the only members of society allowed to hold public gatherings in front of train stations in Japan. Given the central importance of train commuting patterns, train stations are one of the main stages of political campaigning. This collective, which had been banned from holding public demonstrations of more than two people without a municipal and police permit, used their entry into official politics to officially demonstrate against the contradictory forms of regulation of public spaces. To run for ward office one need only to put down a minimal down payment of approximately U.S.$15,000, which is returned to the candidate upon reaching a minimum number of votes. In return for its initial investment Amateur Revolt was able to stage sound demonstrations in the form of punk and rap concerts in front of Kōenji station.

The strategic transformation of the train station from simply a backdrop of official campaigns into a stage of political-cultural demonstration is an example of politics as defined by Rancière: "What I consider to be the real emergence of free speech occurs precisely in places that were not supposed to be places for free speech. It always happens in the form of transgression. Politics means precisely this, that you speak at a time and in a place you're

not expected to speak."[30] The staging and filming of a sound demonstration, of dancing and singing rather than speaking in front of the station transgressed the norms of official politics. The footage of these demonstrations exposes who gets to speak and who doesn't, where one is allowed and not allowed to speak, and who is allowed to speak for others and who is not. *Amateur Revolt* reveals the inconsistent regulation of everyday space that disadvantages certain segments of the population and challenges the system of artistic and political representation that maintains this system of regulation in place.

Whereas government officials remain nostalgic for the salaryman, Amateur Revolt and young labor activists do not want to return to the defunct "enterprise society" model of sacrificing life for work. Given the shifting parameters of global capitalism, such a return is impossible. Instead, they are proposing new values and lifestyles not formulated on corporate profit, the exploitation of workers, and the equation of wages to happiness. While pointing out the inconsistencies between neoliberal rhetoric and policies that benefit corporations at the expense of the dispossessed, they are attempting to change both the material conditions and the discourses and systems of representation that regulate both public space and the economy. Contesting narratives of neoliberalism that have long blamed the freeter for the economic woes of Japan, these new forms of participatory collectivity are using cinema as a tool of political-cultural expression to redefine what constitutes life, labor, and representation in contemporary Japan.

NOTES

1. Pierre Bourdieu, 1998.
2. Atsushi Kusano, 1999, p. 77.
3. Nozomu Shibuya's trenchant critique of neoliberalism's ability to mobilize affective labor especially of the family is one of the first and best sustained studies of neoliberalism in Japan; see Shibuya, 2003.
4. Yoshitaka Mōri, 2005, pp. 121–122.
5. Mōri, 2009, pp. 232–240.
6. See Mark Driscoll's incisive and entertaining analysis of Tsutomu Miyazaki as part of a larger phenomenon of moral coding of freeter culture; Driscoll, 2007, p. 171.
7. The strong governmental control of the economy in Japan, including the intimate arrangement between corporations, banks, and the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, is often viewed as antithetical to the neoliberal rhetoric of free markets, but rather than view Japan as the exception to the ideology of neoliberalism, David Harvey reminds us that one can examine the local workings of neoliberal policies in Japan as part of the globally intertwined phenomenon, an amalgamation of often contradictory and partial measures that include "the introduction of greater flexibility into labor markets here, a deregulation of financial operations and embrace of monetarism there, a move towards privatization of state-owned sectors somewhere else" (Harvey 2005, p. 87).

8. Koizumi's pro-American neoliberal rhetoric in the new millennium ironically covered up the massive and early role of the Japanese government in deregulating fiscal policies, practices that would later be emulated by the U.S. In addition to allowing corporations to rationalize the labor force, since the 1970s the Japanese government has deregulated its domestic capital market, allowing large Japanese corporations to raise money through issuing new forms of stocks and bonds, a practice that served as a model for U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan. See Driscoll, 2007, pp. 167–168.
9. Driscoll, 2007, p. 167; R. Taggart Murphy, 2009, p. 6; Tomiko Yoda, 2000, p. 631.
10. For a discussion of how currency revaluations have been used to shift U.S. debt to other economies and the increasingly intertwined global economy, see David McNally, 2009, pp. 35–83. In order to keep demand for Japanese products going and to the keep the global capitalist system afloat, Japan was also forced to extend credit to the U.S. Japan underwrote the explosion of the deficit under George W. Bush by covering 77 percent of the U.S. budget deficit during the fiscal year 2004. See Murphy, 2009, p. 8.
11. Yoda, 2000, p. 632.
12. Robert Brenner quoted in Murphy, 2009, p. 6.
13. Norma Field has documented the unlikely revival of the novel's popularity in her appropriately titled essay, "Commercial Appetite and Human Need: The Accidental and Fated Revival of Kobayashi Takiji's Cannery Ship."
14. Karin Amamiya, 2007.
15. The currency of the term precariat is reflected in the title of Amamiya's most recent book, *The Depression of the Precariat* (2009), which sports a cover illustration of a troubled youngster in front of a foreboding silhouette of a crab cannery ship.
16. Amamiya was the protagonist of Tsuchiya's *New God* (1999), a film that documents her turn from rightwing punk rocker to leftwing sympathizer and was his main collaborator on *Peep "TV" Show* (2003). In contrast to the mainstream media and film industries, Tsuchiya's films work with and take youth subcultures seriously. For an excellent review of the latter film's lack of moralism vis-à-vis youth culture, see Anne McKnight, 2010. Tsuchiya is also the producer of Hiroki Iwabuchi's *Sōnan furītā/A Permanent Part-Timer in Distress* (2007), a film diary of the Iwabuchi's time working as a contract laborer on a factory assembly line. *A Permanent Part-Timer in Distress* epitomizes the DIY aesthetic of recent films about labor and collectives that have multiplied with the increasing availability and affordability of digital recording and editing technology.
17. Until this time the membership of the Japanese Communist Party hovered consistently at around four hundred thousand members.
18. The dialectical structure of *Battleship Potemkin* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1925) embodied by the Odessa Steps sequence mirrors how class consciousness is dialectically created in the film.
19. Mark Downing Roberts, 2010.
20. Don Brown, 2009.
21. Martin Fackler, 2009.
22. Fackler, 2009.
23. A manual published by the union presents various strategies for living but also includes a how-to guide for organizing political demonstrations. See Naoko Shimizu and Ryōta Sono, 2009.
24. Hajime Matsumoto, 2006, p. 160.
25. See Hajime Matsumoto's (2008) interviews with a spectrum of people who rejected corporate life in order to set up their own spaces that range from the artistic-cultural to the political.

26. Sharon Hayashi and Anne McKnight, 2005, pp. 87–113.
27. Mōri, 2009, pp. 203–204.
28. Jacques Rancière, 2008, p. 12.
29. Whereas Marx's analysis warned of the dangers of the desire to be represented that led to Bonaparte's rise, Spivak signals the dangers of French intellectuals who confuse the two notions of representation and end up inadvertently speaking for the masses they depict. Gayatri Spivak, 1988, p. 275.
30. Rancière, 2006.

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10 The Underdevelopment of Development

Neoliberalism and the Crisis of Bourgeois Individualism

Jyotsna Kapur

There are, as Marx explained, some impossible contradictions at the heart of capital; contradictions that make life darkly absurd by throwing into question that fundamental bourgeois invention itself, i.e., the freedom of the self.

> Thus in imagination, individuals seem freer under the dominance of the bourgeoisie than before, because the conditions of life seem accidental; in reality they are less free, because they are more subjected to the violence of things. (Marx 1978, p. 199)

Now magnified in the last two decades of India's turn to neoliberalism, these contradictions have doused everyday life in a surreal haze where a Dickensian world of extreme limitation is clashing against an escalating rhetoric of freedom and choice. The boastful marketing campaign of Brand India that it has given birth to a generation of world-class consumers turns into dust in its streets, fields, and sweatshops where impoverished children work to feed themselves and their families. Its claim of unprecedented economic growth reveals itself as a cruel and cynical lie when farmers, unable to pay off their debts, commit suicide.[1] The obsessive fixation on body image and personal escape that drives the growing industry in contemporary Indian fashion and style appears to be the nervous twitch of a psyche worried to death about jobs that are won and lost at the mercy of a global economy. And the Indian state is currently engaged in militaristic offensives against its own citizens in various parts of the country—Kashmir, Chhattisgarh, Bengal—while the billboards and screens of neoliberal India scream personal freedom and mobility.

The Dickensian world is not new. It might be more impoverished, perhaps, but the Indian middle class is used to being surrounded by extreme and dehumanizing poverty. In fact, a certain thread in the defense of neoliberalism, i.e., the so-called trickle-down argument, is precisely that the poor now have a greater degree of choices than before, that they can see a world beyond their immediate horizons. What is new is that neoliberalism has made middle-class life itself increasingly precarious, bringing it into a

violent confrontation with the power of money. Just about two decades into an economy—in which global brands flooded the market, salaries of those connected to the global rose exponentially, and easy access to credit produced a generation for whom it suddenly seemed possible to leap into the ranks of a transnational bourgeoisie—the limits of growth have become starkly apparent, in particular with the most recent 2008 economic crash. It has, once again, heightened the old inequalities while at the same time presenting a new crisis for a generation that was still in the process of being weaned away from the middle-class ethic of saving into a culture of spending; from an identity based in work to one based in self-presentation; and from parental control towards a certain degree of personal autonomy founded upon the discovery of the young as a growing market and youth itself as a commodity. The new economy has, for all its claims of youthful freedom, actually increased the dependence on parental savings and assets and made the prospects of life less secure for middle-class young people while at the same time holding out newer avenues of experiences that can be bought by money.

The violence of things over the living, of a lifelong dependence on debt, of mannequin bodies that real people aspire for, and finally the power of money to control not only the quality of life but the right to life itself—what does it do to the human mind? At the beginning of the last century, in the midst and aftermath of the First World War when the power of capitalism hit the global consciousness with similar force, the surrealists had noted and gone about expressing the underlying violence, the mad aggression that had come to characterize the human psyche, such that death seemed erotic whereas sexuality itself was ridden with violent masochistic and sadistic fantasies. Previously, Marx had identified alienation, the experience of estrangement from oneself and others, as a fundamental feature of the inner life of capital. Freud, despite his ahistorical and patriarchal assumptions, took this so far as to say that a profound distress had become a generalized feature of the human unconscious where the desire for life furiously battled the more powerful drive towards death. Whereas for Freud, this generalized neurosis was an ahistorical and inevitable result of human nature, a fact we cannot change and at best learn to cope with through individualistic self-knowledge/therapy, Marxist and feminist analysis can ground this psyche and help explain it as a subjective experience specific to capitalism and bourgeois patriarchy. In particular, grounding Freud in Marx can help unravel bourgeois subjectivity, its experience of intimacy, and central contradiction, i.e., the promise of freedom that it once made but cannot fulfill.

Along those lines, I wish to analyze here the transformation of a cultural icon of popular Hindi cinema, Devdas, as he moves from an early twentieth-century figure of a romantic, tortured individual of exceptional sensitivity and integrity to step into the twenty-first century as a lumpen who declares, almost cheerfully, "I am a slut." In its original form, as a novel written by Saratchandra Chattopadhyay in 1901, *Devdas* told the

story of a landed aristocrat, Devdas, who, failing to defy social convention and marry his childhood sweetheart, Paro, sinks into a self-destructive tryst with alcohol. During this time he meets a prostitute, Chanda, who falls in love with him and takes care of him. Although moved by Chanda's devotion, Devdas cannot overcome his conformism and accept her as a lover. Instead, he continues to long for Paro and dies, in the end, a painful and lonely death at Paro's doorstep. Paro, who is by now married to a much older but wealthy man, is blocked from approaching and bereaving his dead body. The entire psychological journey of Devdas, from childhood freedom to the debilitating constraints of adulthood, was mapped on a forced move away from the mother, home, and the village to the depersonalized anonymity of the colonial city, Calcutta. Devdas may then be read as the internal journey of colonial middle-class men, who, at the turn of the nineteenth century, were migrating from declining incomes in land to work in the lower rungs of British colonial economic and political enterprises in the city. It expressed the angst of failing to live authentically and to break free, both of patriarchal tradition as well as the humiliations of lower-level clerical employment in the colonial enterprise. So much so that Devdas's drift into suicide appeared to be an act of rebellion, of freedom.

In its most recent reincarnation, i.e., Anurag Kashyap's 2009 film, Devdas has turned into *Dev D* (also the name of the film), is addicted to drugs not alcohol, and does not die in the end. Instead, the film concludes with a frontal shot of Dev D riding with Chanda on her motorbike on the way to defend himself in a criminal trial for having run down and injured several people while driving intoxicated. Rather than drive away into the proverbial sunset, the epitome of Hollywood romantic escape from society, this young couple, now firmly criminalized, drives into the audience. Whether Dev D's money will save him in court is left to the viewer's imagination. But he has now joined the ranks of rich brats and their poorer cousins whose public acts of arrogant and brutal masculinity have horrified the nation.[2] At the top of this lumpen masculinist hierarchy are the sons of ruling elites whose connections encompass the state (including the police, the judicial system, and the government machinery directly connected to business) and capital. Below them, a petty bourgeoisie that is comprised of former landlords living off of selling ancestral lands along the peripheries of a megacity like Delhi, and at the very lowest rung are the lumpen proletariat who work as foot soldiers of various underground or political wings. Dev D belongs to the middle rung. His father is shown to be a landlord in a village in Punjab who has turned some of his land over to a sugar-manufacturing unit. The transformation of Devdas into Dev D, both astute texts in their representation of middle-class masculinity, holds the key to some fundamental change that has taken place in the psyche of middle-class masculinity; a feature, I will argue, that can be explained by developing the concept of lumpen subjectivities as an accompaniment to capitalist development in India and its radicalization in neoliberalism.

Lumpen capitalism or the deliberate underdevelopment that has characterized the Indian political economy is, as Randhir Singh explains, a consequence of its comprador or secondary character, whose elites have served as junior partners to global capital turning the country into a source of cheap labor and materials.[3] Andre Gunder Frank, speaking of Latin America, had characterized this process as neocolonialism, i.e., a manufactured dependency on the U.S. enabled by local elites who carried out structural readjustments through the military coups and dictatorships of the 1970s.[4] Frank called this process "the development of underdevelopment." The reverse would be just as true and not just of the Third World but of capitalism as a system in its entirety. Its effects are now fully apparent in the heart of the Empire, the U.S., where Third World standards of life coexist with the wealthiest in the world.[5] In essence, Marx diagnosed capitalism as the systemic underdevelopment of development, a system based on theft and exploitation. Capitalist development, Marx argued, depended upon turning publicly held resources (the commons, water) into privately owned commodities to be put up for sale; the exploitation of labor and its conversion into a commodity; and, finally, capital's systemic tendency towards monopoly, which produces underdevelopment, i.e., islands of extravagance in a sea of poverty.

Marx, used the term *lumpen*, i.e., the dregs/shreds of discarded cloth, to characterize both those on the lowest rungs of the proletariat—the homeless, the petty criminals who did not produce surplus value through wage labor—and the finance bourgeoisie who "get rich not by production, but by pocketing the already available wealth of others."[6] At the very top, the finance bourgeoisie, like the petty thief at the bottom, make money, Marx explained in relation to mid-nineteenth-century France, by swindling, speculation, scams, and a calculated use of others for profit in which the bourgeoisie would not hesitate to break its own rules. This is nowhere more in evidence than in capital's most recent and radicalized phase of financialization/neoliberalism, when at its highest level, money is not generated via the production of goods but the further circulation of money as commodity.[7] The subprime mortgages, Ponzi schemes, kickbacks, frauds, and other such forms of speculation and gambling are the manifestations of capital's inherent lumpenism and are in evidence globally.

Whereas the results of an elite run rampant in a state known for corruption and criminalization are now in full view in India, the process may be dated to the late 1970s, culminating in the state of emergency declared by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1975.[8] The beginnings of neoliberalism, i.e., the process of dismantling constraints on global capital may be dated back to the early 1980s when Gandhi's elder son, Rajiv Gandhi, became the prime minister in 1984. As C.P. Chandrashekhar and Jayati Ghosh explain, it was under his leadership that import restrictions were relaxed and a gradual dismantling of the public sector and labor laws started to take place.[9] The formal turn to neoliberalism came in 1991, with

Manmohan Singh, who is now the prime minister, but was that time the finance minister. Singh is typical of the neoliberal breed of state leaders: a former World Bank employee and an economist by profession, his roots are not in popular electoral politics but the revolving door between state and business that has come to characterize the neoliberal state.[10] The year 1991 did not represent a break in class relations but was a continuation, as Randhir Singh explains, for a national bourgeoisie that, having benefited from the state-sponsored capitalism of the postcolonial Nehruvian state—its public enterprises, education, health programs, and industrial development—was now revoking its pact with the nation to join the ranks of a transnational bourgeoisie.[11] However, accompanying this neoliberal trajectory has been an escalating violence in society. Ranging from a public sense of insecurity borne out of state-engineered attacks on religious minorities and the takeover of public spaces by a bullying masculinity, it has also produced a personal ethic that considers cheating and strong-arm tactics as the only way to get things done.

It has brought in its wake in India, with our own patriarchal traditions, a fascination with a lumpen sort of masculinity with the lumpen appearing as the doppelganger or much desired Other of middle-class masculinity in Bollywood.[12] In films such as *Good Boy, Bad Boy* (Ashwini Chaudhary, 2007); *Tashan/Style* (Vijay Krishna Acharya, 2008); *Khosla ka Ghosla/Khosla's Nest* (Dipakar Bannerjee, 2007); *Lucky, Lucky Oye* (Dipakar Bannerjee, 2008); and *Rab Ne Bana di Jodi/God Has Made Us One* (Aditya Chopra, 2008) the terribly ordinary but upwardly mobile middle-class young man learns to succeed and at the same time get the girl by learning to con, swindle, and flex his muscle.

It is as if a terrible fear of remaining stuck, of being ordinary, has struck the hearts of the generation coming of age in neoliberal India. The epitome of this embarrassingly ordinary Other is Pappu. A generic term, something like Jack but with connotations of "mama's boy," Pappu used to be a common North Indian nickname that is now a term of cringe-worthy contempt amongst youngsters in their teens. It denotes a goody-goody, nerdy, dumpy, dependent, babyish young man, who conforms to "outdated" middle-class parental expectations of teenage years as a self-imposed period of asexual dedication to schoolwork in the hopes of a "good" life in later years. Pappu is painfully local, sexually repressed, and awkwardly needy at the same time; dependent on parents, he is filled with rage against them and himself for this very dependence. He is, in other words, the unconscious of the sexually desirable, savvy, metropolitan young men of global consumer-capitalist culture or the out-and-out con man/musclemen who speaks in a vernacular accent. Together, they have exorcised the ghost of an older figure of bourgeois masculinity, the romantic Devdas. In the do-or-die race that neoliberalism is, where the bourgeoisie are breaking their own rules you either make it by hustling, pushing, and peddling or you end up a Pappu, a cog-in-the-wheel who lives an undistinguished life. Where is the time for the self-destructive

melancholia of a Devdas? Or idealized self-sacrificing women, like Chanda or Paro, who may be imagined as spiritual Others who could absorb Devdas's narcissistic regression into the self? But the absence of melancholia does not mean that there is an absence of rage or the sadomasochistic fantasies of self-destruction and the annihilation of others.

Legend has it that Saratchandra Chattopadhyay (1876–1938) considered Devdas to be one of his worst writings. Yet, the story caught the popular imagination and has been remade as a film at least five times with Saratchandra guiding the first cinematic version directed by P.C. Barua in both Bengali and Hindi (1935).[13] This was followed by Bimal Roy's remake in 1955 (Roy had been Barua's cinematographer), Sanjay Leela Bhansali in 2002, and the one that I will discuss here at length, Anurag Kashyap's *Dev D* in 2009.[14] More than these specific remakes, the ideal of Devdas as the romantic hero, a tragic brooding, lovelorn figure who dies committed to a love that cannot be consummated because of a hostile society, has dominated Hindi cinema. Asis Nandy has traced the Devdas fascination right through to the 1980s, arguing quite convincingly that even the "angry young man" persona of Amitabh Bachchan that took over in the 1970s and 1980s—a man of action driven to crime to settle some basic social injustice—was a version of Devdas (2001). Bachchan was tragic, Nandy remarks, precisely because he could not be Devdas; because he could not even afford the luxury of grieving over lost love or ideals. Dev D throws out these romantic ideas altogether, as if they are simply too coy or unrealistic in the harsh realities of a new century.

Saratchandra had narrated his story, in line with modern realism, as a commentary/confessional in which the author interprets the inner conflicts of a subject for the reader, creating identification with the subject and simultaneously producing a subject whose inner life runs deep, even if he is unable to know it himself. In other words, Devdas was the classical bourgeois romantic subject whose self-alienation has been the subject of psychoanalysis. Saratchandra portrayed Devdas as quintessentially passive but filled with rage. Unable to rebel against his father on whom he depended desperately for approval and financial support, Devdas is also repelled by the commercial anonymity of the city and turns this rage masochistically inwards by losing himself in alcohol and sadistically outwards against those who love him, i.e., Paro and later Chanda.

In fact, the novel traces a progressive escalation in Devdas's sadomasochistic assertions of masculinity as he finds himself unable to match Paro's and Chanda's courage and defiance of tradition. For instance, when Paro's wedding is arranged to another, she takes matters into her own hands and arrives in Devdas's room late one night and asks him to marry her. "His hair standing at end," Saratchandra writes, Devdas asks Paro, "are you not afraid?" (p. 49) Unable to make a decision on his own, Devdas walks her home that night but then tries to persuade his parents to allow the marriage. Failing to get their permission, he leaves for Calcutta. From there he

writes to Paro, telling her that he had never really loved her and would not have been able to reciprocate her feelings. However, in keeping with his indecisiveness, he subsequently regrets the letter and returns to the village wanting to reconcile. Here he finds an angry Paro who, by now engaged to another, chides him for running away the first time. Furious, he slashes her—coldly and deliberately—across the forehead, leaving a permanent mark. "Come let me put a mark on your face, just like the mark on the moon or the bee on the lotus," says an angry Devdas. This mark may be read as a barely disguised metaphor for rape, symbolizing Devdas staking his territory against another man and at the same time turning his own sense of failure and impotence into aggression against Paro.

Saratchandra represented the same pattern in Devdas's relationship with Chanda. Again unable to challenge social convention, he refuses to accept her offer to take care of him. The narrator takes an inordinate interest in describing sadistically, as if echoing Devdas's unconscious desires, the endless suffering that Paro and Chanda and, to a lesser extent, his mother undergo on account of Devdas.[15] For instance, hearing of his ill-health Chanda walks, her feet bleeding, to Devdas's ancestral home to inquire about him. Bleeding feet is a much-used metaphor in Indian popular culture signifying the redemption of a strong independent woman, especially a prostitute (who is conventionally associated with dancing). The woman is literally punished by the very means of her economic independence—her feet. In contrast to her earlier youthful spirited challenges to Devdas, Paro, too, turns by the end of the novel into a submissive recipient of his blind fury and begins to consider the mark he had left on her forehead as a memento of his love. Like Chanda, she begs Devdas to let her take care of him. At the end, learning about Devdas's death, Paro turns mute.

Saratchandra casts both Paro and Chanda as the eternally giving mother figures of the primary stage of narcissism, when Freud tells us the child has yet to differentiate between the self and the mother or learn about sexual difference. Both Chanda and Paro, the narrator tells us, can see the "aura/light that animates Devdas" in spite of his external demeanor, his melancholic decline into alcoholism. Devdas spends his life, as Nandy explains, in a narcissistic longing for the mother, recreating "situations of grand defeat and personal tragedy that would allow the ultimate woman to enter his life to reinstate a lost, maternal utopia."[16] Unable to stay in this perpetual warmth of flattering self-reflection, Devdas turns away from reality altogether.

Nandy has attributed the power of this iconic figure to its psychological resonance with what he describes as "the traumatic encounter with modernity," i.e., the sense of exile and displacement "lurking in the hearts of Bengalis and important sections of India's urban, semi-Westernized middle-classes" who sympathized with the doomed efforts of Devdas to "reconnect with a lost past and to escape anonymous death in a soulless city" (2001, p. 146). This conclusion is, however, unfair to Saratchandra. Saratchandra

was no apologist for tradition or nostalgic for premodern rural life. Despite some clichéd statements about the genuineness of rural life, and to some extent his celebrations of women as the Other of modernity, Saratchandra depicted rural life as claustrophobic, mind-numbing, and overpowered by social hierarchies and petty tyrants.[17] The problem for Devdas, however, was that the colonial city promised no freedom or authentic life either.

In fact, Saratchandra portrayed the beginnings of Devdas's alienation, from both the city and the village, to the first moment when he returned to the village, now as an adult member of the colonial middle class. Sent to Calcutta to be schooled at the age of twelve by his father, Devdas returns nine years later, a stranger to the village. This is how Saratchandra describes the transition:

> All those faults and signs of rural life that had marked Devdas were erased out of existence, even in name. Now he would be embarrassed to be seen without his foreign shoes, fancy suits, walking stick, gold watch, gold chain, and buttons. Now, walking by the river gave him no pleasure. In its place he would pick up a gun and go hunting. He no longer wanted to catch small fish. Instead, discussions about society, politics, meetings—organizations, football and cricket held his interest. Alas, where was there now any room for Parvati [Paro] and Sonapur, that village of their childhood. (p. 43; all translations are mine)

He covers his insecurity, the narrator alludes, by wandering around aimlessly with a gun.

Devdas returns as a member of the *bhadralok*. Literally the refined class, the *bhadralok* was a self-defining term for the Bengali colonial middle class. The *bhadralok*, as Sumit Sarkar has summarized, were predominantly associated, not with any capitalistic enterprise (foreclosed by the British Empire) but with education, particularly in English medium for high-caste Brahmins, and a "virtually ubiquitous link with land in the form of petty *zamindari*/landholdings, or more often intermediate land holdings."[18] English education was the only medium of advancement but it came with the structured humiliations of work in the colonial hierarchy and the earnings proved inadequate to meet the demands of gentility.

Consequently, the *bhadralok* were compelled to live off of ancestral wealth, dividing and subdividing ancestral property.[19] Unless they took charge of their world through struggle with others and challenged foreign rule, the young male *bhadralok* were doomed to live by squandering away the wealth of their fathers, which is exactly what Devdas does. Short of this, whether they conserved capital through a miserly closefistedness, like Devdas's brother who calculated every penny to be spent at their father's funeral and gave nothing of the inheritance to their mother; or squandered it away, like Devdas, in alcohol and amongst friends, the young *bhadralok* could live, on an individual level, only by spending the wealth of their parents. The train trips that

Devdas takes in his drunken stupor, traveling through the major Indian cities of that period, Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, and Lahore, can be seen as a failed attempt at erasing the memory of a father whose wealth continued to sustain him even after his death. The distress, the internal anguish of unfreedom in relation to both the patriarch and the colonizer, was projected onto the more acceptable, speakable trope of lost love, of the inability to fulfill the romantic desire for Paro or Chanda. Yet, by casting Devdas as a modern subject—it is ultimately his internal flaw and not antagonistic circumstances that thwart the fulfillment of his romantic passions—Saratchandra also, implicitly, critiqued such impassivity as a mark of cowardice. Devdas, one must remember, is a romantic figure who is also paradoxically impotent, an alcoholic who is unable to form mature sexual relationships with either of the two women in his life.

The inward-looking, dark, and self-introspective moods of the *bhadralok*, Sumit Sarkar tells us, varied according to the level of political engagement. In particular, Sarkar characterizes 1870–1905—the originary period of Devdas—as a hiatus, "during which the dream of reform and improvement under British rule had turned sore without as yet being replaced with an alternative about the end of foreign rule."[20] Locating Devdas in this specific history, in the nature of political engagement that the *bhadralok* undertook with colonialism, helps explain the character far more than the generalized conflict between modernity and tradition set up by postcolonial theory. The *bhadralok*, Sarkar adds, would end their isolation and inward-looking moods when they joined others, as in the successful protests against the partition of Bengal in 1905, to claim the city through struggle and imagine the end of foreign rule.

Yet the inward-looking nature of the colonial middle class, its propensity to insist on the home as the repository of spiritual self-sacrificing women, and to cite it as evidence of its cultural superiority has remained. This is because the private home is the foundational institution of the bourgeoisie—this is, the site where private property is held and passed on. By glorifying the domestic sphere and women as repositories of spiritual purity, the *bhadralok* were reconciling nationalism with capitalism/bourgeois modernity, and *not* opposing it as Partha Chatterjee and Asis Nandy suggest.[21] The underlying assumption of postcolonial theory, as exemplified by Nandy, is that the colonial encounter, and not the internal contradictions of class, caste, and gender, was the fundamental antagonism of Indian life. There is also an unquestioning acceptance, in this view, best put forth by Partha Chatterjee, that essentializing women as embodiments of some spiritual essence was a way for the Indian bourgeoisie to way to resist colonialism.[22] On the contrary, Tanika Sarkar has shown that in the case of Bengal, women also participated in this strain of bourgeois nationalism by acquiring education, molding themselves in the image of the new woman as autonomous beings capable of voluntary self-sacrifice/renunciation, and bearing the burdens that came with such idealization.[23] In other words, the colonial middle class, much like their

Victorian counterparts, neutralized women as modern subjects and sexual partners while idealizing them as eternally giving mothers.

We see this dilemma in Saratchandra's representation of Paro. Beginning as a heroine who casts aside shame, i.e., the internalized voice of patriarchy, to claim her desire as her own, Paro ends as the iconic self-sacrificing, mother who has sublimated her desire. In terms of personal transformation, cutting through shame, Adam Phillips tells us, is akin to dying and being born again.[24] In fact, the actual rebellion, the only act of modern subjecthood that takes place in the Devdas story happens on the night Paro breaks the bonds of shame and arrives in Devdas's room and asks him to marry her. This radical assertion of selfhood is of course submerged in Paro's life of renunciation that follows from here on. She becomes the mother par excellence in her husband's home. Shedding all forms of personal adornment or signs of sexuality, she becomes the mother not only to his children (his daughter is older than her) but also to the entire village. Saratchandra enacts the same transformation on Chanda's character, making her embrace renunciation in a selfless love for Devdas. He romanticizes both Paro and Chanda as repositories of purity, lifting them out of modern selfhood into a pre-capitalist ethic of self-sacrifi cing renunciation. In doing so, he was echoing the hegemonic role in which bourgeois women were initiated into the anticolonial struggle—as mothers, who sublimated their individual selves in the service of the nation as a family.

In contrast to the women, Devdas is imminently a modern subject and what makes him so is his tormenting sense of guilt.Freud tells us that patriarchy, i.e., the rule of the fathers, lives inside our heads—as guilt. That is, fearing punishment, the child internalizes authority as the conscience, punishing itself for even thinking of retaliating against authority, of injuring it in the way it has injured the self.[25] Deeply beholden to his father's word and his capital, unable to break free, Devdas may travel far but never far enough to escape the chastising in his head about his failure, first of all, as a son. The only escape is in the forgetfulness induced by alcohol. Guilt, however, can only be experienced by a subject aware of his/her subjectivity, his/her individual freedom. It is born of the anguish of believing in freedom in conditions of unfreedom. For, ultimately, Devdas conforms not only to gender norms, sacrificing his desire for Paro and later Chanda at the altar of patriarchy, caste, and class, but to an even higher order of economic arrangement of his times. Obstructed from accumulating capital by the colonial state, he remains beholden to both the colonial state and his patriarchal family while the promise of freedom, of acting upon the world and changing it, was also so tantalizingly clear.

This is where Saratchandra's portrayal of Devdas serves as stringent social critique. In a cold assessment of his protagonist, the narrator explains that Devdas was incapable of doing the intellectual work necessary to get to the bottom of things. Impulsive and rash, he would quickly make up his mind and then act on it. "Such people," remarks the narrator, "when they fail, cannot get up, sit up, see the light—still and dead, like roots and vegetables

they just lay around. Devdas was one such person."[26] Saratchandra ends his narrative by mourning the loneliness of Devdas, asking his readers to wish that no one should have to die a death this alone and unloved. It is only on the basis of this profound sense of isolation embodied by Devdas that his combination of sadistic and ultimately masochistic pleasure in self-annihilation becomes believable. Unable to join others he dies alone.

In the 2009 cinematic version, Kashyap has deepened this sense of depersonalization even further; he dwells on it, explores it, and puts it up on display, blocking any identification with Dev D. It is in this distancing from Dev D, in offering us an image to examine rather than identify with, that Kashyap has, I believe, produced a critical reflection on contemporary India, updating Saratchandra's critique to the present moment. In translating the drug-induced vertigo of Dev D cinematically, Kashyap forces the viewer into Dev D's hallucinations while at the same time showing them up to be as strange as the world he inhabits. We are brought into Dev D's distorted perspective through extreme close-ups of his face that fill up the entire screen, oozing blood under water; wide-angle framing that puts a great distance between the foreground and the background, bringing us into the exaggerated sense of detachment Dev D feels from his surroundings; and a dizzying sense of motion sickness as the camera simulates the vertigo of Dev D's descent into drug-induced oblivion.

At the very same time, Kashyap pulls the viewer away from any cathartic identification with Dev D by self-reflexively drawing attention to the constructed nature of his portrayal. We are watching a film, we are constantly reminded, one that is a story we already know well. For instance, while Dev D waits to be let into the bar where he will lose himself in drinks and drugs for the first time, he is framed beside a poster of the last version of *Devdas* (2002), starring Shah Rukh Khan.[27] This is a glamour shot of Shah Rukh Khan (India's leading star) who, in a hat and with a cigarette in mouth, is eons away from the degradation that Dev D is about to embark upon. A big-budget Bollywood spectacle with its exaggerated gloss, Kashyap seems to suggest, could never risk showing the utter squalor of Devdas's self-destructive and sadistic persona.

Broken up into three parts that announce themselves with titles—beginning with Paro, followed by Chanda, and ending with Devdas—the film eschews continuity in favor of a form that invites a critical distance from its protagonist. Furthermore, Kashyap introduces witnesses, characters in the film who have no part in advancing the narrative but stand in as reminders that we too should examine the Devdas phenomenon. There is the co-passenger in Delhi's new Metro who stares at Dev all through the journey; an older woman sitting next to him in a bus who chastises him for his addiction; and there is the group of three dancers who perform a number but also appear at other moments in the film as onlookers who observe Dev D. These interruptions echo Brecht's injunction to playwrights and actors in his *The Portrayal of Past and Present in One*:[28]

you should simply make the instant
Stand out, without in the process hiding
What you are making it stand out from.

Brecht had asked actors and playwrights to show the showing itself because he did not want the audience to forget or lose itself in the performance; to imagine that solutions to real problems could be found in theater. Instead, the Brechtian performance aims to provoke the audience to think critically about the world by making it appear strange and unfamiliar. Similarly, Kashyap locates Dev D's alienation not in some inner uniqueness but in a society.

Kashyap sets up, both visually and thematically, the self-obsessed, self-destructiveness of Dev D against the grind, competition, commercialism, and violence that surrounds him through documentary and documentary-like footage. There are some pretty overt comments on the artificiality and superficiality of such a world. The seedy area in which Chanda lives has hotel signs that read RAND (from GRAND, *rand* is a Hindi colloquial term for prostitute) or HIV (from SHIVA) that are revealed in full view only through camera movement. Chanda's sex routines include speaking in many languages and accents, from Hindi, Telegu, and French to British English. She dons costumes from porn films, changing from an American cheerleader to a nurse. In an economy where the most lucrative jobs for young people, especially women, are in call centers where the injunction is to "speak with a smile" to service customers by taking on accents and names that are not your own, what you sell is unimportant because you have to first sell yourself. The mise-en-scène of Dev D is this new India and its capital city, Delhi, which stands transformed from the *sarkari* (government) city of Nehru, with its middle-class housing high-rises and government offices, into enclaves of private wealth and a large sprawling Dickensian world of a shadow, informal economy based on networks, deals, and deception.

Kashyap shows a world in which appearances are deceptive and known only through a canny network of connections. At night, bars suddenly appear in garages, the streets shimmer under a wet layer of crime, sex, and commercial exchange, and strangers eye Dev D, who clearly seems wealthy, as bait. But come morning and from Chanda's balcony we see a dusty Delhi, bathed in its characteristic nondescript yellow, going about its business. Chanda, we learn, is putting herself through college and is lost in the crowd on the street. In a world this strange, where opposites violently clash, Dev D's drug-induced delusions are a timid escape from reality, not a grandiose act of suicidal rebellion; this is just infantile escape.

In a sequence constructed with Brechtian pauses, Kashyap shows the strangeness of bourgeois aspiration for distinction amidst the throbbing class differences in neoliberal India. Instead of sending him to Calcutta, Dev D's father, in keeping with bourgeois global aspirations today, sends him to England. When Dev D returns he is met at the airport by his father who has brought along a music band. Typically, in Bollywood fashion, this

homecoming scene could have been an occasion for over-the-top sentimentality with the mother sensing the son's return before he is even there; Paro waiting in erotic anticipation; and the general spectacle of wealthy globalized families reuniting upon a son's return.[29] Indeed, Dev D does in fact return on the day of his brother's wedding and sees Paro for the first time as an adult.

But Kashyap layers the sequence with awkward pauses and mismatched timing, creating a general aura of distance between Devdas and his environment. After an awkward meeting with his father, Dev D steps out of the airport and the next shot shows the band squatting in the heat, waiting patiently. But as soon as they get the signal, they hurriedly jump to their feet and, adjusting their instruments, launch loudly into their music. Next we see Dev D in the car with his father and the band music fades under their dialogue. Kashyap then cuts to the band and we see them scrambling into the van that will follow Dev's car, still playing their instruments. Their music, which had for a brief moment been subsumed under the private conversation between the father and son, returns to center stage, pulling us out of any identification or anticipation we might have felt around Devdas's homecoming. Instead, Kashyap draws attention to a form of labor that is routinely ignored and mocks the feudal cultural aspirations of the Indian

Figure 10.1 The mismatched choreographic moves of *Emosanal Atyachar*.

middle class.[30] Kashyap not only highlights the social distance between the band and their bourgeois employers but he also pays tribute to the funky, energetic, borrowed, and at the same time original music produced by music bands. At Paro's wedding, the entertainers, dressed as Elvis look-alikes in kitschy homemade costumes, sing a hysterically satirical number, *Emosanal Atyachar* (emotional oppression), set to these band tunes, as if mocking Dev D's narcissism as the psychopathology of the pampered foreign-returned bourgeois.

The cool, cynical, almost mocking tone that Kashyap adopts towards Dev D makes this version of Devdas the most infantile to hit the Indian screen so far. There is a tongue in cheek shot of the back of Dev D as he takes a pee—dressed only in underwear covered in some cartoon figures, Dev D scratches his butt like a child. He is also presented as terribly insecure. Dev D rejects Paro, not under pressure from the father, but because he suspects that she has been sleeping around. He believes the stories of a worker on his farm who tells him that he has had sex with Paro. When he comes back to reconcile with Paro, who is by now already married, she tells him that he should marry the mirror because he is incapable of loving anyone else. She also tells him that he should go back to his village and take care of his business. Enraged, he throws her out of the room just when a short while ago he had been asking her to make love to him. Most devastatingly, Paro also taunts him for his impotence.[31] In the end, Dev takes up with Chanda, but this is no heroic defiance of social norms either. Chanda will take care of him—we see her at the end bathing him like a child in a tub—while he lets her believe that the ring she found was for her and not Paro. "I do not love Paro," he tells her. Looking into the camera, he makes that central confession/claim, "I am a slut."

Neither are Paro and Chanda the idealized, self-sacrificing mothers of Saratchandra. Instead, Kashyap paints them as pragmatic women who make a virtue of "moving on." Kashyap casts Chanda as the daughter of Indo-Canadian parents, who becomes the subject of a sex scandal in her high school years in Delhi. Chanda recovers from her father's suicide, mother's abandonment, and exile in her father's village to become part of the burgeoning industry in white women's sex trade; a nod to the underside of globalization scarcely acknowledged in the celebratory discourses of neoliberalism. Paro settles into her marriage and hints at a satisfactory sexual relationship. Paro's initial rebellion, though, is as striking in this version as it was in Saratchandra's a century ago. Now Paro does not go to Devdas at night. Instead, failing to arrange a room and privacy, she invites Devdas for a sexual encounter in the fields at the break of dawn. In a memorable sequence, she carries a mattress on her bicycle and then brings it back, smarting under his rejection. Eventually, both women accede to what Freud has called the reality principle, i.e., they lessen their unhappiness by diminishing their desires.[32] They had done so a century ago in Saratchandra's writing as well, but this time around it has come without the pious

aura of renunciation. Although Kashyap does not quite say it outright, it is implied here that Paro too lives as a slut; having entered into a marriage of convenience she holds on to it.

In the end, the brooding, romantic, tragic figure of Devdas or the self-sacrificing Chanda and Paro disappear in the harsh glare of neoliberal practicality or cynicism where ultimately everyone is free to be a whore. It immediately brings to mind another figure of the free market—the proletariat, who, like the whore, is both seller and commodity, and the very condition of unfreedom. The proletariat, Marx made clear, sold not just a certain service or a good, but their time, creativity, and, ultimately, humanity. Unable to sustain the notion of freedom even a century ago, the bourgeoisie have, it seems, given up on it entirely in neoliberalism, producing a competitive, antagonistic world in which the instrumental use of self and others appears to be the only logical option. The sense of alienation that Freud had identified in *Discontents of Civilization* has only sharpened in neoliberalism:

> For men their neighbor is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensations, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him. (p. 749)

On the one hand, this deepens a primary narcissism that makes annihilatory projects of the self and Other appear ever-more thrilling, a suicidal and murderous subjectivity that longs to submerge itself in identification with powerful figures, such as the patriarchs in "honor killings" or fascist pogroms against minorities. The patriarchs have already issued an extreme call for exactly such sublimation, laying claim to the right of parents to kill children if they transgress sexual norms. This is not an exaggeration. Faced with a judicial decision that sentenced five family members for the murder of Manoj and Babli, a young couple who had married in their own subcaste, leading members of the Khap Panchayats publicly denounced the court decision. At the heart of the "honor killing" is the right of patriarchs to determine proper sexual expression, ultimately tied to preserving private property via an insistence on purity, i.e., of caste and class. "The parents kill their children due to the shame they were bringing to the home by incest," said a Dr. Santosh Dahiya in defense of the honor killings.[33] The erotic appeal of unity with a superego, i.e., the sense of empowerment that comes from acting as a group against another, is also obvious in the projects of communal violence that have become increasingly regular in India. The sexually repressed, nose-to-the-grindstone Pappu is particularly susceptible to such thrills, and the fascination with the con man in contemporary popular Hindi cinema is a bow in that direction. Freud indicated that sadism and masochism were obverse manifestations born of the same root.

Finding its desire—what Freud called "an original passionate striving for a positive fulfillment of happiness"—for wholeness and unity of the kind the child first experiences with the mother blocked by powerful others, the subject redirects the rage it feels for those hostile others against oneself.[34] Once murder or suicide is eroticized, as in sublimated desire to serve powerful authority figures, it makes self-immolation or the dehumanization of an Other a logical conclusion. It is the thrill that can push people over the edge of self-preservation.

Yet, neoliberalism has also produced a deeply cynical generation that is suspicious of all authority or moral claims; one that can cynically embrace its own use by others and use others in a world it believes is completely immoral and driven by profit. For the last four decades, a global youth consumer culture has thrived on irony and parody, selling carbonated drinks as revolution or branding internationalism as a clothing brand. The skeptical, darkly satirical stance that Kashyap takes towards Devdas is a product of such a commercialized understanding of the world but, I believe, is also its critique.

In updating the tortured early twentieth-century romantic to a hustler in the twenty-first century, Kashyap has held up a mirror to the middle class and conclusively sealed the image of Devdas as a romantic figure. We see him turn from a handsome strapping young man into a ragged, derelict drug addict who is no better than a street dog. Dev D is the most decrepit Devdas we have seen on the screen and it is, perhaps, this utter deglamorization of middle-class masculinity that has earned the film some visceral reactions of dislike. Dev D has rid himself of both guilt and shame and accepted that everyone lives by selling and being sold. Shame, guilt, self-doubt, principles—all appear to be no more than meaningless self-inflicted torture to the flattened neoliberal subjectivity, just needless *emosanal atyachar* (emotional torture). This cynical flattening of affect is evident in a recent reality TV show called *Emosanal Atyachar* where lovers test their partners' fidelity by setting them up with actors who try to lure them—all in the presence of private detectives and hidden cameras. Brought right into private bedrooms on TV, this is an indication of the extent to which shame and guilt are being banished from middle-class sensibilities and the intrinsic connection these attributes share with sexual expression.

Of course, this does not mean that shame and guilt have disappeared. Rather, the crisis of middle-class life revolves around resolving the challenges to social cohesion posed by the instrumental and objectified consideration of self and others as a slut. Although this complete freedom to use others and be used by others sexually has come from the market, it nevertheless shakes the foundations of bourgeois family life. It convulses its basis in private property, in patriarchy, and fully confronts the complete proletarianization of the middle class. In response to the sexualization of commodity culture, of a consumer culture that sexualizes everything from a car to a carbonated drink, there is a reinvigorated call to sublimate sexuality in

self-sacrifice for religion or the family. What is significant is that such calls have become more violent and we can expect the violence to increase as the possibilities of exercising individual autonomy shrink to the point that it becomes common sense to characterize everyone as a whore. The lumpen is at once the antibourgeois but also the pinnacle of bourgeois civilization in that it fully acknowledges the universalized antagonism of the free market, its parasitism and exploitation, its raising of entrepreneurialism and survivalism as a way of life, and its lack of real autonomy. In baring that internal logic, neoliberalism as the universal victory of capitalism, it has also given us clarity on capitalism as a way of life and society.

NOTES

1. pstyle:NT> In 2009, fifteen hundred farmers, in one state alone—Chhattisgarh—committed suicide. See "The Independent World," 2009. Child labor is ubiquitous in domestic homes, streets, sweatshops, factories, and fields.
2. Symptomatic of well-connected, young wealthy men, such as Dev D, taking the law into their hands is Manu Sharma, son of a former minister, who was only recently convicted for the murder of a fashion model, Jessica Lal. Lower on the economic ladder are young lumpen men who murder their own sisters in so-called "honor killings," act as a lynch mob against a single individual, generally very poor, who might have broken a law—such as a petty thief or someone charged with sexual harassment—and move around in groups to secure their power over public places. At the very bottom are those who man the mobs that go on rampages of ethnic killing (under the protection granted by the state) as in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots or the more recent anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat in 2002.
3. Singh, 1999.
4. Frank, 1972.
5. See Marable, 2000.
6. See http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1850/class-struggles-france/ch01.htm#n2.
7. Amiya Bagchi (n.d.) has developed this in relation to neoliberalism.
8. Faced with widespread national protests, including youth and labor, Indira Gandhi suspended all civil rights and put the political opposition in prison, creating an atmosphere of terror that lasted nineteen months. In a sharply polarized nation, fascist tendencies came to the fore as a majoritarian Hindu upper caste and middle class saw the emergency as the restoration of law and order. Sanjay Gandhi, her younger son, is a star lumpen—known for his impatience with law or due process, he epitomizes the aggressive, marauding masculinity I am describing here as lumpen. Sanjay Gandhi died in a plane crash in 1980.
9. Ghosh and Chandrashekhar, 2002.
10. For example, Dick Cheney, who was both the vice president under George W. Bush and on the board of Halliburton, represents the neoliberal politician who no longer maintains the pretense of the state as a buffer against capital (as in the Keynesian model). The neoliberal state is unashamedly "the committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie" the true bourgeois state as Marx (Engels and Marx [1888] 2005, p. 43) described it.
11. Singh, 2008.

12. Thanks to Nandini Chandra for this observation.
13. It is this enduring appeal that makes Devdas a text that can be analyzed as a social phenomenon and also tells us that authorial intention, although crucial to giving birth to a creative work, cannot curtail the meanings embedded in texts, which invariably come to life in the interaction between the text and its context. Kashyap's film is a far more complex, innovative, and powerful text than Saratchandra's, precisely because he identified the central angst of the story, i.e., the alienation of the individual, and updated it to both the present time and the medium of cinema.
14. See Corey Creekumar, 2010.
15. Whereas the critique of political inaction is clear, I think, in Saratchandra's portrayal of Devdas, it is, nevertheless, a sympathetic portrayal of his angst. This is where Saratchandra's representations of women as the Other of modernity are especially in line with the gendered tropes of bourgeois nationalism.
16. Nandy, 2001, p. 147.
17. For instance, he portrayed Devdas's teacher as a cowardly petty tyrant; obsequious in front of Devdas's father, he takes out his anger in school by singling out Devdas for punishment. Devdas's brother, too, is similarly presented as a two-faced shallow man: submissive and docile in front of the father, he is happy to see Devdas sent away to the city. Finally, Saratchandra even stepped back from romanticizing childhood romance—a premise that is central to the story. When Devdas, at that time only nineteen, writes the fateful letter to Paro letting her down, the narrator wryly comments on the limited choices he really had to act on his own: "who knew then that other than child marriage there was no other way to sustain or give life to a friendship which Devdas knew had given him such total understanding and acceptance of his demands and tantrums" (p. 45).
18. Sumit Sarkar, 1997, p. 169.
19. Sumit Sarkar explains: "Land revenue, in Bengal, was fixed in perpetuity by the Cornwallis permanent Settlement in 1793, without any corresponding ceiling on rent leading to subdivisions and over a period of time creating intermediaries whose source of income was rent rather than entrepreneurial capital. Constant sale and fragmentation, however, kept individual incomes quite small and "inadequate to the demands of gentility" (1997, p. 169) The importance of English education, now with an American accent, has remained crucial to the Indian middle class as a form of upward mobility given the absence of other forms of capital accumulation. The large majority of the Indian middle class still rents although there was a spike in home ownership from the opening of credit in India in the 1990s.
20. Sumit Sarkar, 1997, p. 197.
21. Partha Chatterjee, 1993.
22. Ibid.
23. Tanika Sarkar, 2001. Also see Jyotsna Kapur, 1990.
24. Adam Phillips and Leo Barsani, 2008, p. 110–111.
25. Sigmund Freud, [1930] 1989.
26. Chattopadhyay, 1992–92. 2nd revised edition. p. 54.
27. Shah Rukh Khan is the Bombay film industry's reigning superstar.
28. Bertolt Brecht, 1976, p. 307.
29. In different ways the formulaic return has been staged in Kabhie Khushi Kabhi Gham/Sometimes Happiness, Sometimes Sadness (Karan Johar, 2001) and Dilwale Dulhaniya le jayenge/The Brave Will Take the Bride (Aditya Chopra, 1995).
30. Comprised of mostly young men from very low-income families, these music bands play rough but robust versions of popular Hindi film tunes and are

hired by the middle and upper class to give musical accompaniment to and draw attention to their events, particularly weddings, which involve a parade on the street. The ritual harks back to feudal lords arriving with fanfare and band music is a low art form that has yet to be appropriated by the middle class. Part of the ubiquitous urban underclass that surrounds and serves the bourgeoisie, the music band allows a level of creativity not possible in other forms of labor. Even the very loudness of the band competes with the middle-class procession it is accompanying.

31. Thanks to Nivedita Menon for this discussion.
32. Creekumar, 2010.
33. Vrinda Sharma, 2010. The khap panchayats, concentrated in the landed community in the rural area of Haryana surrounding Delhi, claim that marriage within the same subcaste is incest.
34. Freud, [1930] 1989, p. 729.

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11 Fragments of Labor

Neoliberal Attitudes and Architectures in Contemporary South Korean Cinema

Keith B. Wagner

SOUTH KOREAN LABOR

Known to South Koreans and international audiences as a licentious filmmaker whose narratives pivot around sadistic, perverse, and slickly choreographed visceral violence, Park Chan-wook's sensational impulses and aesthetic flair cleverly obfuscate his other concern in South Korean society: motifs of material and immaterial labor. Iconographic elements of the working class and "salarymen" litter Park's mise-en-scène, from the proletariat figure, rugged and broken by extreme social circumstances, to the white-collar worker, laid off and similarly down on his luck. Their work environments, as crafted on screen, vary visually from cramped and bustling factory floors to corporate tower blocks, cosmopolitan high-rises, and lifeless office cubicles.

Equally, the tools themselves of the laborer and the corporate crony signify horrific modes of work in most of Park's earlier films: iron pliers, carpenters' hammers, box cutters, electrical tape, and jumper cables—objects that pertain to work done by hand—become weapons for defense or torture. Salarymen, overworked and loyal to their neoliberal provider, connote less strenuous physical modes of production as their attire and accoutrements remain unmistakably corporate—briefcases, dark-colored business suits, topcoats, and black umbrellas for Seoul's damp climate. These animate and inanimate objects doggedly represent both the working and bourgeois classes as deprived of any socioeconomic power because of their alienation from one another and their power over its very production, something that Park also privileges in his fictional worlds.

Labor power becomes but one interest in this chapter but one I will revisit by way of Antonio Gramsci's writings, little used in film studies. Moving to theorize his *Pre-Prison Writings* (1916–1926), and thus to depart from Marcia Landy's highly applicable and innovative application of Gramsci's other work,[1] my use of Gramscian theory will be deployed to articulate what Park's *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* (2002) and *Oldboy* (2003) say about metalworkers and the bourgeoisie; and how different theorizations by Gramsci regarding social strata can translate into a visual vocabulary to

analyze the narratological structure deployed in Park Chan-wook's diegesis. I build on Landy's text as well as Angela Dalle Vacche's *The Body in the Mirror* (1992) and Angelo Restivo's *Cinema of Economic Miracles* (2002); these seminal texts have helped me to understand Italian cinema and how Gramsci's ideas remain relevant in the European context, but more importantly how a synthesis of his ideas can apply to East Asian cinema as well. It is from this work that theorizations of labor in relation to film have become clearer to me and that this materialist framework is worth pursuing. In essence, these two films remain committed to labor struggle by both the plebian and the conventional middle classes, whereby the marginalization and the radical impulse of these workers to resist is precipitously divided by class. Park's *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* and *Oldboy* also happen to examine the apathy, vileness, and corporate dilettantism of an elite that tout neoliberal polices in South Korea of the 1990s and 2000s, as Gramsci did in a similar context in his critique of corporate fascism in Italy, albeit under a different period, that of monopoly capitalism.

Labor's image is a difficult subject to bring to life filmically.[2] But this is a subject that nonetheless refracts South Korea's recent historical imaginary on screen, propounded explicitly by the workers' struggles, which "greatly contributed to the democratic movement called the 'Mingjung' [that had shown] a clear continuity with the development of class struggle in the 1970s."[3] These social upheavals continued in the following decade with seven hundred strikes and 897 conflicts in the spring of 1980, stemming from many protests against the domination of authoritarian power that eventually came to an end in 1987.[4] Following on from this political turn was the establishment of a supposedly democratically elected Roh Tae Woo regime from 1988 to 1993, and later South Korea's entry into the WTO in January of 1995.[5] However, Korea's emergence onto the global economic stage brought with it new forms of socioeconomic suppression levied against the worker under a neoliberal imposition at the state and corporate levels.[6] Several South Korean political economists see the turn to overaccumulation and a rise in the support of high-tech industries in the early 1990s as leading to the devaluation of the won, where, according to Dae-oup Chang:

> Aside from making the character of Korean industry more capital-intensive, this allowed capitals to avoid involvement in the labor conflicts that started growing in 1987. In general investments in fixed capital during the 1990s, by contrast to capital investment during the boom of the mid-1980s, were focused on introducing new lines of products, the automation of the labor process and R&D, rather than quantitative expansion of equipment. Thus, whereas total investment in plant and equipment comprised 57.3% in 1987, in 1990 it fell to 31%.[7]

Chang's thoughts point to the steady breakup of a skilled workforce by subverting their ability to be productive (trained vocational skills) as the

induction of automation in factories led to layoffs. Thus, virtually any cooperation between workers and capitalists ended by the late 1990s, as the strident but tenuous connection that labor and the middle classes once shared with the privately run companies known as *chaebols* was eviscerated by the Tiger Market crash in 1997–1998.[8] This economic downturn and its consequences for the working and middle classes seem to have triggered Park's narratological impulse to punish forms of labor on screen, but for sociopolitical reasons. Identifying these problems as such has for Park on some occasions been called, in the words of film scholar Hyangjin Lee, a "crisis concerning the loss of cultural identity in the rise of South Korean cinema," amongst other things, and is seldom associated with concerns over the rise of free market policies and practices in South Korea—a culture and cinema that accounts for the fiercest and most potent form of neoliberalism in East Asia.[9]

Because of the financial crisis, "both state and capital executed a series of unprecedented attacks against labor in the form of massive layoffs, legalization of unilateral dismissal by employers and the privatization of major public corporations such as Korea Heavy Industries, Korea Electric Power Corporation and Korea Telecom."[10] Many neoliberal variables such as mass unemployment and privatization are conjured in Park Chanwook's *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* (*SFMV* hereafter) and *Oldboy*. In these films, one can find reference to the recklessness of neoliberalization in real life, where structural adjustments created "austerity policies, liberalization of trade and capital markets, privatization of public companies," which facilitated scant government regulation and cheap foreign capital that escalated the crisis for the worker.[11] All of this came before the IMF stepped in during 1998, adjusting interest rates and pushing a tight fiscal policy for lending. These measures protracted labor even further, leading to "a three-year period from 1998 to 2000 where an astonishing 131,100 workers, or 18.3 per cent of all public workers had been laid off," causing further indiscriminate class divisions and the rise of a neoliberal elite. As stark unemployment figures rose and the impervious nature of economic deprivation continued, neoliberalism permeated most Korean films made post-1998.[12] It then seems important to read films like *SFMV* and *Oldboy* not only as horror films—although we need to acknowledge horrific moments—but to see them equally as films with an enduring fidelity to class.[13] This specification by Park, to leave unresolved the boundaries of oppression through a grandiloquent narrative, speaks not to audience concerns, but to locate such tensions as they transmute into filmic fabrication. In other words, Park operates somewhere in a middle position—he is aware of more overt political films and events (Park Kwang-su's *A Single Spark*, 1996, or Kim Ki-duk's *Address Unknown*, 2001, to mass layoffs and casual workfare conditions), but he also, to borrow from Fredric Jameson's writing on postmodernism, brings "an enrichment to the older conceptualizations of bourgeois society and capitalism (that is to say, its

complex substitutions bring new contradictions usefully to the surface),” by playing with both Western and Korean aesthetic forms.[14] But this *compositional overlap*, as I shall call it, of a Korean radicalism as it relates to labor and class politically, relies on the creative renderings that place his work also on film festival circuits. He accomplishes this by fictionalizing labor and its milieux through subterfuge, artifice, and stylized violence, made memorable in both films: an exhausting and diagonally shot corridor fight sequence where twenty-odd henchmen are impaled, slashed, and punctured by the claw end of a hammer in *Oldboy*; and a killing spree in another sequence in *SFMV* where a gangster’s skull is pulverized with an aluminum baseball bat, creating a ghastly grating sound as metal eventually finds pavement through bone. Despite the charged content found in these two sequences, Park insolubly weaves this violence together with labor exploitation. In essence, these two films utilize motifs of human carnage to historicize, even revalorize labor more believably and less didactically, through arresting narratives and lurid visuals that are undeniably linked to a continuously expendable caste of workers found in Seoul.

My central emphasis will be on demarking how power structures (institutions, social class, and city space) relate to Korea’s particular form of neoliberalism, the inimical effects of which are concretized through Park’s filmic representations in *SFMV* and *Oldboy*, the first two films of his vengeance trilogy series (*Sympathy for Lady Vengeance*, released in 2005, was the final installment). These two highly successful films can be seen to admonish a reconfigured and disastrous political economy that becomes a causality in Park’s South Korea through a crisis over class and space. Lush and well crafted, they appeal to the sensibilities and tastes of audiences worldwide because of their visceral and violent noir action, or, as Jin Suh Jirn has contended elsewhere, an “IMF noir.”[15] Because gratuitous violence is now a staple in the global proliferation of film, little emphasis has been placed on Park’s films as responses to neoliberalism in what I see as embedded links with the characters’ *attitudes* (social stratification) and *architectures* (urban space) in the two films under investigation. As two startling metaphors that perpetuate such violence, what can be seen as a posturing of class and the built structure on-screen, these attitudes and architectures can be used to explore how the neoliberal project destabilizes communities in an age of “survivalist capitalism” during the unhinged 1990s and early 2000s.

PARK AS ANTI-NEOLIBERAL FILMMAKER

Park Chan-wook’s rise to international stardom and popularity beyond the Pacific Rim is a wider testament to not only New Korean cinema’s violent, psychologically unsettling, globalized, masochistic, even remasculinized temperament, something this cinema shares with the narratological

features of contemporary Hollywood from the 1990s (i.e., *Fight Club*, 1999), but it also speaks toward this cinema's affinity to critique the neoliberal political economy in South Korea. Park does so through sophisticated nonlinear storytelling that cultural theorist Rob Wilson perceives "is sublime in the technical sense, meaning it confronts traumatic and underrepresented materials haunting the Korean social system of capitalist global modernity."[16] However, with an increase in personal autonomy, much civic and artistic dialogue becomes muted for the spurious, messy, and constraining end goal of corporate capital, which accommodates the agenda of neoliberalism in South Korea. According to David Harvey and his evocation on capitalism's constraints over culture, he sees "control over information flow and over the vehicles for propagation of popular taste and culture have likewise become vital weapons in competitive struggle."[17] For example, in Park's *SFMV*, Kyu Hyun Kim misconstrues the film as being "unconcerned with the evils of capitalist exploitation," yet, on the contrary, I see this particular film constructing a narrative about this very exploitation. These victims whose "refusal (or inability) to transcend [these] subjective perspective [do not] enter into communication with one another"; this happens because of two central symptoms of neoliberalism that Kim misses: self-reliance and reserved behavior that dictate antisocial communication amongst its characters.[18] Thus, these symptoms rarely present any alternatives for its protagonists. And like the characters in Park's *SFMV*, it is no wonder that the neoliberal agenda in an actually existing institutional context has made a creative compliance to apolitical critiques like Kim's all the more prescriptive for the time. Whereas noteworthy now, due to the financial crisis in 2008, several years ago labor representation, and its agitator, neoliberalism, was not even a marginal concern in film studies. The disapproval for this (Marxian) theoretical perspective explains why little has been written on Park's labor fascination, except in a pejorative context. Another example presents itself, where South Korean film scholar Chong Song-il's tagline "Skulking Stalinism" typifies the gamut of reviews on *SFMV* appearing after the film's release in 2002. Chong's neo-formalist criticism incorrectly conflates Stalinist bureaucratic authoritarianism as a Marxist-Leninist understanding of class, a linguistic turn of phrase that does not differentiate what Stalinist regimes did to labor throughout history (from Gulag labor camps to harsh labor discipline). In other words, Chong sees Park's polemical vision in *SFMV* as less relevant in his mode of auteur criticism—instead he gives precedence to other Korean filmmakers by focusing on their use of strict aesthetic processes rather than tackling the domestic dissension and strife that is pivotal to Park's *raison d'être*. In regard to Kim and Chong's rigid sentiments, I would like to present several new critical inquiries that do not dismiss Park's socially conscious tendencies out of hand but instead embrace his films as a type of politically committed (filmic) literature.[19]

Following this logic to rethink the extreme management of the lower classes, identity also becomes an issue for other theorists working on Park's films. Joseph Jonghyun Jeon points to market entitlement over the preference and security labor once held, yet moves to focus on traumatic impulses as they pertain to contemporary South Korean identity. Taking up other scholars' work on South Korean cinema in what he calls "an allegorical pulse" in *Oldboy*, Jeon theorizes the symptoms and repression of pain in postmodern Korea.[20] Through a psychoanalytic framework, guided specifically by a Derridean notion of "residual selves," he questions "the foundations of a national imaginary and, hence, its future" after the loss of Korean Confucian capitalism during the financial troubles of the late 1990s.[21] However, Jeon's other interest is the supremacy of the once communitarian-oriented *chaebols*, eloquently positing that under new IMF measures these family-owned corporations were forced to lay off both factory workers and salarymen, "a breakdown of corporate paternalism, demonstrating . . . just how different a *chaebol* was from a family."[22]

Interestingly, these changes provided exemption for some smaller groups of neoliberal elites and their family-run *chaebols* in exchange for their compliance in the renegotiation of a harsher, more hostile environment for South Korean labor. Despite *chaebols* being mentioned at some length by leading film scholars, discussions have centered exclusively on investment practices in the Korean film industry or neoliberal cultural policies.[23] However, I wish to call attention to this condition that I label the *neoliberalization of chaebol culture* as it seeps into popular cinema from South Korea, with a focus on the appearance of the *chaebol* in both *SFMV* and *Oldboy*. One scholar who recognizes the strong neoliberal nature of *chaebols* after the financial crisis is Sonn Hochul, who avers:

> Neoliberal globalization, thus, has resulted in internal fractures within the Korean ruling bloc. In contrast to their full support of neoliberal labor policy intended to enhance labor flexibility, *chaebols* have vigorously opposed reform measures that have been targeted at them, including regulations on investment and management restructuring.[24]

Although the previous ruling bloc in South Korea was rapidly dismantled and was then quickly consolidated after mergers, acquisitions, and bankruptcies of the less 'proactive' *chaebols* to venture capital firms, the new ruling bloc that emerged was highly mobile and versed in union-busting tactics. These neoliberals advocated a transnational stance for the absolution of free market supremacy, influenced by the "Big Five" U.S. business schools (Wharton, Harvard, Stanford, Sloan, and Kellogg), whose ethos for instituting newer means of labor exploitation was the favored method in the more competitive and unforgiving globalized environment. In *Oldboy*, for instance, Lee Woo-jin, one of the central protagonists of the film and a successful venture capitalist, is found discussing hostile mergers over his mobile phone as if these

financial exchanges happen daily, unfazed by such transactions yet calculating in his role as corporate raider. Presumably, his business school training in the United States exemplifies both a Friedman-esque penchant for business dealings along with his endless access to capital due to his wealthy upbringing, which explains his large property holdings around Seoul. Guided by such themes, Park Chan-wook takes as his subject the disjuncture pitting labor and the middle classes against the elites. Lee Woo-jin can be interpreted as a callous figure in *Oldboy*, transnational in his outlook, and basking in the rhetoric of most neoliberal CEOs who came to believe in a "masters of the universe" mentality at this time.[25] Although there is some resistance to the wealthy executives in Park's films, figures like Woo-jin eventually come to subjugate the sometimes docile, sometimes ferocious, service industry worker.

SYMPATHY FOR MR. VENGEANCE

SFMV revolves around Ryu (Shin Ha-kyun), a green-haired deaf-mute laborer whose layoff from the *chaebol* firm Ilshin Electronics culminates tragically for him and the firm's nouveau riche owner, Park Dong-jin (Song Kang-ho). The film opens with a medium close-up of a female radio personality in Seoul reading a letter from a listener, a declaration of a strong work ethic by an unknown resident in Seoul. We learn it is Ryu stating in his letter: "I'm a good person . . . I'm a hard worker." (These sentiments are later challenged in the film on moral grounds.) Moving from radio studio to hospital rooftop, there is a cut to a close-up of Ryu and his terminally ill sister listening to this radio show above her patient ward where she is being treated for renal failure. The letter also reveals Ryu's selfless work ethic to pay his sister's exorbitant medical bills in Korea's skyrocketing private health-care system. The brother and sister bond is further established by the memories we hear from the radio voice-over, which complement a delicate watercolor postcard of their childhood vacation spot. A mawkish impressionistic image of a nondescript riverbed outside of Seoul, it remains one of the only joyous images in an arc of despair and estrangement throughout the entire film.

In this context, the watercolor postcard also connotes an auratic impulse for labor and for familial relationships as unique social and psychic modalities of postmodernity. If we bring in Gramsci's ideas of the organic body of labor, it relates well to the uniqueness of Park's auratic sentiments regarding the representation of the worker in his film. Indeed, the laborer and their livelihood to Park is a heterogeneous thing, posited as such through the example of Ryu and his sister in *SFMV*, working-class figures that embody one of the multitude of stories in the global proletarian class in East Asia. In other words, what Gramsci saw as a "human community within which the working class constitute itself as a specific organic body" speaks to familial support in the social sphere, something Park is interested in developing (and tearing down) in *SFMV*.[26]

Put another way, the labor classes for Gramsci were comprised of men united by their commonalities, through which their goal was either the production of goods or the regulation of these goods that determined and conceptualized their pecking order in public life. Whereas the laborer for Park is also an organic thing—organized around his or her physical toil that then produces a commodity object—he also sees the laborer at the service of market. Yet Park constructs his laborer cinematically as one susceptible to pain, devaluation, and, to echo Marx, "abstraction," which I will illustrate in the coming paragraphs.[27]

Eventually put in a state of constant decomposition because of the corruption and exploitation of capitalist policies, this watercolor postcard resonates on-screen as a kitschy portrait of society that does not exist in neoliberal Seoul, and is nothing more than material abstraction, meaningless except to Ryu. Nonetheless, Ryu's sentimental gesture in sending the watercolor postcard to the radio station keeps his sister's morale up (she even weeps), an early example of his unwavering commitment to her unlikely rehabilitation. Preceding this introductory sequence, we learn of her release from the hospital due to unpaid kidney treatment, and she spends her nights writhing in agony on their cramped living room floor in Seoul. Days after Ryu's sister's release he is in search of a donor with the proper blood type for a transfusion and kidney transplant. Unexpectedly, however, he is laid off from the electronics firm where he works as a metal founder. Despondent and unskilled in other trades (although it is revealed that he dropped out of art school to care for his sister), Ryu comes across, while wandering Seoul, a fly poster advertising organs for sale. He decides to sell his own kidney in exchange for a match with his sister's, enlisting the dubious services of black-market medical financiers. At a clandestine meeting in a semi-demolished building shot in semi-silhouette as Ryu and two thugs ascend the stairs of a wall-less building, he agrees to the open-air surgery.

After the operation and waking from the anesthesia with one missing kidney, he finds himself the victim of organ-selling pimps. This scene represents the real-life practice of organs circulating as a medical commodity in the Pacific Rim, a brand of neoliberal price gouging wherein the endgame is selling Ryu's kidney to the highest bidder. Black-market organ selling should also be seen as a consequence of skyrocketing health care in South Korea, where the marketization of individual patient care has become an institutional norm. This has made possible, to cite Rob Wilson, "a system in which body parts like kidneys and hearts become commodities for which one either pays or else dies."[28] Similarly, labor in *SFMV* is much like the organ selling market, too, as it becomes a cheap commodity for the elite to buy and sell. The film goes on to develop this notion where Ryu and his compatriots are nothing more than disposable producers of goods, organ harvesters or 'fall guys' for complex traumas that relate back to capitalism's unequal social determinism on class through its economic development in the region.

Returning to the film, Ryu, desperate after losing both his kidney and his ten thousand won of severance pay to the organ traffickers, brainstorms with

his leftist girlfriend, Yeong-mi (Bae Doona), and then begrudgingly scheme to kidnap his ex-boss's daughter, Yu-sin. They rationalize this decision in the hopes of saving his sister with the ransom money that Dong-jin will pay for his daughter's safe return. But after the successful abduction of Yu-sin, Ryu's sister learns of his termination at Ilshin Electronics, finding the pink slip in his pocket. She then commits suicide, guilty and despondent that Ryu would perpetrate such an unspeakable act, and understanding that she is his financial burden. Gripped with anguish after finding his sister's bloodless body in the bathtub, Ryu travels outside of Seoul to bury her by their childhood vacation spot brought to life filmically by Ryu's watercolor postcard from the opening of the film. The delicate watercolor is now a neoliberal burial ground, the earlier image transformed into a garish and jarring visual epitaph. Both film image and watercolor postcard become sites of misery, trauma, and death.

Bored and then accosted by a vagrant wanderer while she tries to sleep in Ryu's car, Yu-sin runs in a panic from the disturbed man toward Ryu, where she slips and drowns in the mountain stream. The grief-stricken Ryu, busy burying his sister, never hears her screams for help as she floats by in the river. Following the death of his daughter, Yu-sin, Dong-jin hunts down Ryu and his anarchist girlfriend. Finding her first, at home in her apartment, Dong-jin ties her to a chair and tortures her through electrical shocks to the head, killing her in reprisal for his daughter's death. By the end of the film Ryu has been caught by Dong-jin after a deadly game of cat and mouse. Slashing his ankles and bleeding him to death in the same river where his daughter drowned, Dong-jin then dismembers him onshore. But shortly, Yeong-mi's radical group finds Dong-jin and, in retribution for Yeong-mi's murder, stab him viciously to death. *SFMV* thus concludes with all of its characters succumbing to fatal and calculative exploitation under neoliberal restructuring, forcing many actions otherwise unthinkable in more equitable times. We learn, for example, that Dong's *chaebol* firm was sold off—presumably to a stronger conglomerate *chaebol*. No doubt as ceaseless accumulation suspends time, mourning, loyalty, familial and emotional ties, neoliberalism remains the only stable variable in Park's storytelling, a capricious thing that I will examine in more detail in the following sections.

CLOSE ANALYSIS OF SFMV

Park Chan-wook's ability to meticulously mine the effects of neoliberalism on South Korean society is uncanny. Out of his troubling images comes sociocultural meaning, often producing less trenchant class criticism than one would expect. For example, in one striking scene in *SFMV*, a newly redundant welder named Peng throws himself in front of his ex-boss Dong-jin's SUV; the incident occurs as Dong-jin is on his way back with his daughter and colleagues from lunch at the American chain restaurant T.G.I. Friday's. Dong-jin leaps out to see who he has struck and

finds Peng clutching his right leg. Dragging himself out from underneath the SUV, now several meters down the residential road dotted with Western-style McMansions, Peng proclaims his terrible luck since his layoff: "My wife ran off. And my kids are starving." There is a palpable uncertainty as to what he will do next. Disheveled, he pulls something from his coat, throws down his union fatigue jacket, and lifts his white T-shirt (see Figures 11.1 and 11.2). He then begins mutilating his body by carving ceremoniously into his midriff with a box cutter. Dong-jin and his *chaebol* partner initially watch in disbelief, then horror, until finally running to grapple with Peng over the box cutter as the self-mutilation continues to take place. But this action seems more out of self-preservation for Dong-jin's daughter and his colleague's wife and child than for restraining his ex-employee from doing any further bodily harm.

Figure 11.1 The proletariat Jing confronts his *chaebol* boss Dong-jin with a box cutter, demanding an explanation for his recent termination.

Figure 11.2 Learning he will not be re-hired, Jing maims himself with the box cutter as a symbolic and sadistic gesture of his own despondent state.

This scene is shot from the point of view of Ryu, also recently laid off, who is waiting in a nearby car and plotting the kidnapping of Dong-jin's daughter with his girlfriend, Yeong-mi. A long shot positions Ryu in such a way that the viewer does not empathize with this act of physical desecration by the laborer but instead as questioning whether their kidnapping plan will work with all this sudden attention brought by Peng. In many ways, this scene finds a corollary with Gramsci's description of the turbulent time in Italian history, after the Great War, when workers started to become an indifferent mass, often resorting to violence and crime. These workers lacked a "clarity and precision to form a workers' consciousness" when social movements at this time were weakened by capitalist consolidation of factories and worker sentiments for equality waned.[29] In similar ways, the contemporary workforce of Park's neoliberal Seoul lacks the clarity and stamina to counter, or at the very least ability to challenge, the IMF's restructuring. In the neoliberal present of Park's South Korea, work is taken away and its employees are forced to pursue individualistic labor production, or more crudely, predatory action to attain and produce their own brand of capital (child abduction in this case, leading to monetary ransom).

To enable looking at this sequence as a class differential, between the hegemon (Dong-jin) and the consenter (Peng), Gramsci surmises a universal-type treatment of the worker under different capitalist conditions in the early twentieth century, "where the worker is nothing and wants to become everything, where the power of the proprietor is boundless, where the proprietor has power of life and death over the worker and his wife and children."[30] Peng represents this Gramscian notion in the mutilation scene where his corporeal self, his actual flesh, is at the disposal of the capitalist, Dong-jin. Aware of Peng's specialized skills on the shop floor, yet unbothered by his use value, Dong-jin predetermines this sort of reaction: Peng turns to a sacrificial gesture to reassert his loyalty and labor value. However, Dong-jin is resolute in his decision to cut Peng form his *chaebol* organization.

Here, Park also highlights the sharp division neoliberalism creates, using costumes to show such disproportionate prosperity (avoiding direct ideological alignment with the worker). He creates the "boundless power of the proprietor" in an action that is reinforced by attire. Dong-jin is presented in the diegesis as driving a new Korean-built Ssangyong SUV; he wears designer clothing and Oakley sunglasses; eats at expensive American chain restaurants; buys his preschool-age daughter a mobile phone, talking doll, and fashionable dresses; lives in a contemporary-style home in Seoul; and owns a once successful company. Peng wears the clothing he works in daily; does not drive but rather uses public transportation; provides the bare essentials for his children; and lives in a squalid, ramshackle, two-room shack on the southeastern periphery of Seoul known as Bongcheeon district (or more dubiously 'Pig Village,' "jammed between a high-rise development and an expressway . . . [and] home to about 3,500 people"[31]). This temporary housing site operates in the film as another class differential, where after Dong-jin's daughter is kidnapped

he searches out the obvious suspect, Peng, there, only to find he and his family poisoned in their filthy surroundings. Important to the narrative, and in accordance with Park's social criticism, the dwelling becomes another means to measure survival and economic supremacy in the faltering Tiger Market.

Finally, this mutilation sequence in Park's film is remarkably politically conscious without being didactic. In many ways, labor in *SFMV* begins to cooperate in its own demise. Yet these expressions of neoliberalism's effects on the working classes in South Korea are what others have called a distinguishable "allegorical gesture . . . [which] turns politically loaded cinematic motifs into signs that are intelligible without an understanding of their historical and cultural contexts."[32] The desperate move on the laborer's part illustrates his loyalty to the *chaebol* firm, but his audacity is ultimately an act of ill-fated retribution for his redundancy. In a guttural tone, Peng screams out: "I gave my youth to Ilshin Electronics." His pride in his nearly perfect error rate as a metal welder ("only .008 were faulty goods") and at not having taken a sick day in six years points to a different economic time, before post-IMF Korea. Although Peng's remarks further illustrate his mastery of his trade, they also concretize Korea's disregard for skilled workers in this climate of economic consolidation. Hence, this disturbingly competitive environment also signals the desperation of the worker to remain employed at this time in South Korea.

In another crucial and plot-changing scene we see Ryu exerting pure energy on the shop floor of Ilshin Electronics (see Figures 11.3 and 11.4). This sweaty and tactile scene corresponds to Ryu's daily routine: he is responsible for the continuous molding of metal brackets, labor that is painful to watch because of its banality and maddening repetitiveness. However, Park here also structures a visually dense and mesmerizing mise-en-scène that pays homage to the simplicity and physical strength this type of material work requires. Shot in a mostly muted and washed-out color palette outside of the factory, inside the factory we find a scene awash in deep colors from the white-hot orange-yellow flame from the opened furnace to the sweaty and blanched workers' bodies that shuffle around the shop floor. Against these brilliant and saturated warm colors, Park contrasts the deep umbers of the factory walls, grayish concrete furnaces, and olive-colored machinery, masculine imagery undoubtedly in line with a proletarian-style mise-en-scène.

There is then a medium close-up of a toned and slightly gaunt Ryu, who stands in front of a metalworks furnace and guides hundreds of amber, glowing, molten metal pieces into a waiting wheelbarrow. He then transports this white-hot aluminum across the factory floor, where it is cooled in a water basin, taking on its eventual hardened form. Presumably, this activity is repeated dozens, possibly hundreds, of times in a given shift by Ryu. From here, this action then abruptly cuts to the firm's office block, which is composed in lifeless opposition: an administrative wing filled with cubicles, pale and colorless office furniture, and staff wearing indistinguishable blue and gray suits. Park adds to the generally sterile look of the office—arranged in a visually acute way—how these two different spaces

Figure 11.3 Ryu labors arduously on the factory floor to support himself and his ailing sister.

Figure 11.4 The victim of downsizing right before the firm's financial collapse, management pitilessly sacks Ryu, taking the neoliberal stance: management first.

create a dialectical image. Park's use of the office is in striking aesthetic and material opposition to the shop floor; its vapid corporate operation lacks the intensity of the material-based work and what Gramsci would consider "organic structures of production."[33]

Park's purposeful juxtaposition and contiguous editing of these two scenes enables the audience to sympathize with Ryu as he learns of his termination, instantly changing his livelihood from ceaseless material toil on the shop floor to inert unemployment (and later to criminal behavior, unspeakable violence, corruption, and finally homicide). Again, Gramsci's thoughts reveal a process of capitalist social reality in relation to this scene: "The worker is, then, naturally strong within the factory, concentrated and organized within the factory. Outside the factory, in contrast, he is isolated, weak and out on a limb."[34] One could interpret Ryu as a contemporized Gramsci laborer—indeed out on a limb—whereby this scene chimes with the privatization of human interest that is geared toward a survival of the fittest amongst firms as well as human beings in Seoul. A fictional scenario where labor is victim to market forces and unattainable profitability that could have just as easily taken place in Turin or Rome in the 1920s under another variation of capitalism. Moreover, this scene connotes in a powerful way the dialectical image as historically timeless, a cinematic technique that decodes and deconstructs various modalities of the world market in Seoul and elsewhere, and a filmic technique Park returns to often.

In other words, Park in this film fabricates much of the real-world issues surrounding neoliberalism in South Korea, structuring an aggressive and unforgiving filmic space that is miserable, claustrophobic, and dystopic but by "no means a postmodern nihilist" diatribe on unmotivated sadism in an age of neoliberal peril as some have accused.[35] This expendable public sphere, as represented in this scene through Ryu's termination, could be said to mirror the attitudes that management shows toward labor more generally. Terms like *synergy*, *downsizing*, and *consolidation of labor* can easily be applied to this scene as the disregard by management in this context adopts a calculated business school ethic, a neoliberal attitude to labor, finding these proletarian classes uncivilized and ultimately noncompatible instruments in a firm's bottom-line agenda. Yet even at an almost primal level, this scene, through its deliberate and corporatized mise-en-scène, equates a stolid mind-set and space; suggesting that human compassion is concealed for the illusory sense of profitability in the newly managed *chaebols* like the one seen here in *SFMV*.

Such an attitude is only compounded as the unnamed manager is rushed off to an off-site lunch, utterly unconcerned with his firm's decision to lay off Ryu and what he will do next. In this respect, neoliberalism's erasure of social safety nets in South Korea is thus magnificently composed in this sequence. Alluding to the dubious and "inadequate" welfare system, widespread unemployment, and unraveling social fabric suggests that, in economic terms, the free market has transformed Korean citizens into what Hsuan Hsu calls "disposable people."[36] These neoliberal attitudes come to devalue a Confucian lifestyle as seen through the more sadistic actions of these central characters.[37] Yet, by the end of the film, we learn that it is both management and labor that pay the price, losing loved ones to neoliberalism's harsh economic imperatives that cyclically determine the gruesome

fates for all of Park's characters (by suicide, drowning, electrocution, dismemberment, and ordered execution).

OLDBOY

In *Oldboy* one finds something more financially insidious. The film builds on a complex narrative, centering in a structural (though not necessarily visual or narratival) way on elite technocrat Lee Woo-jin (Jitae Yu) and his unflinching power in neoliberal Seoul. Woo-jin is a character that can be seen as "venal, grasping and perverse," to echo Gramsci, and he is determined not to direct all of his energy to achieving economic success, which he already has plenty of, presumably through his *chaebol* family connections. Rather he is dually motivated by revenge.[38] The social and psychic control he wields, in the way of a fifteen-year-long imprisonment imposed on his target, petit bourgeois class member Oh Dae-su (Choi Min-sik), only tangentially connects to Dae-su's high school rumor that Woo-jin and his sister Soo-ha were incestuous lovers. Dae-su, through a flashback near the end of the film, is reminded of the sexual liaison between these two siblings, peering through a cracked windowpane, finding them in a tender yet compromising embrace.

Putting the blame on Dae-su for his beloved sister's suicide, Woo-jin's vengeful plan moves beyond the civilian garrison where Dae-su must toil away his time: keeping detailed journals of all the people he had scorned and dishonored in his lifetime, training himself as a competent fighter through shadowboxing, while digging a continuous hole in the cell/room's wall with a metal chopstick mistakenly included (or perhaps given) in one of his daily dumpling meals. This intellectual and physical work occupies one-half of a split screen in this particular sequence where a series of images from the television are juxtaposed with Dae-su's busywork in his cell-like room. The images on the right of the screen follow the temporality of the Korean present tenseness and its spectacular contemporary history, all over a decade and a half of forced detention. One finds a televisual reel of political and cultural development next to national scandals and the always elusive reconciliation with North Korea. Here, one could observe Dae-su's countless hours of televisual consumption as both disparaging as well as enlightening. Park uses this dialectical strategy to deploy an artificial sociohistorical reality, differing significantly from *SFMV*. This artificiality creates a parallel split screen for viewers—on the left of the frame a temporal 'real' reality of Dae-su's lived experience in forced confinement (physical toil through his training and digging through the wall and material production in the form of *his* diaries of personal history)—whereas on the right of the frame there is an appropriated construction of a linear breaking news template from South Korean media (where scrolling images of Korean political corruption to the 1997 handover of Hong Kong to China to the death of Princess Diana and, most importantly, the IMF bailout are chronologically displayed). Here,

television serves as a mode of distraction given to Dae-su by his captors, which also reminds him of his seemingly unending incarceration. But this split screen image also structures the “where and now” of South Korea, part of a spectral world with its own cells and walls that demand, much like Dae-su’s forced personal re-historicalization of his past—why he (and South Korea) might be forced into this current state of subservience. This can be read metaphorically as South Korea’s fragile economic recitation by larger global hegemons, mainly the IMF and U.S. investment and capital, which is just as important to think about as the local hegemons or wealthy neoliberals and the *chaebols* that also ratified South Korea’s historical trajectory. These intangible and tangible “glocal” forces require a careful historical reexamination, in and outside of Park’s diegesis.

Following this dialectical sequence, Dae-su is released from the private penitentiary, where, due to his hypnosis, he begins, unknowingly, an incestuous relationship with his long-lost daughter, who he finds working in a Sushi restaurant (this reunion is prompted by Woo-jin). Incest as a trope is handled by Park to equate a perversity and dissipation of familial values and patriarchal society spawned by a new set of neoliberal values, i.e., the victimization of others, lack of communal respect, and absurd self-motivation above the complex networks of capitalist classes. Hyangjin Lee, in her appraisal of *Oldboy*, sees the undercurrent of sexual perversion as a moral ambivalence towards incest that:

> radically critiques Confucian patriarchal society, while connecting this critique back to antagonistic capitalist economic classes. The moral dilemmas faced by Woo-jin and Dae-su over their incestuous relationships are resolved in completely opposite ways. Woo-jin, the rich boy, abetted his sister’s suicide and escaped to America, setting up Dae-su as a scapegoat to relieve his sense of guilt.[39]

By successfully facilitating Dae-su and his daughter’s sexual encounter, Woo-jin (also in his position of economic supremacy) shapes the lives of the people beneath him: he pays for the civilian prison where Dae-su is held, leaves money and clothes on his release, while also paying for his daughter’s upbringing and education in Dae-su’s absence. If Ryu in *SFMV* is the prototypical working-class Korean male, Dae-su in *Oldboy* embodies the other class hampered by immaterial labor and socioeconomic disadvantage, an easy target given his drunkenness, general bourgeois malaise, and reprehensible behavior as a salaryman. These social traits play savagely into Woo-jin’s planned revenge. The cyclical effect on the bourgeois males in Park’s fictional Seoul echo Gramsci’s thoughts in many ways with his very same fascination with class, where: “Human society is undergoing an extremely rapid process of decomposition, corresponding to the process of dissolution of the bourgeois State.”[40] Because of this deterioration and an expendable middle class under neoliberal

globalization, new spaces for such exploitation occurred in Italy, according to Gramsci, but can also be found in Park's *Oldboy*.

Control is also key to *Oldboy*'s narratological development. And to bring Gramsci back into the discussion, I believe his work on state power, particularly the role that police played, is vital to understanding Italy during the 1920s. In this period, they adopted disreputable practices to suppress worker solidarity and revolt—through brutal force, infiltration of union organizations, disinformation, and general arrest. Whereas in Park's contemporary South Korea, Woo-jin utilizes similar yet more technically advanced tactics to achieve authority. Driven by a warped reprisal to clear his own guilty conscience, Woo-jin masters several hegemonic modes of suppression. One can trace these modes of surveillance where Dae-su's seemingly autonomous search for his captor is never out of Woo-jin's grid of discipline. Dae-su is followed by for-hire neoliberal gangsters who perform various stakeouts of his movements around wider Seoul: Dae-su has his Internet browsing monitored, is gassed with his daughter in a hotel room (appraised gleefully by Woo-jin), and eventually discovers a bug in the heel of his shoe, all clandestine forms of surveillance and eventual sublimation to Woo-jin's scrutiny and social jurisdiction.

This discussion of surveillance leads me to my discussion of architectural forms. In other words, *Oldboy*'s mise-en-scène explores topography, in particular interior space, as essential to conceptualizing neoliberalism. Saskia Sassen has developed this notion elsewhere, finding that convergent modes of control discriminate different, usually lower-class urbanites. Sassen finds that "the interaction between topographic representations of fragments and the existence of underlying interconnections assumes a very different form: what presents itself as segregated or excluded from the mainstream core of the city is actually in increasingly complex interactions with other similarly segregated sectors in other cities."[41] Ultimately, *Oldboy* comes to expose the logic of social stratification and urban transformation via architectural mapping. Here, both tenets—class stratification and urban change—are thus analogous to the contradictions that neoliberalism urbanism has brought to South Korean society. The real and fictional cramped and jumbled city blocks of Seoul are what make such sectioning off of these different classes of society possible. Through Park's interest in urban architectural space, the cityscape as a trope comes to display how Seoul has transformed in the post–Tiger Market neoliberal epoch, shared by geographers, who, like Park, have found that the:

> propagation of neoliberal discourses, policies, and subjectivities is argued to have given rise to neoliberal urbanism. The neoliberal city is conceptualized first as an entrepreneurial city, directing all its energies to achieving economic success in competition with other cities for investments, innovations, and "creative classes."[42]

Whereas many global communities experience such similar urban regeneration at the hands of neoliberalism, South Korea remains at the top of the list in terms of socioeconomic and physical changes to its urban fabric. Urban planning scholar Mike Douglass has argued that "missing from the neoliberal city [of Seoul] are unscripted public spaces, place—making by residents and their neighborhoods . . . lower income populations, and participatory planning."[43] He continues to see that despite the ideology of the private sector much public space has become a target for rezoning or worse. For example, because of the national financial crisis, families or family members were often forced onto the streets or pushed to districts like Bongcheeon as jobs became increasingly scarce. In Jesook Song's fieldwork in Seoul, she characterizes different types of homelessness: females, families, individuals. In essence, she posits that during the Asian debt crisis females were no longer the "needy" subjects, whereas the "deserving" subjects, mostly out of work men, had been given preference "with the potential of returning to or creating normative families."[44] The oftentimes indiscernible victims became what Song calls invisible homeless women. Thus if neoliberalism indoctrinates these destructive and cutthroat social realities as it deterrorializes the metropolitan milieu, who or what imposes, even fortifies, such a reality?

In filmic terms, the neoliberal architectures of Seoul becomes a topographic chessboard where Woo-jin allows his opponent Dae-su to discover and mobilize his own revenge. Park's cinematic imagery is conceptualized through smooth, almost styleless residential and commercial buildings that adorn Seoul, or "apartment city" as it is locally nicknamed. As if keeping some of the Eastern-European style, albeit socialist layer-cake designs, Seoul has contemporized its urban milieu with postmodern vertical designs that Park uses in his mise-en-scène: one finds concrete replacing brick, tablets of colored glass replacing plastic or wooden window frames, and dark, drab exterior surfaces give way to more ornate building materials (light metallic skins and corporate logos for transnational banks, city bars and Korean characters in nonresidential areas that keep some of the provincial and vernacular customs intact). Architectural surroundings to Park are built spaces that buttress various stages of postindustrial power in Seoul's neoliberal present. Therefore, we must also consider, through built spaces, access to both dilapidated and meticulously refined architectural surroundings that are repressive and powerful metaphors in Park's filmmaking. In other words, these dwellings and domains come to expose the burden of continuous economic adjustment in Seoul.

Put another way, Park deals with architectural space and its relation to neoliberal urbanization in an observant and resourceful way. My brief close analysis will focus on the final sequence in Woo-jin's penthouse apartment. In this scene, we find Dae-su, in a fit of rage after being

taunted by Woo-jin, charge his nemesis, only to be confronted by Mr. Han, a gifted opponent with superior martial arts training. In a complicated series of shots, Park uses a "bird's-eye view" of the exterior of the penthouse, eventually panning in on this violent scene of grappling, choke holds, and deflected bodies. Moving from an exterior, omnipresent position between residential high-rises and corporate tower blocks to a hovering tracking shot that penetrates through the penthouse floor-to-ceiling windows, the shot eventually returns to a pan of Dae-su, who, in battle with Woo-jin's bodyguard, rests momentarily in the cavernous space of the penthouse. It is here that violence comes to parallel the effects of neoliberalism on society as the two jockey for position in the elite and often clandestine flows of power (both capital and psychic) that Woo-jin holds over Oh Dae-su and his employed bodyguard. Here the hegemony of the neoliberal's prowess echoes this minimalist, albeit concrete, architectural form. The cosmopolitan space of this penthouse apartment, much like Woo-jin himself, is stoic and purposeful, altering the destiny of Oh Dae-su while also allowing him to navigate the spatial confines of the museum-like apartment.[45] In many ways, the filmic tableau of the penthouse is equally haunting in a visual sense. Based on an atmospheric and corporatized cosmopolitanism, e.g., airy tech-tonics and colored plate glass windows, smooth gray concrete interiors that are reminiscent of Louis Kahn's minimalist architectural designs, running-water installations in the floor (lit green from below), along with a mechanized monolith wardrobe that splits open into four sleek forms to reveal Woo-jin's impeccable collection of clothing, these objects, ornate and immaculate in reference, show the material wealth of Park's neoliberal elite. Yet this also points to the vacuous nature of neoliberal spaces only transposed, momentarily by personal affects (photographs by Woo-jin). When scrutinized further, these vintage photographs and nineteenth-century camera equipment appear as a referent to forms of historical documentation, mawkish and formalistic, what I see as clever reminders by Park to the falsity of the image as truth-object. Equally, these images hung about the polished cement act as commemorative keepsakes and snapshots of loved ones, which simultaneously equate forms of leverage that inflicts new and continuous forms of trauma (Dae-su finds his lover is actually his daughter, presented to him in a chronological photo album documenting her upbringing since birth; whereas Woo-jin uses his sister's memory, drawn from aging photographs, to justify his vicious plan and as personal leverage to keep his suicidal thoughts at bay until he ultimately takes his own life). In essence, we see this ensnared reality of neoliberal urbanization in the confines of such empty architectural space, a larger placeholder, much like the photographs themselves for understanding the commodified experiences of contemptible human behavior and numbing personal loss, all emotional histories that become surplus experiences under neoliberalism.

NOTES

1. See Marcia Landy's Film, Politics, and Gramsci.
2. For example, South Korea's continuous rupture with material labor is sometimes trivialized in its mainstream media. It is quite common that labor is chastised for being unable to cope with economic change or accused of trying to impede Korea's progress.
3. Dae-oup Chang, 2001, p. 199.
4. Ibid., p. 198.
5. See http://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/countries_e/korea_republic_e.htm.
6. With regard to the Korean War, see Bruce Cummings, 2009. On corruption, see, for example, S. Haggard and J. Mo, 2000.
7. Chang, 2001, p. 191.
8. Labor as subject in Park's films parallels many of the real-life struggles for the Korean worker. For instance, the union uprising in 1987 to a decade later where, in 1997, Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU or Minju-nochong) successfully launched the first general strike in Korean history. According to labor sociologist Hagen Koo, "The strike mobilized some three million workers and shut down production in the automobile, ship building and other major industries. This was a move against the Kim Young Sam government, who planned to legalize layoffs in such a way as to enable Korean capitalists to introduce neoliberal flexible labor strategies" (Hochul 2007, pp. 163–96). From this strike, temporary gains were made for the workers and the KCTU.
9. Hyangjin Lee, 2006, p. 182. For more information on the Tiger Market crash, see CRS Report for Congress, "The 1997–98 Asian Financial Crisis" at http://www.fas.org/man/crs/crs-asia2.htm; or PBS Online NewsHour, "A Wounded Asian Tiger" at http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/asia/july-dec97/skorea_12-4.html. See also the World Socialist website, "Daewoo Collapse Threatens Further Financial Crisis in South Korea" at http://www.wsws.org/articles/1999/oct1999/kor-o08.shtml.
10. Sonn Hochul, 2007, p. 209.
11. Ibid., p. 205.
12. Ibid, pp. 209–210.
13. See Jinhee Choi and Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano, 2009.
14. Fredric Jameson, 2009, p. 98.
15. Rob Wilson cites the use of IMF-noir as a generic formulation by Jin Suh Jirn, who is working on his doctoral dissertation at the University of California at Santa Cruz.
16. Rob Wilson, 2007, p. 123.
17. David Harvey, 1990, p. 160.
18. Kyu-Hyun Kim, 2005, p. 115.
19. Kyu-Hyun Kim quoting Chong Song-il, 2005, p. 113.
20. Joseph Jonghyun Jeon, 2009, pp. 714–715.
21. Ibid., pp. 718–719.
22. Ibid., p. 720.
23. See Doobo Shim, 2006; Darcy Paquet, 2005. For political economy of cinema and media, see Yong Jin Dal, 2006.
24. Hochul, 2007, p. 206.
25. This colloquial saying is common in Wall Street for those men that control the market control the world.
26. Antonio Gramsci, 1994, pp. 166–167.
27. Karl Marx, 1990, pp. 54–85.
28. Wilson, 2007, p. 125.
29. Gramsci, 1994, p. 130.

30. Ibid., p. 164.
31. See http://www.newint.org/issue263/pig.htm.
32. Eunsun Cho, 2009.
33. Gramsci, 1994, p. 175.
34. Ibid., p. 252.
35. Wilson, 2007, p. 124.
36. Hsuan Hsu, 2009.
37. However, these actions are never provoked for psychic reasons alone (with exception to the black marketers who rape and kill for money and for fun), largely because they disregard emotional resonance in order simply to stay alive.
38. Gramsci, 1994, p. 151.
39. Lee, 2009, p. 130.
40. Gramsci, 1994, p. 105.
41. Saskia Sassen, 2003, p. 25.
42. Helga Leitner, Jamie Peck, and Eric Sheppard, 2007, p. 4.
43. Mike Douglass, 2008, p. 8.
44. Jesook Song, 2006.
45. We see this more generally throughout the film, where Woo-jin seems not to infringe on Oh Dae-su's supposed rational choice. Rational choice inflects the totality of the neoliberal market in this context. Ultimately, the sites of architecture in Oldboy, some cosmopolitan, some not, work to zone off and cyclicalize Oh Dae-su to participant in disadvantaged groups and locations that are in the end governed by Woo-jin himself.

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12 Mainlandization and Neoliberalism with Postcolonial and Chinese Characteristics

Challenges for the Hong Kong Film Industry

Mirana M. Szeto and Yun-chung Chen

In face of intensifying neoliberal global economic crises and the antecedent imposition of structural adjustments, the commodification of culture into cultural industries and cultural capital has become a major policy tool for postindustrial city renaissance and global city competition. The recent transformations in the Hong Kong film industry is a part of this larger picture. This chapter tries to analyze the recent decline and seeming revival of the Hong Kong film industry as a unique process of transition and adaptation, from the conditions of colonial laissez-faire policy before the 1997 return to Chinese sovereignty, to the conditions of neoliberal governance today, albeit with postcolonial and Chinese characteristics. We will show how Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty in 1997 and its geo-cultural proximity to China complicate its postcolonial condition and its relation to the regional and global film industry, which is a unique situation difficult for the outside world to understand. Rather than celebrating the recent neoliberal "revival" of the Hong Kong film industry as an effect of the rise of China, with all its implications of nationalist euphoria, our fieldwork results caution about the human and cultural costs as well as long-term implications of this neoliberal structural adjustment.

The Hong Kong film industry, owing to a complex set of geo-historical conditions, had been able to dominate Chinese-speaking cinemas in the Asia-Pacific region up until the mid-1990s, when the rise of Chinese, Korean, Thai, and other Asian cinemas began to challenge its regional prominence.[1] Hong Kong film production peaked in the early 1990s, producing over two hundred feature films per year (peaking at 242 in 1993), employing over fifteen thousand people, and taking up 79 percent of the gross local film market. However, with the end of the Cold War in 1989, the end of Martial Law (and thus the beginning of freedom of expression) in Taiwan in 1988, the transfer of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, and the entry of China into the WTO in 2001, the conditions protecting Hong Kong film from regional and global competition were eroded. In addition, competition from other forms of media entertainment and pandemic piracy on intellectual property further eroded the small but once reliable local market for Hong Kong cinema, making its sustainability suddenly precarious. By

2008, the local market share of Hong Kong films had plummeted to 25 percent. Its overseas revenue fell from an apex of HK$1.86 billion in 1992 to a mere HK$252 million in 1998, representing an 85 percent fall. In 2007, only fifty local films were released.[2] The actual figure, as an experienced producer and director told us, was even worse.[3]

This seemingly drastic decline of the Hong Kong film industry has to be contextualized. Rather than relying simply on trade and profit figures from the perspective of investors who consider culture no more than a commodity, we wanted to consider this decline both from the perspective of local cultural identity and creativity as well as the experience of those who labor in the culture industry. In other words, we want to foreground the perspectives of industry practitioners about their artistic expression and working conditions.

The change in working conditions has, indeed, been rapid and drastic. In the early 1990s, Hong Kong produced nearly 250 films a year, a process that Michael Curtin has characterized as a virulent "hyperproduction" that led to declining production quality and overseas demand.[4] Once the return of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty was announced in 1984, the industry plunged into a frenzy of production, seeking to cash in domestic and regional capital before the return in 1997. The process was aided by an increased diversification of platforms (VHS, VCD, DVD, satellite and cable television), which allowed distributors to make a lot more money from video rights than before, thus pushing up the price for regional presale bids and increasing the demand for production (Curtin 2007, pp. 68–70). This frenzied opportunism encouraged producers and talents to hyperproduce at the expense of quality, and to tailor casting and production elements to formulaic distributor considerations rather than to audience satisfaction and artistic excellence. Profits attracted intensified triad involvement,[5] leading to poor production conditions (ibid., pp. 70–74). In 1993, 242 movies were screened as opposed to the usual 120 to 130. The shorter runs clogged the market, and the abundance of poor-quality films crowded out the good ones, making it hard for any film to build its reputation through word of mouth, and making it difficult for the audience to tell the good films from the bad ones. Frustrated theatergoers became reluctant. This was exacerbated by home distribution and rampant piracy, leading to box-office slumps both local and regional (ibid., pp. 74–75, 79). The Asian economic crisis of 1997 further decimated regional markets.[6] As one producer-director noted, a "third of our labor were cut off, a third of our products gone."[7] The career of everyone in the industry seemed vulnerable, both in terms of the pressures against quality production and the disappearance of jobs.

Although Hong Kong film history can be read as a constant process of restructuring in face of regional and global cultural, political, and economic challenges, this does not alleviate the anxieties of the present "structural adjustment." In face of this crisis, while making policy adjustments of its own, the pro-business Hong Kong government also interceded with the Chinese

government to intervene and help with the crisis by formulating specific policies relevant to the Hong Kong film industry. What are the resulting policy interventions and in what sense are they neoliberal? How is the Hong Kong film industry restructuring in response to the changing local and national policies and the shifting cultural dynamics of diverse local and foreign audiences? In what sense is this restructuring a neoliberal process?

"ACTUALLY EXISTING NEOLIBERALISM"[8] WITH POSTCOLONIAL AND CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS

The Hong Kong government wants to intervene in support of the film industry not only because of pressure from industry leaders. This alone would not have worked to persuade this government to give up its "adherence to laissez-faire," repackaged as "positive non-intervention" in the 1970s and "maximum support, minimum intervention" in the 1990s.[9] In Hong Kong, governance was carried out without the people's mandate through universal suffrage, whether before or after the change of sovereignty. Thus, the government has relied on the cornerstone laissez-faire policy to produce "acceptable boundaries between public and private interests within a political system that was based on a partnership between colonialism and capitalism" (Goodstadt 2005, p. 13). This policy allows the government to project a façade of impartiality while committing to low taxes, small government, market deregulation, and the continuation of monopolistic practices at the same time. Thus time and again, it has steadfastly allowed ailing "industries and entire sectors of the economy" "to wither unaided" and without "subsidies."[10] Why would this colonial-capitalist state start to positively intervene into the market in the postcolonial era?[11]

In fact, the preceding outline of Hong Kong's "laissez-faire" policy already shows how colonial Hong Kong has long been operating on a logic similar to neoliberalism. Ironically, while Britain and "the rest of the world moved in the opposite direction" after WWII, the Hong Kong colonial administration embraced "laissez-faire" "with renewed fervor" as "the principle of non-intervention" (Goodstadt 2005, p. 119). Thus, unlike most Western democracies, neoliberalization in Hong Kong is less about the "rollback"[12] of Keynesian policies than the intensification of already existing colonial policies. If "neoliberalism is not really a regime of unregulated capital but rather a form of state regulation that best facilitates the global movements and profit of capital,"[13] then much of Hong Kong's actually existing colonial policies that have survived into the postcolonial present could have been understood as neoliberalism. The actual policy practice has been the hands-on provision of minimal social welfare, like using public housing as a social wage to subsidize capital by keeping wages low, and hands-off market regulation whenever possible. Hong Kong has also avoided Western-style welfare state policies, intervening only minimally

and mostly in labor reproduction–related policies such as public housing and health care, while ignoring production-related industrial policies.[14] Together with the lack of developmental state protectionism practiced by other Asian economies, there is not much market regulation to "roll back" in the first place. Thus, neoliberalization in the postcolonial Hong Kong case means largely the conscious and intensified "rolling forward" of existing policies. The 1997 Asian economic crisis simply gave further impetus to the intensification of state divestment, devolution, downscaling, fiscal austerity, and market deregulation, leading to heightened social polarization, aggravated exploitation, and unbridled capital speculation and monopolization. Hong Kong now tops all Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries in terms of its rich–poor gap.

Hong Kong's colonial form of governance, which trickily continues in large measure after the 1997 sovereignty change, has allowed a rather seamless transition from "colonial" to "global" neoliberal exploitation on both discursive and practical levels, and, thus, allows the conglomerate of institutional and business elite more clout to glocalize neoliberalism through already existing institutions, policies, and public discourses. Thus, ironically, it is easier to explain to Hong Kong people how "neoliberal" colonialism already was, because they know laissez-faire policy and free market orthodoxy so well, than to explain to them how "colonial" neoliberalism actually is, because the government has been so successful in persuading the community to endorse the commitment to laissez-faire, and, therefore, also neoliberalism, understood as a contemporary upgrade of the same, that the "community came to believe that Hong Kong owed its post-war prosperity to laissez-faire," and, therefore, would be reluctant to see neoliberalism as exploitative and "colonial-like," even "when used as an excuse for the government's refusal to pursue social and economic goals that were major priorities for the general public" (Goodstadt 2005, p. 122). This explains why "colonial-like" neoliberal injustice can happen again and again to this once colonized population with mainstream consent. In fact, the laissez-faire policy in Hong Kong can be understood as a variegated form of neoliberalism in East Asia, albeit with decidedly colonial roots.

What is new in the postcolonial phase of neoliberalization in Hong Kong is the "rollout" (Peck and Tickell 2002, p. 15) of policies that actively assist in capital accumulation. The asymmetrical intervention of the colonial era leaves room for the present "rollout" phase of neoliberalization, which Mark Purcell candidly refers to as "aidez-faire" (2008, p. 15). This refers to the way the entrepreneurial state "rolls out" pro-market policies such as indirect subsidies as well as industrial policies of clustering, upgrading and innovation to assist capital accumulation.[15] The postcolonial government's intervention on behalf of the film industry is simply part of this neoliberal "aidez-faire" policy in the recent round of global city competition. The exploitation of cultural capital has become

the major policy tool to repackage urban redevelopment as postindustrial city renaissance. Film is taken as a leading creative industry in city branding efforts. The Hong Kong chief executive aspires to turn Hong Kong into a "cultural metropolis befitting the claim to Asia's World City alongside London and New York" (Policy Address 1998).The government started investing in Disneyland Hong Kong, the West Kowloon Cultural District, and the revitalization of cultural heritage sites. It established a HK$100 million Film Development Fund (FDF) to support the industry, earmarking HK$50 million in 2003 as a Film Guarantee Fund (FGF) to help local film production companies obtain loans (Chan, Fung, and Ng 2010). "Prestigious new advisory bodies were created to devise fresh and more interventionist strategies," (Goodstadt 2005, p. 135) like the Film Development Council (FDC) established in 2007 to advice the government on how to spend HK$300 million in revitalizing the film industry.[16] However, our interviewees unanimously express that such funds require a punishing amount of bureaucratic paperwork and are much less useful than traditional trade fair platforms like FILMART (Hong Kong). Scholars have also observed a "lack of interest" for the FGF, and those who "successfully obtain" it "were mostly big film companies" with "no particular problem in financing" (Chan, Fung, and Ng 2010, p. 29).

Although proactive local neoliberal policies seem to have little effect, the government is prevented from exercising more effective protectionist policies on behalf of the film industry due to its free market ideology. The solution is to defer this role to the national government in Beijing, which has such policies in place and can extend their jurisdiction to Hong Kong businesses in the form of the Mainland and Hong Kong Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement (CEPA) effective since January 1, 2004. This is a spectrum of preferential market liberalization measures extended to the Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macao but not to foreign countries. Whereas China is liberating it markets, especially after entering WTO, censorship and protective measures are still applied to foreign businesses due to national interest and security concerns. This selective liberalization measure is part and parcel of a neoliberalism "with Chinese Characteristics."[17] Wang Hui has clearly captured the irony of this idea: whereas *neoliberalism* refers to the retreat of the state and the liberalization of the market, "China has promoted radical marketization . . . upon the premise of a continuity of its political system" and "under the guidance of state policy. . . . This continuity and discontinuity has lent a special character to Chinese neoliberalism." Due to the heavily state-led character of this neoliberalization process, "using the existence of state interference in the economy to prove . . . that there is no neoliberalism in China is really beside the point." In fact, the legitimacy of the Chinese state and of neoliberalism is interdependent. On the one hand, neoliberalism relies heavily on "the strength of transnational and national policies and economics":

> That is, in the absence of such a policy/state premise, neoliberalism would be incapable of concealing unemployment, the decline of social security, and the widening gap between rich and poor.[18]

Thus, in effect, neoliberalism relies on the state to absorb its negative effects and deflect criticism and responsibility from targeting it. In Peck and Tickell's terms, neoliberalism requires a lot of "institutional fix."[19] On the other hand, the Chinese state relies heavily on its claim to successful neoliberal economic reforms to deal with its crisis of legitimacy, which is, ironically, a crisis that neoliberalist exploitation plays a large part in creating. It is according to this paradoxical logic of controlled market liberalization that certain neoliberal policies in China get extended to the Hong Kong film industry. We will show how the CEPA and correlated censorship policies applicable to Hong Kong demonstrate a kind of neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics: they selectively liberate the flow of capital and cultural capital but not the flow of labor and critical ideas; selectively liberate the economy but not the grip on culture and politics.

The market liberalization policy called CEPA privileges Hong Kong film against all foreign films.[20]

- In terms of film distribution: Hong Kong companies are permitted to establish wholly owned film distribution companies in China whereas foreign companies are completely off-limits.
- In terms of film exhibition: Although foreign companies are allowed to construct or renovate cinemas in China, they can only do so through minority-owned joint ventures with Chinese companies, with the exception of seven cities, which allow foreign firms up to 75 percent ownership. Hong Kong companies, however, can establish wholly owned companies in China to construct or renovate cinema chains in multiple locations.
- In terms of access to the market: Foreign films face a twenty film per year import quota, but totally Hong Kong–produced films fare better, because their "import" quota restriction is waived. There is no limit to the number of Hong Kong films entering China each year. Hong Kong–China co-production films enjoy the most privilege, as they are considered "national" products and are not subject to "import" quota or import tax.
- In terms of profit sharing: Foreign films must pay a 5 percent import tax and get a lower 13 percent to 15 percent box-office share. Hong Kong–China co-productions are regarded as local Chinese films allowing them a 30 percent to 40 percent box-office share and a waiver of import tax.
- In terms of different kinds of co-productions: Qualification for Hong Kong–China co-production film is a major strategy to enjoy the status of local Chinese film.[21] Hong Kong–China co-productions

> face no cap on the proportion of principal Hong Kong creative personnel, so long as there is at least one-third of the main cast from China. Foreign-China co-production films, however, must have a fifty-fifty ratio of foreign and *mainland* crews (mainland meaning excluding Hong Kong and Macao), at least one-third of main casts being mainlanders, and a story that takes place in specific Chinese mainland locations.[22]

These CEPA privileges lead to the accelerated restructuring of the Hong Kong film industry in terms of a *mainlandization* process (explanation in the following). The seeming rebound of the Hong Kong film industry with seventy feature releases in 2009 is often attributed to the success of this CEPA policy. This ethnographical study,[23] however, draws on industry data and insider views of Hong Kong film practitioners to outline a more complicated and less flattering picture of neoliberal restructuring, focusing especially on the model of Hong Kong–China co-production films favored by most in the Hong Kong film industry, albeit with many misgivings. This, together with exhibition and distribution strategies adapted to CEPA policies, and strategies in face of the censorship system in China, form the basket of adaptive survival tactics the Hong Kong film industry is experimenting with. We will explore the human and cultural costs as well as long-term implications of this structural adjustment process. Our analysis shows that even with the seeming rebound of production volume since 2009, structural dangers are actually intensifying rather than receding. The Hong Kong film industry is facing some painful dilemmas.

MAINLANDIZATION AND BIFURCATION: IMPLICATIONS OF HONG KONG-CHINESE CO-PRODUCTIONS

Since the 2000s, there has been a surge in the number of cross-border "co-productions" by Hong Kong and mainland filmmakers, raising a hot debate on whether Hong Kong–China co-production is the panacea for "restructuring" the Hong Kong film industry. To evaluate the consequences of this trend we need to understand, from the point of view of those engaged in production, the conditions in and the processes by which these films are coproduced and distributed. The findings can be quite different from what policymakers imagine them to be.

There are two ways that Hong Kong films enter the Chinese market. The first is as an imported item, which benefits from CEPA waiver of import quota. Unlike the positive impression presented by communications scholars and the government quoted earlier (Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department [HKTDC] 2010; Chan, Fung, and Ng 2010; Hong Kong Motion Picture Industry Association [HKMPIA] 2010), our informants consider this policy item as "unpopular and not at all related to the increase

of Hong Kong film distribution in China." On the contrary, an industry titan explains:

> Films that do not go through the co-production track can enter the China market as imported Hong Kong films through CEPA . . . but they still need to go through the extremely tedious import system and censorship.[24]

Another experienced regional producer adds that companies applying for import into China:

> need to first register with the Trade and Industry Department as Hong Kong companies and get "qualified condition." Paco Wong was the first to try. The tedious paperwork took too long. If you have relations with distributors in China, you can simply write a flat deal instead. It is not worth the trouble.[25]

In fact, the import track is a cumbersome last resort when co-production fails. For example:

> Johnny To's *Sparrow* (2008), with policemen committing theft and so on, would never qualify as a Hong Kong–China co-production film, which . . . must have its script passed through censorship before production. As co-production, it will never be made. Thus, they make it first and then try the CEPA import track.[26]

The second way for Hong Kong films to enter the China market is through Hong Kong–China co-production. Co-production also involves cofinancing and profit sharing and faces no cap on the proportion of principal creative personnel from Hong Kong, so long as there is at least one-third of the main cast from China. Since 2006, almost half of the fifty to sixty "Hong Kong" films made every year were coproduced and the proportion keeps increasing. However, "neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics" is defined by the coupling of tight ideological censorship and selective market liberalization. Thus, although CEPA co-production deregulates the film market to allow the flexible flow of capital between Hong Kong and China, it continues to regulate the flow of ideas and of labor.

The incentive is high for the Hong Kong film investors and above-the-line talents to pursue Hong Kong–China co-production as a way out for the crumbling industry. The statistical growth is clear to the Asian regional corporate executive.

> Hong Kong's maximum aggregate box office is saturated. It will not grow. In 2002, the profit distribution was 8.9 percent from Hong Kong, 8.9 percent China, both around ninety million to one billion. In

> 2004, Hong Kong is still grossing ninety million, but China is grossing 1.5 billion. It was two billion in 2005, 2.6 in 2006, 3.3 in 2007. In comparison, the U.S. grossed an aggregate of 8.9 billion U.S. in 2002. China has a much larger population and room for growth. Any foreign film can easily do twenty million. Imagine that.[27]

Before CEPA, Hong Kong companies "must go through the state assigned distributors" and "cannot choose our own distributor." Now with Hong Kong–China co-production status, a film gets "local treatment" and "has the rights to distribute ourselves or choose our own local distribution partners." This allows a company room to negotiate between a 30 percent to 40 percent profits share, and the 10 percent difference can be extremely significant for big-budget films like Peter Chan's *Warlords*, which took in "twenty million box office in China" as well as "Lau Wai-Keung, Mak Siu-Fai's *Initial D* and *Confession of Pain*" that numerically pulled in close to twenty million. Compared to the 13 percent to 15 percent profit share of imported films, industry leaders are increasingly moving toward co-productions. The increasing significance of the China market for Hong Kong film is crystal clear.[28] Moreover, China offers cheap locations and labor, along with a diverse geography for the selection of scenes and sites, as well as a formidable market. Thus, big budgets get poured into filmmaking in China and major talents all start exploring the mainlandization possibility. Capturing the China market suddenly becomes imperative to Hong Kong investors and filmmakers. Figures 12.1 and 12.2 illustrate the drastic consequence of this mainlandization trend on the market share of Hong Kong films in both Hong Kong and China.

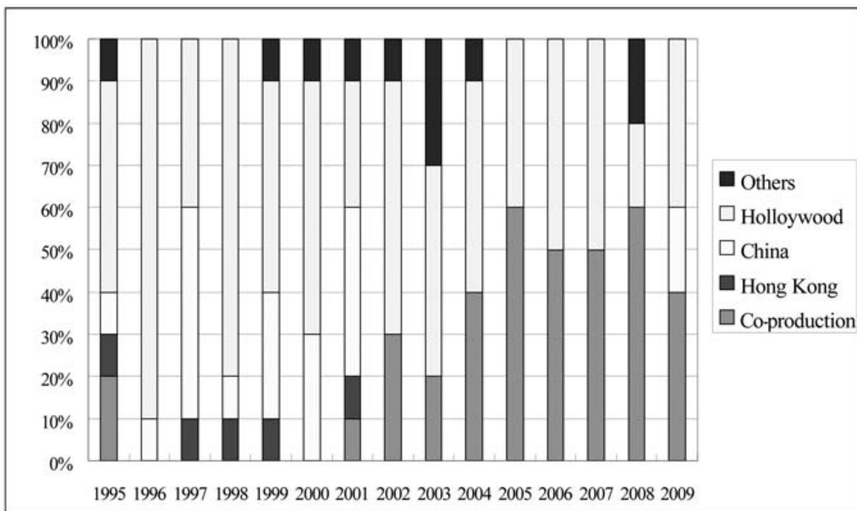

Figure 12.1 Top ten box-office films in the China Market (1995–2009).

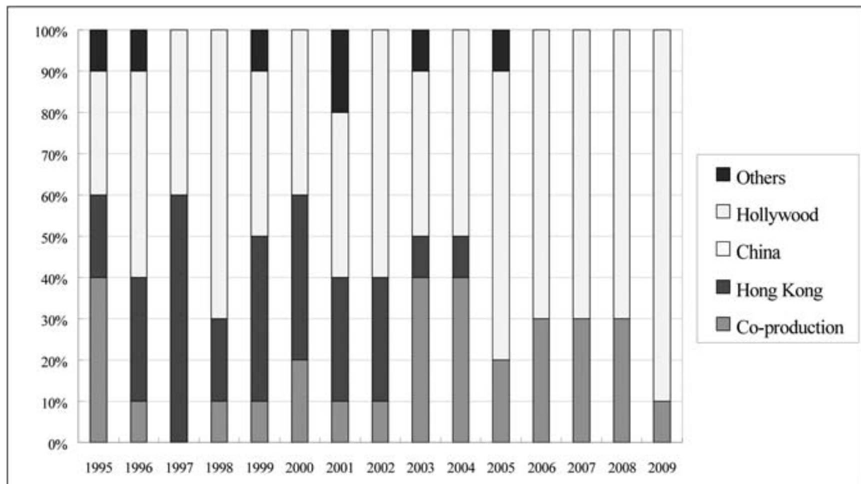

Figure 12.2 Top ten films in the Hong Kong market (1995–2009).

Figure 12.1 traces the distribution of the top ten box-office films in China. The domination of Hollywood in the 1990s was accompanied by a sizable portion of Chinese films and token Hong Kong films until 2001. In the new millennium however, the Chinese film market started to liberalize (2002) and then developed into the CEPA policy for Hong Kong in 2004, causing the dominance of Hong Kong films to gradually disappear. Thus, since 2002, local Chinese and Hong Kong films disappeared from the top ten list, and can only come back as a revenant component of Hong Kong–China co-productions, i.e., they are replaced by an increasing proportion of Hong Kong–China co-production films, which were capable of challenging the dominance of Hollywood films. The year 2009 marks the beginning of a bifurcated trend: the facing off of Mainlandization and Hollywoodization. Hong Kong film as a category is facing an ontological crisis.

Figure 12.2 traces the distribution of the top ten box-office films in Hong Kong. The change in the Hong Kong market is even more dramatic. Hong Kong films, which were as prominent as Hollywood before the year 2002, completely disappeared when the new Hong Kong–China co-production policy began. With capital and talents being drained by co-production in China, very few local Hong Kong films actually made it to theaters, and Hollywood quickly filled in the vacuum to capture the Hong Kong market share. It is also significant to note that Hong Kong–China co-production films are not particularly popular in Hong Kong, and over the years, very few of them actually rose to be top box-office releases.

This pressure to mainlandize threatens not only Hong Kong film but also national films in the Asian region. An acclaimed director-producer thinks that the mainlandization imperative is true not only for Hong Kong

but for all of Asia: “Pan-Asian films will eventually gravitate to China . . . and even Chinese tastes. . . . China has enough money enough talent and enough people to watch Chinese films, and with that three ‘enough,’”[29] the “mainlandization” imperative is very hard to resist.

MAINLANDIZATION AND BIFURCATION IN PRODUCTION AND LABOR

Our first observation about the mainlandization of film production is that Hong Kong’s preferential access to the opening and growing China market has allowed extremely large-budget Hong Kong–China co-production films to become more dominant. However, whereas this co-production model allows experienced and above-the-line creative Hong Kong talents and crew members as well as established film production and distribution investors to make it big beyond Hong Kong, their survival and success depends on the sacrifice of Hong Kong junior and entrance-level practitioners and technicians as the jobs migrate to mainland China. This bifurcation has exacerbated the “winner-take-all” phenomenon in the Hong Kong film industry. The gradual hollowing-out effect results in the shrinking of the local labor markets and the tarnished dream of upward mobility for young film graduates.

As in other industries in Hong Kong, the shift of parts of the production process up north to China, which is part of the trend in production outsourcing in search of lower production costs, means that the investment going north will bring with it only the irreplaceable chief creative talents and labor functions that they cannot find in China. As a result, Hong Kong jobs that can find cheaper and comparable labor in China will be lost. Thus, below-the-line workers will need to take pay cuts and travel north to compete, or they have to leave the industry altogether. A very prominent director-producer who has moved the company headquarters to China estimates that “a third of our labor were cut off” in this restructuring.[30] It is now harder to find work in Hong Kong as large-budget co-productions have moved north and small-budget productions are infrequent and badly paid. A young production assistant remarks that many people left the industry because companies began to cut overtime pay, hire less people to do the same work, and cut the daily per diem for jobs outside Hong Kong.[31] A boom operator describes the predicament of subcontracted labor. They are paid a flat amount for a unit of work, salary, equipment rental, equipment maintenance, and insurance inclusive. Due to the “contract manufacturing” nature of their work, they have to bear all the risks of production. Sometimes companies refuse to wait for proper import of equipment into China and would like them to smuggle the gear. These technicians would rather not take such risks of equipment confiscation, where in the subcontractor role they need to absorb the loss. Moreover, their unit pay has been

declining from HK$5,000 per nine hours to per fourteen hours.[32] Most below-the-line interviewees know of or have experienced labor exploitation and most agree that their unions are not doing much to protect their rights. An assistant director complains that their profession fails even to form a union due to their transitional status and frequent change of employment. Neither has affiliation with the directors' guild ever proved helpful in industrial bargaining.[33] An industry leader who has been active in championing film-worker rights concur that although the Federation of Hong Kong Filmmakers is already trying to encourage the ten member unions to act up, film investors have many ways to deflect the pressure of their mediation and collective bargaining. Investors can offer job conditions in a "take-it-or-leave-it manner" because they can hire people outside Hong Kong and cut costs in all sorts of ways.[34] Experienced workers all express preference for work with Hollywood or Canadian companies, for they have better work conventions and better labor terms. Moreover, those workers with families are reluctant to work in China. Working abroad is difficult in general, requiring strong motivation and adaptation to cultural differences. To put it bluntly, the job has to be worth the pain. As most young graduates prefer to work in Hong Kong and choose relatively stable jobs, many have moved to advertising, television, or other media-related work. Bifurcation in production organization is clearly disadvantageous for the below-the-line crew and is making such careers unsustainable.

However, for above-the-line creative talents and investors, the move to China is perceived as a way to keep "Hong Kong film" alive. Some of them have even fared better in China than in Hong Kong. Producers, distributors, and investors all sound enthusiastic about their situation. Bifurcation in production organization is leading to a "winner-take-all" phenomenon. An owner of a cinema chain is building sixty to seventy cinemas in 2010, eighty to one hundred in 2011, and the company decision is to build up to eight hundred.[35] However, behind the glitter is a more disturbing cultural implication.

MAINLANDIZATION OR HONGKONGIZATION? FROM MADE IN HONG KONG TO MADE BY HONG KONG

An experienced producer and entertainment corporate CEO from Hong Kong now based in China tellingly reveals an ironic and surprising phenomenon that official figures about co-production profitability cannot tell. The question is: what do insiders think constitutes Hong Kong film in this era of Hong Kong–China co-production, and what cultural identity politics could they be harboring in the process?

> *Confucius* (2010), a co-production film, is in fact 100 percent conceived, led, and made by Hong Kong companies and talents, except

> the director Mei Hu, a few acting staff and some below-the-line crew. The demo version was made by Peter Pau, the producer is Bo Chu Chui . . . Chung-Man Hai was on-hands [*sic*] and the [Hong Kong] investor was actually the one who made the final cut. . . . Since this film has national symbolic meaning, a token Chinese company must be there. This company however, does not share the profit nor shoulder any of the work. . . . Believe it or not, even Alex Law's *Echoes of the Rainbow*[36] is technically a co-production film. More outrageously, Derek Yee Tung-Shing's *Triple Tap*, a quintessential Hong Kong film with fund-managers, police officers, and lots of shooting and armed robbery, is a co-production as well, because there was Chinese actress Li Bingbing.

He further challenges anyone to name a:

> big Chinese blockbuster without Hong Kong people in significant roles. . . . *Curse of the Golden Flower* is Bill Kong's. Except Zhang Yimou, everyone else, Chow Yun-fat, Chung-Man Hai . . . are from Hong Kong. [In general,] 70 percent to 80 percent of the important crew members are Hong Kong people. [They are] made by Hong Kong films [in terms of the] creative control and financial control. . . . Peter Chan's *Bodyguards and Assassins* [2010] is a co-production film, but what element in it is Chinese, after all, except the set?[37]

This perception is echoed almost verbatim by a prominent producer-director, who thinks that films were "made in Hong Kong" in the past but will "definitely be made by Hong Kong" in the future. "Most scripts are developed in Hong Kong, and even if the films are not made for Hong Kong, they are developed by Hong Kong people at different stages, and then taken to China for feedback" to ensure cultural relevance and accuracy.[38]

Other above-the-line informants also confirm that the major creative talents not only in production but also in preproduction, postproduction, marketing, and distribution are mainly from Hong Kong, whereas the below-the-line crew is easier to come by and cheaper from China.

This makes us ponder whether it is Hong Kong film production going through a process of *mainlandization* or Chinese film production going through a kind of *Hongkongization*. The spatial shift of production to China and the emphasis on cultural content catering to the Chinese market is posed against the influx of Hong Kong above-the-line people calling the shots, setting up the industry conventions, transferring the know-how, and building the industry infrastructure.

The Hongkongization idiom sounds slightly disturbing. The language in which this transnational creative class paints the picture of their investments makes China sound like a flat space for capitalist ventures and a virgin frontier for the Hong Kong film industry. The way they describe their

discovery of new Chinese talents and mentoring of Chinese crew and the pride they show in building the first cinema in a small town make the whole venture sound almost like a benevolent civilizing mission.[39] The first author has analyzed this familiar cultural imaginary in mainstream Hong Kong before and has called it "petit-grandiose Hong Kongism," which is a kind of colonial inferiority–superiority complex expressed in terms of an economic chauvinism against economically less developed people and places in China. It also contains a "Northbound Cultural Imaginary" about China (on its north), which posits its cosmopolitanism and capitalist expertise as a justification for an implied economic and cultural expansion towards China. Ironically, places in China that mainstream Hong Kong has been imagining as cultural and economic colonies have in fact outdone Hong Kong in the capitalist *upstart* game.[40] Meanwhile, Hong Kong is trying to *restart* its crumbling industries by building a second spring in China. Like many a Hong Konger, these Hong Kong film titans seem to be savoring a bit of compensatory colonial imagining.

MAINLANDIZATION: CHINA'S INTEGRATION OF THE REST

What then are the cultural implications of the mainlandization take? In what sense is Hong Kong film mainlandizing?

Now that the imperative of the China market has make Hong Kong–China co-production film an inexorable trend, everyone agrees that the next biggest hurdle is the need for such films to pass through Chinese censorship twice, like all mainland productions. The script must be approved by the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT) before shooting, and the final cut must pass censorship again before screening permission is issued. State censorship encourages preemptive self-censorship from the beginning to the end of the creative process as a way to avoid last-minute cuts and release uncertainties. Informants ascribe the predominance of historical sagas set in vaguely defined time and place to SARFT taboos on history and politics. The nearer you get to present time and place, the more politically sensitive you potentially become. For example, to set a story of corruption, crime, and violence any time after the 1949 Communist revolution would run the risk of delayed or cancelled distribution (Klein 2007, p. 202). Thus, the profusion of films about vaguely defined legends with outlandishly armored warriors fighting in oddly Baroque-oriental sets is the result not of the lack of research but the collective attempt to avoid historical precision. Clifton Ko Chi-sum's professed "armor-phobia" is an industry-wide malady.[41]

Well-connected Chinese production houses like Huayi Brothers and state-owned distributors like China Film Group become influential co-production partners, coaching Hong Kong filmmakers through intricate censorship processes (Klein 2007, p. 202). Thus, although the Chinese market

seems to give Hong Kong film a comeback opportunity, censorship forces the industry to tailor cultural content to official SARFT parameters. This is what we mean by the *mainlandization* of Hong Kong filmmaking. By mainlandization, we are not referring to the tailoring of content based on essentialist assumptions about the cultural preferences and differences of Chinese audiences, but to the tailoring of cultural content to what SARFT perceives as acceptable or not acceptable in mainland China.[42] What then are the cultural identity implications?

Experienced film professionals concur on one worrying trend in Hong Kong co-productions that manage to get past Chinese censorship: these films tend to have skirted ideological taboos by compromising genre possibilities and *deodorizing* cultural sensitivities.[43] A producer at large for the Asian region laments that such "mainlandized" works tend to find the more liberal Hong Kong and Southeast Asian markets harder to penetrate.[44] Others agree that less censored versions of their films are often made for markets outside China. Conversely, films made for the Hong Kong and Southeast Asian markets may contain content or genres excluded by SARFT. Many a genre that Hong Kong is famous for could imply the promotion of superstition or crime, and thus a ghost film popular all over Asia, for example, cannot be released in China. Thus, irrespective of the potential diversity of the Chinese audience, state censorship imposes an artificial cultural divide, forcing the Hong Kong film industry to choose between the China market and the rest. If we compare Figures 12.1 and 12.2, the phenomenon becomes clear. Co-production films that are top ten box-office winners in China are not popular at all in Hong Kong, showing how these censored films are hard to sell beyond the Chinese border. However, seeing double-digit box-office expansion in China, Hong Kong filmmakers are often willing to compromise content and concentrate on the Chinese market rather than making films for the rest of the market and risk exclusion from China.

This mainlandization and market bifurcation also contain another layer of implications. A film corporate executive notes:

> For example, Chen Kaige's *The Promise* appealed to the Chinese audience, garnering one hundred to two hundred million in China, but got only five million in Hong Kong. The tastes of the two audiences are totally different. The glossy spectacles and slapsticks that please Chinese audiences do not get the Hong Kong audience anymore, although this used to be the staple of Hong Kong production for local and Southeast Asian markets. Likewise, *Confucius* and *Curse of the Golden Flower* got China but lost Hong Kong.[45]

Chinese director Feng Xiaogang is another frustrating example. His top blockbusters (or Leitmotif films) that are phenomenally successful in China consistently fail to work for Hong Kong and Southeast Asia. His recent

World without Thieves falls into the same predicament, even with top Hong Kong star Andy Lau as the lead.[46] Perhaps the impression of censorship has reinvoked Cold War "prejudices" against anything from "mainland China" among Hong Kong and Southeast Asian audiences. It is very likely that cultural prejudice dies hard, and even Feng's wonderful brand of perceptive humor, his ability to "be critical without criticizing," is lost among nonmainland audiences.

If one takes a step back to question this "China or the rest binary," one could perhaps trace an increasingly bifurcated market not only between China and the rest of Asia, but on the larger global scale as well, in terms of a bifurcation between global lowest-common-denominator fare and increasingly localist tastes and concerns.[47] For example, nonverbal jokes, slapstick, and physical cultural spectacles that have been highly commodified globally, like kung fu and stuntsmanship are more easily accepted across cultures, whereas verbal puns and culturally specific issues and concerns catch only the local audience and the culturally curious or highly informed connoisseurs. A famous director-producer sees an increasingly inward-looking and nationalizing tendency among audiences, making:

> genuinely bicultural co-production films very difficult to sell. Everyone's tolerance for cultural difference is becoming lower. . . . The whole world is less curious about other nations, especially culturally. . . . Even during the heyday of Hong Kong film in the eighties, there used to be a steady market for French, British, German films. This is no longer the case everywhere. Japanese film is enjoying a comeback but they are very Japanese.[48]

In this context of global bifurcation of audiences, what is left possible for local or national cinemas with local audiences significantly smaller than China, India, and the U.S.? Hong Kong is in this category, and the possibilities left are, first of all, small- to medium-budget films catered to local concerns and sensibilities, targeting the small local market and foreign niches. The other possibility is the globalization of an increasingly monotonous blockbuster culture. Such films target the lowest cultural and genre common denominators of large global and national markets. In other words, they culturally deodorize, globalize, Hollywoodize, Bollywoodize, or Mainlandize.

Films targeting the small local audience can only survive as independent, low-budget or subsidized productions. They tend to alienate the global and large foreign markets due to their flavorful cultural odor. Many filmmakers of this category will find it very difficult to access mainstream film screens, even with much academic, critical, and festival acclaim. Paradoxically, this trend of small national cinemas turning local and inward-looking also caused the collapse of the art-house cinemas they rely on to export to each other. The same director-producer laments that:

> Art-house cinemas are dead not just in Hong Kong, but in New York. A lot of megaplexes have all six halls showing the same blockbuster all the time. An independent film can be cut to a showtime that nobody sees. In the past, some theaters still focused on niche and art-house films, and a film can take over a theater for a period of time. But this is now over. The marketing cost of art films in the 1990s was pushed so high the films become no longer commercially viable.[49]

However, whereas other Asian national cinemas, like Korea, India, and China, can rely simply on the nationalization of cultural sensibilities and tastes to survive, Hong Kong's small population prevents the local industry from relying on the local audience to survive. Thus, over the years, it has made films with wider regional appeal and more diverse tastes.

CONCLUSION

At the end of the day, neoliberalization of the Hong Kong and China film markets liberates the flow of capital and cultural capital but not labor and critical ideas. With the hold of censorship not likely to "liberalize" soon, and the prospects of entry into the industry in Hong Kong getting slimmer and slimmer, Hong Kong–China co-production is not a way out for everyone in the Hong Kong film industry. Only experienced directors, producers, distributors, and stars will benefit the most in this bifurcated winner-take-all situation, whereas the future of below-the-line new talents looks more and more dismal. Co-production is highly speculative at this stage as the film market is expanding rapidly in China. The honeymoon period might just stop abruptly and this neoliberal alternative might prove to be unsustainable. Co-production is highly censored by the Chinese government, limiting the freedom of creation for Hong Kong filmmakers, whereas the Hong Kong and international audiences continue to be hard to please. This is a real dilemma and challenge to creative thinking.

Looking back in comparison, it seems that Hong Kong films of the previous era, before the blossoming of the China market and the growth of other Asian films, had the scope to experiment with more diverse cultural tastes and assumptions, and in so doing, were paradoxically more able to cultivate and develop their diverse local cultural identity and sensitivities than Hong Kong films can nowadays, despite the present access to a wider and larger market. Thus, all in all, the increasing "mainlandization" of Hong Kong film ironically limits rather than encourages the development of diverse cultural sensitivities. What would Hong Kong be without that?

NOTES

1. The Sino-Japanese War, the Chinese civil war dividing Communist China and capitalist Taiwan, the Cold War, and the trade embargo against China since the Korean War, as well as the severity of censorship in both China and Taiwan, led to waves of Chinese capital, cultural talents, and industrial know-how flooding to Hong Kong since the 1930s to 1950s. With relative freedom of expression, where ideological censorship operated within the rule of law, the British colonial enclave became where the Chinese film industry could flourish in all its diversity. The loss of the mainland China market helped to propel the Hong Kong film industry towards the local and regional markets; see Ain-ling Wong and Pui-tak Lee, 2009; Ain-ling Wong, 2003.
2. See Hong Kong Motion Picture Industry Association (HKMPIA), 2010; Chan, Fung, and Ng, 2010; Hong Kong Census and Statistics Department (HKCSD), 2010; Hong Kong Trade Development Council (HKTDC), 2010.
3. "It should be less than thirty-five. Some films were publicly released for only one to two days, just in order to push up the price of DVD rights. . . . These cannot be counted as real releases." Interview with the authors on December 10, 2009. This informant has been in the Hong Kong film industry for over thirty-five years and is a prominent director and producer working across different media and performance-exhibition channels. In this research, interviewee anonymity is maintained throughout unless permission is obtained for the disclosure of identity.
4. Michael Curtin, 2007.
5. Triad involvement is not unique to Hong Kong film. Typical triad activities include money laundering, forcing famous stars and artists to play major roles in their films, or, as one informant noted, after being paid their due fees, stars find themselves harassed by "crew" members constantly borrowing money from them that they never pay back, etc. Interview with the authors on December 10, 2009. See note 3.
6. Curtin, 1999.
7. Interview with the authors, October 22, 2008. This Hong Kong director-producer who has moved headquarters to China echoes our outline of the decline: "Our market used to be 20 percent Korea, 40 percent Taiwan, the seven million people in Malaysia a steady base, and Singapore too. Now Taiwan does not watch Hong Kong films anymore. It is our fault. We became too sloppy and rushed. The other markets are also dwindling, except Malaysia. A third of our labor were cut off, a third of our products gone. Places like Japan and Korea are beginning to revive. All of a sudden, we have competitions from many different places, but meanwhile, because we tried to make everything before 1997, the whole Hong Kong was doing the same boring thing. . . . We were left with a very vulnerable industry."
8. We are borrowing the term from Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore, 2002, pp. 349–379. They argue that neoliberalization as an institution-building process can be called "creative destruction" that destructs (partially) the existing Fordist-Keynesian institutional arrangements and creates a new infrastructure for market-oriented economic growth, commodification, and the rule of capital (ibid., p. 362).
9. Leo F. Goodstadt, 2005, pp. 118–121. Leo F. Goodstadt is the first and last head of Hong Kong's Central Policy Unit during the colonial era under the last governor Chris Patton.
10. See Goodstadt, 2005, pp. 118–122; Tak-Wing Ngo, 2000, pp. 31–33; Stanislaw Wellisz and Ronald Findlay, 1993; Shiu-hing Lo, 2002.

11. In post-1997 Hong Kong, the head of state and the heads of government bureaus are not produced by party politics and the cabinet system. Instead, an electoral college of eight hundred people handpicked by Beijing in collusion with the pro-growth coalition elects the chief executive (the head of the Hong Kong government). The chief executive then chooses his heads of bureaus and departments, and such choices are effective only with approval from Beijing. This ruling elite is supported by a civil service that has by and largely continued from the colonial system.
12. Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell, 2002; Mark Purcell, 2008, p. 15.
13. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, 2004, p. 280.
14. Yun-chung Chen and Ngai Pun, 2007, p. 71.
15. David Harvey, 1989.
16. Joseph M. Chan, Anthony Y.H. Fung, and Chun Hung Ng, 2010, pp. 26–27.
17. Harvey, 2005, pp. 120–151.
18. Hui Wang, 2004, pp. 7–8.
19. Peck and Tickell, 2000.
20. As Hong Kong is a special administrative region of China, there is an immigration and quasi border separating it from China, and its trade relations with mainland China retain some elements of international trade, although such trading procedures, barriers, and monitoring are gradually being "liberated." Thus, Hong Kong films are not automatically considered national products and are comparable to imported foreign films in several ways. CEPA policies aim to "liberate" exactly such "import" restrictions on films from Hong Kong.
21. Hong Kong film production companies must own over 50 percent of the copyright and contribute at least 50 percent of the invested budget of a film to qualify for Hong Kong–China co-production status.
22. The data can be found in HKTDC, 2010; Lixing Liu, 2008; Christina Klein, 2007, p. 202.
23. So far, we have interviewed over sixty practitioners in the Hong Kong film industry, from regional corporate heads, above-the-line creative talents, to below-the-line talents and workers in this ongoing research on the restructuring of the Hong Kong film industry. Echoing Jeroen de Kloet, 2007, p. 66, and Klein, 2007, p. 190, calling for actual material contextualization in film studies, we anchor the changing cultural and identity politics of Hong Kong films into the detailed context of production, distribution, and exhibition.
24. Interview with the authors on May 26, 2010. This CEO of an entertainment corporation based in China has been in the Hong Kong film industry for over thirty-two years, is an experienced producer-distributor, a versatile creative talent with a full range of production experience, an industry leader in film production, exhibition, distribution, investment, and executive operations, as well as an active volunteer in labor union platforms.
25. Interview with the authors on April 9, 2010. This experienced CEO of a pan-Asian production house has been in the industry for over thirty years with wide local, regional, and global experience in film production, distribution, and marketing, has worked in local and regional television corporations, and is a chief corporate executive and partner of regional companies in the industry.
26. Interview with the authors on May 26, 2010. See note 24.
27. Interview with the first author on October 1, 2008. This is a top corporate executive of one of the most powerful Asian regional film investment companies whose businesses cover the entire range of media production,

distribution, and marketing and whose company owns a formidable library of titles.

28. Ibid.
29. Peter Chan, speech at Rayson Huang Theatre, University of Hong Kong, October 22, 2008.
30. Interview with the authors October 22, 2008. See note 7.
31. Interview with the authors, August 26, 2009. This informant is a production assistant who joined the film industry in 2000 and has an associate degree in Film and Television Production from Australia.
32. Interview with the authors, October 29, 2009. This informant joined the industry in 2001 and is a boom operator and part of a sound recording crew.
33. Interview with the authors on October 2, 2008. This informant is an assistant director with over ten years of experience, who has kept track of industry conditions over the years.
34. Interview with the authors on May 26, 2010. See note 24.
35. Ibid.
36. *Echoes of the Rainbow* (Alex Law, director, Hong Kong: Mei Ah Entertainment Group Ltd.; Beijing: Beijing, Beijing Dadi Century Ltd., 2010), winner of Crystal Bear at the Berlin Film Festival, is a film about quintessential Hong Kong quotidian life in the 1960s set in a familiar Hong Kong tenement community, Wing Lee Street, now designated a protected heritage site by the Hong Kong government. The entire film was made in Hong Kong by local crew and talents and much was shot on location. It was, however, presented by a "mainland" company, Dadi Entertainment Limited, which is registered in China but whose chief partners and executives are Hong Kong people.
37. Interview with the authors on May 26, 2010. See note 24.
38. Interview with the authors October 22, 2008. See note 7.
39. Interview with the authors on May 26, 2010; interview with the authors on April 9, 2010. A similar mentality has been criticized in Craig Calhoun, 2003.
40. Mirana M. Szeto, 2006.
41. Imagine being overwhelmed and bored by the succession of films like Zhang Yimou's *Curse of the Golden Flower* (2006), Feng Xiaogang's *The Banquet* (2006), Peter Chan's *Warlords* (2007), and John Woo's *Red Cliff: Part I* (2008) and *Red Cliff: Part II* (2009).
42. Although filmmakers do calculate market potential according to cultural assumptions about different audiences, the potential tolerance and diversity of the mainland Chinese audience cannot be registered in the official reception of the film as challenging contents have already been edited out for them. It is in the "hidden transcript" (Scott 1990), the quotidian level of audience sharing about pirated full versions of Hong Kong films, that the full cultural potential of the Chinese audience can be deciphered and where subaltern audience perceptions can be measured against official discourses and hegemonic mainstream culture. The term "hidden transcript" is coined by anthropologist James Scott to refer to the offstage shared discourse and culture of subordinated people, the speech, ideas, gestures, and practices in which they communicate while they are beyond the surveillance of the power-holders. The "hidden transcript" is where critical and subversive content can be shared and accumulated in relative safety. This is contrasted with the "official transcript," which is the shorthand for the open interaction between subordinates and superiors, which can be officially documented and registered, but in which the subordinates often stage their responses according to the expectations of the dominant. If the "hidden transcript" ever surfaces in

the official one, it is the moment of direct resistance and even rebellion, often resulting in punishment and suppression.

43. A term borrowed from Klein, 2007, p. 195, which was in turn adopted from Iwabuchi, 2002. Cultural deodorization is as much a strategy to ease the taint of excessive cultural and ideological foreignness (Klein 2007, p. 195) in foreign films trying to enter the dominant U.S. market, as it is a strategy to ease the passage of Hong Kong and foreign films through the Chinese state censorship system.
44. Interview with the authors on June 3, 2010. This informant is a producer from a Southeast Asian cultural background, now a producer at large for Asian filmmakers from various national origins with expertise in pitching Asian films of medium to smaller budgets for the local, regional, and global markets.
45. Interview with the first author on October 1, 2008. See note 27.
46. Interview with the authors on June 3, 2010. See note 44.
47. Zhang Yingjin has done a lot of work on bifurcation in relation to the three China syndrome among China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. See Zhang, 2002, 2004.
48. Interview with the authors on October 22, 2008. See note 7.
49. Ibid.

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13 Neoliberalism and Authoritarianism in Singaporean Cinema

A Case Study of *Perth*

Jenna Ng

> I have spread my dreams under your feet,
> Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.
>
> —W.B. Yeats[1]

This chapter examines the strains, tensions, and ultimate congruity between neoliberalism and authoritarianism in Singapore as shown through the tragic story of Harry Lee, protagonist of the Singaporean film *Perth* (2004). Underscored by the doctrines of free trade and noninterventionist free markets, the island state of Singapore is regarded by many as a model for Asian neoliberalism, lauded for its championing of capitalism, free economic growth, and near-miraculous economic success. Yet the city's prosperity masks a vital tension between neoliberalism and authoritarianism. The two did not emerge as directly oppositional: whereas classic (laissez-faire) liberalism—for example, of mid-nineteenth-century Britain—rolled back the state to allow private enterprise to profit without undue interference from legislation and the tax costs of a welfare state, neoliberalism requires a strong state to promote its interests, particularly in the way of producing a pliant and economically viable workforce needed by capitalism.[2] However, the authoritarianism I wish to examine here is that of a government that focuses its resources and energies not only on the pragmatics of the marketplace, but in its ideological and electoral strategies specifically pits the country's economic success as the singular goal, even at the costs of the social and human welfare. Through a close reading of *Perth*, this chapter describes the price exacted by neoliberalism: (a) on account of class differences between higher, white-collar income earners and those who are less skilled and mobile; (b) the rapid phasing out of the old and the familiar; and (c) the brutal realities of economic development that ride roughshod over those who fail to keep up or are deliberately kept out of "making it." The central argument is that the sheen of Singapore's economic success is, as elsewhere, shadowed by the state's authoritarianism, which is relentlessly perpetuating its economic agenda at serious human costs.[3]

Any close reading of a cinematic text as a means to explore subjectivities engendered by a social context, such as I am attempting to do here with *Perth* and neoliberalism, must rely on other political, economic, and

historical analyses. There is extensive sociological analysis of neoliberalism and state intervention in Singapore that I have found very helpful.[4] However, it is texts like *Perth* that can offer some fundamental insights into how it feels to live in contemporary Singapore. I have chosen to focus on how the film crystallizes issues of escape and nostalgia through the adversities, aspirations, and endeavors of its protagonist. *Perth* tells the story of Harry Lee (Lim Kay Tong), who works as "a security supervisor with the shipyards." Harry's consistent line is that he is "a simple man": all he wants is to get through his working life and retire in Perth. However, his plans go awry when he discovers that his wife has not only been unfaithful to him, but, more importantly to Harry, gambled away his life savings on an ill-advised horse racing bet. To make ends meet, Harry ends up driving a cab at night. In order to earn extra money and save up again for Perth, he takes on a job ferrying prostitutes to wealthy clients. In that new job, he meets Mai (Ivy Cheng), with whom he strikes up a relationship. After falling in love with her, he tries to buy her freedom from the gangster pimping her out, an act that leads to tragedy, violence, and, ultimately, Harry's own death.

In particular, I will show how the film is a sardonic comment on Singapore's outward economic achievement; its dystopic ending suggests that the dreams of escape produced on its foundations can offer cathartic release only through violence.

NEOLIBERALISM AND AUTHORITARIANISM IN SINGAPORE: "DO YOU FALL IN LOVE WITH CLEAN, EFFICIENT, CONVENIENT AND WEALTHY PEOPLE?"

In its broadest strokes, neoliberalism espouses market power and freedoms; to that end, it is a systemic agenda that extends beyond the spheres of associated economic doctrine such as free trade and global market capitalism. As Garry Rodan writes, "neoliberalism is principally a political project of embedding market values and structures not just within economic, but also within social and political life."[5] Neoliberal values are thus advocated through various channels; neoliberal governments, for example, would "promote notions of open markets, free trade, the reduction of the public sector, the decrease of state intervention in the economy, and the deregulation of markets."[6] Accordingly, in neoliberal systems, there might be an inherent mistrust of democracy, preferring an elite government that is able to effectively embed market values in their policies and legislation to pursue the economic goals of neoliberalism.

Such is certainly the case with Singapore. David Harvey sums up the situation:

> [The case of Singapore] has combined neoliberalism in the marketplace with draconian coercive and authoritarian state power, while invoking

> moral solidarities based on the nationalist ideals of a beleaguered island state (after its ejection from the Malaysian federation), Confucian values and, most recently, a distinctive form of the cosmopolitan ethic suited to its current position in the world of international trade.[7]

Touted as "the world's freest economy,"[8] Singapore is conventionally considered a successful model of neoliberalism by virtue of its open economy and trading system. Consistently ranked at the top of the Index of Economic Freedom (in its 2009 rankings, Singapore was once more only second to Hong Kong), Singapore's economic success has won her numerous accolades—world's busiest port, best airline, high GDP per capita, etc. Through economic initiatives such as granting concessions and tax exemptions to foreign capital, Singapore deliberately markets itself in the global economy. Trade—and by virtue, a free economy—has thus always been of priority, particularly vis-à-vis Singapore's historic regional entrepreneurial role with her immediate neighbors and reliance on them for raw materials, including food and water.[9] Besides economic positioning, neoliberal values are also enforced through other measures, such as the Parental Maintenance Bill, which requires working children to support their aged parents in the name of "Asian values" of piety and communitarianism.[10] This, goes the argument, "constituted a 'superior' response to the contradictions of late-capitalism, ensuring that those who needed welfare received it (from their family)," and more significantly for the purposes of neoliberalism, "while allowing the logic of capitalism to remain relatively undiluted in Singapore."[11] Similarly, initiatives such as Asian journalism—for example, the state-owned and operated Channel News Asia—advances neoliberal aims in Singapore by "producing a self-disciplining media that would support nation-building goals and de-legitimize resistance to neo-liberal capitalism."[12]

Neoliberalism needs state regulation. It contains, as David Harvey tells us, a fundamental contradiction:

> If "there is no such thing as society but only individuals," as Thatcher initially put it, then the chaos of individual interests can easily end up prevailing over order. The anarchy of the market, of competition, and of unbridled individualism (individual hopes, desires, anxieties, and fears; choices of lifestyle and of sexual habits and orientation; modes of self-expression and behaviours towards others) generates a situation that becomes increasingly ungovernable. . . . In the face of this, some degree of coercion appears necessary to restore order.[13]

Essentially, market forces are unstable: if, on the one hand, the free market generates intense competition, it also produces its counter, i.e., the tendency towards monopoly, swallowing up, or merging with one's competition. To keep order, the governing party in Singapore, the People's Action Party (PAP)

has retained an authoritative rule from its capture of state power in 1959. Accordingly, the ruling party "moved immediately to consolidate its power by suppressing opposition forces through repressive legislation,"[14] such as a raid in February 1963 that detained more than one hundred radicals and was authorized by the Internal Security Council.[15] The ideological trajectory has since taken a turn towards more open consultation and the active pursuit of communitarian values, particularly with the assumption of Goh Chok Tong as prime minister in November 1990, where initiatives such as the establishment of a Feedback Unit in the Ministry of Community Development demonstrated at least a gesture towards consensus and public input.[16]

Yet strains of authoritarianism remain in Singapore. Despite efforts at more consultative governance, authoritarian aspects of PAP rule in Singapore continue. Draconian laws remain in use, including the Internal Security Act (ISA), Criminal Law (Temporary Provision) Act (CLA), and the Misuse of Drugs Act (MDA), which allow for arrest without warrant and detention without trial. Political discussion continues to be muted, most notably by pursuing punitive and aggressive defamation actions against opposition politicians such as J.B. Jeyaretnam, Francis Seow, and Chee Soon Juan. Through government-linked companies (GLCs) and private holding companies with close ties to the government, the PAP retains a near monopoly of the local media. Foreign media are also kept at bay under a 1986 amendment to the Newspaper and Printing Presses Act (NPPA), and foreign newspapers with sales of over three hundred copies in Singapore are required to apply for permits annually.[17]

More significantly, neoliberalism colors the bigger picture of how Singapore constantly ensures her survival via the prevailing rationality of the hegemony of economics over all other spheres of life. Dominated by hard-nosed pragmatism, Singapore responded to global pressures and market realities—such as competition from the cheap manufacturing costs of her regional neighbors and falling manufacturing revenues, the challenges from China, the deregulation of markets, etc.—by developing from a trade and manufacturing center to the new economy of a knowledge-driven economy hub focused on information and a skilled and educated workforce.[18] In these ways, the calculations and considerations of the market continue to drive Singapore's most sensitive political and economic decisions.

Authoritarianism and neoliberalism in Singapore thus perpetuate each other as the cold pragmatism of neoliberalism translates into economic achievement closely tied up with the domination of the ruling party: "politics as reduced to economics."[19] In that respect, this statement by Lee Kuan Yew, then prime minister, is also telling: "political problems ultimately mean *the problem of how we make our living*, how we can give everyone a fair and equal chance to study and work and have a full life."[20]

The result is a fundamental tension between the pressures of economic success and the straitjacket constraints of an authoritarian government. It is a difficult pressure to articulate: the economic success of the country

has afforded many middle-class opportunities for its population, ensured the country's survival, and produced results that can not only be compared favorably to its regional neighbors, but also many First World countries. This achievement, after its traumatic independence (of being expelled from Malaysia in August 1965), remains a source of nationalist pride. Yet there are also issues in keeping up with the hectic state of development, and a widening income gap has left behind blue-collar workers—the less skilled and less mobile—struggling with the pressures of increasing costs of living and property prices. In 2001, then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong controversially labeled the population as "cosmopolitans" and "heartlanders"—the former referring to Singaporeans with greater mobility, earning higher incomes, and employed in "international" occupations and earning "international" wages, as opposed to members of the population in lower-income brackets, less well-educated, and well capable of moving out of Singapore.[21] There is a real sense of pressure felt by the less-skilled and the older workers of being squeezed out of jobs as, alongside the advancement of technology, graduate certifications are also preferred by employers. Singapore's solution is retraining:

> Apparently, there is no simple answer to the problem. Just raising wages without upgrading skills is no solution. The only feasible remedy is training for those thrown out of work, while aiding those affected by helping them to subsist during retraining.[22]

Yet, retraining itself translates into pressure as well, with the relentless drive to keep ahead:

> [Goh Chok Tong, ex–prime minister of Singapore] believes that training should not be associated just with taking courses. It should take the form of adapting to new types of employment, possibly in different surroundings and in different housing. *There have to be expectations of change, rather than of continuity. Jobs are no longer to last for a life time.*[23]

Eventually, the material stresses of costs and employability extend into the more emotive sense of nonbelonging in a world transmuting too rapidly for recognition—the alienation of a stranger in a strange land. The very features of Singapore's success—its efficiency, wealth, cleanliness, etc.—become touchstones of isolation in the midst of clinical and sanitized experiences, as pointed out in the rhetorical question of this private correspondence:

> I am suddenly reminded of a group of Singaporeans, trying to make up the reasons for why they love their country. Naturally all the reasons were superficial ones. I find it hard to understand how someone loves a country because it is clean, efficient, convenient, wealthy, etc. Do you fall in love with clean, efficient, convenient and wealthy people?

In *Perth*, these various considerations of pressure and alienation crystallize into two powerful themes—escape and nostalgia—weaved into its narrative of a taxi driver seeking to migrate to Perth for his retirement. In the context of neoliberalism and authoritarianism in Singapore, the film presents its two ideas (escape to the dreamed utopia of Perth and nostalgia for an old world) not only as adroit commentary about modern Singapore, but, alongside its violent ending, also as a meta-narrative of resolution ironically disrupting the uneasy equilibrium of neoliberalism and authoritarianism. In that sense, escape and nostalgia are more than the sum of their parts; they become a thematic dialectic—a desired escape to a new land while hanging on to the old—which reflects the tension between the freedom of the open market and the restrictions of life dominated by economics. The resolution is a startling eruption in screen violence. An equilibrium can only be maintained for so long—"things fall apart; the centre cannot hold."[24]

NEOLIBERALISM AND AUTHORITARIANISM THROUGH PERTH

> Inevitably, the whole conversation topic [with Singaporean taxi drivers] ends up in migration . . . out of Singapore.... Out of maybe ten, fifteen conversations with the cabdrivers, at least a third or two-thirds of them said they wanted to go to Perth. And I was intrigued. Why do these blue-collar taxi drivers want to migrate to Perth? I thought it would be somebody who would be a white-collar person, who has a bit more earning power. But no, it was these taxi drivers, and they said: they just want a simple life.
>
> —Djinn, director of *Perth*

Escape

Harry waxes lyrical about Perth. He reels off his reasons for his almost overwhelming desire to retire in Perth: Perth is "very beautiful," has great food, with lots of space and nature ("here in Singapore, it's all city"). In Perth, "you have the sea, everything is cheap, the weather is perfect, not hot like here." There is also an economic rationale: "Here [in Singapore], it's not the same anymore—everything has become so expensive. Singaporeans are becoming too materialistic. . . . We go there [to Perth], we live like kings . . . the beer is cheaper, the food is cheaper." Harry's choice of Perth is single-minded, almost fixated: when his good friend, Selvam (A. Panneeirchelvam) moots going to Gold Coast (on the eastern side of Australia), Harry dismisses the idea in favor only of Perth: "Not so far [East] is better. West Coast is more Asian, also better food and less racist. Gold Coast, I don't know. Better come to Perth. Forget about this place—forget it! Expensive,

and there's no place for us." On one level, Harry's decision for Perth is practical, yet on another level it is about something more than a dream, as we realize that getting to Perth is also Harry's emotional crutch and ultimately a perceived salvation for all his problems. The more obsessed he becomes with the prospect of Perth, the more his ideas about Perth verge on fantasy: "Here, the buggers [the government] will work you to death. Over there, it's more relaxed . . . four-day week!"

Harry's dream to retire to Perth is thus as much a practical decision based on its perceived comforts as it is a crucial escape from the pressures of Singapore. As that prospect fades with the loss of their savings, gambled away by his wife, Perth transmutes once more into an emotional lifeline, an affirmation that he still has an aim in life, no matter how improbable, and, perhaps most importantly, that there is still something of relevance in his life. The sense of relevance—of not having the meaning of one's life phased out—that poignantly informs Harry's dream of Perth is patent throughout the film, and significantly linked to the neoliberal values of Singapore's economic success in their concentration on the demands of the marketplace. This is perhaps highlighted most clearly in the scene where Harry is asked by Angry Boy "AB" Lee (Sunny Pang), his manager and friend, to "take early retirement" (i.e., be retrenched). Harry laughs in response, perhaps with false bravado, and tells AB: "Don't worry. You have been good to me." Tellingly, he adds: "Besides, I have plans. . . . Don't worry, I'm okay. I'm migrating to Perth. It's always been a dream of mine. Let's call it—the dream of a simple man!" In this dialogue exchange, Harry's dream of escape to Perth is an explicit consolation to the more sobering realities of the neoliberal economy, such as the brutal replacement of blue-collar manufacturing jobs by high-tech jobs and the increasing difficulties of making a living without many educational qualifications. It is a predicament colorfully described by AB Lee: "Right now we are being replaced by fucking poly grads. How to fight? Cannot fight. Surrender already." To that extent, the film balances the hope presented by Perth with an underlying sense of quiet despair. For example, in a particularly poignant sequence, the film effectively conveys Harry's increasing irrelevance and, by extension, the decline of sunset industries, such as shipbuilding, in which Harry works. Beginning, as Harry locks up the shipyard, with a close-up of a padlock being snapped shut—a metaphor for both the doors closed to him as well as the shutting down of the industry in the rapidly changing economy of neoliberalism—the next three shots, each fading into the other, show Harry watching a large trade boat being towed out of the harbor. Again, the image is metaphoric, depicting the proverbial sailing of the boat, leaving those behind (in the figure of Harry stonily watching the ship leave the harbor) to rue missed opportunities and lost prospects. Although the time is late afternoon, these shots are sepia-tinted, as if already consigned to be yellowing photographs stored in a dusty archive. The music set to the sequence heightens the melancholy: scored as a short tune in a minor

key and played in two bars, it becomes a musical motif that is repeated in successive lower keys, each tonal descent conveying an increasing sense of sadness. Against this music, Harry reflects on his career end in a voice-over monologue: “This is where I started: first mate for twenty years; now not even a security guard. But I’d been around the world! Seen it all. Europe. France. South America. South Africa. Cambodia. Vietnam.” This recollection of glory days is not merely for the sake of memory, but, more importantly, an appeal for relevance, to a time when his work mattered and made a difference.

This is the reality of Singapore’s economic success from neoliberalism: the power of the marketplace prescribes the relevance of jobs and skills at the price of human cost as the value of local labor and knowledge is sidelined. As Piers Blaikie points out:

> The neoliberal paradigm . . . is highly totalizing and universalizing. Its view on the role of local people in applying their knowledge and skills in action is therefore myopic. Local knowledge is sidelined and reduced both theoretically and practically to market information on the technical choices available, and the local appropriateness of these choices to their environment and individual or household endowments. The paradigm is indifferent to the ‘localness’ of appropriate institutions which should be induced to meet market demand.[25]

In *Perth*, this is reflected in Harry’s and Selvam’s situations as they contemplate their increasing irrelevance in a society marching to the tune of the market. Harry laments to Selvam: “[Singapore] is so expensive, there’s no place for us. . . . You and I—we are not educated men. . . . We are the generation that used to work with our bare hands. Nowadays, there’s no more use for us.” This also reflects the neoliberal turn from material production and labor—work produced by “bare hands”—to the inverse of a white-collar service industry, mirroring the commodification of labor power in the early days of capitalism, whereby pools of workers were easily substituted for one another, resulting in substantial disruption in low-skilled labor markets. Their frustration with the inefficiencies of the system is unconcealed, as Selvam, who is master sergeant in the Singapore army, describes his annoyance and contempt for his younger and more educated successor: “Working so hard all these years, and the pension so small. And you know something? The fucker who takes over my place—with his university degree—first day, jog ah, not run. Jogging only for five kilometers, the fucker ‘peng san’ [Hokkien phrase for faint].” Interestingly, the men reassert themselves by their masculinity, which they express as a function of virility: “We use our hands for work and masturbate. Nowadays they use their hands for what? Computers. Don’t even know whether they masturbate. Maybe that’s why we got population problem!” Economic utility in the neoliberal agenda is thus tied conversely to emasculation—real men

work with their bare hands; the dictates of the marketplace, on the other hand, threaten masculinity, so that machismo is belligerently asserted to mask one's fear of diminished relevance and depleted usefulness, and the lack of value for one's life experience.[26] The irony of this outburst of masculinity from Harry—a worker sliding down the economic ladder, cuckolded by his wife, his work increasingly irrelevant to society—is also patent.

The motif of escape in the film also plays out against the authoritarianism of the city-state. The constant presence of rules and laws in the country presents Singaporean society laced up so tightly in its own constraints that it is used to comic effect. In an early scene, Harry boards a bus holding a cigarette, to which the bus driver objected with a sharp admonishment: "No smoking!" As Harry throws away the cigarette, the driver admonishes him again: "No littering!" As the driver spits out of the bus window in contempt, Harry returns the treatment: "No spitting!" In this comic portrayal of authoritarian Singapore, the admonisher and the admonished trade neither insults nor blows, but laws and regulations. There are rules for everything, even the racial segregation of prostitutes: as AB Lee explains, there is one street for the Thai women, one for Malaysians, whereas Joo Chiat, a neighborhood in eastern Singapore, is for the Vietnamese.

The rigidity of rules applies to other aspects of life as well. Singaporeans are assigned an identity number from birth, which they carry with them in perpetuity as identity cards. Harry quotes his dead mother as he locates her urn—by its number, of course—in the crematorium: "Cradle to grave, you are just a number." In its own way, the digitization of life in Singapore reflects the immutable nature of society and, again, the desire for escape from this unrelenting system takes the form of emigration to Perth. Speaking once more of Perth, Harry compares his own departure to the flight of political dissident Francis Seow, a nod towards the notorious aggression of Singaporean leaders against opposition politicians: "I'm going to Perth, Selvam. If I get this job, six months I make back the money I need, then it's time to be a quitter. I charbot [get the hell out] faster than Francis Seow!"[27] Escape is thus also a reflection of depoliticization—mirroring political emasculation against prevailing authoritarianism. As Robert McChesney writes, "[neoliberalism] is also a political theory. It posits that business domination of society proceeds most effectively when there is a representative democracy, but only when it is a weak and ineffectual polity typified by high degrees of depoliticization, especially among the poor and working class."[28] In Harry's emigration to Perth is also the representation of such depoliticization, a weakening of political will in the hegemony of the marketplace.

Perth thus transmutes from a destination, even a dream, to an *ideal* of getting out of Singapore, the rat race, and the economic pressures it encapsulates. Yet, even that ideal is ironic, as Harry's method of earning money to get to Perth—by ferrying prostitutes for Big Boss (Chuen Boone Ong)—contains similarly economic premises, as AB Lee summarizes: "The most important part of all this: we are recession-proof!" Nevertheless, it is not

all about economics. Perth is also an escape from the distress in Harry's personal life, such as the wreckage of his marriage—as Harry declares, "I'm going to Perth—no more compromise, no more wife!"—and the dead-end failure of his forced retirement.

In a scene almost two-thirds through the film, Harry storms into his son's wedding. His son, estranged for reasons never fully explained, had not invited his father to the celebration. Harry is drunk, furious, and his behavior is embarrassing, making it difficult for the audience to be sympathetic. Yet it is equally difficult *not* to feel sorry for Harry, for the scene is laden with a great deal of pain. It is preceded by numerous shots of tenderness, for example, Harry practicing in front of the mirror handing over the *angpow* (a red paper envelope containing money, traditionally given from an elder to a member of a younger generation for good luck and blessings on any auspicious occasion, such as weddings, birthdays, and Chinese New Year); a rehearsal that is even more painful in how wishful it is as a gift that is not to be. For the big occasion, Harry marks the date on his tear-away calendar with pink highlighted asterisks and dresses thoughtfully, taking care to wear a red shirt (red being an auspicious color to the Chinese). In a low-angle shot, Harry surveys himself for a long time in front of his cracked bedroom mirror, dressed in a fine shirt and suit for his son's wedding to which he has not been invited. The low angle emphasizes the heaviness of the character's mood and the ponderousness of the familial rift that is doomed to miserably continue. All these only add to the painful revelation of Harry's personal life and another aspect of the wretchedness from which he wishes to escape via Perth. The ironic poignancy of these revelations is magnified when seen against the extratextual reality of the Parental Maintenance Bill. As mentioned earlier, the bill, passed in 1997, legislated the obligation of working children to support their aged parents, thus maintaining neoliberal values and the operations of capitalism. However, in the process, care is mandated without love, and this hard-nosed pragmatism is brutally signified by the sad state of relations between Harry and his son. The latter now represents the young, English-speaking, and university-educated (early on in the film there is a glimpse of a photograph bearing a young man, presumably Harry's son, in graduation robes) who is the beneficiary, at his father's expense, of the neoliberal economy and who has now turned his back on his father, despite the latter's good intentions and tenderness toward him. Harry thus conceives his dream to get to Perth as a literal retirement to relinquish the pain and wretchedness he is suffering in Singapore. The true utopia of Perth is thus a process and not a destination: dreaming is more important than the dream.

Yet, if the motif of escape is prominent in the film, so is its impossibility. *Perth* is laden with doom from the beginning: the film opens with a violent scene, shown to us in a series of quick fades, of a man beating up a woman. We later realize that this is Harry beating up his wife after he discovers that she has gambled away their life savings and his financial means to get

to Perth. After the initial sounds of rage—the bellowing of the man, the cries of the woman, the sounds of blows and breaking glass—we hear, a little to our surprise, sobbing from the man, and the final two shots of the sequence, in high angle, reveal Harry, in only his underwear, staggering in the room. The shots are viewed out of focus, with clear scratches on the lens, thus emphasizing their formalism and drawing the audience's attention acutely to them. In so doing, these shots avoid voyeurism and identification, creating in the audience instead a state of distance and discreteness. The high angle of the shots implies omniscience in our passive gazing from above, as if from a higher power, but the conspicuous imperfection of the shots, coupled with their emotive undertones, underscores the helplessness of that omniscience, the fatefulness of what is to befall Harry, and the inevitable disappointment of his dream.

Impossibility is also reflected in the topography of the film. The film title of "Perth" bleeds into a classic Singapore skyline of the Central Business District at Raffles Place, itself a clarion affirmation of Singapore's economic achievement and neoliberal success. Yet, the dominant placing of the film title implies the fundamental unhappiness in the country, such that the dreams of Perth fill its horizons. This static shot of Singapore's city skyline also acts as an exposition of Singapore's own economic journey. The refurbished Fullerton Hotel, for instance, as seen in the foreground of the shot, is a telling icon of Singapore's colonial past; the building was named after Robert Fullerton, the first governor of the Straits Settlements, and commissioned in 1919 as part of the British colony's centennial celebrations; it is now a five-star boutique hotel reflective of Singapore's status as a global city. Likewise, the skyscraper buildings of UOB Building, OCBC Building, Singapore Land Tower, etc., demonstrate the country's economic achievements, juxtaposed against the Singapore riverfront in the foreground as a reminder of Singapore's pioneering days as a regional port and where much of her early trade was conducted. Nevertheless, the title of "Perth" constitutes the ironic dream of getting away from this success. In the DVD commentary, the film's director, Djinn, remarks on how easily mistakable the opening scene might be, as viewers not familiar with Perth or Singapore might erroneously identify the Asian city's skyline as the former when the film title comes through. Yet, this mistaken reading is also apt, as the mislabeling of Singapore as Perth reflects the dream (of Singapore's economic success) gone awry for Harry and Selvam. Through the topography of *Perth*, the viewer is often reminded of this ironic juxtaposition and its nascent dystopia: shots of the gleaming city or of others' happiness, for example, are frequently cut to shots of Harry in shadows or in unhappy loneliness. In one sequence, shots of Harry making his way to his flat are sandwiched between a scene where a child, young and oblivious, kicks his ball into Harry's path (which an annoyed Harry then kicks away), and a scene-setting shot of Singapore's city lights at Marina Bay, another area of premium shopping centers and business offices. A particularly memorable

shot in the middle of this sequence shows Harry climbing a staircase to his walk-up flat. The shot is stationary, with the camera positioned at a landing, looking down as Harry makes his weary way up, level after level, his body moving in and out of shadows, his climbing of the different floors not unlike Virgil looping through his circles of Hell. Another example is the scene described earlier, which shows Harry standing akimbo as he watches a ship being launched off a slipway, one that will sail without him.

Eventually, the film resolves its tension through violence. Violence runs as a thread through the film and signifies the mode in which survival is possible in the new economy, shown particularly in comparison between Harry and AB Lee. In the film, AB Lee is a resourceful character who is a survivor in the system—he not only presumably retains his job as a supervisor at the shipyard, but also finds ways to supplement his income by working for the gangsters, gets his way with the prostitutes, and on various levels ensures a comfortable existence for himself. More than that, though, AB is able to look out for others, for example, by giving Harry and Selvam the job opportunity of ferrying the prostitutes, and mediating between Harry and Big Boss vis-à-vis Harry's later request for Mai's freedom. In an early scene, when Harry mentions he had an altercation with a bus driver, AB Lee replies: "Anyone give you problem, it's not a small matter. You tell me who the fuck it is, I go and fuck him up. . . . Cos I'll take care of it otherwise, okay. You are Lee, right? We take care of our own kind, and I take care of you." AB Lee is the go-to man, the enterprising character who can deal with the system and work something out. In comparison, both Harry and Selvam look helpless and self-pitying, complaining between themselves of their lot in the coffee shop.

On that logic, Harry's and AB's different capabilities in the new economy mirror their propensities for violence. AB—direct and resourceful—shows a blunt and unfazed capacity for brutality. When two Caucasian men swear at AB and Harry as they drive past, AB orders Harry to chase their vehicle and, when the cars stop, gets out, rushes over, and beats up the passenger who had insulted him. He washes the blood from his hands afterwards with no remorse, cursing instead about how difficult it is to wash blood off his rings. Violence to AB is not only a casual occurrence, but an almost natural solution to life's problems. He indulges in it with an attitude akin to cheerfulness, with no dread or apprehension. In comparison, Harry's attitude to violence swings between mindless rage and almost Prufrockian abeyance. An early sequence in the film shows Harry fantasizing about beating up the bus driver who had admonished him for smoking and littering. Yet, just minutes earlier, he had, in the fragments of the opening scene, assaulted his wife for having gambled away his money. Violence for Harry thus runs as another uneasy equilibrium between fantasy and reality, and the slippages between them—the reality of beating up his wife as set against the suggestive capabilities of violence as he slips his large rings on his fingers, as set once more against the fantasies of him splitting open the head of the

bus driver—pave the way for the eventual release that Harry finds through his final act of extreme violence. Enraged by Big Boss's insult to him by stripping Mai before him, Harry grabs his *parang* (the Malay equivalent of a machete and traditional weapon of Southeast Asian gangsters) and first gashes AB Lee (who tries to stop him) on the head, before going on a killing spree, slashing the boss's henchman and finally Big Boss himself. In finally realizing his desires for violence, Harry's acts of gore achieve mythic heights. Murray Pomerance explains his category of mythic violence in the dramaturgy of screen violence:

> In numerous instances of screen violence, we see an extraordinary exhibition of aggression, negativity, destruction, or presumption made exceptionally visible and noteworthy against a violent context precisely by the extremity of the style and manner in which it is executed. The perpetrator becomes mythic by outperforming his context.[29]

Seen in that light, Harry, generally portrayed as nonconfrontational (with the bus driver and with the Caucasian men in the car), outperforms his context (the impossibility of getting to Perth) in his killing spree, elevating his straitened economic situation into one of transcendence (through death), and in the process establishing his status as a mythic hero. Yet, these mythic echoes are promptly deflated, as the following shot shows last night's events as a lurid headline in the next day's newspaper, whose front page is quickly trod over by a muddy shoe, its heedlessness echoing the meaninglessness of the "Geylang massacre." The imagination of escape in *Perth* is not a well-earned flight to retirement in Australia, but a drunken brawl resulting in senseless deaths, and the ceaselessness of the many busy shoes pounding the pavement in the subsequent shot shows how quickly life moves on. The pragmatism of the market and of survival has no place for myth or drama.

Nostalgia

The film is shot through with a sense of an old world, often literally so: the director, Djinn, had taken care to use many of Singapore's old neighborhoods as backdrops for the film—the shophouses and walk-up apartments along Balestier Road with their window-mount air conditioners; the HDB apartment blocks of Tanglin Halt (presumably where Harry grew up, as he walks through the neighborhood, lost in memories before visiting his mother's urn); the old-style flats in Whampoa; the clan associations near Geylang, where Harry's wife (Liu Qiulian) plays *mahjong*; the *kopitiam* (old coffee shop) in which Harry chats with Selvam and to which he brings Mai for rice porridge. There are several visual reminders of the past: the junks at the docks where Harry sits, reflecting on his past; the *tai chi* of the elderly folks in the park behind Keong Saik Street; the many decorations on the walls of Harry's flat and the paraphernalia in his cupboard, clutter

that one can only find these days in the flats of the older generation; the brown-paper-wrapped food Harry carries in his blue plastic bag, a rare sight these days as Styrofoam boxes have become the norm; the rows of burnt-top bread loaves from an old-style provision shop, which Mai stops to sniff, an olfactory reminder of her own past in Vietnam. These images are also cultural vestiges of Singapore's past: the clan associations at Geylang, for example, are a representation of the old system in which each Chinese dialect group—such as the Hokkiens or the Teochews—gravitated to their own like a social club and helped each other out, akin to an ad hoc welfare system.

The "old school" is also reflected in the film in other ways, such as the vernacular of Singapore. In less than a generation, the language capacities of the older and younger generations have changed dramatically. Older folks in Singapore tend to switch comfortably between Malay and various dialects (such as Hokkien or Cantonese), and any spoken English, such as Harry's, is heavily accented with the intonations of Chinese dialect. In the *kopitiam* with Selvam, Harry orders his tea in Malay from a passing Malay stall keeper who ignores him; unflustered, he reorders in Hokkien to another Chinese stall keeper. The younger generation, having had more exposure to Western culture, tends to speak English with more American/English inflexions, and the difference is noticeable, particularly in conversations between Harry and his son or with Raneesha the socialite. Changes in culture are also apparent, such as in the scene of Harry's son's wedding, where the traditional celebratory toast of "yum seng"—a phrase meaning "bottoms up" in Hokkien, to be bellowed as long and as loudly as possible—is replaced by the more genteel celebration of clinking glasses by the champagne fountain. The later scene of Harry, pained to the core by his son's rejection, toasting himself in the toilet with his own cries of "yum seng" only adds to the poignancy of the changing environment between generations. Economically, Singapore's neoliberal policies have not only brought about a prosperous environment and greater opportunities for the younger new generation social-elite group, but have also resulted in growing insecurity and inequality that have alienated the older generation and made them feel vulnerable and disconnected.

The rejection of the past is also portrayed emotionally via the objects shown in the film, mostly in the paraphernalia in Harry's flat—the plastic decorations stuck on the walls or hanging along the doors of his closet; the enshrined deity of Guan Gong in a low shot looking up towards his forbidding stare; the various Indonesian and Malay statues; photographs; a little flask of whisky; a jade pendant that Harry fingers—as well as objects shown in other places featured in the film, such as the Maneki Neko (a Japanese sculpture of a cat, common in Asia, waving an upright paw and believed to bring good luck to the owner) at the *kopitiam*. These objects are typically shown in close-up, emphasizing their corporeality in comparison to the intangible value they contain as keepsakes. Much of modern life

treats such paraphernalia and trinkets as cheap souvenirs—in their starkest form, they are just blobs of plastic—but their value lies not only in their sentimentality but, perhaps more importantly, in their affirmation that the past is valuable in the way of memories or lived understanding.

The irrelevance of this past in neoliberalism is thus a rejection of an existence that had been meaningful to those who had lived it but is now rendered inconsequential, whose value is prescribed instead by replacement and novelty. Objects are the antithesis of neoliberalism—the market does not treasure old things deemed to be useless—and the visual emphasis of these objects in *Perth* is a reiteration of both relevance and irrelevance. In particular, the white out-of-season Christmas tree standing in Harry's flat crystallizes the dichotomy—a signification of a happy time in the past, yet also a damning attestation of its inapplicability: a needless decoration that is completely out of season, as incongruous as a white Christmas in tropical Singapore.

CONCLUSION

The case of neoliberalism in Singapore is ambivalent: on one hand, it has brought economic prosperity and opportunity to the country; on the other hand, such development has incurred serious human cost, as I have tried to show via the filmic imagination of *Perth*. Set against this is the hard hand of authoritarianism in Singapore, which maintains the stability of the city-state in an uneasy equilibrium contra the market ideals of neoliberalism, resulting in a tension in which flight is sought and escape constantly considered, no matter the labels given to emigrating Singaporeans, as Harry shows by proudly proclaiming that he is more than happy to "be a quitter" and head for Perth. The resolution of this tension is not easy, and there is enough evidence, anecdotally or otherwise, that emigrating Singaporeans have become a real issue. Consider, for example, this letter written by a Singaporean reader to *Today*, a freely distributed local daily:

> It has been a new spring that left me with mixed feelings about what it really means to be a native-born Singaporean. I realised that two of my cousins' families have migrated without saying a word or leaving any contacts. One has gone to the United States and the other to Australia after living in Hong Kong for two years.
>
> Why are so many middle-aged university-educated professional Singaporeans leaving? Is it the National Service, our education system or the changes in our society that are pushing them away? Has the influx of foreign 'talents' from India and China made them feel that being citizens count for very little nowadays or is it the pull of greener pastures where life is less pressurised and less stressful?
>
> That my cousins left quietly the soil where they were born and educated without any fanfare or leaving any form of contacts can only

> mean one thing—they are cutting all ties with their motherland for good.[30]

If flight or emigration is the solution, what might be left behind, then, on this little island of gleaming skyscrapers and shiny new cars are bodies engaged in building more skyscrapers and driving more new cars, where everything becomes commodities in the language of neoliberalism and paths are paved with trodden dreams. In tracing Harry's story, the film *Perth* leaves us with this sobering vision.

NOTES

1. W.B. Yeats, n.d.
2. See, generally, F.A. Hayek and B. Caldwell, 2007.
3. See, for example, the case studies in Chase, 2002.
4. See, for example, Henry Wai-Chung Yeung, 2000.
5. Garry Rodan, 2004.
6. Carlos Alberto Torres, 2009, p. 1.
7. David Harvey, 2005, p. 86.
8. Comments such as those quoted from ex-U.S. President Bush at the signing of a Free Trade Agreement in 2003, whereby Singapore was highlighted as "an example for . . . the world of the transforming power of economic freedom and open markets," are typical citations: see Seok-Fang Sim, 2005, p. 1.
9. See Stanley S. Bedlington, 1978, pp. 244–256.
10. See Beng-Huat Chua, 1995.
11. Sim, 2005, p. 2. Also see Sim, 2001.
12. For instance, Sim describes how the local Chinese press criticizes the local English press for being under "a psychological burden of needing to be critical to be seen as credible or professional," an accusation that Sim argues indicates "successful neo-liberal discipline . . . and that a certain (non-adversarial 'Asian') state-society formation has already been securely engineered into existence." See Sim, 2005, p. 10. See also Kalai Natarajan and Hao Xiaoming, 2000.
13. Harvey, 2005, p. 82.
14. Chua, 1995, p. 10; see also pp. 9–39.
15. See Richard Clutterbuck, 1984, pp. 144–159.
16. See Chua, 1995, pp. 23–25.
17. See also Robert W. McChesney, 2005, pp. 159–170, on how neoliberalism and global media buttress each other in terms of power relations and business interests.
18. See Aihwa Ong, 2004, pp. 176–189, particularly on how in neoliberalism, market risks challenge authorities to incorporate technology into management and governance.
19. Chua, 1998, p. 31.
20. Kuan Yew Lee, 1962, p. 83; emphasis added.
21. As Serene Tan and Brenda Yeoh describe: "The cosmopolitan Singaporean would be familiar with global trends and lifestyles, diverse cultures and social norms, and feel comfortable working and living in Singapore as well as overseas and would grow up with an international perspective. Internationalisation is a key word here—the internationalised Singaporean is a cosmopolitan

Singaporean." In comparison, heartlanders "make their living within Singapore and have local orientation and interests rather than international ones." See Serene Tan and Brenda S.A. Yeoh, 2006, p. 150.

22. Diane K. Mauzy and R.S. Milne, 2002, p. 81.
23. Ibid.; emphasis added.
24. Yeats, 2003, p. 158.
25. Piers Blaikie, 2000, p. 1043.
26. See also Aihwa Ong's examination of the outsourcing of high-tech jobs and its blows to American masculinity in Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty (2006), especially pp. 158–160.
27. Francis Seow is a Singapore-born political dissident who is currently living in the United States after facing lawsuits from former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew for tax evasion.
28. McChesney, 2005, p. 167.
29. Murray Pomerance, 2004, p. 45.
30. From "Puzzle of Migrating Singaporeans," February 2, 2006; see http://www.temasekreview.com/2011/01/13/puzzle-of-migrating-singaporeans-and-ft-policy

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14 Gambling on Life and Death

Neoliberal Rationality and the Films of Jeffrey Jeturian

Bliss Cua Lim

Committed to exposing the ways in which the personal is always crosshatched with the social and the political, filmmaker Jeffrey Jeturian's most memorable work traces the relentless conversion of all forms of social experience into economic transactions. In interviews, the Filipino film director has distilled the essence of his feature films: "personal, intimate stories that say a lot about our social and political realities,"[1] resulting in an oeuvre that offers a sustained consideration of commodification: the commodification of sex (in *Pila Balde* [Fetch a Pail of Water], 1999), of traumatic life histories (in *Tuhog* [Larger than Life], 2001), of love (in *Bridal Shower*, 2004), of news reportage (in *Bikini Open*, 2005), of death, grief, and hope (in *Kubrador* [Bet Collector], 2006). Asked to comment on the thematic of commodification in his films, Jeturian has remarked that such transactions reveal of relations of exploitation and oppression.[2]

This chapter explores the relevance of Wendy Brown's notion of neoliberal rationality—a "conduct of conduct" in which subjects internalize their subjectivation as entrepreneur-citizens—to the films of Jeffrey Jeturian.[3] Brown contends that neoliberalism is more than a series of economic processes; rather, it is a suffusive political rationality, a form of governmentality that reaches beyond the state and the economy to pervade every sphere of life. "Neo-liberalism carries a social analysis," Brown writes, which "reaches from the soul of the citizen-subject to education policy to practices of empire." For Brown, the Foucauldian concept of governmentality underscores the role of internalized mentalities and calls our attention to how citizen-subjects are *formed* under neoliberalism, as opposed to being controlled, repressed, or punished.[4] The logic of the market encroaches on every sphere of life that might be considered independent of economic calculation and hollows out, in the process, moral and ethical principles—like social justice and egalitarianism—that are not rooted in market logics of profit, pragmatism, or expediency.[5] Though the commodification of affect and experience seems encompassed by the classical Marxist theory of reification, Wendy Brown suggests that the newness of neoliberal rationality lies in its capacity to "reach beyond the market." Under neoliberalism, "all dimensions of human life are cast in terms of a market rationality." Market

values permeate even noneconomic spheres, reframing the state as a market actor and reaching even the most individuated scale of personal life. For Brown, neoliberalism is no mere aggregate of economic policies; instead, it is a political rationality that "involves extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action."[6]

Whether in *Pila Balde*, where sex is linked as much to emotional devastation as to economic desperation, or in *Kubrador*, whose bet-collecting protagonist translates every experience into numbers that can be played for money in the underground gambling trade *jueteng*, Jeturian's films manifestly thematize the neoliberal transformation of social individuals into calculative entrepreneur-consumers. The neoliberal formation of the national subject and the corresponding transformation of the public sphere have been chillingly described by Brown as "the production of citizens as individual entrepreneurial actors across all dimensions of their lives [and the] reduction of civil society to a domain for exercising this entrepreneurship."[7]

Through a close consideration of *Pila Balde* and *Kubrador*, this chapter traces two levels at which both films operate to expose the workings of neoliberal rationality in the Philippines. First, Jeturian's *diegetic* elaboration of commodification in story worlds where sex, longing, death, and grief become subject to economic calculation. Second, the *extra-cinematic* dimensions of Filipino film production in the context of economic crisis and political corruption. Released in 1999, *Pila Balde*'s conditions of production register the aftershocks of the economic collapse of Asia's so-called "tiger economies" in 1997, when neoliberal tenets led to financial crisis in Asia.[8] Intended to shield national industries from financial stresses and to foster global competitiveness, the economic and cultural policies that followed the 1997 crisis had unforeseen effects on-screen. My consideration of *Pila Balde*, a low-budget *pito-pito* film, indexes the desperate measures Philippine film studios adopted to weather the "crisis of Philippine cinema" in the late 1990s, when the "steadily dropping box office returns of Filipino films, the currency devaluation brought on by the Asian economic crisis, and prohibitive government taxation (with 30 percent of a film's profits going to the national amusement tax) caused the industry to flounder against the ticket sales of Hollywood fare."[9] Seven years later, in 2006, *Kubrador* was released in the wake of another sequence of state crises: the political scandals of 2005 that implicated the First Gentleman of the Philippines, Mike Arroyo, in payoffs from the illegal gambling trade, *jueteng*.[10] Prominent *jueteng* scandals recall not only state failure under the regime of Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (2001–2010), but also indict the prior administration of President Joseph "Erap" Estrada (1998–2001), whose ouster by mass protests in 2001 was triggered by the revelation of huge *jueteng* payoffs to the nation's highest leader.

Whereas both diegetic and extra-cinematic aspects of *Pila Balde* and *Kubrador* illuminate the workings of neoliberalism in the Philippines, my chapter also wrestles with the question of affect or tone in both films.

Jeturian's films consistently feature slum dwellers and the urban poor, but Jeturian has repeatedly stated his refusal to romanticize poverty through melodrama, preferring "simple social realist stories"[11] instead:

> My quarrel with local films is that they usually romanticise or dramatise poverty—which is not the way Filipinos look at poverty. I myself am amazed at the disposition of the Filipinos. They enjoy life and that's what I wanted to capture in my film. Not even poverty can stop them from loving, from keeping on [with] their struggles, from living, and I hope that is clear in my film because in the end, the message is, even if there's so much tragedy in the lives of these people, life still goes on for them.[12]

The result is a diegesis that mingles desperate, immiserated economic circumstances with an absence (at least on the part of the protagonists) of utter despair, in large part due to a communitarian ethos of reciprocity that tempers the neoliberal formation of unimpeded individualism. In the last section of this chapter, I consider the tonal complexity of Jeturian's films in the context of the proximity between gambling and death in his story worlds. Literal and figurative links between placing a bet (*kubra)* and giving a donation to those in need (*abuloy*)[13] are introduced in *Pila Balde* and intensified in *Kubrador.*

PITO-PITO FILMMAKING AND NEOLIBERAL CRISIS

The neoliberal policies of the IMF and the World Bank laid the groundwork for financial crisis in Asia.[14] The 1997 Asian economic crisis stemmed from capital market deregulation that encouraged a rapid influx of investment, fueling a property and construction boom in Southeast Asia that ended in loan defaults, retracted investments, and currency devaluations. As Jamie Morgan reminds us, "not only did neoliberalism help to create the conditions for financial crisis, but market liberalization helped to ensure that those conditions could be exploited." Southeast Asian currencies—the Thai Baht, the Philippine Peso, and the Indonesian Rupiah—were famously raided by currency speculators like George Soros, who, through planned and systematic sales of Southeast Asian currencies, knowingly destabilized those currencies and then exploited the difference between fluctuating exchange rates, making millions of dollars in profit with impunity. In her acute recounting of neoliberalism as the stage setting for the Asian economic crisis of the late 1990s, Morgan notes: "The point is that neoliberalism provides incentives for the destabilization of an already precarious position. Neoliberal finance is the modern form of usury."[15] The supremely rational-calculative self-interest of a few resulted in lasting hardship for the vast majority of citizens in these economically battered Asian nations: the

aftereffects of neoliberalism were registered not only in currency valuations and stock markets, but in the collapse of businesses and the further immiseration of the poor as the living standard for millions of people in Southeast Asia plunged below the poverty line in 1997–1998.[16]

Pila Balde bears the imprint of the cultural politics of pragmatism adopted by Filipino film and television studios in the aftermath of the 1997 crisis. The industry's biggest film studio, Regal Films, strove to streamline costs, resulting in their infamous low-budget exploitation films, known colloquially as *pito-pito*. Literally meaning "seven-seven," the phrase *pito-pito* denotes a Philippine medicinal tea composed of seven types of herbs. In the parlance of the Filipino film industry in the late 1990s, *pito-pito* came to refer to the films produced by Regal Films' "ultra-low budget," "quickie" division, Good Harvest, which, hoping to turn a profit in the brutal post-1997 economic climate, adopted an initial policy of completing each phase of preproduction, production, and postproduction in seven days apiece (in practice, these periods were somewhat longer), with tiny budgets and no bankable stars.[17]

Pila Balde was shot in thirteen days on a shoestring budget of 2.5 million pesos (about U.S.$50,000),[18] a fraction of the twelve-million-peso budget then allotted for a typical mainstream Filipino film.[19] The production limit of twenty thousand feet of film stock constrained the filmmaker to produce a good take with a shooting ratio of about two to one, as opposed to shooting ratios for high-dollar Hollywood films that may go as high as fifty-five to one.[20] Remarkably, Jeturian recalls that *Pila Balde*'s climactic scene—in which a fire razes the slum community—was shot for only U.S.$500.[21] Explaining his ability to mount such a complex scene so effectively and economically, Jeturian remarks: "I think my TV experience helped me when they gave me this *pito-pito* project. In TV you have to do everything fast, within a short time. You finish everything within two taping days. I thought it [*pito-pito*] was a breeze. Compared to two shooting days, suddenly I would be given ten shooting days!" The connection between *pito-pito* production and Philippine television was not limited to the role of television as a training ground for young Filipino filmmakers. Jeturian also recalls that in the late 1990s, Regal Films was contractually required to supply Philippine-based television network and multimedia conglomerate ABS-CBN with films for television broadcast. *Pito-pito* filmmaking became a way to produce films for television quickly and cheaply.[22]

In 1998, Marilou Diaz Abaya, a noted Filipina auteur who rose to prominence in the New Cinema of the early 1980s, characterized the beginning of the 1990s as a euphoric period of economic growth in the Philippines. An influx of investments allowed new movie theaters to be built and television and film studios to expand, and television became a profitable ancillary market for films after their initial theatrical release. Dollar remittances from overseas bolstered the formation of a new, more educated middle class who patronized quality films by established local directors. This era of growth came to an abrupt end with the Asian economic crisis of 1997.

Shrinking profits panicked Filipino film producers, who could no longer rely on conventional filmmaking practices to ensure box-office success. Thus, for industry insiders like Abaya, the neoliberal economic crisis inadvertently created the conditions for a new generation of young filmmakers to revitalize the Filipino film industry at the end of the 1990s. Abaya noted that Filipino film producers "have no idea what will or will not make money. That's very good for the filmmaker because, like the late '70s and the early '80s [the period of the Philippine New Cinema], they are forced to concede that the judgment on what will or will not make it is really the director's." Diaz-Abaya optimistically remarked that the crisis in Philippine filmmaking "all paints a picture of vitality" because "directors are being allowed to make films which five years ago would have been thrown out, because [producers] thought they had a formula, but not now."[23]

Writing for *Film Comment* in 2000, critic Roger Garcia similarly regarded *pito-pito* filmmaking as a positive development. Garcia characterized *pito-pito* as low-budget genre filmmaking that, by "embracing a peculiarly Filipino mix of the lurid, political and religious . . . has produced some of the most promising mainstream films since the Seventies," effectively "launch[ing] the careers of young filmmakers like Jeffrey Jeturian, whose hit, *Fetch a Pail of Water* (*Pila Balde*) has Brocka's social conscience and a touch of humor."[24]

Against these optimistic assessments of *pito-pito* film production, director Lav Diaz, hailed by Garcia as "the major writer-director talent" showcased by Good Harvest's *pito-pito* division,[25] gave a sobering account of *pito-pito* filmmaking's exploitative conditions of production:

> The idea that the "*pito-pito*" is a source of promise for Philippine Cinema is a myth. The only reason Jeffrey [Jeturian] and I were able to make meaningful films within this type of production is that we fought [the studio] all the way. The "*pito-pito*" is hell, from checks postdated to six months after the film shoot, to the lack of decent wages for the film crew—100 to 150 pesos [about U.S.$3] a day! It's very exploitative. Sometimes the shoot goes on for 24 hours straight, with no sleep. People collapse from exhaustion. Far from keeping Philippine cinema afloat, the "*pito-pito*s" will make our industry sink to the very bottom. There is no redemption to be found in "*pito-pito*s."[26]

Asked to comment on Diaz's scathing assessment of *pito-pito*s, Jeturian responded by acknowledging the exploitative aspects of *pito-pito* filmmaking. Jeturian cited low wages, casting compromises, and creative decisions undermined by considerations of profit and expediency. Significantly, his comments shed light on the reliance of *pito-pito* filmmaking on the structure of *abono*—the act of advancing money to replace a shortage of funds or capital—that forced fledgling filmmakers to partially finance their own productions, with no assurance of recouping their investments:

> The conditions of *pito-pito* are really exploitative in the sense that you have to make *abono* [advance your own money to cover funding shortfalls], you have to make *pakiusap* [ask favors] of everybody. They have to be your friends so they will agree to work under those conditions . . . You have to agree to casting actors who, even if they're not [a good] fit for the role, you're forced to agree with because they fit the budget . . . My feeling when I was doing my first film [*Sana Pag-Ibig Na (Enter Love)*, 1998] was that it would be okay for me to make *abono*—to invest with my own money—because that's what happens with *pito-pito*. Because of the limitations, you end up making *abono* for salaries of the staff. But for me, I saw it as an investment. Because it was a make or break thing for me. They [Good Harvest] gave me the break. Before that, no one would just give you a break and entrust five to ten million worth of investment unless you come from a rich family. Here in the Philippines there are directors who produce their own films just to get their break. So [to break into the industry], you either have to know the producer or have the resources to make your first film . . . That process gave me my break to do my first film. There was no deception. The studio will lay down their cards and say, "Here are the conditions." And it's up to you whether to agree or refuse. So if you agree then you should know what you are getting into and you accept the conditions.[27]

Jeturian's candid portrait of the exploitative-yet-undisguised conditions under which young *pito-pito* filmmakers managed to launch their own careers in the Philippine film industry makes clear the neoliberal interpellation of the filmmaker-as-entrepreneur, forced to reify his own talent as a commodity in which to invest. As Lukács emphasized, reification entails the commodification of every worker's own self-regard: "the worker, too, must present himself as the 'owner' of his labour-power, as if it were a commodity."[28] Self-objectification, or the sense of regarding one's own qualities and abilities as objective possessions to be owned, disposed of, or properly invested in, is the condition of life under capitalism, one that intensifies as the structure of the commodity is interiorized and we regard our own labor in increasingly abstract, homogeneous terms (for example, as a "career").[29] Along with other conditions of constraint and compromise detailed earlier, *pito-pito* emblematized a reified structure of filmmaking in which talented directors were forced to "make *abono*," to advance funds that in effect represented a form of investing in—or gambling on—their own careers.

SPACE, CLASS, AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN *PILA BALDE* [*FETCH A PAIL OF WATER*]

In 1999, following *Pila Balde*'s strong performance at the box office, Good Harvest production chief Joey Gosiengfiao enthused: "It's our first certified hit." The first bona fide commercial success of *pito-pito* filmmaking, *Pila*

Balde's profitability upon its initial release was welcome news to a "local movie industry . . . experiencing its lowest dip in the business chart."[30] Impressively, Jeturian's commercial hit went on to garner multiple awards and critical commendation both domestically and internationally.[31]

The material for *Pila Balde* originated in a television episode scripted for the weekly television drama anthology *Viva Spotlight* by Armando "Bing" Lao, Jeturian's primary screenwriter-collaborator.[32] Jeturian describes the narrative kernel of *Pila Balde* as a "simple story about a young couple who dreamt of having a better life but the environment made it difficult for them." According to Jeturian, the director of the original television episode, Joel Lamangan, felt that "there seems to be nothing much happening with the story, because it's not story-oriented. The plot was so simple." For Jeturian, however, the simplicity of the social realist narrative enabled a focus on "the culture, the environment" surrounding the struggling protagonists. However, he faced the difficulty of pitching this spare social realist narrative to a mainstream production studio, Regal Films. Joey Gosiengfiao, the supervising producer of Regal's *pito-pito* division, Good Harvest, gave the green light for the film on one condition: he asked Jeturian to "put in a lot of sex." The studio's demand to transform a social realist narrative into a commercially viable sex film is parodied in Jeturian's next film, *Tuhog*, released in 2001, two years after *Pila Balde*. The filmmaker relates: "*Tuhog* was a satire on sex in Philippine cinema. The first scene of *Tuhog* is this director proposing material to a producer which he read from a tabloid about a rape-incest victim. And the producer said '*o sige*' [okay], he gave the green light for the project, but he said, '*basta gawin mong* sexy' [just make it sexy]."[33]

Jeturian's acquiescence to the studio requirement to retool *Pila Balde* as a sexploitation flick can be traced to his view of genre filmmaking as a vehicle for social realism: "I want to tackle real stories. It's just my way of telling them that varies. Like, I can use a sex comedy. I use different genres to show real stories."[34] It was also partially motivated by Jeturian's desire to prove his mettle as a commercially viable film director following the commercial failure of his first film, *Sana Pag-Ibig Na*, which had won critical praise but had failed to attract popular audiences the year before: "My first film was a very wholesome family drama but it bombed at the box office. But it got awards and it won for the actress a Best Actress award. So in my second film, I was ready to inject some sex into it just to be able to prove to my producer that I can be a mainstream director. And also because I thought the material could stand some sex. That was the only way I could convince my producer to allow me to do a socially relevant subject."[35] Upon rescreening *Pila Balde* with a Munich film festival audience in 2004, Jeturian felt in retrospect that "there was too much sex in the movie . . . it could have stood some editing. I felt guilty for succumbing to the requirements of the producer to put in a lot of sex." The proliferation of sexploitation films under a liberal Board of Censors chief had created a climate in which a director's addition of extraneous sex scenes became necessary "to compete, to get approval from the producer."[36]

Gratuitous sex notwithstanding, *Pila Balde*'s naughty humor and its libertarian, "non-pontificating" framing of socially relevant material resonated favorably with popular audiences and film critics alike.[37] The film's success at crafting a dual-tiered mode of address to both moviegoers with a preference for commercial fare as well as film reviewers drawn to adept filmmaking and social insight is signaled by the canny double entendre of the film's title. Jeturian explains:

> The original title, *Pila-balde*, means lining up for water but it has a sexual connotation to it. It means gang bang, a girl with guys lining up to have sex with her. . . . It's for the audience who loves to watch sex films, that's why it has a naughty title. But at the same, I was hoping that even if they are there for the sex, they'd realize it's not just an ordinary sex film. If I consistently do films of this sort, then probably I would create an audience for my movies, more than just having viewers who are after sex. My target is also people who go for good cinema. Because my first film got good reviews and my second film got good reviews, I'd like to think I'm succeeding in creating an audience for my films.[38]

As Jeturian's comments make clear, the film's title had a risqué connotation in urban slang, and served to signal the film's explicit sexual content to local audiences. Underscoring the prurient connotation of the movie title, the first close shots of the communal faucet around which young men use a hand pump to collect water from a deep well (*poso*) are accompanied by the offscreen sound of street boys joking about getting an erection. By blatantly inviting a phallic reading of the hand-pumped faucet, the act of fetching water is overtly sexualized from the beginning of the film (Figure 14.1).

Figure 14.1 In *Pila Balde* [Fetch a Pail of Water, dir. Jeffrey Jeturian, 1999], both the film's title and early expository scenes overtly sexualize the act of fetching water from a communal water pump.

Shot on location in Quezon City, *Pila Balde* explores the intersecting lives of two neighboring communities entangled in what Jeturian calls an "economic circle": the lower-middle-class residents who live in the Marcos era tenements built in the late 1970s by the Bagong Lipunan Sites and Services (BLISS) and the urban poor squatters who live in the adjacent slum area, known as *manggahan* (mango groves; ironically, the area appears treeless).[39] By the end of the 1970s, First Lady Imelda Marcos had amassed an enormous degree of power: she held the offices of assemblywoman, minister of Human Settlements, and governor of Metro Manila. Imelda Marcos famously christened the national capital region of Metro Manila the "City of Man," aiming to achieve "low-cost housing for the poor," the "upgrading of blighted areas," and the overall "beautification" of the city.[40] The government's BLISS housing projects established condominiums in "the most depressed areas within each region, province, town, or city" and promised to provide basic needs—water and power foremost among them—to the nation's poorest citizens.[41] Two decades later, Jeturian's location filming for *Pila Balde* in the low-income housing projects of Quezon City exposes the false claims of the Marcos period. The title makes literal reference to the failure of government-owned utilities to pipe water into all corners of the city, and the chronic lack of water and electrical power looms large in the lives of the film's protagonists. (Offscreen, periodic water shortages in Metro Manila persist to the present day.[42]) In this film about spatial proximity between people of distinct socioeconomic strata, the scarcity of water functions as a potent leveler between classes because neither the middle-class residents nor their poor neighbors have access to water indoors. Everyone is forced to fetch water at a communal outdoor faucet, though the comparatively wealthier tenement residents pay the young men of the slums to do it for them. In one scene, a water carrier offers his services as an in-home masseuse to a university professor, bearing out the link between water and sex established in the film's opening scenes.

Pila Balde is ostensibly a narrative about how Gina (Ana Capri), a slum girl who dreams of being rescued from poverty by her better-off neighbor, Jimboy (Harold Pineda), becomes bitterly disillusioned when he tosses her aside as a mere sexual conquest. The film, however, is much more than the story of how Gina learns to entrust her heart to Nonoy (Marcus Madrigal), a truer though poorer lover, and with him to try to eke out a life in the midst of poverty, sexual and economic exploitation, and the death of loved ones (Figure 14.4). As Jeturian recognized, the narrative progression of events in Gina and Nonoy's lives is not the sole focus of spectatorial engagement. Instead, the viewer follows the densely crisscrossing paths of multiple characters in a milieu film crammed full of several other interesting figures: the usurer Mrs. Alano (Becky Misa), who aggrandizes herself at the expense of others and routinely shortchanges the slum workers for their labor; Lola Cion (Estrella Kuenzler), Gina's loving but gambling-addicted grandmother; the loudmouthed Shirley (Amaya Meynard), who works at a sex club; and Mr. Ocampo (Edwin Amado), the gay male professor who cruises the young men

of the slums as they haul water for their wealthier neighbors. The real reason that *Pila Balde* draws us in is its capacity to sketch vibrant characters and the texture of everyday life in the context of interclass dynamics of desire, exploitation, dependency, and distrust.

The film takes up the question of what happens when two proximate but distinct socioeconomic classes live at close quarters with one another. As a result, setting is the most conspicuous formal element in the film, a clear visual analogue for the narration's spatialization of class relations. *Pila Balde* portrays class antagonisms as a set of entanglements between neighbors. Class dynamics are visualized through both spatial proximity and spatial distinction: though the middle-class apartment building and the slums are right next to one another, the tenements appear to tower over

Figures 14.2 and 14.3 The spatialization of class in *Pila Balde* is introduced through two complimentary establishing shots: a high angle shot from the perspective of the middle-class apartment building overlooking the slums, followed by a low-angle shot from the perspective of a slum alley in which the tenement building towers over the homes of the poor.

the shanties below. The beginning of the film introduces this spatialization of class through two complementary establishing shots, each taken from the perspectives of the different classes: a high-angle shot from an upper floor stairwell of the middle-class housing complex overlooking the rooftops of the slum dwellings (Figure 14.2) is followed directly by a low-angle shot from street level in an alleyway of the slum community, showing the middle-class tenement housing overshadowing the homes of the urban poor (Figure 14.3). The implication is clear: these two class-stratified spaces may be adjacent, but they are not equal.

The film explores relations of antagonism as well as intimacy, exploitation, dependency, and duplicity between classes. Though neither class is innocent—the squatters occasionally cheat their wealthier neighbors at gambling and illicitly tap their electrical lines for power—the film is staunchly on the side of the underclasses for the greater sins of exploitation perpetrated by the rich on the poor. The middle-class residents exploit the slum dwellers' poverty (Mrs. Alano's usury), their sexual vulnerability (Jimboy's duplicitous seduction of Gina), and the larger precariousness of their social situation (once the slums are razed in the squatter fire that ends the film, the poor face the possibility that the government will forcibly relocate them to areas far from their sources of work).

Jeturian has remarked that he endeavors to create films that allow "people to see how lucky they are and how unlucky some people can be also," striving to "erase the barriers of discrimination and prejudice" between classes. *Pila Balde*'s exploration of class discrimination is evident in two parallel conversations where confidences are exchanged between members of the same class: Mrs. Alano complains to Professor Ocampo that the tenement environment was much less seedy before squatters moved into the adjacent land. The professor's response, however, indexes what Mrs. Alano has disavowed:

Figure 14.4 Sweethearts Nonoy (left) and Gina (right) are the enterprising albeit impoverished protagonists of *Pila Balde*.

the middle-class residents' dependency on their social and economic subordinates for cheap domestic and sexual labor, from housemaids and laundrywomen to water carriers and masseuses. In a later sequence in the film, Gina tells her imprisoned father how she was able to the raise money for her grandmother's funeral: through a combination of *abuloy* (donations to the grieving family) and *sugal* (gambling). Gina relates that her friends from the slums cheated at *mahjong* and donated their winnings to the family's meager funds for the funeral. Gina's account prompts her father to laughingly remark that their tenement neighbors are dupes. Thus, a variant of class racism is conspicuously paralleled in both conversations: the rich, say the poor, are easily deceived, whereas the poor, say the rich, are thieves.

Jeturian has called attention to the prior scene in interviews, saying that Mrs. Alano's discrimination against the poor "is ironic because the lady who lives in the tenement housing isn't really that rich except that she's probably a notch higher than the poor folks but that somehow gives her license to oppress those under her." Mrs. Alano becomes, for Jeturian, emblematic of the film's critique of materialism and class prejudice, of the overvaluation of money in the context of pervasive poverty.[43] Jeturian's film also links economic impoverishment to a street-level, lower-income form of entrepreneurialism: "If you noticed, the main characters, even if they are young, know how to make ends meet. They know how to make a living just by fetching water, by driving a tricycle or even prostituting themselves. That goes for most Filipinos."[44]

Gina and Nonoy, the entrepreneurial protagonists of *Pila Balde*, are both enterprising young people who hold down several simultaneous jobs to support dependent adults (Gina's ailing grandmother and Nonoy's alcoholic father are both infantilized by their gambling addictions and no longer able to provide for the family). Gina sells snacks and does paid housework and laundry; Nonoy drives a tricycle, delivers water to middle-class residents, and prostitutes others and himself in an underground economy for gay as well as straight sex.

The internalization of an entrepreneurial mentality is, for Brown, a key feature of neoliberal governmentality. The citizen-subject normatively constructed by neoliberal governmentality is a *homo oeconomicus*,[45] behaving calculatively towards his or her life and that of others, an entrepreneur who, in the context of the minimal state's abdication of its old role as provider of social protections, is charged with "self-care," or the responsibility of looking out for oneself. Brown elaborates:

> In making the individual fully responsible for her/himself, neo-liberalism equates moral responsibility with rational action; it relieves the discrepancy between economic and moral behavior by configuring morality entirely as a matter of rational deliberation about costs, benefits, and consequences. In so doing, it also carries responsibility for the self to new heights: the rationally calculating individual bears full responsibility

> for the consequences of his or her action no matter how severe the constraints on this action, e.g., lack of skills, education, and childcare in a period of high unemployment and limited welfare benefits.[46]

In *Pila Balde*, neoliberal rationality reverberates in the actions of the impoverished-and-hence-entrepreneurial protagonists. As the state reneges on its responsibility to offer social protections to the least of its citizens, *makaraos* (to survive, to carry on) and *makaahon* (to move up the socioeconomic ladder) become commonplace expressions for the need to look out for oneself and, if possible, rescue oneself from poverty by any means possible. The neoliberal entrepreneurial subject so formed is active in self-interest and self-aspiration but politically nihilistic and passive because agency is never construed in collective terms: "the model neo-liberal citizen is one who strategizes for her/ himself among various social, political and economic options, not one who strives with others to alter or organize these options."[47] In the context of the state's abdication of its basic obligations to its citizens, Filipinos citizens are hailed as self-rescuing neoliberal subjects, prompted to adopt an entrepreneurial, politically nihilistic perspective on themselves and their own lives in the context of widespread poverty. Yet alongside *Pila Balde*'s acute portrait of the atomizing neoliberal citizen as self-oriented entrepreneur is an equally potent ethos of neighborly, collective assistance. This communitarian ethos is explicitly linked to gambling and death in the conversation between Gina and her imprisoned father about the slum dwellers who donated their gains at gambling to Lola Cion's funeral funds. In that conversation, Gina recounts how the family was able to pay for the high costs of death—*kabaong, lote at nicho* (a coffin and burial niche)—through both *abuloy* (donations from neighbors and acquaintances) and *tong sa sugal* (the proceeds from public gambling at the wake, where Nonoy and his friends duped the tenement residents in order to raise money for the funeral). Gina's father responds incredulously to this mixture of duplicity and generosity: "*May tarantado palang mabait, ano?*" (So, even tough guys can be kind?) In hindsight, such scenes in *Pila Balde* can be seen as foreshadowing the links between gambling, death, and communitarian assistance pursued by the film *Kubrador*, released seven years later.

THE DANGEROUS LIFE OF A *KUBRADOR* [*BET COLLECTOR*][48]

Several aspects of *Kubrador*'s prologue highlight the deep ties between the gambling underworld and the corrupt national government. The opening intertitles point to *jueteng* payolas as being linked to both deposed leader Joseph "Erap" Estrada and family members of former president Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, whose husband, First Gentleman Mike Arroyo, was also accused of involvement in *jueteng*.[49]

If *Pila Balde* was characterized by the prominence of setting—the proximity of middle-class tenement housing to the *manggahan* slums—then *Kubrador* is distinguished by the revelation of space through camera movement. The film is seen through the lens of a mobile handheld camera that is by turns invasive or unobtrusive. A probing, jerky camera follows the movements of characters through long, revelatory takes. The film's most prominent motifs of cinematography and editing—handheld following shots in combination with long takes—are first introduced in the film's prologue, when the camera follows Toti, a *kubrador* or bet collector on his way to a *bolahan* or drawing of winning *jueteng* numbers. Toti's T-shirt, prominent as he makes his way

Figure 14.5 Allusions to electoral fraud in *Kubrador* [The Bet Collector, dir. Jeffrey Jeturian, 2006]: The back of a bet collector's shirt bears the face of matinee idol and former presidential aspirant Fernando Poe Jr.

Figure 14.6 In *Kubrador*, the exhortation on the front of a bet collector's shirt, "*ituloy ang laban*" ("on with the fight") alludes to electoral fraud in the last presidential race of 2004, when Gloria Macapagal Arroyo was declared victorious.

along the winding alleys of the slums, is emblazoned with the face of matinee idol and former presidential aspirant Fernando Poe Jr., popularly nicknamed "FPJ." The injunction on the front of Toti's shirt, *ituloy ang laban* (on with the fight), alludes to the 2004 presidential race in which FPJ is widely believed to have won more votes than Arroyo, (Figures 14.5 and 14.6), though Arroyo was declared victorious

When Toti rests his bet-book on the table, a close shot of the tabloid headline underneath refers to the failed attempt to impeach President Arroyo despite proof of her direct involvement with large-scale vote tampering (Figure 14.7). The association between fraudulent elections and *jueteng* is obvious to local spectators well aware that campaign funds and political war chests are augmented by gambling payolas.[50]

Moments later, the *jueteng* proceedings attended by Toti are interrupted by a police raid, and a memorable chase scene ensues in which the police pursue Toti across the rusty metal rooftops of the slums. This energetic expository sequence introduces the viewer to the dangerous life of a *jueteng* bet collector while also embedding its story of an individual *kubrador* in the larger, politically charged context of corruption under two presidential administrations.

After Toti's arrest, the handheld camera turns its attention to the film's real protagonist, Amy (Gina Pareño), a middle-aged *kubrador* trudging through the intricate, claustrophobic maze of slum dwellings in Barangay Botocan, Diliman.[51] The hazardous daily existence of a *jueteng* bet collector is brought home in the very first line of dialogue Amy utters in the film. Starting her workday with a prayer, Amy entreats: "*Sana po, hindi po ako mahuli ngayon*" (Lord, grant that I don't get caught today).

More than the ever-present threat of police raids on low-ranking *jueteng* workers, the film drives home the notion of a state steeped in corruption and hypocrisy. On the street level, the very policemen who arrest Amy instruct her to take down their bets on the sly. The chief of police (Soliman

Figure 14.7 The tabloid headline below a *jueteng* bet-book in *Kubrador* refers to the failed attempt to impeach President Arroyo for vote tampering in the 2004 presidential elections.

Cruz), who places a "secret bet" with Amy, sits at a large desk behind which Arroyo's portrait is prominently displayed, a visual reminder that the state, in refusing to legalize *jueteng*, institutionalizes a form of corruption that permeates the government from top to bottom (Figure 14.8).

When Mang Poldo (Johnny Manahan), a prosperous-looking *jueteng* "cashier," prepares envelopes containing large payoffs to various congressmen, he ruefully reminds his underlings that the *jueteng* world finds "crocodile" politicians useful ("*may pakinabang sa buwaya*"). Scenes at Mang Poldo's mansion show piles of Philippine currency—*jueteng* bet collections ranging from small change to larger bills—being hastily shoveled into large bags. Referring to this scene, the director notes, "The poor man's money gives these powerful people the food on their table, without the poor knowing it."[52]

Amy, the street-level *kubrador* whose labor helps to feather the nests of big *jueteng* operators, collects *kubra* or bets to augment her family's meager income. A chain-smoking middle-aged woman with a tough-as-nails temperament, Amy is also compassionate and personable. As realized by veteran actress Gina Pareño's superbly nuanced performance,[53] Amy emerges as a well-liked figure in the close-knit slum community: she sends off a goddaughter with good-natured warnings to her new American husband to behave himself, and is a reliable neighbor regularly called upon by the parish priest to collect funeral donations for grieving families. In spite of her solid standing in the community, Amy is deep in debt to her *jueteng* manager, constantly borrowing against her future earnings (*bale*) by guaranteeing these pay advances with expected remittances from a daughter working overseas. Amy takes a 15 percent commission from each small bet, which results in a scant daily wage (in one scene, her commission from a day's *jueteng* collection amounts to less than two U.S. dollars).

Figure 14.8 When Amy is arrested for collecting illegal gambling bets in *Kubrador*, the head of the precinct places his own "secret bet" with her. A portrait of President Arroyo is prominent behind the police chief's desk.

Amy's story unfolds over a three-day period, during which we watch her ply her trade, a disarming *kubrador* who is equal parts bet collector, confidante, and friend. Some of Amy's clients bet on the birth date of someone they love, converting what is dearest in their lives into a value they can gamble on. Whenever a cash-strapped potential bettor cites a recent tragedy to explain their inability to place a bet, Amy translates such experiences of misfortune into numbers that can be played for money: a tricycle accident is *otso trese* (eight for the motorcycle wheels, thirteen for the passenger sidecar); children caught stealing from school translates as *bente at singko* (five stands for child, twenty for thief).[54] Amy even translates as *trese bente nwebe* (thirteen, crying, twenty-nine, death) her own empathetic grief for Tatang Nick (Domingo Landicho), whose loss of a beloved grandchild reminds her of the death of her own son Eric (Ran del Rosario). To all these life tragedies, to sufferings great and small, Amy assigns a number for which she or others stake a bit of cash: the conversion of everyday experience into a profit-making activity means that, in placing a bet derived from her own grief, Amy earns a percentage from her own sense of loss. This is neoliberal reification lived on the ground, in the lives of the very poor, a suffusive, hardscrabble, entrepreneurial translation of everything—from anecdotes related in casual social interactions to the deepest pains of the heart—into a numerical value from which to calculate a profit.

Amy's dead son, Eric, who had been employed as a soldier for the Philippine Armed Forces, appears at four key moments in the plot's three-day arc. A spectral figure in a military uniform, Eric looks on kindly from the doorway behind his harassed mother as she makes a phone call on the morning of the first day. Later that evening, when Amy comes home exhausted from her ordeal at the police station, the ghost of her son caresses her feverish forehead as she sleeps. On the afternoon of the second day, Amy loses her way in the dense alleys of an unfamiliar shantytown and is on the verge of panic when the ghost of her son, calmly passing unseen behind her, shows the way home. On the third and last day of the plot, Amy is visiting her son's gravesite at Manila's overcrowded North Cemetery to commemorate *Araw ng Patay* (All Saint's Day, November 1), when she witnesses an accident between a public transport jeepney and a privately owned car. The enraged motorist fires a gun at the jeepney driver but misses, seriously injuring a passerby. Amy is watching the injured man being rushed to the hospital when it dawns on her that she too is bleeding from her left shoulder. As Amy pauses, stunned and distraught, her dead son looks on unseen behind her. In contrast to other people hastily making their way through the cemetery, the wounded mother and her spectral son are isolated by their stillness and silence against the speed and uproar of the city crowd (Figure 14.9). The last shots are of the gunman being mauled by an indignant mob and subsequently rescued by the police. *Kubrador*'s penultimate scene thus drives home what we know to have been true all along: Amy's precarious life is constantly grazed by death.

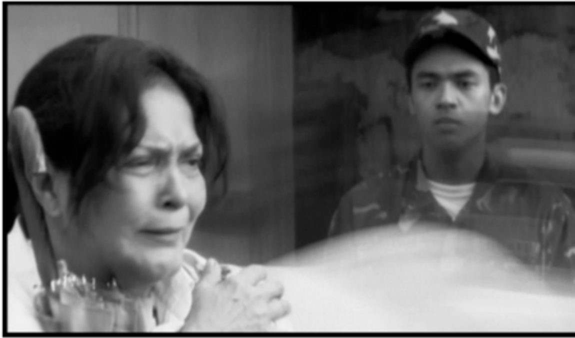

Figure 14.9 In *Kubrador's* penultimate scene, Amy's shoulder is grazed by a gunshot as the spectral figure of her son looks on, unseen, behind her. Amy and her son are isolated by their stillness amid the speed and uproar of the overcrowded city cemetery on All Saint's Day.

For Jeturian, the ghost motif in *Kubrador* explains Amy's refusal to give up in the face of poverty, illness, and soaring debt: "the memory of her son and her love for the family keeps her going throughout her daily routine, to go on living." Perhaps more importantly, the spectral resolution reveals the filmmaker's interest in illuminating the inextricability of life and death in the story world.[55]

GAMBLING ON LIFE AND DEATH: FROM *KUBRA* TO *ABULOY*

Even more than in *Pila Balde*, debt and gambling structure both life and death in *Kubrador*'s story world: the poor are overrun by usurious debts (*five-six* refers to the 20 percent monthly interest rate charged by local loan sharks); Amy's underemployed husband obsessively watches luck-based game shows on TV; and death becomes a matter of money because funeral expenses pose a heavy burden on the poor. To help Tatang Nick raise money for his grandson's burial, Amy and other neighbors set up gambling tables for *dama* (checkers), *mahjong*, and the card game *tong its* for the wake. Amy's workday routine blurs the distinction between collecting a funeral donation (*abuloy*) and soliciting money for a bet *(kubra*). This point is made with understated humor early in the film: when a policeman tries to arrest Amy, she attempts to disguise the true nature of her bet-book by claiming that it is merely a list of funeral donations: "Sir, *abuloy lang yan*." Personally requested by the parish priest to collect funds for a bereaved family, Amy carries out her neighborly duty with conviction, managing to convince even a skeptical rice vendor that sympathy for the dead and the bereaved should not be limited only to personal acquaintances and friends. When she approaches

Mang Poldo for a sizable *abuloy*, he sums up her character perfectly: "*dalawa lang naman ang pinagkakaabalahan mo: jueteng at patay*" (You're only ever interested in two things: *jueteng* and the dead).

The literal and figurative links between placing a *jueteng* bet (*kubra*) and giving a donation for the family of the deceased (*abuloy*) in *Kubrador* are glossed by Jeturian as follows:

> Amy's character represents also a position of trust; in the community that she belongs to, people trust her. That's why she's given the responsibility to collect *abuloy*. And there's a possible parallelism there: the money that she collects also as *jueteng* collector is probably an *abuloy* also, isn't it? . . . She gets to collect *abuloy* while she collects money also as bets. But this can probably be the same donation, for these people, who aren't aware of it, sort of symbolically an *abuloy* for their own death also. These are living deaths also, the kinds of lives that they lead.[56]

For Jeturian, the figurative continuum between placing a bet and giving donations for the bereaved hinges on the notion of *suerte* (luck), the hope that a windfall from gambling might provide an escape route from an impoverished death-in-life. In a diegesis where slum dwellers have very few opportunities for social or financial advancement, a bet, no matter how poor the odds, can hold out the promise of a better future. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the notion of betting on oneself extends extra-cinematically to the conditions of 1990s *pito-pito* filmmaking, when fledgling filmmaker-entrepreneurs were forced to acquiesce to the structure of the *abono*. A director who advances personal funds to complete a film does so with the explicit understanding that the *abono* is a personal investment, a form of betting on oneself and one's future in filmmaking.

To a large extent, the down-market entrepreneurialism of Amy and other bet collectors in *Kubrador* can be seen to affirm the neoliberal rationality of *homo oeconomicus*. That the protagonists of *Kubrador* and *Pila Balde* are driven, *but not despairing*, calls to mind a point made by Wendy Brown in a recent interview. "I am not convinced," Brown remarked, "that neoliberalism produces despair." Rather, it produces a nihilistic, everyday form of pragmatism. She elaborates:

> neoliberalization actually seizes on something that is just a little to one side of despair that I might call something like a quotidian nihilism. By quotidian, I mean it is a nihilism that is not lived as despair; it is a nihilism that is not lived as an occasion for deep anxiety or misery about the vanishing of meaning from the human world. Instead, what neoliberalism is able to seize upon is the extent to which human beings experience a kind of directionlessness and pointlessness to life that neoliberalism in an odd way provides. It tells you what you should do: you should understand yourself as a speck of human capital, which

> needs to appreciate its own value by making proper choices and investing in proper things. Those things can range from choice of a mate, to choice of an educational institution, to choice of a job, to choice of actual monetary investments—but neoliberalism without providing meaning provides direction.[57]

Neoliberalism, for Brown, supplies direction but not meaning: we learn to view ourselves through entrepreneurial eyes, using our decisions to "invest" in ourselves and others. Yet unmistakably, one glimpses in both *Pila Balde* and *Kubrador*, despite and alongside this interiorization of entrepreneurship as a generalized code of conduct, a communitarian sense of reciprocity, one that tempers individualistic neoliberal directives, in the practice of *abuloy*. Outside the story world, *abuloy* also recalls the remittances of overseas Filipino workers on which not only family members but the Philippine economy itself are crucially dependent.[58] *Abuloy* as ethic of care fails to constitute radical organized collective action; nonetheless, it does confer meaning through other-oriented acts and softens what Brown calls "the ghastliness of life exhaustively ordered by the market and measured by market values."[59] The continuum between *kubra* (a bet placed for oneself) and *abuloy* (a contribution for another) depends on the reciprocal faith that others will do the same for you should the need arise.

If the neoliberal ideal is one in which "men and women follow unimpeded self-interest in the marketplace" then this unrestrained self-interest in the context of scarce resources, oblivious to "economic immiseration, exploitation, and inequality"[60] is not what we see in *Kubrador*. The enterprising and nearly destitute Amy works to keep herself alive, but more importantly, she works in order to sustain others: primarily her family, but also her neighbors, those who have died in her life and in theirs, and those survivors, herself among them, that mourn them in a kind of death-in-life.

The protagonists of *Kubrador* and *Pila Balde* face their grim circumstances with a casual, streetwise levity, a lightly ironic willingness to eke out a living under the most impoverished conditions. Jeturian's films betray what might be called a neorealist sense of humor (he has indicated his preference for "neorealist" style in combination with what he calls a "casual," "accessible" tone),[61] a grim levity that, peppered across the harshness of his protagonists' circumstances, leaves film critics somewhat divided. Whereas some foreign reviewers complain about the hopelessness of Jeturian's harsh story worlds, several local critics have responded warmly to the role of humor in his films. A writer for *Visual Anthropology* complains that *Kubrador* "falls short on human action and any ability to produce change," resulting in a film steeped in despair: "there is nothing redeeming about the filmed situation—only dire circumstances that kill hope, and indications that Amelita, her family and her community will remain forever entrenched in their current existence."[62] In contrast, an appreciative review for the Philippine news daily *Business World* highlights the film's communitarian

ethos ("there is so much humanity in this community of illegal gamblers") and notes that "humor is injected and effortlessly executed" to "lighten the heaviness of the topic."[63] The affective resonances emphasized in these reviews are diametrically opposed: where one critic sees atomizing despair and passivity, another detects communal lightheartedness.

On the one hand, this levity and good humor could be the fatalistic mask of neoliberal passivity, what Pierre Bourdieu calls a "screen discourse" of accommodation that accepts cultural, economic, and political domination because they are seen as inevitable.[64] On the other hand, both *Pila Balde* and *Kubrador* arguably nuance the screen discourse of accommodation by unmasking neoliberalism's "debased appeal to pragmatism" as always prior to social justice, and by powerfully contesting what Henry Giroux calls "the central neoliberal tenet: that all problems are private rather than social in nature."[65] The tonal complexity of Jeturian's films is rooted in their depiction of a calculative entrepreneurial subjectivity modulated by something it has not fully subsumed: an ethos of communitarian reciprocity that sustains the diegetic protagonists in life as well as in death.

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This chapter is for Joya Escobar, in whose company I first screened *Kubrador* at the Cinemalaya festival in 2006. My thanks also to Jeffrey Jeturian, who graciously agreed to be interviewed for this study and who generously provided a commercially unavailable English-subtitled DVD of *Kubrador* for my students in Philippine Cinema at the University of California, Irvine.

NOTES

1. Yvonne Ng, 2001, par. 19.
2. Jeffrey Jeturian, interview with author, July 27, 2009.
3. For Wendy Brown, the Foucauldian concept of 'governmentality' designates what Foucault called "the conduct of conduct." The question of interiorized "mentality" emphasizes subject formation rather than state control or coercion. Brown, 2003.
4. Ibid., par. 2 and 6.
5. With regards to Brown's notion of neoliberalism as the extension of market rationality beyond the market, she contends that "neoliberalism entails the erosion of oppositional political, moral, or subjective claims located *outside* capitalist rationality but inside liberal democratic society, that is, the erosion of institutions, venues, and values organized by non-market rationalities in democracies. When democratic principles of governance, civil codes, and even religious morality are submitted to economic calculation, when no value or good stands outside of this calculus, sources of opposition to, and mere modulation of, capitalist rationality disappear" (2003, par. 20). Brown notes that despite the Left's skepticism and ambivalence toward liberal democracy, the latter did stand as an important mode of "modulating" and "tempering"

capitalist rationality even as it often worked as a ruse or justification for capitalist stratification. "Liberal democracy cannot be submitted to neo-liberal political governmentality and survive. There is nothing in liberal democracy's basic institutions or values—from free elections, representative democracy, and individual liberties equally distributed, to modest power-sharing or even more substantive political participation—that inherently meets the test of serving economic competitiveness or inherently withstands a cost-benefit analysis." Neoliberal rationality saps civic values that are not derived from a profit orientation of their strength, substituting principle with pragmatism: "one of the more dangerous features of neo-liberal evisceration of a non-market morality lies in undercutting the basis for judging government actions by criteria other than expedience" (ibid., par. 21, 23, and 27).

6. Ibid., par. 9 and par. 21.
7. Ibid., par. 38.
8. The Asian economic collapse of 1997 had devastating effects on the Philippines, though the Philippines was not itself perceived as having reached the status of a "Tiger" economy, as *Newsweek* noted in 1996: "the Philippines has begun to emerge from nearly a century of dependence on the United States and is ready, at last, to join the ranks of Asia's economic 'tigers'" (Elliot 1996).
9. Bliss Cua Lim, 2000, par. 3. In 2009, the amusement tax was lowered from 30 percent to 10 percent, but domestically produced films in the Philippines still face a bevy of other taxes: withholding tax (5 percent), value-added tax on the producer's earnings (12 percent), and a corporate income tax (35 percent). Onerous taxation is seen as contributing to the decline of Filipino movie production, from 250 movies annually to less than fifty-three movies annually since 1996. See Crispina Martinez-Belen, 2009. See also Lira Dalangin-Fernandez, 2009. http://showbizandstyle.inquirer.net/breakingnews/breakingnews/view/20090316-194479/Arroyo-urged-Enact-lower-amusement-tax-law
10. Annalisa Vicente Enrile, 2009, p. 66.
11. Jeturian remarks: "That was one of my quarrels generally with Filipino films. Because for us, for something to be dramatic, somebody has to be raped, kidnapped or have an extramarital affair. So we're not used to simple stories which at the same time have this ability to move you, to touch you. So we went through [screenwriter Armando "Bing" Lao's] files and I said, 'here Bing, this might be good.' I don't remember if *Pila Balde* was the original title. But the problem was it was a social realism story, it was a simple social realism story, so we wondered, 'how will we do this when our studio is Regal Films, such a mainstream studio?'" Jeturian, interview with author. The interview was conducted in a mixture of Tagalog and English; all translations from Tagalog in this chapter are my own.
12. Ng, 2001, par. 6.
13. Though the term *abuloy* can refer broadly to the act of contributing to a person or to a cause, in Jeturian's films, *abuloy* primarily refers to donations to assist the bereaved in defraying expenses incurred by the death of loved ones.
14. Henry Giroux writes: "Neoliberal global policies have been used to pursue rapacious free-trade agreements and expand Western financial and commercial interests through the heavy-handed policies of the World Bank, the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in order to manage and transfer resources and wealth from the poor and less developed nations to the richest and most powerful nation-states and to the wealthy corporate defenders of capitalism" (2005, p. 6).

15. See Jamie Morgan's (2003, pp. 545–546) succinct and insightful account of the neoliberal underpinnings of the 1997 Asian economic crisis.
16. For contemporaneous accounts of the attacks on Southeast Asian currencies by speculators that exacerbated the Asian economic crisis, see Eugene Linden, 1997, pp. 26–27; Sonny Melencio, 1997.
17. Lim, 2000, par. 4. See also Roger Garcia, 2000, pp. 53–55.
18. Ng, 2001, par. 8.
19. Garcia, 2000, pp. 53–55.
20. Jeturian, interview with author. Of the shooting ratio in contemporary Hollywood productions (the ratio of exposed footage to the actual shots included in the finished film), David Bordwell explains: "For every shot called for in the script or storyboard, the director usually makes several takes . . . Not all takes are printed, and only one of those becomes the shot included in the finished film . . . A 100-minute feature, which amounts to about 9,000 feet of 35 mm film, may have been carved out of 500,000 feet of film." Bordwell's example would yield a very high shooting ratio of about one to fifty-five. See David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, 2008, pp. 20–21.
21. Ng, 2001, par. 8. The fiery climax of *Pila Balde* also recalls the squatter fire portrayed in Lino Brocka's *Maynila: Sa Kuko Ng Liwanag* (Manila: In the Claws of Neon, 1975), a social realist film on rural–urban migration and poverty that ushered in the Philippine New Cinema of the 1970s. In Brocka's *Maynila*, the fire that razes the slums served to foreclose the budding romance between two poor but virtuous characters, whereas in *Pila Balde*, the squatter fire that takes Nonoy's father's life brings him closer to Gina, who is still in mourning for her late grandmother. As explored later in this chapter, the thematic of loving supportiveness in the context of death-in-life is prominent in both *Pila Balde* and *Kubrador*.
22. Jeturian notes that today, in the context of a declining Filipino film industry, ABS-CBN's film division Star Cinema has become more active than Regal Films in terms of 35 mm theatrical film output. Jeturian, interview with author.
23. Lim, 1998, par. 7–11.
24. Garcia, 2002, pp. 53–55. Noel Vera also credits a film festival of Good Harvest productions in 1998, which showcased the *pito-pito* work of new directors like Lav Diaz and Jeturian, with fueling a "mini-renaissance" of Filipino filmmaking. See Noel Vera, 1999, p. 30.
25. Garcia writes, "it is Lavrente (Lav) Diaz, with three Good Harvest features and a string of international festival credits, who has emerged as the major writer-director talent of this group" (2002, p. 55). Diaz's first film, *Serafin Geronimo: Ang kriminal ng Baryo Concepcion* (Serafin Geronimo: The Criminal of Barrio Concepcion, 1998), was a Good Harvest production.
26. Lim, 2000, par. 12.
27. Jeturian, interview with author.
28. The quote continues: "His specific situation is defined by the fact that his labour-power is his only possession. His fate is typical of society as a whole in that this self-objectification, this transformation of a human function into a commodity reveals in all its starkness the dehumanized and dehumanizing function of the commodity relation" (1968, p. 92).
29. Ibid., p. 100.
30. Iskho F. Lopez, 1999, p. 24.
31. *Pila Balde* won the Gold Award at the 2000 Worldfest International Film Festival in Houston; the NESPAC Jury Prize in the First Cinemanila International Film Festival in 1999; and three Gawad Urian Awards from the

Manunuring Pelikulang Pilipino (Philippine Film Critics Circle) for Best Screenplay, Best Editing, and Best Production Design.

32. Armando "Bing" Lao is credited for story and screenplay for the first three films directed by Jeturian: *Sana Pag-Ibig Na* (1998), *Pila Balde* (1999), and *Tuhog* (2001). Lao is also credited with screenplay supervision for two of Jeturian's more recent films: *Bridal Shower* (2004, story by Chris Martinez) and *Kubrador* (2006, story by Ralston Jover, whom Jeturian describes as a student of Lao's).
33. Jeturian, interview with author. Jeturian also described the parodic content of *Tuhog* in similar terms during his 2001 interview with Ng: "[*Tuhog/Larger than Life* is] also a parody of Philippine cinema, the way we do films, the way we hype everything just to make it 'cinematic.' It's also a dig at our tendency to make our films look like Hollywood. It was written by the same writer who did *Fetch a Pail of Water*. In the very first sequence, there's this film director who's proposing the film material and the producer approves it but gives instructions to the director to make the film very sexy—the same thing that happened to me. And that gives him license to distort the story" (Ng 2001, par. 18).
34. Jeturian, interview with author.
35. Ng, 2001, par. 9.
36. Jeturian, interview with author. Local and foreign critics remarked on the presence of gratuitous sex in *Pila Balde*: *Variety*'s otherwise favorable review noted that "several nude scenes . . . pepper the pic and look like commercially motivated inserts." Filipino critic Noel Vera's largely glowing review of *Pila Balde* likewise observes: "The sex scenes tend to stick out, which bothered some people who've seen the film . . . you can't help but think that the sex in *Pila Balde* is there not because it needs to be there but because it helps sell the picture." See Elley, 2000; Vera, 1999, p. 30.
37. Vera's review of *Pila Balde* commends Lao's screenplay for "a superbly realized context—that of a community of upper-lower to lower-middle class families, living in close, rubbed-shoulders proximity with each other. [Lao] throws in a few sharp social observations—one middle-class character notes that the nearby squatters provide a source of cheap and ready labor—but does so lightly, without unnecessarily heavy pontificating or preaching" (1999, p. 30).
38. Ng, 2001, par. 3 and 13.
39. Jeturian has commented that "BLISS represents the thrust of the Marcos government, it represented the dream of every Filipino . . . housing for the poor. [This allusion to the Marcos government] probably wasn't intentional in the film. But at the same time, now that you mention it, it did represent every man's dream to have decent housing." Jeturian also recalls that he chose the location for *Pila Balde* based on "the proximity of BLISS with the slums. If you did it in a village residence it's like you would just be talking about an individual family, an individual entity. Whereas in BLISS, it represents an economic circle where those who are in the circle a bit above others [*medyo nakakaangat*] don't want to be classified with those below them." Jeturian, interview with author.
40. See contemporary coverage of BLISS and other Ministry of Human Settlements projects in *Focus Philippines*, a Marcos-controlled periodical. Wilfrido D. Nolledo, 1979, p. 24–25, 32, 38.
41. The "eleven basic needs" identified by the Ministry of Human Settlements were livelihood, water, food, power, clothing, health care, education, culture and technology, ecological balance, sports and recreation, shelter and mobility. See "BLISS: The Human Settlements Revolution" (1979, pp. 26–27, 33).

42. For recent water shortages in Metro Manila under the presidency of Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III due to low levels in Bulacan's Angat Dam, see Maila Ager, 2010; Christian V. Esguerra, 2010.
43. Ng, 2001, par. 8.
44. Ibid., par. 7.
45. Brown writes: "not only is the human being configured exhaustively as *homo oeconomicus,* all dimensions of human life are cast in terms of a market rationality. While this entails submitting every action and policy to considerations of profitability, equally important is the production of all human and institutional action as rational entrepreneurial action, conducted according to a calculus of utility, benefit, or satisfaction against a micro-economic grid of scarcity, supply and demand, and moral value-neutrality" (2003, par. 9).
46. Ibid., par. 15.
47. Ibid.
48. *Kubrador* and its filmmakers have won numerous awards both nationally and internationally. In the Philippines, Jeturian is the recipient of the 2006 Lino Brocka Award at the Cinemanila International Film Festival; *Kubrador* also swept the awards for Best Picture, Best Direction, and Best Production Design in the 2007 Gawad Urian Awards and Best Director, Best Editing, Best Motion Picture Drama, Best Original Screenplay, and Best Sound in the 2007 Golden Screen Awards. Internationally, *Kubrador* won the 2006 FIPRESCI Prize at the Moscow International Film Festival; Best Film at the 2006 Cinefan Festival of Asian and Arab Cinema; and the 2007 NETPAC Award at the Brisbane International Film Festival.
49. The opening intertitles of *Kubrador* read: "'*Jueteng*' is a numbers game in the Philippines. Though illegal, it is popular especially among the poor. Millions of people depend on *jueteng* for their livelihood. It is so lucrative that the big *jueteng* operators are said to wield undue influence over politicians, the military, the police, and even the church. In the year 2000, the President of the Philippines was charged with accepting pay-offs from *jueteng*, and was subsequently deposed. More recently, the current president, her husband, and son, were also accused of having links to *jueteng*." Estrada was found guilty of plunder in 2007. Six weeks later, he avoided serving a life sentence in the national penitentiary through a presidential pardon from Arroyo. Critics charged that Arroyo's use of executive clemency was calculated "to curry favor with the opposition and to deflect mounting charges of corruption within her own administration" (Avendaño and Uy 2007). http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/inquirerheadlines/nation/view/20071026-96809/Arroyo_pardons_Estrada
50. Jeturian notes that the film's allusions to the role of *jueteng* in Philippine politics "helps in relaying the message that the government is in cahoots with it; in fact, they're a big part of it. Campaign funds, they come from *jueteng*, like with 'Erap.'" Jeturian, interview with author.
51. According to Jeturian, *Kubrador* was shot on location in Quezon City at Barangay Botocan, Diliman, near the BLISS housing project that provided the setting for *Pila Balde*. Signage for "Pook Libis, Diliman" is visible in some shots of *Kubrador*.
52. Jeturian, interview with author.
53. For her performance in *Kubrador*, Gina Pareño has won two Best Actress awards locally (the 2007 Gawad Urian and 2007 Golden Screen awards) and three Best Actress awards in international film festivals: the 2006 Amiens International Film Festival; the 2006 Cinefan Festival of Asian and Arab Cinema; the 2007 Brussels International Independent Film Festival.
54. According to Jeturian, the practice of converting or translating experiences into betting values came to his attention in preproduction research, when the

filmmakers interviewed an actual *jueteng kubrador*. Jeturian, interview with author.

55. Jeturian, interview with author.
56. Jeturian, interview with author.
57. Christian Sorace, 2010.
58. The Philippine economy's reliance on ever-increasing remittances by Filipino migrant workers is staggering: remittances from overseas Filipino workers (OFW) grew from 7.5 billion pesos in 1998 to 8.5 billion dollars in 2004 (a sum equal to half of the country's national budget), and $15.56 billion dollars in 2008. E. San Juan Jr. writes, "In 2006, the OFW remittance was five times more than foreign direct investment, 22 times higher than the total Overseas Development Aid, and over more than half of the gross international reserves. Clearly the Philippine government has earned the distinction of being the most migrant- and remittance-dependent ruling apparatus in the world, mainly by virtue of denying its citizens the right to decent employment at home" (2009, p. 100).
59. Brown, 2003, par. 22.
60. For a discussion of the neoliberal concept of individualism and self-interest, see Morgan, 2003, pp. 543–544.
61. Ng, 2001, par. 17 and 19.
62. Enrile, 2009, pp. 66–67.
63. Jet Damaso, 2006.
64. For Bourdieu, neoliberalism is a "screen discourse" that tends "to make a transnational relation of economic power appear like a natural necessity." See Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant, 2001, par. 5–6.
65. Giroux, 2005, p. 9.

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Part IV

Africa and Europe

15 Nollywood in Lagos, Lagos in Nollywood Films

Jonathan Haynes

Concurrent with the rise of the Nollywood video film industry has been a new visibility, on certain intellectual horizons, of the Lagos metropolis—or "megacity," as it has been dubbed, as its population approaches fifteen million. (It is projected by the United Nations to reach twenty-three million by 2015—which would make Lagos the third largest city in the world.) The city owes its new visibility to its serving as an example and case study in discussions of the world's urban future. On the one hand, there is a genre of lurid descriptions of Lagos as an urban "apocalypse"—a term that foreign visitors seem to find unavoidable, as they find in Lagos the ultimate expression of anarchic urban catastrophe, environmental destruction, and human misery; its "crime, pollution, and overcrowding make it the cliché par excellence of Third World urban dysfunction."[1] On the other hand, there is a postmodernist-inflected celebration of the coping mechanisms and creative forms of self-organization of a population whose ability to survive contradicts ordinary common sense, accompanied by an argument about the inability of conventional modes of understanding to explain what permits this survival. The leading figure in this trend is the Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas, who has been conducting a study of Lagos with students in the Harvard School of Design's Project on the City. Lagos has figured prominently in major art exhibitions in London (Century City, 2001); Barcelona (Africas: The Artist and the City, 2001); and, most influentially, Kassel, where the exhibition Documenta 11 (2002), curated by Okwui Enwezor, included a weeklong forum held in Lagos. These shows emphasize the ingenuity of people struggling to survive in the slums and informal economic sector of African cities, the manic energy that pervades city life and urban artists' creativity.[2]

The celebratory character of Koolhaas's point of view has been criticized on several scores: that it ignores the suffering of the poor and the predation of many arrangements in the informal sector;[3] that it obscures the historical processes through which things got to be how they are and who is responsible for them;[4] that it effectively takes off the table the possibilities for rational and progressive political and economic change;[5] and that it overestimates the extent to which coping with adversity is stimulating,

rather than depressing.[6] But the point that existing vocabularies and analytical frames of reference from urban planning and other disciplines are trapped in an almost entirely negative contemplation of Lagos's deficiencies and failures and are inadequate in showing how things actually operate needs to be given its due.

Nollywood is an extraordinary example of the sort of coping mechanism that keeps Africa alive: out of the impossibility of producing celluloid films in Nigeria (because of economic collapse and social insecurity) came a huge industry, constructed on the slenderest of means and without anyone's permission.[7] Cruelly constrained in its material circumstances, it is a heroic act of self-assertion—on the part of Nigeria in general, and of the individual filmmakers. Franco Sacchi's documentary film *This Is Nollywood* nicely captures its personality: people are kept going through the seriocomic obstacle course of making a film under Nigerian conditions by a desperate need to hope and dream, by the legendary Nigerian resilience and humor, and by a peculiarly African mixture of resignation and determination.

In 2002, when the term *Nollywood* was coined, it met with opposition from Nigerians who thought it suggested that Nigerian filmmaking was only a copy of the American model, Hollywood. The term is here to stay because it expresses the general Nigerian desire for a mass entertainment industry that can take its rightful place on the world stage, but both the term and the phenomenon need to be read as signs that the global media environment has become multipolar, rather than that Hollywood's example is unavoidable.[8] Despite an undeniable imitative element (Nollywood draws on a great number of cultural influences, domestic and foreign, Hollywood among them), Nollywood fundamentally does not resemble Hollywood or anything else—apart from its smaller sibling, the Ghanaian video film industry. The geographers Sallie Marston, Keith Woodward, and John Paul Jones III make a radical theoretical argument for understanding Nollywood not as an example of scalar models of hierarchical relationships (the dominant model in discussions of globalization), which would inevitably find Nollywood to be a defective imitation of Hollywood, but as an example of specifically situated, localized social activity, networked with other sites, that produces something fundamentally different from Hollywood in production, distribution, consumption, and aesthetics.[9]

Salimata Wade, another geographer, makes a point that overlaps with Koolhaas's observation about the inadequacy of Western categories to describe the realities of African cities. As Pep Subirós reports her conversation, she says:

> the main problem with African cities, at least those in Western Africa, is one of perception and representation. The differences that exist in the images, in the viewpoints, and in the aspirations of the key urban players. Especially between politicians and managers on the one hand and ordinary people on the other.[10]

The former think like Europeans, Wade says, seeing infrastructural problems and so on; the latter bring with them (from the villages from which most of them emigrated) views and habits that cause them to neglect facilities provided for them, or to remake them to suit their own purposes. The city they inhabit or want to inhabit is not the one the authorities understand or want to build.

The commercial success of Nollywood films depends on their expression of the point of view—the values, desires, and fears—of their popular audience, and therefore they help us see what their intended viewers see or want to see when they look at their city. These images differ distinctly from those familiar from other African cinematic and literary traditions.

Lagos is where Nollywood is primarily located, and for budgetary reasons its films are always shot on location, most often in Lagos, which serves as the ground of the films, not just in the immediate sense that when cameras are turned on, they make images of Lagos (or one might even say, Lagos imposes its images on them), but also that the films are a means for Nigerians to come to terms—visually, dramatically, emotionally, morally, socially, politically, and spiritually—with the city and everything it embodies. Nollywood's imagination forms the city's images, making them public emblems of fear and desire. Nollywood is a part of that cityscape, an element in its visual culture. This cityscape is a resource that the films share and an environment that shapes them materially. This chapter explores these reciprocal relationships, always with an eye to material circumstances, aiming to describe the specificities that give Nollywood its character.

NOLLYWOOD IN LAGOS

Nigerian video film production began in the late 1980s as a humble popular art form, but it has grown into the third largest film industry in the world, producing more than fifteen hundred titles per year. The image of the Nigerian nation, literally and metaphorically, is now largely shaped by these films, which have become wildly popular across the African continent and beyond. Video film is the primary expressive medium through which Lagos makes itself visible, both to itself and to external audiences.

Lagos is the center of Nigeria's filmmaking and film distribution, as it is the center of most of Nigeria's industrial and commercial activity, but there are other important Nigerian filmmaking centers, notably Kano, in northern Nigeria, home to a large, parallel, but almost entirely separate Hausa video industry. The term *Nollywood* refers principally to southern Nigerian, English-language films, whose distribution is largely controlled by Igbo marketers, but that are made by people from the full range of southern Nigerian ethnicities. *Nollywood* has come into general use as the name of the Nigerian video film industry, but when used in this way, the term obscures the Hausa branch and Yoruba-language video production

based in Lagos, though the Yoruba production partly overlaps with that of Nollywood. The term includes film production and marketing centers in the eastern Nigerian cities of Enugu, Onitsha, and Aba, which are integrated with the marketing system based in Lagos.

The central paradox of Nollywood is that it is a huge industry, employing thousands of people and generating large (if largely unverifiable) revenues, but it is built on tiny capital formations. Cheap and easily operated video technology allowed it to arise as an informal-sector activity, like other African "popular arts," such as Congolese painting, the designs and proverbs painted on trucks, and Yoruba traveling theater.[11] The film that "opened the market," Kenneth Nnebue's *Living in Bondage 1* (1992), was made for a few hundred dollars. An extremely dysfunctional distribution system and rampant piracy make large investments in single films risky, holding average budgets down to about U.S.$20,000. The industry remains disengaged from banks, government loans, and other formal sector sources of capital; it still consists of myriad very small-scale producers, who make each new film on the profits from the last, or on advances from marketers.

As a result, the Nigerian film industry has had no money with which to construct its own visible spaces. Nollywood is not a place: it consists of nodes scattered across Lagos and beyond, lost in the metropolis. Idumota, the center of marketing and finance, is a market in the oldest part of Lagos; its streets are narrow, filthy, and packed with people and handcarts hauling plastic buckets, consumer electronic goods, and cloth. Visiting the major marketers involves balancing on boards thrown over open sewers and penetrating damp warrens of crumbling concrete.

The producers are scattered mostly around the neighborhoods of Surulere and Ikeja, on the mainland, where there are few proper sidewalks and the streets may become nearly impassable when it rains, but there are fashion boutiques and international-style fast-food restaurants, and a forest of cell phone towers and satellite dishes rises above air-conditioned Internet cafés and international telephone call centers, all powered by generators during the frequent blackouts—independent of the national grid and aimed at the sky. Here where Nigerian films are produced it is surprisingly hard to buy or rent them—video shops are almost entirely dominated by American films. The masses who consume Nollywood films live in poorer neighborhoods. The producers occupy modest bungalows or office spaces on side streets. They have small editing studios, often with respectable digital equipment, and keep their digital cameras locked in closets, but they have no production studios and soundstages.

For years, the principle meeting place for actors and producers was Wini's Guest House, where the floor was sticky with beer and the furniture was apt to tear one's clothing. Under pressure to relocate by neighbors upset by the noise, the frequent blockage of the street, and the difficulty of distinguishing aspiring actresses from prostitutes, the film people moved from Wini's to O'Jez's, a more attractive nightclub and restaurant located

in the National Stadium. The stadium itself is a hulking ruin, the field overgrown, the equipment ripped out and carried away by thieves, and the environs haunted by armed robbers, but O'Jez's is spruce and hums with activity, a suitable home for a vibrant, rising professional community: it has good sound and light systems; and downstairs in the courtyard, film people carry on animated conversations over tables crowded with beer bottles, pepper soup, and cell phones.

The exhibition sector of Nollywood is peculiarly hard to see. Video films are commonly (if confusingly, for Americans) called "home videos" in Nigeria, because that is where they are normally viewed: in domestic space, away from the public eye. The horrendous crime rates and general breakdown of public order of the 1990s was an essential condition of the video boom: going out to theaters at night became too dangerous. The theaters in Lagos all closed; many were turned into churches or warehouses. A few gleaming multiplexes have appeared recently, but they show American films. At the other end of the social spectrum, small video parlors serve the poor, offering access to Nollywood via a wooden bench and a video monitor. Those who cannot afford the very modest entrance fee for a video parlor gather on street corners to watch the monitors set up on vendors' stalls.[12] Newly released films may be screened in rented public spaces ranging from university auditoriums to the most elegant cultural venues in Lagos. Film festivals and award ceremonies are becoming regular occurrences and attract glittering crowds to fancy places, but these are fleeting occasions; the films are not at home in these places.

Television stations broadcast films into homes and frequently show trailers. A capillary distribution system serves a dispersed audience of workers as they return home: small shops and street stalls sell films; even more people patronize thousands of video rental shops. Film posters decorate these establishments and are plastered anywhere they will stick—a ubiquitous element of visual street culture. These are fairly small posters: the small budgets of the films, the notorious reluctance of marketers to spend much on publicity, and a scarcity of printers that can produce large posters mean that billboard-size images are rare, and the absence of theaters means an absence of marquee-size spaces to fill.

Like the jackets of the videocassettes and video compact discs, the posters provide splashes of vivid color in an often dreary cityscape. They are normally identical or closely related to the jackets—which is to say they are designed to work on a small scale. Their function is to scream for attention in a saturated market. Almost invariably they are crowded with actors' faces. As in any commercial cinema culture, a star system is responsible for selling films, and for an audience of uncertain literacy, faces serve better than names. Posters and jackets are always mechanically reproduced; there is nothing like the tradition of "folk art" film posters in Ghana.[13] The need for small but recognizable images of specific actors would itself discourage hand painting, and the industrial scale and rate of Nollywood film

production requires mechanical reproduction. In any case, naïve folk art runs counter to the ethos and aspiration of Nollywood. *Living in Bondage 1* is considered the inaugural film of the video boom, not because it was the first Nigerian feature film on video, but because it was the first to be packaged in a full-color printed jacket and wrapped in cellophane, like an imported American or Indian film.[14]

Video compact discs are becoming the dominant medium for Nollywood films in Nigeria. The visual quality of VCDs is poorer than that of DVDs; it is about the same as that of a pristine VHS tape, but considerably better than that of a videotape that has spent a week out in the tropical sun on a hawker's shelf and is then played on a machine full of Harmattan dust. Brian Larkin observes that theories of media generally assume that their infrastructures work perfectly—which is far from the case in Nigeria, where audiences experience films by way of "cheap tape recorders, old televisions, videos that are the copy of a copy of a copy to the extent that the image is permanently blurred, the sound resolutely opaque."[15] This technology is embedded in living rooms shared with crying babies, or in video parlors full of shouting adolescents—social environments that shape and color the experience of film viewing.[16] The whole business is subject to the vagaries of the electrical power grid, which has been deteriorating for decades and is commonly described as "epileptic." Blackouts are unpredictable but routine and often long-lasting, and when the electricity goes off, the images disappear, except in homes with generators powerful enough to run video equipment as well as a refrigerator and lights. Moving pictures are evanescent by nature; in Nigeria, they have a particularly lurching, fragile existence. Nollywood films have little supporting material culture around them, and so when the electricity goes off, there is not much to look at. Still they shape the national imagination, building their empire in people's heads.

LAGOS IN NOLLYWOOD FILMS

The urban scene is fundamental in Nigerian films (Okome 2003). Not all Nollywood films are set in Lagos,[17] but Nollywood is inconceivable without it—its personality, dynamism, infinite astonishing stories, and garish glamour—and Lagos is the most common setting.

The first thing to say about how Lagos appears on screen is that it does so in various guises in thousands of films, reflecting the size and complexity of the city and the film industry. The videos are at home at nearly all social levels, and some directors (e.g., Chico Ejiro) and directors of photography (e.g., Jonathan Gbemutuor) have distinctive visual styles. Still, the films share strong commonalities—not because they are the products of a consolidated mass-culture industry mobilizing large amounts of capital to deliver a standardized product, and not because they are shaped in any significant way by

government influence:[18] the Lagos in the films is a collectively produced representation because the film industry is heavily imitative and generic—which is the generative structure of African popular culture and its commercial basis.[19] Material conditions impose certain features on nearly all films. Location shooting—one of those features—creates a common realism, a mass of interchangeable, conventionally framed shots of Lagos streets and compounds, lavish parlors and ordinary bedrooms, hospitals, and offices. Common desires lard the films with standard images of luxury automobiles, huge houses, and expensive clothes. Common fears take visible form by employing familiar generic resources—melodrama, crime film, and various conventional means of representing the supernatural.

The films are made so fast (shooting typically takes about two weeks, and often less), on such minuscule budgets, and under such unrelenting commercial pressures that individual artists have few resources and little time to realize a distinctive vision. "Art directors" now sometimes appear in film credits, but the ability to control the look of a film is limited. All shooting is done on location because, as noted earlier, Nollywood does not have the capital to construct its own spaces. Interior scenes are shot in houses borrowed for a few days, so the color of the walls behind an actor cannot be changed. Nollywood films have acquired enough social prestige that wealthy people like to have their houses featured in them, but the crews are there on sufferance and have no real rights. Lighting is a neglected art, seldom used creatively; filmmakers think they can get along without it because their video cameras are good at picking up ambient light. Though directors are accused of liking to create traffic jams,[20] their ability to control the life of Lagos streets is precarious at best. Time is as hard to control as space: film narratives routinely sprawl across generations, but they never attempt to reproduce the look of a historical period other than the present. Budgetary reasons are doubtless overwhelmingly responsible for the lack of historical verisimilitude, and again the inability to control space is significant: there is no back lot on which to construct a period street, and even a room where period props could be stored may be difficult to come by.[21]

The visual dimension, compared with dialogue and narrative, is less important in Nigerian video films than it is in most cinema cultures. The most highly developed arguments about the visual aspect of African films—chiefly the work of a line of Francophone critics[22] thinking perhaps primarily of the stark Sahelian landscapes in films from Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger—have stressed the image as the carrier of profound symbolic, social, and political meanings. The importance of the image is emphasized by slow pacing and an enveloping silence. Silence is the essential ground in the Mandingo sense of art and language,[23] but the coastal peoples of Nigeria are exceptionally voluble, and their films tend to be crowded, frenetic, and noisy, like the film posters, cassette jackets, and Lagos itself. Nollywood films are tailored to the small, low-resolution screens on which they appear. They are

narrative-driven and talky, like the soap operas (both domestic and imported) and Latin American *telenovelas* that make up a large part of their DNA. As the director Don Pedro Obaseki says, Nigerian video films were born of television, not cinema, in terms of their personnel (many of whom came from television soap operas), aesthetics, and video technology.[24] In their early days, nearly all Nigerian video films had a distinctively leaden, slow-moving quality; many still do, but on the whole, they have evolved in the direction of a brisker, international professional style of shooting and editing. This movement tends to undermine arguments for an essential African film language and to encourage us to see practical reasons for some of its supposed features. A static medium shot is an easier way to capture a conversation than the international standard shot-reverse-shot pattern, for example, if one is working with one camera and actors who are improvising from a scenario, rather than reciting lines from a script.

Nollywood films are full of close-ups because they are made for television screens. It is fundamentally a cinema of faces, which need to be seen in close-up because we need to see the tears streaming down them or otherwise get close to the emotions generated by almost invariably melodramatic plots.[25] This is an aesthetic of immediate impact, plunging us into each moment and milking it for everything it is worth, rather than subordinating every element in the film to an overall sense of design.[26] There is some truth in the frequently repeated notion about African cinema favoring the collective and therefore preferring medium shots to close-ups, but the Igbo and Yoruba and other southern Nigerian cultures that underlie Nollywood films place strong emphasis on individualism—individual dynamism, individual destiny, self-realization through the independent pursuit of money.[27] Lagos is notoriously a place where all forms of social solidarity break down, leaving individuals struggling for their survival and advancement, each against all.[28] The close-up carries these meanings.

Objects are also frequently shot in close-up, commodity fetishism clearly motivating the lingering, even lascivious camerawork. When the camera repeatedly returns to the label on a bottle of wine (*Glamour Girls* 2), product placement is doubtless involved. Most of the luxury objects—clothes, cars, houses—are borrowed from shops, car dealerships, or individuals. Wealth in the most tangible, desired forms is fundamental to the lure of Lagos and is at the heart of Nollywood imagery and thematics. “It’s now I know I have come to Lagos!” crows a mercenary woman who has finally gotten a man to give her a new car in *Living in Bondage* 2.

The films nevertheless pull back to give us the larger picture of the city, and the realism that comes with location shooting compensates for many of the limitations discussed earlier. Everything we see is Lagos, both what the camera is focusing on and what we can see over the actors’ shoulders—which is often tremendously revealing. Of course these images are shaped, part of a project of representation. It is not easy to imagine or picture this singularly incoherent city.

As Matthew Gandy writes, Lagos from its origins has been marked by extreme income inequality and a conceptual split between the colonial/European/modern/world city and the "native" areas, left to fend for themselves under the presumed authority of "tradition" because, in fact, the city's rulers had no interest in paying for a comprehensive urban infrastructure. By now, only a tiny proportion of the city functions as an integrated metropolis: the percentage of households connected to the piped water system has fallen from 10 percent in 1960 to 5 percent now; only 1 percent are connected to a closed sewer system. In the absence of any real pretense at the provision of municipal services, the population lives in atomized units, at every social level. The wealthy build walled compounds with their own security guards, boreholes for water, and generators. In middle-class neighborhoods (such as Surulere and Ikeja, where the film producers are based) the streets are gated and manned by neighborhood-supported security guards in an attempt to fend off gangs of armed robbers. The poor, left to their own devices in two hundred slums spread throughout the city, have no such physical security. Remnants of collective forms of social organization maintain some order, but as (for instance) traditional conceptions of whose responsibility it is to keep a shared compound clean break down, trash piles up. "Traditional rulers" of various kinds exert influence; normally, their roles have become highly exploitative. Functions such as provision of water are in the hands of even more predatory figures, who charge exorbitant fees and block moves to provide running water because it would reduce their business. As Gandy emphasizes, there is an ideological vacuum where there should be a public sphere, or rather a splintering into ethnic and religious extremisms and the pursuit of individual advancement through patronage networks, strategies that promise a measure of control over immediate environments in the face of an admittedly intractable whole. This means that the situation is likely to stay the same because there is insufficient political pressure to bring about the needed enormous investments in infrastructure. It also means that coherence is hard to achieve, even on the conceptual level, either in popular consciousness or at the urban-planning level.[29]

Of course almost every African city is a mess; Lagos is only the biggest. The two-cities-of-colonialism theme was articulated in classic form by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*,[30] and Roy Armes has shown how it informs the treatment of space in the symbolically founding film of African cinema, Ousmane Sembene's *Borom Sarret*.[31] Françoise Pfaff introduces a study of "African Cities as Cinematic Texts" in Francophone African celluloid filmmaking by saying, "Nowhere but in contemporary African cities is the clash between tradition and modernity better expressed. And it is precisely the dramatic rendition of this theme that lies at the core of the greatest number of African films, especially those set in urban contexts."[32]

It is possible to find Nollywood films in which a polarity between "tradition" and "modernity" is operating, but this polarity does not structure the

imagery of Nollywood films in general. The architecture and monuments associated with colonialism that Pfaff finds so prevalent are almost entirely absent; the population of Nollywood, as of Lagos, is young and does not remember the colonial era. The high end of the Lagos cityscape was formed by the era of oil-boom-fueled heroic national aspiration of the 1960s and 1970s, with its freeways and grandiose public buildings, and the era of neoliberal kleptocracy that followed. Money, rather than race, has for decades been the structuring principle, and though class divisions are exceptionally sharp and visible in Lagos, they are permeable[33]—doubtless much more permeable in imagination than in reality, and Nollywood is all about selling the dream of individual advancement. As has been frequently observed, the hope of individual advancement has been a formidable obstacle to the formation of class consciousness in Nigeria.[34] Wealthy neighborhoods are now desired, rather than seen under the sign of exclusion, alienation, and disorientation, as in *Borom Sarret*.[35] Rich and poor coexist on intimate terms in a state of incomplete class formation. Many extended families include someone with money, or at least have a relationship with a wealthy patron; no extended family is without many poor relations. Hopes for spectacular social promotion and fears of social collapse are almost universal and are the essential socio-emotional matrix of the images of the films.

There is immense wealth in Lagos. Between 1971 and 2006, Nigeria earned more than $400 billion in oil revenues, of which an estimated $50–100 billion was siphoned off through fraud and corruption; between 2006 and 2020, the country is expected to make $750 billion more.[36] Much or most of this money has flowed abroad, rapidly, or gone elsewhere in Nigeria, but Lagos has gotten more than its share, and it is, along with the new political capital, Abuja, the preeminent showcase for wealth. No amount of money, however, can buy complete segregation from ambient misery and danger. Unlike other megacities—such as Bombay, Dhaka, Manila, and São Paulo, which concentrate their poor in discrete satellite cities—Lagos has poverty that permeates all but a few enclaves.[37] Almost all streets have broken surfaces and are bordered by trash, open sewers, and petty commerce. No street is safe from daylight armed robbery and carjacking. All this is visible as a camera tracks a fancy SUV through Lagos. Tejumola Olaniyan gives an example of how difficult it is to produce an exclusive image:

> During the reign of the infamous dark-goggled tyrant General Sani Abacha (November 1993–June 1998), his propaganda machine produced a video, *Nigeria: World Citizen*, to burnish his image and the image of Nigeria he had dragged into the mud. The clips of Lagos that appeared in it were all high-angle shots of towering skyscrapers. The vertigo induced immediately tells you that something is amiss far before you are able to make sense of it: conventional eye-level shots that would have shown people on the streets are missing. Yes, the dirt on Lagos streets is so legendary that it subverts any attempt to perfume it over by propaganda.[38]

But Nollywood has found ways to romanticize the Lagos cityscape, chiefly by pulling the camera far back for establishing shots of the fancier, greener residential areas of the city, or the skyline of high-rise buildings on Lagos Island. A favorite shot—is it actually the same one, recycled from film to film?—is taken from a tall building in Ikoyi, looking over Five Cowries Creek to the exclusive realm of Victoria Island. Another common solution is to shoot at night, when lights sparkle and darkness hides the squalor. Improbably, traffic on the freeways and major streets provides images of urban glamour and mobility (*Tears for Love*); again, shooting at night helps (*Dead End*). The notorious Lagos traffic jams never appear.[39] These establishing shots seem to be emulating the look of Hollywood films, and they often occur in romantic films or at romantic moments to provide an image of a desired good life in a normal city (*Violated* 1).

Particular iconic buildings are seldom featured.[40] Politically, this doubtless reflects the fact that Nigeria was under military rule during the rise of the video films, and filmmakers were understandably cautious about sticking a camera in the rulers' faces, even if they had been allowed to do so. In any case, until 1991, political power was centered in Dodan Barracks on Lagos Island, which presents a blank wall to the city, and then moved to the new capital, where the videos have a weak foothold. Public institutions do not function, as everyone knows well, so there is little reason to show them. Economic power springs from the oil wellheads of the Niger Delta and then cascades through myriad, often secret networks. The videos represent this sort of wealth through totalizing shots of the whole Lagos skyline of tall buildings, or through more or less randomly chosen examples of sleek office buildings and extravagant mansions with fanciful curved concrete work in the modern Nigerian style. The videos have an obsessive interest in people who tap into the sources of wealth—their houses, parties, and cars. Film cultures everywhere give disproportionate attention to the elite, of course; here, social turbulence, moral spectacle, and cynical political analysis are an integral part of the vision of a privileged lifestyle. As Pierre Barrot acutely observes, though Nollywood frankly aims at being an entertainment industry, it does not turn away from the "wounds" of society, as (for instance) the far more escapist Latin American *telenovelas* do: on the contrary, Nollywood deals with these issues constantly.[41]

The ambient chaos is apt to show around the edges of the image unless care is taken to exclude it; even that establishing shot from a tall building in Ikoyi, if it pans inland to the streets below, may seem to develop an exploratory quality (*Illegal Brothers*), though Nollywood shies away from the tendentious shots of garbage piles and traffic jams that are irresistible to foreign documentary filmmakers (*Suffering and Smiling*). These realities are too familiar to need comment; people watch movies to see something else.

The social anxieties that underlie most Nollywood films are apt to be expressed less through direct, social realist images of social chaos or danger than through the plots, which often follow savage campaigns for social

advancement that take a toll on innocent victims, or illustrate social precariousness through tales of families ruined by unemployment, hospital bills, or the death of a breadwinner that makes it impossible to pay school fees.[42] Such stories take place mostly in the standard interior spaces of homes, offices, and hospitals, but they may culminate by melodramatically dumping their protagonists out into the streets, where they search vainly for work (*Dying for the Nation*; *Shame*), a lost child (*Onome* 2), or a patron (*Dry Leaves*), solicit as a prostitute (*Domitilla*), sit amid household furniture after being evicted (*Died Wretched*), or eat garbage as a raving lunatic (*Living in Bondage* 2).

The dangers of Lagos life are imaged directly in crime films, which are often topical and generally respond to anxieties about violent crime. Some films in this genre convey the terror of the denizens of Lagos with gritty realism; others sympathetically—and melodramatically—explore the social pressures that produce criminals (*Owo Blow*; *Rattlesnake*); others seem to be constructed mostly out of recycled international film culture. Various strands of iconography have been developed: images of gangsters modeled partly on actually existing Lagos "area boys" and partly on American and Chinese (*Bloody Mission*) films (of course the area boys are fans of American and Chinese gangster films and dress accordingly); equally menacing vigilantes, based closely on the black-clad, amulet-wearing Bakassi Boys, who operated in eastern Nigeria around 2000;[43] and slicker, frankly Americanized action film heroes reveling in high-tech gear and dealing with international conspiracies in clean, modern landscapes that hardly exist in Nigeria (*Blue Sea*; *State of Emergency*). There have been some highly eroticized treatments of gangsters, both male (*Rattlesnake*) and female (*Outkast*). Filmmakers are apprenticing themselves to the arts of American film violence, but their budgets sharply limit what they can shoot up or blow up. I believe *Rituals* (1997) is the first Nigerian film in which a car is destroyed—a landmark for the industry.

Half the population of Lagos lives on a dollar a day, and these people do not get proportional screen time in Nollywood films, but Nigerian filmmakers are on easy and intimate terms with the life of the poor. The low-budget realism that springs from just going somewhere and filming conveys a lot of truth—seldom do we see Hollywood-style or Bollywood-style representations of poverty, in which the hovels constructed on soundstages are too large and well-lighted and the actors wear theatrical rags. A sturdy tradition of comedy in Yoruba, Pidgin, and English dealing with ordinary people living in a shared urban compound descends from the Yoruba traveling theater tradition and from the classic 1980s Nigerian television situation comedies, like Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Basi and Company*. The laughter is generated in the struggle for survival in a world full of tricksters and predators (*Lagos Na Wah!*). The inspired satire *Holygans* is set at about the same class level. Pidginphone exponents of this tradition often appear in Shakespearean fashion as comic servants—gatemen, house help—in films about their social superiors.

The fact that public space is incoherent and artistically unmanageable encourages retreat into the family compound and the genre of domestic melodrama, the dominant mode of Nollywood film. Nigerian film culture has the upward social bias normal in film cultures around the world, preferring to set its stories in attractive large houses, or even in luxurious mansions. As Birgit Meyer has observed (speaking about Ghanaian videos, though the point is equally valid for Nigerian ones), an attraction of the films for their audiences, who overwhelmingly live in modest circumstances, is that they purport to provide a glimpse behind the high walls and imposing gates of the wealthy, which shut out the rest of society to shelter bourgeois nuclear families.[44]

Behind those walls, scenes of luxury unfold; what happens is invariably melodramatic, and it frequently involves the occult. As Meyer argues, making spiritual forces visible is a crucial function of the video films.[45] The occult permeates all social environments in the world of the videos, and whereas one can find examples where it is associated with the primitive or village world, as opposed to urban modernity (*Narrow Escape*), more often it is integral to the representation of modernity and modern wealth.[46] Money rituals in which a human being is sacrificed to bring miraculous wealth were already established in Nigerian popular culture before the rise of the videos, as a figure for the mysterious, unearned wealth of the oil boom.[47] Such rituals have been a hallmark of Nigerian videos from their beginning (featured, for instance, in the founding film of the video boom, *Living in Bondage* 1), and they are associated with "bigmen" and the spectacle of flashy wealth in Lagos.

Households at all income levels are haunted by ghosts, often of virtuous wives and mothers wickedly done away with (*Living in Bondage* 1 and 2; *Blood Sister*); households contain jealousies that give rise to witchcraft attacks (*Iya Ibeji Eleran Igbe*); households are infiltrated by demonic forces that must be cast out by Christian pastors (*The Maid*). Meyer makes a strong argument for the role of Pentecostal Christianity in shaping the way occult forces are represented in video films,[48] but Christianity does not have a monopoly on access to the spiritual realm. Diviners are frequently consulted in times of difficulty, and they may be Yoruba *babalawos* or Igbo *dibias*, good (*Iya Ibeji Eleran Igbe*) or evil (*South Connection*), honest (*419 Connection*) or dishonest (*419 Connection* again), effective (*Compromise*) or ineffective (*Rituals*). Occult forces appear in many guises, sometimes in the raffia skirts and kaolin face painting of indigenous religious traditions, sometimes in imitation of Hollywood horror films, sometimes in fanciful original concoctions. Special effects are integral to their representation, from magical appearances and disappearances managed by simply stopping the camera, through spiritual-force laser beams emanating from eyes or fingers, to extensive digitalized imagery, as at the beginning and end of *Six Demons*, where computer-generated demons rise from and sink into a computer-generated

sea. Postproduction companies (House of Macro, TFP) specialize in this work. Highly standardized, electronically generated sounds accompany occult manifestations. In these dimensions as well, the occult is associated with the cutting edge of modernity, not with the "primitive."

Spiritual warfare rages throughout the city—another level of danger and conflict made visible, shadowing the ordinarily visible city. The videos do not agree about the forms of the spiritual realm. In general, they display a range of ideological and cultural positions: liberal and conservative when it comes to women's roles, Christian fundamentalist and cultural nationalist, grounding themselves in an ethnic or traditionalist morality or emulating a Western-oriented cosmopolitanism, and so on. Nevertheless, in spite of the variety I have noted throughout this chapter, there is a remarkable coherence to the representation of Lagos that emerges from these films. Wealth and poverty, the modern and the traditional, the police and the streets, may be valued differently or even oppositely, but they are imaged in much the same way, with a common visual vocabulary. Opposites tend to meet: the lure of garish riches might seem antithetical to born-again Christianity, for instance, but the former serves as the requisite temptation in the morality tales of the latter—and in the many Lagos "prosperity churches" garish riches are seen as proof of divine favor.[49] Teco Benson is both a leading practitioner of the American-inspired action genre, filled with images of expensive, sleek urban surfaces (*State of Emergency*), and a leading director, in association with the Reverend Helen Ukpabio, of Christian videos (*End of the Wicked*; *Highway to the Grave*). From vernacular fooling amid the garbage of a slum, through intimate emotional betrayals and spiritual combat against demonic assailants, to the political maneuvering of the hyperrich, the films seem like pieces of a mosaic, rather than contradictory and competing representations. The popular imagination from which they spring is syncretic[50] and elastic; the genres mix and interpenetrate so each film and each kind of film shades into others; the constraints of their budgets and the sharing of personnel and procedures form similar images. All this tends to produce a seamless, motley fabric. Heavily generic and saturated with the supernatural, the films may seem to contradict our notions of realism, but they spring from a common ground—Lagos—and they vividly image their enormous, horrible, fascinating object of knowledge.

NOTES

1. Robert Kaplan, 2000. This essay first appeared in *Africa Today* 54.2, 2007. pp. 135–50 and is reprinted here with permission from Indiana University Press.
2. For a review of these discourses on Lagos, see Matthew Gandy, 2005. Other examples of the recent efflorescence of interest in Lagos include Bregtje van der Haak's documentary film *Lagos/Koolhaas* and her and Silke Wawro's interactive DVD *Lagos Wide and Close*, both stemming from the Rem Koolhaas/Harvard Project on the City research; Kunle Tejuoso and Weyinmi Atigbi's cof-

fee-table book , *Lagos: A City at Work* (2005); dele jegede's contribution to the interactive CD-ROM, Patrick McNaughton et al., 2000).; Dan Ollman's *Suffering and Smiling*, a documentary about the musician Fela Ransome-Kuti and his children; and a rash of foreign documentaries about Nollywood, including Franco Sacchi's *This is Nollywood*, Brenda Goldblatt and Alicia Arce's *Nick Goes to Nollywood*, and Jamie Meltzer's *Welcome to Nollywood*.

3. Gandy, 2005; George Packer, 2006.
4. Gandy, 2005.
5. Gandy, 2006.
6. Pep Subirós, 2001b.
7. Jonathan Haynes, 1995.
8. Haynes, 2007.
9. Sallie A. Marston, Keith Woodward, and John Paul Jones III, 2007.
10. Subirós, 2001a.
11. Karin Barber, 1987, 2000; Johannes Fabian, 1978; Jonathan Haynes and Onookome Okome, 1998.
12. Onookome Okome, 2007.
13. Ernie Wolfe III, 2000.
14. Madu Chikwendu, personal communication; Haynes, 2007.
15. Brian Larkin, 2004.
16. Larkin, 2000, 2002, 2008.
17. Other cities and towns are frequently shown; many films are set in villages; one flourishing genre, the cultural epic, is set in the precolonial or colonial historical past, and such films are typically shot in rural areas. Producers often find it convenient to get their casts and crews away from the distractions of their lives in Lagos to shoot somewhere quieter and cheaper.
18. The Censors Board tries to hold the line on certain fronts—obscene language, excessive sexuality, violence, and inflammatory political or ethnic positions—but does little or nothing to set the agenda of the films, visually or in any other way.
19. Barber, 1987, 2000; Haynes and Okome, 1998.
20. Chidi Nebo, 2000, pp. 52–53.
21. The great exception to this rule is the cultural epic. In this case, it is easy to find, or, if necessary, to build, a village of thatched huts off in the bush, and costuming, often fancifully conceived, is a featured attraction. *The Battle of Love*, a film about the Biafran War, works at recreating the 1960s, but this is the only film I am aware of that tries any such thing. The sense of anachronism is not natural; it did not arise in Western culture until the Renaissance and developed slowly thereafter (Garin 1965) and there is little sign that African audiences are disturbed by anachronisms in Nigerian films, though film reviewers in Nigerian newspapers occasionally point them out.
22. André Gardies and Pierre Haffner, 1987; André Gardies, 1989; Olivier Barlet, 2000.
23. Barlet, 2000, p. 145.
24. Don Pedro Obaseki, 2009.
25. Haynes, 2000, pp. 22–29.
26. Pierre Barrot, 2009; Barber, 1987, pp. 46–48.
27. Karin Barber and Christopher Waterman, 1995; Barber, 2000.
28. Obododimma Oha, 2001.
29. Gandy, 2006.
30. Frantz Fanon, 1963.
31. Lizbeth Malkmus and Roy Armes, 1991, pp. 186–187.
32. Françoise Pfaff, 2004, p. 89.
33. Tejumola Olaniyan, 2004, pp. 89–90.

34. Christopher Alan Waterman, 1990; Biodun Jeyifo, 1984; Gavin Williams, 1974; Barber, 1987.
35. In a study of representations of the city in Ghanaian video films, Esi Dogbe comments, “The city is visually and metaphorically the locus of wide-ranging patterns of cosmopolitan consumption in which the camera itself, the film-makers, the syncretic mix of beliefs represented, the narratives and fictional characters, are all complicit. This mutual complicity is quite different from Ayi Kwei Armah’s (1968) lone ‘man’ squirming his way detachedly through a sensory overload of putrid smells, disjunctive sights, sounds, and the textures of (neo)colonial buildings that blanket the festering social, political, and economic sores of a rotting new Ghana in the novel *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*” (2003) p. 230–231.
36. Paul M. Lubeck, Michael J. Watts, and Ronnie Lipschutz, 2007.
37. Packer, 2006, p. 68.
38. Olaniyan, 2004, pp. 89–90.
39. Haynes, 2006.
40. Cf. Pfaff, 2004.
41. Barrot, 2009, pp. 64–65.
42. Haynes, 2002.
43. John C. McCall, 2004.
44. Birgit Meyer, 1999, p. 110.
45. Meyer, 2002a, 2003; Oha, 2001.
46. There is now a large literature on magic and modernity in Africa; seminal texts include Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, 1993, and Peter Geschiere, 1997.
47. Barber, 1982; Daniel Jordan Smith, 2001; Meyer, 2002a.
48. Meyer, 1998, 2002a, 2002b.
49. Asonzeh F.-K. Ukah, 2003.
50. Barber, 1987.

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16 French Cinema

Counter-Model, Cultural Exception, Resistances

Martin O'Shaughnessy

Any cartography of resistances to Hollywood domination and to the influence of neoliberalism in the cinematic sphere would inevitably place France somewhere near its center. Countering the prevalent hostility to state 'interference' in market mechanisms, France has maintained a generous system of state support for filmmaking that has, in turn, sustained a vigorous national production system. France has also played a key role within Europe both by defending individual state's rights to support their national cinemas within the European Union (EU) and by promoting pan-European support for film. At a more global level, France has been a leading proponent of cultural exceptionalism and diversity in opposition to free market understandings of cultural activity. France has also been one of the heartlands of political counter-globalization, despite the progressive and seemingly inexorable internationalization of its own economy in recent decades.[1] Responding to this broader context, recent French cinema, both fiction and documentary, has seen a return of political involvement as manifested in a wave of films dealing with the oppressiveness of the contemporary order.[2] This coexistence of film industrial, policy, political, and textual resistances might suggest an admirable consistency. Yet things are, of course, more complicated. Not all resistances are equivalent and the French system is riven by tensions and contradictions, as underscored in a recent report by the Club des 13, a group of film professionals, which describes an industry torn between commercial and cultural logics and small and large players.[3] Any celebration of French cinematic resistances needs to be postponed until after a careful examination of policies, industrial structures, and texts.[4]

FRENCH CINEMA AS GLOBAL COUNTER-MODEL?

The origins of the current French system of state support and regulation of cinema go back to the period following the Second World War. Consolidating the wartime Vichy regime's interventionist stance, the French Fourth Republic established the Centre National de la Cinématographie (CNC) in 1946. Faced with the postwar influx of Hollywood films and

the felt imperative to defend its national industry, the French government set up the CNC administered state aid system that, with important revisions, still continues today. The cornerstone of the system was a tax on all cinema tickets that was used to support French cinema, particularly producers and exhibitors, thus effectively forcing American films to subsidize their French rivals, partially offsetting their overwhelmingly dominant position.[5] The system was revised in the 1950s, and particularly after the installation in 1958 of the French Fifth Republic, a regime that underlined the importance it accorded to the cultural sphere by the establishment of a Ministry of Culture under the charismatic tutelage of André Malraux. The year 1959 saw the inauguration of a selective aid mechanism that allotted funds to productions according to their perceived cultural worth. Automatic aid mechanisms continued to support all French productions, but the addition of selective support marked a shift of French policy from a purely industrial logic (support of the national industry) to a hybrid one where industrial and cultural logics worked in tandem. This shift took place in a broader French context in which cinema's cultural status was nourished by the country's flourishing network of cinema clubs, the emergence of the New Wave, the strength and assertiveness of the specialist press (notably *Les Cahiers du Cinéma*), and film's broader intellectual prestige. Contemporary mobilizations in support of cinema are still substantially framed by the kind of understanding that emerged from this foundational moment but also remain marked by the inevitable tension between film's industrial and cultural dimensions.

Automatic and selective support mechanisms were at the heart of the French system throughout the next two decades. They remain vital instruments today but ceased to be the chief source of film funding after a series of momentous changes in the 1980s, a decade that saw the liberalization of the audiovisual sphere as governments of both right and left opened up state-controlled television and radio to private ownership. TF1, the leading television channel, was privatized. Two new private channels were established and, most importantly, pay TV channel Canal Plus was set up, with its main fare being recently released films. Whereas U.S. cinema had been the main threat, the newly expanded television sector, with its great appetite for films and capacity to draw audiences away, seemed the new rival to a cinema industry whose ticket sales, after plummeting in the 1960s and stagnating in the 1970s, were again in sharp decline. The French government response to this context was to make television pay for increased state support for cinema. Whereas the main terrestrial channels were obliged to invest a relatively low percentage of their profits in the film industry, Canal Plus had to invest 20 percent of its earnings in film production.[6]

The role of Canal Plus reminds us to what extent the French system is a regulated rather than a 'free' market one. What drives the system is a commitment to maintain some kind of balance between big and smaller players and cultural and commercial understandings of film. Since at least the

time of the Lang Plan of 1989, France has sought to encourage producers, distributors, and exhibitors who are large enough to compete at home and abroad. Lang's core objective was to promote big-budget filmmaking as a way to fight declining attendances. Films would no longer get proportionally less automatic public funding as their budgets rose, a clear financial incentive to grow larger, and a commitment was made to maintaining a dense network of cinemas in order to sustain audience levels. At the same time, the country maintained its support for small productions by subsidizing new directors and artistically ambitious films and by obliging Canal Plus to fund a diverse range of works.[7] It allowed the regulated growth of the multiplexes that brought attendances back up from the lows of the 1980s and early 1990s, but also subsidized the modernization of France's art cinemas.[8] Although this commitment to commercial and cultural logics and large and small operations might seem contradictory, it makes considerable sense. A cultural cinema without commercial success would quickly appear an expensive, elitist indulgence. Yet purely commercial measures of success would be unable to justify the complex system of state support.

The French system seemingly provides a seductive European alternative to the Hollywood of global media conglomerates. After the sharp decline of the 1980s and early 1990s, when annual attendances were down to around 120 million, French audiences are robustly healthy. The 2008 audience figure of 189.7 million represents a 6.7 percent increase on 2007. French films took an impressive 45.4 percent of their home market, shading out the U.S.'s 44 percent, an exceptional result that owed a lot to the box-office triumph of popular comedy *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis* whose 20.5 million ticket sales were an all-time record for a French film.[9] The home market share of French film is more typically 30–40 percent, which is nonetheless a much better figure than other European industries manage on their home market, even if it cannot rival the home performance of some Asian countries.[10] In 2006, multiplexes provided just under a third of cinema screens, yet nearly half of French cinemas were categorized as art cinemas, an internationally unrivalled proportion.[11] French film sells well internationally. UniFrance, the publicly funded export support agency, reports 84.5 million overseas seats sold for 2008. This represents a record for the period since they started to log figures in 1994 and easily outstrips figures in the mid-sixty millions for the previous two years. It takes overseas admissions for the year close to the figure for French film on its home market, confirming the importance of exports for the industry.[12] The year 2008 also saw production reach a record high with 240 partially or wholly French classified films being made.[13] The sum invested in French-led films went up by 230 percent between 1996 and 2006, which, even allowing for the increase in output, still represents a growth in average budgets.[14] These impressive figures would seem to confirm the success of the French model. It can, however, be questioned in two ways. Firstly, it could be argued that, despite its apparent successes, it is increasingly dysfunctional, with a Byzantine set of

regulations needed to maintain its impossible balances. Secondly, it might be suggested that, behind its apparently high-minded commitment to diversity and to noncommercial logics, it is a closed and protectionist system. These two arguments will be considered in turn.

SYSTEMIC DYSFUNCTION

Some of the dysfunctions of the system are condensed in a rising sense that the French industry is splitting in two, with the emergence of a 'two-speed' cinema and an increasing gulf between the big players in production, distribution, and exhibition and the rest.[15] This came to a head in 2008 when Le Club des 13 published their report lamenting the 'bipolarization' of the French industry and identifying crisis tendencies in all its different sectors. The increased average budget per film hides a situation in which the number and cost of big-budget films has climbed sharply, opening a widening gap between them and other productions.[16] In contrast, producers of smaller films are forced to patch together a financial package drawing on the different funding sources (television, the public support system, regions, SOFICAs (tax-break vehicles), co-production money), needing to keep each funder happy to the detriment of the integrity of the project.[17] Television may have become cinema's cash cow but has no real commitment to small films and pushes larger ones to follow highly conventional lines in terms of style, narrative, and casting.[18] The number of films being made has indeed increased but, rather than being an advance, this effectively means a bitter competition for screen space and an accelerated turnover. This situation is exacerbated by blockbuster-style release patterns of big films. Recent years have seen an inflation in the number of prints per film so that big releases can occupy a high percentage of the nation's screens at a given moment. Promotional budgets have also been driven upwards, increasing by over 300 percent between 1998 and 2006.[19] Lacking the means to compete, smaller films struggle for screen space and public attention.

The picture for distribution is no more reassuring. The French market is dominated by big, at least partially vertically integrated players; the distribution arms of American majors, of French TV channels (M6, TF1, Canal Plus), and of big exhibition chains. In 2006, the ten biggest distributors accounted for a market share of 83.3 percent.[20] Because big distributors are able to spread their risks across a range of films and to make money at different points in the supply chain, they are relatively protected from the uncertainties of the business. Distributing fewer, smaller films and faced with increased promotional costs and the shorter shelf lives of films, the kind of independent distributors on which art and auteur cinema depend are increasingly vulnerable. *Auteurs* can be picked up by big distributors if they achieve a certain public profile but are then lost, by a cruel irony, to the small distributors who nourished their early career.

The situation in exhibition is not necessarily brighter. Multiplexes have helped revive cinemagoing, attracted new, popular audiences, and driven the upgrading of facilities across the range of theaters. The increased audience they deliver has helped sustain a popular French cinema that can compete with Hollywood at the national box office.[21] What they have done for cinematic diversity is more debatable. Within Paris, where they cater for a large cinephilic public, they show a wide range of big budget and art-house films.[22] What they show elsewhere, especially outside the big urban centers, is, in its standardized variety, much less so. Unlike many art cinemas, where business needs are balanced by a real commitment to individual films, multiplexes are essentially money-making machines. Because much of their profits come from confectionary and other ancillaries, films can easily become the lead product that sells the others. A long-standing convention had it that theaters did not charge for showing promotional trailers for films: breaking with this understanding, multiplexes charge for advertising upcoming features, increasing their own profits and further undermining the fragile economy of independent distributors. The loyalty cards that the big chains operate encourage customers to come to them repeatedly while discouraging attendance at other cinemas.[23] With exhibition, as elsewhere within the industry, if you scratch the surface of France's apparently balanced and diverse cinematic terrain, you find a bitter struggle for market domination and survival.

Export performances confirm this tension-ridden situation. Successful French exports in 2008 are indeed varied, including English language 'post-national' action films (*Taken*, *Transporter* 3), auteur films (Kechiche's *La Graine et le mulet*, Cantet's *Entre les murs*), medium-budget-quality films (*La Môme*), national comedies (*Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis*), and big-budget European co-productions (*Astérix aux jeux Olympiques*). At first glance, this list suggests an admirable balance between national and 'post-national,' art-house and popular, and lower and higher budgets. On closer examination, things look less rosy. Of the export box office for French films in 2008, 55.6 percent belong to big-budget, English-language productions made for international, multiplex audiences. Popular French-language hits like *Astérix aux jeux Olympiques* or *Bienvenue chez les Ch'tis* prospered in Europe but made little impact in the U.S. French art-house films continue to travel well, helping to fill an international demand for more demanding works, despite rising competition from other world cinemas such as South Korea. Yet, most French films never make it to export, not least because of the high marketing costs involved, which constitute an effective barrier to circulation.[24] The international festival circuit constitutes an alternative, less purely commercial distribution channel for a non-Hollywood cinema.[25] Yet, the pressure on festival screens is intense and the marketing costs of festival films, like those of other films, have increased greatly.[26]

Should one conclude from these dysfunctions and tensions that, far from serving as an European counter-model to Hollywood, the French system is irredeemably flawed, one more proof of the inability of the state to regulate efficiently? This would be precipitate. The cinematic landscape is constantly shifting (the rise of television, the advent of the multiplex, the constant drive to monopoly of the bigger players). The only way to deal with this inherent instability is through a constant series of regulatory revisions, an "endless tweaking of the system," as Buchsbaum puts it, with each revision producing unforeseen effects that require further adjustments. The way that television money, although a vital funding source, has also driven films in fundamentally conservative creative directions is a case in point. Yet, as Buchsbaum also notes, continuous tweaking is the only way to maintain the kind of diversity that allows the French system to balance commercial and cultural logics.[27] Rather than discrediting state intervention, the French model ultimately underscores the difficulty and necessity of regulating markets.

NATIONAL PROTECTIONISM?

Is the critique of national protectionism more justified than that of regulatory dysfunction? Anne Jäckel, a leading authority on the political economy of European cinema, thinks not. Taking strong exception to academic analyst Martine Danan's description of the French model as "a closed national system,"[28] she proceeds to lay out a persuasive case for its 'inter/nationalism.' She notes that whereas production support is only accorded to films categorized as all French or French co-productions, automatic support goes to all distributors and exhibitors in France regardless of nationality. She underscores the openness of French film culture to foreign films: France has more film festivals than any other country and its rich art cinema network sustains a truly internationalist cinephilia, particularly in Paris.[29] She notes too France's long tradition of participating in co-production deals with European and other countries. France signed the first intergovernmental co-production treaty with Italy in 1949 and, a desirable co-production partner not least because of its generous support mechanisms, now has agreements with forty-four countries.[30] France has also provided support for reputed foreign directors who for political or financial reasons have struggled to make films in their own country. These include names such as Andrzej Wajda, Krzysztof Kieslowski, Andrei Tarkovsky, and Ken Loach.[31] The list could now be expanded to include Abbas Kiarostami, whose latest (French-funded) film is in postproduction at time of writing. In addition, two French support schemes, the Fonds Sud and the Fonds Eco, were set up in 1984 and 1989 respectively. During its first decade, the former helped finance over 130 films from thirty-nine countries from the global South. The latter contributed to the making

of sixty-five features in the old Eastern bloc between 1990 and 1997.[32] The international commitment manifested by these schemes is complemented by France's leading role in driving European support mechanisms, within both the EU and the Council of Europe, the Media program coming from the former, Eurimages from the latter. Recognizing that a highly fragmented distribution sector was a major obstacle to the circulation of European films within Europe, Media came to focus much of its attention on supporting distribution. Seeking to promote co-productions as a way of building cinematic bridges, Eurimages provides production support for projects involving at least two European partners. France also played a leading role in the development of the Europa Cinema network, a pan-European support system for cinemas programming a significant number of films from across Europe. Whereas these support schemes are relatively modest in their financial impact, France's commitment to them evidences a determination to take something of the French model of public support beyond national borders.

These different initiatives support Jäckel's conclusion that, far from having a closed system, France shows a consistent international commitment. She writes, "France's film policy has made a vital contribution to the production of a transnational, world cinema," and adds, "French and non-French films made with the support of France's various funds, particularly selective aids, offer some of the best examples of a viable—and enduring—world cinema."[33] Whereas she is surely right to refute the perception of French policy and support mechanisms as narrowly national, she is perhaps too generous in the internationalist picture she paints. French policy is simultaneously nationalist *and* internationalist, essentially because France's national cinematic interests in the face of the overwhelming strength of Hollywood are best served by the existence of a diverse international cinematic landscape and cooperation with suitable partners. Moreover, moving beyond the film-industrial, France has good political reasons to promote European rapprochement and its colonialist past at least partly explains its desire to maintain links and cooperation with the global South as a way to sustain its influence. More broadly, a country that was once a major power has long mobilized the cultural as a way to maintain a certain level of international prestige. Jäckel is fully aware of this complex nexus of determinants of the internationalism of French film policy but underplays it in her conclusions. She also underplays the extent to which the more narrowly commercial face of French cinema policy and the increasing industrial concentration it favors may actively militate against the kind of diversity she praises. If one side of French cinematic internationalism is expressed through support for foreign directors and films, another side translates into encouragement of big players who will be able to compete on world markets. English-language blockbusters are also part of French internationalism.[34]

CULTURAL EXCEPTIONALISM AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

In the same way that France has driven European cinema policy, it has also played a leading role in cultural policy more broadly and particularly in defense of cultural exceptionalism and later of cultural diversity. French cultural exceptionalism, the refusal to consider culture as just another merchandise or service, came to the fore in 1992 at the GATT trade negotiations when the Americans predictably took a strong free-trade line and the French dug in their heels. Not simply an affair of governments and bureaucrats, the GATT talks mobilized substantial elements of the cultural industries with French professionals and industry organizations predictably playing a leading role in lobbying at national and European levels.[35] We have seen that French cinema, far from being a homogeneous block, is riven by competing interests. What helped it unite in this case was the threat to the support system. The fact that leading exhibitors were also producers of films and major benefactors from the system helps explain the ease with which consensus was achieved.[36] The GATT's threat to European agricultural subsidies was then a bigger issue in France than culture, with small farmers putting considerable pressure on the government through highly visible public mobilizations. The coupling of agriculture and culture allowed the former to lay claim to a cultural dimension—agricultural production was not simply a business but part of a national identity and way of life—and the latter to connect to other struggles and to appear less sectoral in its thrust.[37]

The Franco-American standoff at the GATT was an unequal confrontation. France badly needed support from the EU and its individual member states. The EU could not be counted on. Its core purpose being the abolition to barriers to circulation within the union, it took a dim view of national mechanisms that might be seen to constitute a barrier to the free flow of audiovisual products. In 1979, having outlawed quotas and tariff barriers, it turned its attention to state support mechanisms, only to come up against vigorous opposition from most of the states concerned. The EU is far from monolithic. Some of its members—the UK being a prime example—favor liberalization of markets. Others, like France and Germany, are far more inclined to support state intervention. Important EU Directorates-General (the European Commission's policy arms) have pushed the liberalization agenda whereas the less influential Directorate responsible for culture has backed support mechanisms.[38] When the EU was finally persuaded to align itself with the cultural exception, it was the result of France's ability to convince other nations and intense lobbying by cultural professionals at a national and European level. Due to their high media visibility, cinema professionals such as the actor Gérard Depardieu were able to take the campaign to a much wider public.[39]

The victory won by the French at the GATT in 1993 was not definitive for the U.S. would open other fronts, seeking, for example, to build clauses favorable to its audiovisual industries into bilateral trade agreements with individual countries, fully aware that those wishing to sell their goods to it find it hard to hold out on the cultural front. It would use the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) to mount a more general challenge to European aid systems. The core principle of the MAI, confusingly labeled 'national treatment,' was the requirement to accord the same treatment to foreign and national investments. Applied to cinema, this would have meant that American firms would have had equal access to European aid mechanisms, effectively negating any advantage that they conferred. A second principle was the 'most favored nation' clause, which required that governments treat every nation as well as those they treated best in investment terms. This would have undone any advantages accruing from bilateral cooperations and co-productions, a vital part of the French and European cinematic armory. The fact that these devastating consequences might not immediately strike those concerned underlines why it has been so important that cultural professionals develop an international counter-expertise. Tellingly, the chief event that brought the threat represented by the MAI to the notice of politicians was a colloquium organized at the French National Assembly by cultural professionals, with the world of film to the fore. The battle was to be waged at the level of knowledge with the private meetings and arcane discussions of elites opposed to the public debates of those who challenged them. The lobbying of French and EU politicians was (and remains) an essential part of the cultural professionals' armory, but the importance of also taking the arguments to a wider public was underscored by the subsequent organization of conferences and colloquia and the dissemination of reports, as opposition to the MAI mounted.[40] French mobilization against the agreement united film professionals with other groups (unions, counter-globalization activists, committed intellectuals) also opposed to neoliberal globalization.[41] Like the earlier pairing with agriculture, this forging of a common front helped elevate the cinematic cause to a more general level. The MAI talks broke up at the end of 1998 with no agreement having been reached. The mobilization against them contributed in no small way to the birth of the Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens (ATTAC), the leading French counter-globalization organization.

About the same time as the MAI negotiations were failing, countermoves were afoot to promote the principle of cultural diversity at UNESCO, the UN's cultural arm. France again played a leading role, in alliance with Canada, another country with excellent reasons to preserve cultural defense mechanisms, given the extent of the U.S. penetration of its media landscape. The drawing up of a universal declaration on cultural diversity in 2001 was followed by the adoption of the Convention on the Preservation and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expression in 2005 and

its ratification in 2007.[42] In 2005, 148 countries voted for the convention. Two, the United States and Israel, voted against. The victory was partly symbolic because, although the Convention legitimizes state action in the cultural sphere, it does not take precedence over trade treaties. It underlined, however, how successful France had been in building support for its stance.[43] Having risked isolation at the GATT in 1993, it had now achieved *near*-consensual support for the principles behind its positions. In the process, of course, it had universalized what might initially have seemed a narrowly national and indeed sectoral position. The international dimension of French film policy as described by Jäckel can profitably be located within this strategic universalizing drive.

CINEMA AS RESISTANCE

Mobilization around the MAI coincided with a broader French context within which globalization increasingly came to be questioned and to a degree unparalleled in other European countries. The year 1995 was a turning point. The end of the year saw a massive public sector strike wave in defense of workers' acquired rights that explicitly opposed itself to neoliberal logics. The later 1990s saw the rise of the French counter-globalization movement and specifically the launch of ATTAC by Paris-based journal *Le Monde Diplomatique*, itself a leading international forum for opposition to neoliberalism. The year 2005 was another high point of French counter-globalization: the country's 'no' vote in the European referendum of that year was not simply a rejection of neoliberal logics or of the liberalizing thrust of EU policies. Such a rejection was nevertheless a key factor in what happened. The year 2007 again saw the French invade the streets, this time as students and workers came together to block the rightist government's planned introduction of the CPE, the Contrat Première Embauche, a piece of legislation designed to make young people more easy to hire by making them easier to fire. Opposition to the legislation again underscored the strength of French resistance to neoliberal logics and to the forced flexibilization of labor. At the same time, prominent French intellectuals such as Pierre Bourdieu, Jacques Rancière, Luc Boltanski, Eve Chiapello, and Alain Badiou were amongst the leading international voices challenging the neoliberal consensus. Of course, one cannot automatically equate French resistance to Hollywood hegemony and championing of cultural diversity with the politics of counter-globalization or anti-capitalism. A policy that can be sold to the EU and to most of the world's nations is hardly intrinsically radical. Yet, given the right circumstances, such as the broader opposition to neoliberalism within France, a refusal of market logics can lend itself to articulation within a more genuinely oppositional politics. This is surely the lesson of the subsumption of cinema within broader based, social movement opposition to the MAI.

It is therefore no accident that there has been a return of some form of oppositional political commitment within French film since the mid-1990s.[44] Those working in film find themselves part of a context in which neoliberalism is challenged both intellectually and on the streets and there is a hunger for oppositional representations and counterknowledge. They have repeatedly needed to mobilize to defend the French cinema system against external assaults, educating themselves about the functioning of globalization in the process. They encounter daily the brutality of market forces as they endeavor to make, distribute, and exhibit the films they want in a context where so many films struggle to survive and where the profit drive constantly threatens to hollow out other values. It is, of course, to a considerable degree, the generous support system that allows films with noncommercial drives to be made and the large state-supported network of art cinemas that enables them to reach a public. Yet, the same system, in its drive to profit and oligopoly, is also what threatens their existence and circulation. Film professionals are, one might say, traversed by the tensions within the system, the unstable and constantly threatened balance it maintains between cultural and commercial logics. Given the broader sociopolitical situation, it is unsurprising that *some* therefore feel driven to make fictions or documentaries that engage with the systemic violence that surround them, despite other contextual features (the need to please financiers, television channels, audiences, distributors) that typically push in the opposite direction.

There is a division of labor between fiction films and documentaries. French fictions have typically figured the impact of the systemic on individuals and small groups in restricted locales. Their characters move in a world whose spatiality is profoundly dislocated: the nation offers a diminishing symbolic home to them and the causes of what is happening to them have effectively moved out of story space and cannot be pinned down or named.[45] They have to deal with pressing needs, have diminishing or restricted access to traditions of resistance, and no prospect of a better future. In the absence of broader solidarities or an elaborated discourse of politics, they typically encounter the unmediated impact of the violence of the current order at the level of the body. The films are effective to the extent that they work against their own recalcitrant raw materials to reconnect local, immediate conflicts to the systemic and to restore eloquence to bodies deprived of a language able to name and oppose what is happening to them.[46] Unsurprisingly, a good number of them take us into the world of work as a place where oppression can be forced back into visibility. An increasing number figure the experience of migration: in a world where goods, services, and finance circulate freely, the constrained and painful mobilities of those at the edges of the neoliberal order can highlight the inequalities inherent to globalization.

Erick Zonca's early fictions like *La Vie rêvée des anges* (1998) are among the best examples of films that figure the unmediated impact of

socioeconomic violence on individuals evicted from collective and institutional protections. Bruno Dumont's films, notably *La Vie de Jésus* (1997) and *l'Humanité* (1999), work on a similar terrain. Both directors figure a world with dislocated spatial contours within which the nation no longer offers a real or symbolic shelter. As *La Vie rêvée* begins, Isa, one of its two heroines, is seeking a friend in the north of France but finds he has crossed the Belgian border in search of work. She herself is given a job in a backstreet sweatshop by a Yugoslav whose daughter is working in the U.S. making army and police uniforms. Borders seem to have lost their meaning, as turning stereotypes on their head, the immigrant now employs the 'native' French person in an international, low-wage economy. The uniforms that his daughter makes point, perhaps clumsily, to a shift in the state's role from protection to repression. In Dumont's *l'Humanité*, there is no longer anything to bridge the space of the high-speed transnational, as embodied by the Eurostar train, and the slow, local mobilities of the characters. In his *La Vie de Jésus*, a group of young, unemployed men circulate aimlessly on mopeds on local lanes. Whereas the national once might have lifted their lives to a more general plane, it is now reduced to a particularist neo-tribalism as expressed in the brutal murder of a young man of North African descent. Dumont's films are traversed by a raw physicality that is intrinsically associated with the inarticulacy of characters no longer able to rise above their situation through access to a universalizing language. Zonca's characters retain access to isolated fragments of a language of class but their struggles nonetheless tend to take on a directly physical character.

Whereas in Zonca's and Dumont's works a tradition of struggle is simply unavailable, Robert Guédiguian's films figure characters who live in the remains of the past: emptied-out epic spaces like the cement works of *Marius et Jeannette* (1997) serve as a mute backdrop to small, foreground dramas, reminding us that the stories only make sense in a broader context. Characters retain a leftist vision but are no longer part of the organized working class that made that tradition meaningful. Marking a transition, Guédiguian's *La Ville est tranquille* (2001) confirms the passage from the epic to the fragmentary: we see one of its leads participate in a group of dockers' last stand against redundancy before he uses his payoff to buy a taxi, collective action giving way to a personal struggle for economic survival before our eyes. Later, the same character mockingly sings the "Internationale" in different languages as he drives his taxi past the docks and warehouses. The internationalist hymn can now only be sung ironically by an individual: even as Marseilles is transformed by a globalizing economy, a universalizing oppositional language is falling silent. The film's heroine is a fish-packer. She struggles to look after her granddaughter while working to feed her drug addict daughter. Eventually, she kills the latter to ensure the future of the former. Where once there had been a struggle for a better world, there is now only struggle for life.

Cantet's *Ressources humaines* (2000) is the classic but far from only example of films that go into the world of work to force exploitation, alienation, and struggle back into visibility, thus refuting the fiction of the consensual acceptance of the neoliberal order. In an early sequence, one worker raises his middle finger behind his boss's back, and another uses the pretext of his oily gloves to refuse to shake the boss's hands. At this stage, resistance must pass through the individual body, whose mute expressivity bears witness to yet resists the silencing of opposition. However, going further than other films where struggle has been silenced and individualized, Cantet's film reaffirms the necessity and possibility of a collective struggle mediated by an elaborated political language. The film's hero breaks into the factory at night, prints out the management's secret redundancy plans, and tapes them to the factory door. With oppression thus forced back into public visibility, the workers are driven to take strike action and rediscover their voice in the process. The 1995 public sector strikes in France reinstated the possibility of resistance to apparently unstoppable neoliberal logics while reaffirming a vision of the sociopolitical terrain with struggle at its heart. In its own small way, Cantet's film does something similar.

Migration has been an important issue for film professionals. A sizable group of them took a leading role in a high-profile mobilization in support of the paperless migrants or 'sans-papiers' in 1997. A further mobilization in 2007 saw the launch of a petition defending the right of the children of migrants to be educated in France. It bore the names of more than three hundred film professionals as well as a good number of professional associations and production companies and was supported by a short film made with migrant children and called *Laissez-les grandir ici* (Let Them Grow Up Here). A number of fictions have been constructed around migration of which Philippe Lioret's 2009 release *Welcome* is the latest. *Welcome* became the object of a bitter public exchange between Eric Besson, the Minister of the Interior, and Llioret when the filmmaker compared French legislation criminalizing those helping migrants with the practices of the anti-Semitic, wartime Vichy regime. Migrants are complex figures in contemporary cinema. Typically coming from the European East or the global South, they paradoxically embody both the brutal inequalities of contemporary globalization and the failed promises of state socialism, decolonization, and development. Uprooted, deprived of state protections, available for hyper-exploitation, they foreshadow the vulnerability that threatens established populations as protections weaken. Yet they can also be made to compensate for the same vulnerability: the building of the real and symbolic barriers that exclude them seems to reconstitute the very national boundaries that globalization undermines. Rich with this potential resonance, migration should allow films to develop a multifaceted critique of systemic violence and inequities. However, films like François Dupeyron's *Inguelezi* (2004), or *Welcome*, within which a French figure must choose

whether or not to help a migrant, tend to address the issue in ethical terms that neglect the systemic. Mehdi Charef's *Marie-Line* (2000) frames migration in more politically productive ways by showing the interaction of a handful of French and migrant workers in a workplace context, thereby exploring, at the micropolitical level, nascent internationalist solidarities and the forces that militate against them.

The fictions are collectively haunted by ambiguity. They help restore the grounds for critique by pointing to neoliberalism's aggravation of inequalities, domination, and exclusions. They reassert the possibility and necessity of struggle, showing characters who are defined not by their circumstances, as in an immobilizing social realism, but by their refusal of them. Yet, operating in the ruins of a politics, showing the remnants of the working class, they also inevitably point to a defeat and to a closing down of political horizons. It is this combination of characteristics that largely differentiates them form earlier understandings of political cinema.[47]

In contrast to the fictions, French documentaries are more likely to deal with collective struggles. A series of them have dealt with the impact of factory closures on workers, the most well known being Hervé le Roux's *Reprise* (1997), Luc Decaster's *Rêve d'usine* (2002), and Ariane Doublet's *Les Sucriers de Colleville* (2002). Unlike the fictions, they figure groups that still have access to a language of resistance and can thus reflect on their situation even as their future is closed off. Documentaries typically accord themselves a greater mobility than the fictions and a more explicit access to a totalizing explanatory frame. Thus, a film like Marie-France Collard's *Ouvrières du monde* (2000) moves between Levi's workers in France, Belgium, Turkey, and the Far East as it tracks the workings of a multinational moving its operation towards zones with subsistence-level wages and nonexistent protection of worker's rights. The film stages an exchange between European and Asian workers by inviting the former to comment on a video recording of the latter's discussion of working conditions. By opening this dialogue between two groups destined not to meet, the film starts to reopen a virtual space within which an internationalism from below may be articulated. Something similar occurs in Sabrina Malek and Arnaud Soulier's *Un Monde Moderne* (2005), a film showing how teams of foreign workers are brought together in the French shipbuilding port of Saint-Nazaire to construct the luxury ocean liner Queen Mary. The film's initial impact seems dispiriting. Shipbuilding was one of the industries where the strength of the organized working class was most tangible. Now we see a workforce so fragmented by subcontracting that one group of workers may steal tools from another to meet deadlines. Long-standing gains are swept away but there is no longer a single, identifiable employer that can be confronted. Instead, spread around Europe and the wider world, the different subcontractors and agents seem to defy location or even identification. Yet, the film finds grounds for hope in the efforts made by the CGT, the French trade union federation, to defend the rights of the different foreign workers

as, through translation and linguistic improvisation, an international solidarity from below is patched together.

Partly moving us away from work, two high-profile French coproduced documentaries, Jonathan Nossiter's *Mondovino* (2003) and Hubert Sauper's *Darwin's Nightmare* (2005), make commodity production and consumption their main target. With a mobility similar to *Ouvrières du monde*, *Mondovino* explores the globalization of the wine trade, the homogenization of taste regimes that accompanies it, and the resistances of those who seek to hold on to more socioculturally embedded forms of production. Choosing, like *Un Monde Moderne*, to observe global flows as they pass through a single nodal space, *Darwin's Nightmare* focuses on the Tanzanian town of Mwanza. The town's seedy airport is the point of departure of the heavy Russian transporter planes that ship out the flesh of the much sought after Nile carp fished in the African Great Lakes region for European and Asian consumers, even as people in Tanzania go hungry or feed off the remnants of the fish carcasses. The film is meant to be understood allegorically as much as literally. The way in which the carp, an imported species, has decimated native fish species before turning on its own kind is meant to be read as an allegory of the spread of globalizing capitalism and the predatory dynamics that accompany it. If Sauper's film seems harder hitting than Nossiter's because of its visceral aesthetic (rotting carcasses, deformed bodies, maggots, and mire) and its relentless focus on exploitation and misery, the strength of Nossiter's is to keep resistance and a sense of agency at its core.

Despite their differences, the documentaries share a strong pedagogic dimension: they seek to educate us about the impact of global capitalism upon lives and cultures. This drive is epitomized by Vincent Glenn's *Davos, Porto Alegre et autres batailles* (2003), which intercuts between the discussions of global and political leaders at the World Economic Forum in Davos and those of counter-globalization activists in Porto Alegre at the World Social Forum. Staging, like *Ouvrières du monde*, a virtual exchange between two groups that never actually meet, the film highlights and contributes to the emergence of a counter-expertise able to challenge the voice of neoliberal elites. This counter-expertise provides an on-screen echo of the expert knowledge that cinema professionals have been forced to develop to engage with arcane world-trade discussions on an equal footing.

Although, as we have seen, the fictions and documentaries tend to occupy very different symbolic universes, they share a focus on resistances and a refusal of consensual constructions of the socioeconomic terrain. What also unites them is the way they have provided resources for trade unions and counter-globalizers who have repeatedly used them as a way to structure and inform their debates. For example, Images Mouvementées, an annual film festival organized by ATTAC in Paris, is now in its seventh year. The festival in 2009 used about forty fiction and documentary films and nine interlocking debates to explore the theme of utopia.[48] In a more general way, France's art cinemas routinely use post-film discussions to differentiate their offering

from the multiplexes more narrowly commercial approach, thus providing a space wherein the kind of film described here can be used to stimulate reflection and exchange of views. In short, film has helped to make the consequences of globalization a matter of public concern and debate.

CONCLUSION

To the extent that opposition to unbridled free market logics constitutes resistance, it is reasonable to see French cinema as a resistant cinema, a leading global exemplar. However, we should hesitate before drawing hasty parallels between French cinematic resistances and the politics of counter-globalization. To begin with, the former come out of a different, longer history that, despite France's long-standing resistance to Hollywood, only converges with counter-globalization proper in more recent years. Secondly, as we saw, French cinematic resistances are driven by a range of motives, only some of which could be directly connected to a broadly progressive politics. Thirdly, whereas French cultural exceptionalism has played a leading role in challenging free market logics in the cultural sphere, its roots lie more in a state-centered understanding of the cultural than in a radical politics. Fourthly, whereas it might be suggested that any film that challenged Hollywood either at the box office or at the level of style, form, or theme was resistant, we would do well to remember that the kind of resistance mounted by a Cantet film has little to do with that of a Besson action-fest. On the other hand, it is undeniable that, occurring in the broader context of widespread French opposition to neoliberal logics, French cinematic and cultural resistances have lent themselves well to articulation within a progressive politics, notably since the mid-1990s. It could indeed be argued that, having had to face up to EU and U.S. free market drives at an earlier stage, French cinema and cultural professionals helped lead the way, notably through the generation of a counter-expertise and through the mounting of high-profile public campaigns. French film can also be seen to have helped rebuild the grounds for critique and opened spaces for public deliberation. Whereas what drives French film policy is clearly not the desire to create a politicized cinema, such a cinema could not have taken the dimensions and found the audiences it did without France's generous state-support system and the unrivaled network of art cinemas and alternative exhibition venues it helps defend. Ultimately, whereas French cinematic resistance is a complex, uneven phenomenon, it is also a real and important one.

NOTES

1. Philip Gordon and Sophie Meunier, 2001, pp. 13–40.
2. Martin O'Shaughnessy, 2007.

3. Le Club des 13, 2008.
4. My thanks go to Jonathan Buchsbaum and Graeme Hayes for their helpful and informed comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.
5. Colin Crisp, 1997, pp. 73–79.
6. Jonathan Buchsbaum, 2006, pp. 5–7.
7. Ibid., p. 13.
8. Graeme Hayes, 2005.
9. European Audiovisual Observatory, 2009, pp. 22–23. The home market share of French film is more typically 30–40 percent, which is nonetheless a much better figure than other European industries manage on their home market.
10. To give a snapshot comparison, home box-office shares for some European and non-European countries for 2008 are as follows: Germany 26.6 percent, Italy 29.3 percent, Spain 13.3 percent, UK 31 percent, Poland 25.4 percent, People's Republic of China 61 percent, Japan 59.5 percent, India 90.5 percent, South Korea 42.1 percent (European Audiovisual Observatory 2009).
11. Le Club des 13, 2008, pp. 209–212.
12. UniFrance, 2009, pp. 7–8.
13. European Audiovisual Observatory, 2009, pp. 22–23.
14. Le Club des 13 (2008, p. 138) gives the following figures: 385 million Euros were invested in 134 French films in 1996 and 900 million Euros in 203 films in 2006. The average invested per film thus increased from 2.87 to 4.43 million Euros over the period.
15. Buchsbaum, 2006.
16. Le Club des 13, 2008, pp. 138–139.
17. Ibid., pp. 86–91.
18. Ibid., pp. 78, 93–102.
19. Ibid., p. 156.
20. Ibid., p. 152.
21. Hayes, 2007, pp. 16–22.
22. The downside of this is that they enter into direct competition for prints with art-house theaters and have the whip hand over independent distributors who cannot afford to upset them, given that success in Paris substantially determines the national career of French films; see Le Club des 13, 2008, pp. 178–186.
23. Hayes, 2007, p. 17.
24. Le Club des 13, 2008, p. 274.
25. Thomas Elsaesser, 2005, pp. 82–107.
26. Le Club des 13, 2008, p. 273.
27. Buchsbaum, 2006, p. 12.
28. Danan cited in Anne Jäckel, 2007, p. 24.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., pp. 24–26.
31. Ibid., p. 30.
32. Ibid., pp. 30–32.
33. Ibid., p. 33.
34. Luc Besson's Europa Corp is the leading purveyor of French 'post-national' films. Apart from the *Taxi* and *Transporter* franchises, Europa Corp also specializes in Westernized martial arts (*Kiss of the Dragon* [2001], *Danny the Dog* [2005]), remakes of Japanese thrillers (*The Secret* [2007]), and linguistically mutable animations (the part computer-generated and part live-action *Arthur and the Invisibles* [2006]). The company's name pays eloquent testimony to its ambition to become a European mini-major with fingers in both production and distribution; see Rosanna Maule, 2008, pp. 163–188.
35. Frédéric Depétris, 2008, pp. 198–210.

36. Ibid., p. 203.
37. Ibid., pp. 207–208.
38. The Directorates-General III and IV, responsible for the audiovisual sphere and for competition respectively, both consistently opposed state support mechanisms (ibid., pp. 155–162).
39. Ibid., pp. 216–217.
40. Daniel Mouchard, 2003.
41. Depétris, 2008, pp. 249–250.
42. Buchsbaum explains the shift from cultural exceptionalism to cultural diversity by suggesting that the former was too associated with "the stigma of French defiance" to rally wider support (2006, p. 13). Whereas exceptionalism is essentially defensive in its implications, the latter lends itself to a more assertive framing.
43. France persuaded the EU to align with its positions and mobilized its influence amongst the Francophone countries. Canada laid the ground for the convention by establishing the International Network on Cultural Policy, which brought countries' cultural ministers together annually for informal discussions. Seeking to mobilize civil society actors in a parallel manner, French and Canadian cultural groups set up the International Liaison Committee for Coalitions for Cultural Diversity, which attracted representation from more than thirty countries (Musitelli 2006).
44. Graeme Hayes and Martin O'Shaughnessy, 2005; O'Shaughnessy, 2007.
45. O'Shaughnessy, 2005.
46. O'Shaughnessy, 2007.
47. Ibid., pp. 36–55.
48. See http://www.local.attac.org/images-mouvementees/.

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