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**Allegories of Dispossession  
Neoliberalism and Proletarian Global Cinema**

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# **Allegories of Dispossession: Neoliberalism and Proletarian Global Cinema**

**Dissertation submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy in Film Studies at King's College London**

**Keith B. Wagner**

**2013**



## Abstract

This thesis attempts to theorize how precarious work—poorly paid, flexible, on call, even part-time employment—is pronounced in the global cinema of filmmakers Jia Zhangke, Park Chan-wook, Neill Blomkamp and Sebastian Silva. The images of the urban worker envisaged by these global directors show Chinese, Korean, Chilean and South African working classes as less attuned to the predatory nature of neoliberalism and the uncertainty they face: overwork, downward mobility, beckoning consumerism often out of reach, physical exhaustion, strains on family ties and worst of all, the lingering threat of destitution. These hardships point, at least since the late 1990s, to the insertion of a precarious worker in global cinema. With this in mind, much cinematic precarity is demonstrable to flaws in our current network society, wherein nomadic dispersal and managerial hegemony are part of a neoliberal agenda to dismantle any type of collective bargaining and shared prosperity. But these cinematized conditions must be read “against the grain,” where to conceive of workplace precarity we must go beyond *The Maid* and *The World* as compelling “foreign melodramas,” *District 9* as video game inspired “science fiction” and, finally, *Oldboy* and *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* as depoliticized “neo-noir.” To see them as labor films advances our understanding of the transformation of labor practices in advanced capitalist systems (Neilson and Rossiter 2005). It also, in a double move, exposes the inadequacy of the phrase and category of “world cinema” and its institutionally homogenous and problematic orientation to comprise new cultural capital—itself, another form of work. Thus by rephrasing *world cinema to global cinema* acknowledges its own material production as well as its artistic and social value, in that we understand any particular instance or text to be globally orientated. More specifically, individual chapters will be based on the relational phenomena that show political and economic forces at work, or—allegories of dispossession—which mark and differentiate spaces within these urban centers for its proletarians: neoliberalism, particularly in its geo-cultural manifestations. To date, two monographs and two anthologies in film studies deal with labor and its revivification in a contemporary (but also Western) context: Broe, 2009; Nystrom, 2009; James & Berg, 2001; and Zaniello, 2003. In light of this gap in research, this project examines how cinematic formations of the proletarian can lead to new articulations about national identity, race relations, urban citizenship, unstable labor networks and their social interactions under neoliberal globalization.

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## Introduction

### Histories of Neoliberal Dispossession: Film and the Global South

#### I. Dispossession goes commercial in the global South

Representations of labour in the last 30 years have largely remained unfashionable in cinema, as both mode of critique and narrative subject. Of course there have been those filmmakers over the decades that continue to paint a bleak picture of labour and labouring from Stephen Frears to Jean-Pierre Dardenne and Luc Dardenne. Yet their films—*Dirty Pretty Things* to *Rosetta*—are often confined to the realm of art cinema rather than labour cinema. Their auteurist designation in turn provides visibility for labour—that Frears and the Dardenne brothers are comfortable with—but for other filmmakers, there is trepidation to put their films at the service of the proletariat; and this aversion to class-conscious depictions has typified the cultural logic of postmodern and cognitivist theories that are largely endorsed by critics. However, since the Global Recession of 2008, there has been an active resurgence in labour issues on screen, not limited to a small group of European auteurs. Indeed, where a mass panic over neoliberalism as a once triumphant and ideal economic model has given way to astonishing deprivation and social disparity for a great many classes—where attention rather than neglect of those at the margins of society has grown on the public's consciousness—this economic and social calamity that is linked to the Global Recession has, at the very same time, given a degree of perceptibility to labour-conscious narratives in global cinema.

These new forms of perceptibility come to “offer complex perspectives on what labour is and how it is treated,” and thus brings labour suffering into the open.<sup>1</sup> It is the connection of labour suffering to global cinema that I believe conveys and often times confronts the uncertainties, instabilities and insecurities felt by the global worker. Yet how do global cinema texts express such hardship? Moreover, how are filmic representations of the proletariat able to articulate their grievances about different socio-economic obstacles such as marginalization, survival in the city, intense competition and job loss? What factors connect these disparate communities? The thread that connects the global proletariat is, I believe, their increased sense of detachment from controlling their work and their lives—socially, physically and emotionally. These figures in global cinema are ultimately suffocating from class and professional devaluation, a theme that reaches across different cultures and different geographies. Such devaluation can be traced to a labour market trend under neoliberalism, where pools of contingent workers and those in alternative work arrangements come to experience “frequent job changes and little economic security” with “no hope of economic advancement.”<sup>2</sup> Increasingly precarious employment is characterized as poorly paid, unprotected, fixed term, on call, even part-time—as the employer disregards benefits, working conditions, bargaining power, protection and income levels, leaving the worker vulnerable and uncertain about their job security.

It will be the central aim of this project to show how contingent workers and workers in alternative work arrangements are in essence part of an ongoing global phenomenon of *precarity* that has been captured in global cinema texts for many years now; and the texts under examination here testify to workers in “exploitative or unstable

labour arrangements: the unemployed, women, racial and ethnic minorities that are discriminated against in the economic sphere that constitute the large informal proletariat.”<sup>3</sup> Though the conditions for the informal proletariat remain a serious concern for those in the global South, it is the growing middle class from these same regions, with their burgeoning consumer markets, and new economic partnerships with other developing countries, which have buoyed hopes that those nation-states associated with the so-called Third World may eventually eclipse even the United States in comprehensive economic power. This latter narrative, however, also conceals considerable inequalities between rich and poor, coast and hinterland, and members of different proletarian communities—the haves and have-nots.

Focusing on a group of labour-conscious films made between 1997 and 2011, certain global cinemas have come to either implicitly or explicitly allegorize the proletarians’ dispossession under neoliberalism. My use of the term “proletariat” relates to the Marxist understanding of the lowest classes in global capitalist society, as they contribute their labour power to the interconnected web of vertical and horizontal production processes worldwide. The etymology of the term “proletarian” originates from ancient Rome, as an idiom for those classes from below and closely relates to the terms reemergence centuries later in a political context in 19<sup>th</sup> century France as *proletariat*, which denotes a working-class subject. Under these political circumstances, a certain subject formation solidified itself in France and by the time of the European Revolutions of 1848, the term proletariat was a means to articulate, imagine and contest working class strife in industrializing Europe. Jacques Ranciere points out how the proletariat asserts its place in history through a staging of its struggle that forms around

a solid core: labour, the struggle of labour to maintain its ownership and appropriate space. It was possible then to trace a straight line running, by way of working-class association and revolutionary syndicalism, from the striking tailors of 1833 who decided to manufacture on their own account, through to the Lip strikers of 1973 who combined taking over the bosses' factory with an identical discourse of love of their work and working-class dignity: the autonomous path of socialism and workers' revolution raised against the strategy of dispossession that ran from the philanthropic enterprises of employer paternalism in the nineteenth century down to the great manoeuvres of individual barbarism—Marxist and anti-Marxist—of the twentieth.<sup>4</sup>

As a potential revolutionary class in contemporary society, the proletariat has the potential to bring about a workers' intervention to control their means of production. This intervention would aim to reverse the lopsided wage division which Marx himself proposed in *Das Kapital Vol. 1*, and which was later advocated by leading Marxist-inspired revolutionaries—from Lenin to Mao to Castro—to end impoverished wage labour and trenchant class divisions. This reversal remains a resilient proposition even today, yet the challenge is still to turn the means of production and profit—concentrated and controlled by the elite and managed on their behalf by the bourgeois classes—back into the hands of an organized and universal class of proletariat.

In contemporary terms we find worker compliance and labour fatigue as two intertwined problems that have eroded working-class solidarity for the proletariat in the age of neoliberal globalization. These two problems are tied to a number of market reforms in the global South, namely: the race to the bottom for cheap sites of production and an increasingly disciplined workforce, absurd competition between regional and transnational corporations, and the subsistence of wages that are now increasingly laid bare for the public to see. Although these

tough circumstances were heightened by the Global Recession in 2008, which has again, like previous financial crises in history—1895, 1929-38, 1970-3—shattered the illusion of a global classless society and shown the class basis of fundamental differences between proletariat, bourgeois and elite classes.

It is also necessary to acknowledge the scholarly debate which is happening in academe about whether or not we are in a “post-proletarian moment.” My response to this debate is to admit that neoliberal globalization has in fact changed the face of labour and its subjugation through flexible, on-call, temporary, anti-union policies—what constitutes a condition rather than a new class—but a condition that has made the lives of the contemporary proletariat more *precarious* with increased socio-economic deprivation and workplace vulnerability. This is not to say that the human experience is static and universal as neoliberalism has proven that class divisions between proletariat, bourgeois and elite classes is ever evolving. However, to negate the classic class structure devised by Max Weber and later reinterpreted by academics such as E.P. Thompson<sup>5</sup> and Ralf Dahrendorf<sup>6</sup> in the 1960s, distilled by Robert Blackburn<sup>7</sup> and Erik Olin Wright<sup>8</sup> in the 1970s and 80s, and revised by globally-conscious labour scholars like Beverly Silver<sup>9</sup> and Wang Hui<sup>10</sup> in the 1990s and 00s, seems premature because it dilutes a universal language for comprehending how class shapes the economic dynamics of capitalist development. This conceptualization of class is something I shall return to in more detail in Chapter 2.

In another way, Emmanuel Barot has recently claimed that the “post-proletarian moment” has come to weaken

...the anti-capitalist Left, because the contemporary situation still hovers in between the “post-proletarian” view (Marcuse) and the “neo-proletarian” one (Mandel): after the “Poors” and the “Multitudes”, the “Precariat” or even the “Cognitariat” are now hailed as the new so-called potential post proletarian subjects of the revolutionary process, whereas objectively proletarian ways of life have become widespread again.<sup>11</sup>

Like Barot, I concur that the proletarians’ way of life have become widespread again, and culturally worth paying attention too, but my point of departure is to view how the proletarians, or for others—the “Poors,” the “Multitudes,” the “Precariat,” or even the “Cognitariat”—all struggle to have their stories told in different phases of capitalism.

We can think of the contemporary classes of proletarian as young in age and often semi-educated who are *put* into a new form of disadvantaged living; the proletarian is excluded from previous generations’ socio-economic stability and jobs-for-life idealism that flourished and was often a reality under Fordist capitalism. Equally, many neoliberal corporations prey on these proletarians desire for self-ownership and self-negotiation which is no longer attainable or even exists for this class. We should also be cognizant not to think of these proletarians as those intermittently employed by choice, as in Japan’s freeter culture. Nor should we think of them as the sandal-wearing Caucasians “getting by” in places like Silicon Valley, California, as part-time tech-specialists. Rather, we need to think of these proletarians as people of colour from the global South, now drowning in the rhetoric of “knowledge transfer” and “flexible hours” that has little bearing on their lives other than to provide reasons for their increased subordination. One should stress that in the global South there is an ever expanding service industry and this industrial rationalisation has altered modes of work which

provide newer images of international precarity from places like Chile, China, South Africa and South Korea.

The classification of the proletariat is not an empirical reality but an analytical concept that I will be deploying to recast this large group of workers from the global South. Their relationship to contemporary history, and indeed their “consciousness” to their prolonged mistreatment demands further scrutiny. Therefore, the analytic frame of this study is to show that bondage to capital in the era of neoliberalism has not in fact changed but that working-class identity—fragile and polymorphous—continues to be reshaped under neoliberalism, creating new working-class identities and a panorama to “the pathology of the paralytic moment.”<sup>12</sup>

This paralysis the proletariat suffers from is dispossession, which can be understood in this project as a state of being—even a condition of vulnerability—that is exacerbated by neoliberal policies that range from temporary employment arrangements to urban policies of renewal and gentrification that price out the working classes from living in city centres. David Harvey has explained some of the issues of dispossession proletarians face—they “typically pay more for inferior basic commodities such as food, and the under-servicing of low-income communities places added undue financial and practical burdens upon such populations,” which often confines them to a sobering life of economic unpredictability and indebtedness.<sup>13</sup> To connect my usage of dispossession to Harvey’s theory of “accumulation by dispossession,” it must be pointed out that new and old capitalist states come to redistribute wealth and power at the discretion of transnational corporations, neoliberal agencies and elite institutions, pivoting on a four-



tier schema: 1. privatization, 2. financialisation, 3. manipulation of crises, and 4. state redistributions. This re-distribution of assets and workers rights has led to what Harvey calls “the open force, fraud, oppression, looting which occurs between capitalist and non-capitalist modes of production.”<sup>14</sup> He states:

Accumulation by dispossession entails a very different set of practices from accumulation through the expansion of wage labor in industry and agriculture. The latter, which dominated processes of capital accumulation in the 1950s and 1960s, gave rise to an oppositional culture (such as that embedded in trade unions and working-class political parties) that produced embedded liberalism. Dispossession, on the other hand, is fragmented and particular—a privatization here, an environmental degradation there, financial crisis of indebtedness somewhere else... Dispossession entails the loss of rights. Hence the turn to a universalistic rhetoric of human rights, dignity, sustainable ecological practices, environmental rights, and the like, as the basis for a unified oppositional politics.<sup>15</sup>

This discord of which Harvey speaks, the loss of rights to fair pay and job security for the working-class, is part of an economic determinism through which wage labour relinquishes their social rights to neoliberal forces in the hopes that some type of transformation in their particular class or individual circumstance will emerge (i.e., higher wages, better pensions, more capital to spend). But in the context of the global South, the wage labourer continues to believe, or forcibly accepts, that the de-nationalization of state property, fixed salaries, tax breaks for corporations and the wealthy, and contract employment—all for commercial gain—can or could have a positive effect on their livelihoods. This enticing exchange has been sold to global laborers since the early 1970s, and an analysis of this exchange requires a ground-level view as well as a systematic overview of these proletarians’ dispossession, because, as David Palumbo-Liu *et al* puts it, “We need to ask, then, whether there is a real connection between struggle and system.”<sup>16</sup> I believe there is a connection. In fact, this

link between dispossession and the neoliberal system is something I see as being increasingly focalized in global cinema. It is striking that one of the less noticed patterns over the last three decades is how a sizeable number of films have commented on the economic volatility caused by capitalism before capitalism itself was in full “public” crisis.

We find these dramatizations and the pathos of the proletarian not only in Hollywood productions—where employees make “cold calls” to potential clients selling them worthless stocks as in *Boiler Room* (USA, 2000), for example—but also in developing areas of the world where class background has been far more pronounced and therefore acts as a hindrance to a better life, as found in a film such as Xie Fei’s *Black Snow/Ben ming nian* (1990, China). In these cinematic narratives there is also a discourse showing how “worker-citizens in [the] contemporary transnationalizing state will continue to feel the competitive heat of the one billion new workers that have added to the capitalist system since 1989.”<sup>17</sup> Despite the economic competitiveness of this neoliberal logic, this exclusion is neither finite nor inexpressible and many types of global cinemas respond to situations where the nature of work and indeed the work environment is itself given detailed attention.

While alternatives to the precarity phenomenon have not emerged as of yet, these contingent workers and workers in alternative work arrangements have nevertheless organized as global proletarians to call attention to why their flexible labor needs to be decommodified and reevaluated. These shared concerns are found on the ground through protests in Europe, according to Andrew Ross and relying on the research of Brett

Neilson and Ned Rossiter (2005), which have resulted in a series of demonstrations, actions and “events such as EuroMay Day 2004 (Milan and Barcelona), 2005 (in seventeen European cities), Precarity Ping Pong (London, October 2004), the International Meeting of Precariat (Berlin, January 2005), and Precair Forum (Amsterdam, February 2005).”<sup>18</sup> Additionally, and to update this research on precarity protests to include the last few years, the London student demonstration in 2010 was largely in solidarity with those administrative workers in the UK seeking better pay; and elsewhere in 2010, there were reports of rioting female factory workers at Apple’s Foxconn in Northeast Chengdu, China, who were against not only the flexible contracts they received but also voiced their outrage over a string of suicides that resulted from unstable employment and the Dickensian conditions. Beyond the possibility of change called for by civic actions listed above, we can interpret the notion of precarity not merely as a way to conceptualize the “radical uncertainty of their futures, the temporary or intermittent nature of their work contracts,” but also the situation or place these precarious global workers are put in as “their isolation from any protective framework of social assurance” weighs heavy on their conscience.<sup>19</sup>

In academic circles recognition in terms of the prevalence of precarity has been interestingly confined to studies of social movements in Europe or more particularly in French cinema from the 1990s. Despite certain continuities to European precarity, labour exploitation in the global South contributes in particular ways to precarity scholarship as it refracts through cinema.<sup>20</sup> My periodization—1997 to 2011—emphasizes dispossession as accented by neoliberal policies yet to be connected to global cinema. Highlighting cinematically neoliberalism’s transitional phases is crucial, and we must

take on board the following crises to this free market system: The Tiger Market Crash in 1997 in South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore, the Global Tech-Bubble Meltdown in 2000 and its fanning outwards geographically, and the Global Recession from 2008-10 in the United States and worldwide. All have levied tremendous debt and affected markets from Los Angeles to Johannesburg, Seoul to Toronto, Dakar to Santiago, as these three crises led to further employment problems for the proletariat. The result has been a series of protracted layoffs that targeted a higher proportion of lower-skilled workers as well as a twenty year implementation of casualization, where the streamlining of hours in the work week also meant the loss of full-time benefits (insurance, paid sick days, workplace representation).

I will explore, nonetheless, four countries from the global South and many of the depictions of the “deadening nature of work itself” found in Chilean, Chinese, South African and South Korean cinemas.<sup>21</sup> I take the view that Sebastian Silva’s *The Maid/La Nana* (2009), Jia Zhangke’s *The World/Shijie* (2004), Neill Blomkamp’s *District 9* (2009) and Park Chan-wook’s *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance/Boksoonun naouguk* and *Oldboy/Oldūboi* (2002 and 2003) make clear new conditions of inequality and exclusionary spaces in global cinema: for example, long hours, fixed salaries and managerial supremacy by which each character in these films is impaired. In many ways, the deadening experience of repetitious work on the psyche of a tool-setter on a shop floor creates the same mental stress as that of the security guard, left to their mundane nightly shifts at corporate theme parks like the one found in Jia’s *The World*. Together, these conditions for the worker signal their indentured status to labour intensity. In *The Maid* a live-in nanny faces no job security despite serving her family for over two

decades. *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* focusses on one employee downsized despite the company having knowledge that a terminally ill family member depends on his financial support. Each of these circumstances paradoxically gives some form of agency to the characters as they come to exert varying levels of power to redefine their depressed circumstances—though not always in affirmative or legal ways.

Indeed, although less trenchant in their creative exchanges than Marxist critiques of apartheid society in South Africa (in the vein of *Come Back, Africa*, 1959), political documentaries that openly chastised Chilean society in the 1980s, recent South Korean biopics about celebrated union leaders (*A Single Spark*, 1993), or cinema from Maoist-era China (1949-76), the global cinema I will analyze from 1997 onwards is still a reaction to, and a reflection of, the profoundly dissatisfied and devastated classes from Africa, Latin America and Asia. The overwhelming tone of these films reminds the viewer of the forgotten worker entwined in and animated by the age of neoliberal globalisation, searching for a way out of their socio-economic predicament. Thus I believe these displaced working classes need amplification and reinterpretation—not rescuing or romanticizing—as these urban workers, despite challenges to validate their own individual aspirations and collective desperations, are notably integrated under the banner of global cinema.

A host of films falling under the global cinema rubric, beyond the countries and directors I explore in the contemporary period, also narrate in differing ways, the dispossessed lives of *their* global proletariat. The following examples of global cinema texts from roughly 1997 to 2011 attest to the global crisis for labour: Mort Ransen's

*Mararet's Museum* (Canada, 1996); Volker Koepp's *Wittstock, Wittstock* (Germany, 1997); Djibril Diop Mambety's *The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun* (Senegal, 1997); Peter Cattaneo's *Full Monty* (England, 1997); Laurent Cantet's *Human Resources* (France, 1999) and *L'emploi du temps* (France, 2001); Mike Judge's *Office Space* (USA, 1999); Robert Guediguian's *A l'attaque* (France, 2000); Stephen Frears's *Dirty Pretty Things* (England, 2002); Fernando Leon de Aranoa's *Mondays in the Sun* (Spain, 2002); Jorge Gaggero's *Cama Adentro* (Argentina, 2004); Sergio Aran's *A Day Without a Mexican* (Mexico, 2004); Brutus Sirucha's *Green Card* (Kenya, 2004); Niki Caro's *North Country* (USA, 2005); Douglas Horn's *Entry Level* (USA, 2007); Clarissa de los Reyes's *Giving Care* (Philippines, 2008); Tanaka Hiroyuki's *The Crab Cannery Ship* (Japan, 2009); Nigel Cole's *Made in Degenham* (UK, 2010); Kenichi Fujiwara's *Grap Freeter Toki* (Japan, 2011). The global cinema samplings above show in one way or another how the proletariat has been delegitimized under neoliberalism, where meritocracy does not erase class barriers and where plebian prejudices have not vanished.

As I will soon explain, the neoliberal agenda keeps perpetuating crises for the proletariat. Indeed, rises in home prices, fuel, food, health care and education in the last three decades have made the working class beholden to wages that have not at all matched these increases in terms of real costs of living.<sup>22</sup> This flat-lining of wages indicates salaries more in common with the late 1970s than the 2000s. For example, *Mondays in the Sun* treats this issue in its narrative as a lesson about austerity measures, illustrating in agonizing detail several Spanish workers struggling to readjust to a shrinking economy while trying to find full-time employment in Northern Spain. Realistically, the workers found in *Mondays in the Sun* (and the larger list of films

above) show countless proletarians failing to find, maintain or regain steady work, and instead temporary, casual employment. Directors like Leon de Aranoa and others portray the exclusion of the proletarians from the benefits of this so-called “market revolution” despite the rags-to-riches fairytales purported in mainstream media.<sup>23</sup> A closer look at the films in this project, however, uncovers a particular sort of neoliberal triumphalism, also propagated by media, that enables this message to act as a diffuse visual sign system that counterbalances the derogatory and “market-driven calculations” at the core of neoliberal interventions in my four national case studies. Thus neoliberalism, as it is understood in this four-pronged investigation of urban centres, is nevertheless still in the process of consolidating public enterprises, institutions and even professions, while it concurrently runs alongside more open and competitive global trading for contracts (commerce, finance, labour and real estate) in and outside these nation-states.<sup>24</sup>

Today, as the crisis intensifies and the working classes continue to see the failures of top down capitalism as no longer the idyllic blueprint for liberal democracy, I will explore this idea of dispossessed workers in precarious life and work situations as part of a strand of global cinema with an allegiance to the proletariat. This large and informal proletariat, is represented in the visuality and narrative concerns of many films as a collectivized network of diverse material and immaterial workers who are not united in the diegesis, but instead by the directors of these films who are concerned about their fictive and real-life class struggles. Beyond these directors’ aspirations for cultural and political emancipation for their characters and the worlds outside of their cinematic depictions, they remain faithful to their characters’ individual desires and the roles they play in each of their respective neoliberal societies. This is accomplished by providing

audiences with populist modes of expression to make proletarian hardship more palatable: violent thrillers, polished social realism and post-apartheid science-fiction, each of which falls under my proletarian global cinema grouping. Reading this phenomenon from a wider perspective also allows, the slow revivification of labour analysis in film studies and gives a new face to different global proletarian communities experiencing casualization or contingent work that until recently has been effectively relegated to a type of cultural oblivion.

### **I. Labour Inequality**

One may ask: how did the global proletarian get to this point, trapped in such inequality? When was the turning point? The fulcrum for the intensification of labour control came in 1973, with the end of the postwar boom. With rising inflation destroying the rate of profit and working-class power regarded as having destabilized the output of global goods, criticism grew over Keynesian capitalism's ability to generate a successful monetary policy. Harvey proposes that "stagflation"—stagnant output of goods and high inflation of prices—triggered "all segments of the economy to seek out ways to economize on energy use through technological and organizational change and led to a recycling problem of surplus petro-dollars, that exacerbated the already brewing instability in the world's financial markets."<sup>25</sup> As a way out of this phenomenon, neoliberal policies were implemented that led to the roll-back of protectionism for the working-classes (where bargaining via workplace and marketplace and the right to negotiate pensions and benefits waned), while simultaneously the roll-back of heavy manufacturing in most of the world was part and parcel of the deindustrialization process. "Technical change, automation, the search for new product lines and market



niches, geographical dispersal to zones of easier labour control” altered the importance of traditional assembly-line productions and changed the nature and face of labour forever.<sup>26</sup>

Industries such as coal, automobile production and agriculture were soon outmatched by the lure of the finance and service-sector industries, which corresponded to an increase in an immaterial workforce created to manage new services and products. This immaterial workforce, initiated in the 1970s, began to splinter working-class production into newer, more cognitive or service production realms that made possible non-tangible commodities: from stock portfolios managed in Geneva, to timeshares held in Bermuda to concept branding in London. But the shift to non-tangible commodities illustrates another transformation. According to Maurizio Lazzarato “the labour that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity” was radically reorganised and rethought:

where the skills involved in direct labour are increasingly skills involving cybernetics and computer control (and horizontal and vertical communication). On the other hand, as regards the activity that produces the "cultural content" of the commodity, immaterial labour involves a series of activities that are not normally recognized as "work"—in other words, the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion.<sup>27</sup>

If Lazzarato points to the “living labour within production” it is also important to reflect on how others counter this position. For Marx, all labour in capitalism is simultaneously material and immaterial. It is material in the sense that it involves a physical labour process (irrespective of whether the product is a material good or a service) and immaterial in the sense that competition reduces these different processes to quantities

of what Marx calls abstract social labour. I recognize Marx's conception of "abstract social labor" yet still believe that certain immaterial positions under neoliberalism, for example the role of the twenty-first century security guard and what they produce in their protective services for a particular industry is important. It is through these security guards' use of digital technology via CCTV cameras and motion detectors that constitute a type of immaterial labour that can be performed from a remote office, not on the premises, that takes the place of patrol and surveillance done on foot. Therefore, I will not dispense with Marx's ideas about social labour nor will I dispense with Lazzarato's autonomist understanding because both will be beneficial in this dissertation as I conceptualize the changing forces imposed upon the proletariat in the transnational world.

At the same time that immaterial labour began to grow worldwide there was also new strategies under neoliberalism to structurally weaken global workers' movements.<sup>28</sup> Since the pro-business environment was looking to emphasize and increase managerial power to regulate and discipline working-class insurgency—this marks one of the defining features of neoliberalism then and now. In other words, "As the delegation of management to a salaried personnel advanced, a sharp polarization occurred between the upper and lower strata...the division of tasks was not merely functional but hierarchical, and this hierarchy still defines a basic feature of social relations in contemporary capitalism."<sup>29</sup> This hierarchy is something I will return to shortly as it defines class struggle in all the films analyzed in this dissertation.

### **III. The global South and Neoliberalism: Chile, China, South Africa and South Korea**

Decolonisation was widespread by the 1960s. Liberation movements soon began to set up their own governments and largely disposed of Anglophone, Francophone, Lusophone and other colonial powers, however many ex-colonies retained much of their economic dependence to these hegemonic states to help spur growth in this transitional period. These new governments in independent African, Latin American and Asian countries had a “set of demands that were actually carefully worked out through the institutions of the United Nations and what would become, in 1961, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).”<sup>30</sup> These demands were largely conceived with three principle themes in mind: Peace, Economic Reform, and Justice. This was known as the Third World Project. As many of the demands by the end of the 1960s became unachievable and Cold War conflicts continued, by 1970, Henry Kissinger stated the demands of Third World Project to be preposterous, and went as far as to say these developing countries had little to negotiate with in the faltering world capitalist economy.

In an attempt to ward off stagflation which I discussed in the previous section, the “demise of the Third World Project, and so the opening up of the” Third World “to the new geography of production” can be seen as the start of the use of the phrase the global South.<sup>31</sup> It became a catch-all phrase to distinguish those newly decolonized, industrialized, or underdeveloped countries that soon began instituting variations of neoliberalism. Because of the vast number of countries associated with the global South, the major advanced industrialized nations in 1975 formed the Group 7 (G7)—where the

United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, Japan and Canada comprised the other half of the axial division—the global North.

The linguistic origin of neoliberalism can be traced to Latin America, where in the late 1960s many were calling the increased market liberalization found on the continent “neoliberalismo.” There are also conflicting accounts that the Hungarian neo-classical economist Janos Kornai was responsible for the coining of the phrase in the 1960s.<sup>32</sup> Regardless of its derivation in either Latin America or Eastern Europe, confusion often arises as to its precise meaning. This misunderstanding is often associated with the “liberal” in neoliberal being conflated with some type of democratic principle rather than the loosening of market regulations. However, in the most convincing and straightforward manner, Alfredo Saad-Filho and Deborah Johnston perhaps define its general meaning best:

[n]eoliberalism refers to new rules to the function of capitalism, which affect the centre, the periphery, and the relationship between the two. Its main characteristics include: a new discipline of labour and management to the benefit of lenders and shareholders; the diminished intervention of the state concerning development and welfare; the dramatic growth of financial institutions; the implementation of new relationships between financial and non-financial sectors, to benefit the former; a new legal stand in favour of mergers and acquisitions; the strengthening of central banks and the targeting of their activity toward price stability; and the new determination to drain the resources of the periphery toward the centre...<sup>33</sup>

Made hegemonic in the Latin America, Asia, continental Europe, North America and Africa, neoliberalism over the years has evoked strong allegiances toward market rationality, privatization, and an individualistic propensity that “appeals to intuitions and instincts, to our values and desires as well as the possibilities inherent in the social worlds we inhabit.”<sup>34</sup> As free market ideologies continued to define themselves in the

United States and Great Britain in the 1990s, neoliberalism was emulated and put into practice in the global South. In order to situate the different proletarians and their role in each national economy, I propose to move neoliberalism beyond much of the standard categorization it has received in film studies, which tend to reduce it to a one-dimensional political economic motor of globalisation.<sup>35</sup> I believe that the hypothesis that globalisation is a resource allocator for corporate commerce needs interpretation here. Globalisation is inseparable from the intricate and varied prisms of neoliberalism because globalisation has been shown to transcend ethnic borders, lines of communication and languages by bringing commerce and culture closer together. We can see it as periodising capitalism for the first time in the industrializing Third World, leading to a diffusion of time and space that continues to restrict labour movements by way of rapidly interconnected markets from the beginning of the nineteenth century right up to the contemporary neoliberal moment. If globalisation is the means to rationalize capitalism to a worldwide public, then neoliberalism acts as a safeguard for globalisation to accomplish its goal in real, graspable time and space (IMF and World Bank institutions and their legislation, which promote austerity measures against the proletariat).

Although globalisation's starting point in history is often contested, we can definitely record neoliberalism's origins to Austria in 1944. Economist Friedrich Hayek's development of retracted state intervention in markets was first published in *The Road to Serfdom* (1944). By the early 1950s, his ruminations about opening the global market were beginning to gain traction and led first to an appointment at the London School of Economics and later to one at the University of Chicago. At Chicago,

Hayek's theories were appropriated, in blunt terms, to suit Milton Friedman's more reactionary suspicions over state-guided monetary policy.<sup>36</sup> Here Friedman and his colleagues formed a Chicago School consensus that sought, and later implemented, higher levels of competition, the privatisation of state enterprises and deregulation on an unprecedented scale.

Building upon the economic model proposed at the University of Chicago, neoliberalism's bloody test run first occurred in Latin America, where General Augusto Pinochet's coup d'état on September 11<sup>th</sup> 1973 in Chile sought to immediately legitimize the military's deposing of President Salvador Allende. Once the country was under the control of the military, Pinochet initiated a series of shock treatments to the economy that eviscerated its previous social reforms. In no uncertain terms Pinochet regarded the working class as an obstacle to privatisation, and thus devised policies that demanded their subservience: he immediately outlawed unions outside of his junta's approval, then dismantled state-owned companies and finally opened high levels of competition on domestic-made goods.

Among the hundreds of industries in Chile subject to neoliberalisation through the 1970s and 80s, it was the metalworkers who saw the most radical changes to their workplace under the Pinochet dictatorship. Nearly the whole industry were accustomed to pre-neoliberal reforms that gave blue-collar men, many who lacked formal education and often migrated from rural areas of the country, the opportunity to settle in the capital and comfortably raise families. But with the new powers granted to management by the mid-1970s, "managers rationalized production in piecemeal fashion through wage and

benefit reductions, work intensification, and promotion of worker competition.”<sup>37</sup> What this meant in reality for the workers was to either chase the prosperity many were accustomed to in the past, which led to “a vicious circle of overtime work, conspicuous consumption, and debt for many workers,” or to risk the possibility of physical intimidation, imprisonment, even death to try and secure pre-neoliberal salaries and workers’ rights through collective organizing, illegal under Pinochet (a commonality to many other economies in the global South that I will discuss in subsequent chapters).<sup>38</sup> As Chilean historian Peter Winn, finds, “Neoliberalism policies were an economic assault on the gains in wages, benefits and working conditions that workers had won since the 1930s. They complemented Pinochet’s violent repression of labour unions and worker activists, political attacks designed to disarticulate worker resistance to the dictatorship and to cow workers into a passivity that would enable the regime to impose neoliberal labour and economic policies that were prejudicial to worker interests.”<sup>39</sup> But this volatility also led to human rights atrocities still being reckoned with in the country today.

To emphasize the human cost of neoliberal policies on everyday life in Chile during Pinochet’s autocratic rule, Steve J. Stern puts the socio-economic upheaval in chilling perspective:

The repression in Pinochet’s Chile was large in scale and layered in its implementation. In a country of only 10 million people in 1973, individually proved cases of death or disappearance by state agents (or persons in their hire) amount to about 3,000; torture victims run in the dozens of thousands; documented political arrests exceed 82,000; the exile flow amounts to about 20,000. These lower-end figures, suitable for a rock-bottom baseline. Even using a conservative methodology, a reasonable estimated toll for deaths and disappearances by state agents is 3,500-4,500, for political detentions 150,000-

200,000. Some credible torture estimates surpass the 100,000 threshold; some credible exile estimates reach 400,000.<sup>40</sup>

Stern's historicisation outlined above can deepen our understanding of global culture under neoliberalism. It seems prudent then to think more robustly about Chile, which shares a point of convergence with other countries implementing neoliberal policies, though at later points in their histories: first China in 1978, then South Africa in 1994, and finally, South Korea in 1998. These four countries' integrations to neoliberalism, in their variegated forms and regional particularities, constitute my national case studies. By carefully analyzing and distinguishing different class formations in these countries, as they adjust and realign themselves to commercial and financial enterprises, I will argue that a certain aspect of global cinema responds to those most affected in another period of steady financial turmoil: the neoliberal creep from 1997- 2011.

Indeed, I contend that a four-stranded manifestation of neoliberalism is produced cinematically in this period. These strands are:

1. "Post-dictatorial neoliberalism" in Santiago, where the shedding of Pinochet's regime has brought about limited social and democratic change, leaving the legacy of free market and class polarization an everyday reality.
2. "State-guided neoliberalism" in Beijing, which broke the social, conceptual and imaginary totality of socialist modernity toward a social market under Deng Xiaoping, a reformer who advocated competitive global trading and market expansion over culture and collectivity in China. The PRC today is guided by "the narrow vision of citizenship that includes only property owners, privileging



an independent and egoistical individual in isolated pursuit of economic self-interest,” in the words of social anthropologist Aiwah Ong in her *Neoliberalism as Exception* (2006).<sup>41</sup> Ong describes the effects of different East Asian forms of neoliberalism on contemporary citizenship in Singapore, Indonesia, China, and other Asian countries over the last 15 years, making the connection between market reform and the so-called democratic standard of those living in capitalist and postsocialist states, which is valuable to my own research on two different East Asian nations.<sup>42</sup>

3. “Post-apartheid neoliberalism” in Johannesburg, where the African National Congress, once a socialist mediator in its appeal to alleviate inequality in the country, has now adopted a neoliberal logic to leave its poor majority with no social cushion. The outspoken critic Hein Marais, for example, has delivered a withering analysis of post-apartheid South Africa that finds a thread with other specialists writing about neoliberalism in other disadvantaged regions. He writes: “In the political realm, that system was vaporized. But efforts to improve the wellbeing of black South Africans have fared less well.”<sup>43</sup> Such deplorable conditions are allegorized in the films I analyze from South Africa and allow for a newer vantage point from which to deconstruct neoliberalism and race.

4. “Post-IMF neoliberalism” in Seoul, where the recent financial restructuring has added a new layer to problematic exchange between state and market players, with a radically new consequence for Koreans: selective welfare programmes. The paradox, however, according to Jesook Song is that the state must be held

“accountable to the dispossessed while at the same time promoting individuals’ self-reliance and the ideal of liberal citizens free of subjection to and dependence on the state.”<sup>44</sup> This means that Seoul’s city policy offers protectionism for certain groups over others—for example, out-of-work college graduates over the long-term homeless.

As the strands above indicate, these different cultures constitute different forms of neoliberalism whereby a new proletarian identity is found across borders and inscribed in working-classes experiences as seen in several films.<sup>45</sup> Unlike the consumerism, commodification of culture and almost blind allegiance to neoliberalism in the contemporary United States,<sup>46</sup> Chile, China, South Africa and South Korea have had varying responses to the expansion of entrepreneurship and deregulation that allow for newer interpretations of culture as refracted through a more anarchic system of corporate hegemony.

These neoliberal economies fall under what I am calling “recovering and emerging” markets. The national markets in these recovering and emerging countries showed growth in GDP but a slump in terms of hiring in the 14 year period this thesis considers (China being the only exception). In South Africa, for example, annual GDP growth dipped significantly in the 1990s, while in Chile anyone outside of the professional classes (bankers, lawyers, doctors, architects) saw their incomes shrink to levels practically untenable. Such inequality as a symptom of neoliberal transformation has put the marginalized working-classes in a perilous position. Particularly relevant in this context is how global cinema resurrects a new sort of global blue-collar blues as

income levels dropped for the lower fifty per cent of populations in Chile, China, South Africa and South Korea.

While one of the central tenets I have been arguing so far is an economic history of neoliberalism and its correlation to cinema from the global South, it is crucial to have an intimate understanding of the precarious conditions for the worker. I will seek to articulate how global cinema texts express such hardship for the proletarian, by looking at what socio-historical factors connect these disparate communities. In this sense, we must consider how the capitalist political economy plays in the creation of cultural paradigms like global cinema, and the harm that superficial assessments of a particular national cinema has on domestic as well as international reception in these different global communities.

#### **IV. Neoliberalism and its reboot in 2008**

Since the latest financial crisis hit in 2008, three things have happened or have been exacerbated in what I am coining the “neoliberal reboot.” First, the banks were bailed out through appropriated taxpayers’ monies, the supposed cardinal sin in the free market bible, but a move which led to the further consolidation of power and influence of neoliberal institutions—i.e., Goldman Sachs. Ahead of the pack, Goldman Sachs by early 2009 stated publically that it had made a profit in all the market turmoil. The weaker banks—Bear Stearns and Washington Mutual—failed and their collapse saw public opinion turn to animus as banker bonuses rose sharply in the face of hundreds of thousands of people losing their jobs.<sup>47</sup> The contraction of the market also showed how an old but reliable source of capital—how neoliberalism—can squeeze the public sector

of financial resources in new ways. In view of this situation, we could be witnessing the last gasp of the Reagan-Thatcher legacy as it is currently playing out in the US, UK, and parts of Southern Europe (especially Greece and now Spain).<sup>48</sup> But it also shows the tenacity of monetary policies forged in the eighties, as such policies still provide liquidity for an assortment of bankers and finance professionals (bond managers, currency traders, investment and derivative analysts, hedge fund gurus, etc.) and elite hegemons (Wee Cho Yaw from Singapore to Eike Batista from Brazil).<sup>49</sup>

Second, I see the good life envisioned by neoliberalism, particularly in the United States, having turned into a commodity exchange of degraded dreams, and one held on to, more tragically, by people outside of America, who are often worse off socioeconomically. Contemporary philosopher Michael Sandel's assertion that "we have drifted from *having* a market economy, to *being* a market society," in his populist book *What Money Can't Buy* (2012), is a truism to be sure, but one convincingly elaborated in Lauren Berlant's scholarship on our market society. Berlant's book *Cruel Optimism* (2011) outlines how the social/psychic condition derived from the neoliberalisation of culture has produced over the last three decades a mental belief that comes from media and the market and provides a false sense of hope in the daily neoliberal rituals of dead-end work and consumerism. "The fantasies that are fraying," Berlant writes, "include, particularly, upward mobility, job security, political and social equality, and lively, durable intimacy." In effect, these goals have eroded "expectation whose sheer volume so threatens what it had meant to 'have a life' and they are realized less and less in the three crises I revolve my study around—The Tiger Market Crash, Global Tech Bubble Meltdown and the Global Recession."<sup>50</sup>

Third, the formula of neoliberalism in countries like China and Brazil has yet to be rethought like it is currently in Southern Europe, and this leads me to a final point here. To take a page from Gerard Dumenil and Dominique Levy, who see as do I the financial hegemony as shifting to the East:

Concerning economic growth in general (the growth in GDP), ongoing trends are clearly in favor of China and India. The hypothesis that China might emerge as a new hegemonic financial centre as a substitute for the United States is sometimes put forward. Two aspects of this development must be considered. On the one hand, during the first phase of the contemporary crisis, countries of the periphery clearly seized the opportunity to enter into the capital of the ailing world leaders....There was a clear determination on the part of the corporations and SWFs [Sovereign Wealth Funds] of these countries to take stakes in the financial institutions of the United States...On the other hand, the challengers to US financial hegemony also developed their own financial institutions.<sup>51</sup>

If the global financial sphere has been decentred and now leans to the global South, something new in terms of global financial hegemony, then the counter-hegemony occurring in the cultural sphere of these regions of the world is in fact something that is not new and has found a critique elsewhere. As Shohat and Stam explain, by the mid-1990s Asia and Latin America and to a lesser extent Africa all came to firmly expand their media via transnational and inter-regional competition and partnership.

Among the salient trends of recent years have been: a notable increase in Asian film production [that in Korea and China has doubled by 2012]; the emergence of audio-visual media giants in Mexico and Brazil (Brazil's Rede Globo is now the fourth largest network in the world [now the sixth largest by 2012]; the rise (and occasionally the decline) of centralized, state-sponsored film production in both socialist and capitalist countries (Cuba, Algeria, Mexico and Brazil); and the appearance of First World nations and institutions (notably in Britain, Japan, Canada, France, Holland, Italy, Germany) as funding sources for Third World filmmakers [that has been seriously constrained by the Global Recession since 2008].<sup>52</sup>

Shohat and Stam's information is now dated, written as it was before the Global Recession, and I have interjected above by correcting some of their figures. But I believe

the central thread of their argument is still salient and complements my own in terms of analyzing the continuous growth of global cinema in developing and recovering nation-states adopting neoliberalism.

The global cinema I am proposing in this project is a polymorphous category, vast in its ability to span geographies, narratives, ethnic circles, religious sects and political differences, and is thus a diverse user group. In broad terms it is what the concept of global cinema must function as: offer new multicultural as well as intercultural histories that de-westernize preexisting approaches and assumptions. The re-centring of globalisation in Asia, particularly with the rise of China economically, and the recovering markets in South Africa and Chile all offer a multi-dimensional and broad-ranging analysis of filmmaking that exposes degrees of repression, disunity and consumer hysteria brought about under the parameters of “national” interest in free-market statehood on screen. Instead of arguing for unequal emphasis away from the national imaginary—what Dudley Andrew calls “actual vernaculars,”<sup>53</sup>—this study will consider global cinema as having constituent elements of domestic culture, mainly ethnic identity, specificity and uniqueness to class, where “filmmakers around the world are known to have been in dialogue with one another’s work, and other cultural and political exchanges to form the dynamic context of these dialogues” for many decades now and thus transcends the culture that produces it.<sup>54</sup> To emphasize this national dialogue, I will discuss the importance of global comparativism in Chapter 1 and then turn to global cinema’s meditation of economic changes via distribution (through world-systems terminology) and end with an overview of allegory to ground my use of this extended metaphor in relation to global cinema.

## **PART I**

### **Macro-Social Histories: Theories of Global Culture and Capitalism**

## **Chapter 1**

### **Global Comparativism, World-Systems Theory and Allegory**

#### **I. Global Comparativism**

This doctoral dissertation seeks to highlight neoliberalism's permeation into culture across four distinct cities—Beijing, Seoul, Santiago and Johannesburg. While Beijing and Seoul are regarded today as two of the leading metropolises in rapidly developing East Asia, Santiago and Johannesburg, referred to here as recovering economies (cities that suffered from either economic tyranny or racial segregation), must be viewed not in a strict comparative sense given their different processes of urbanization, transformation and complexity within a historically compressed modernity—although similarities at cultural, structural and spatial levels are nonetheless present. In other words, it is integral to think about global “comparativism,” to borrow a term from Neil Lazarus, as neoliberalism creates conversations amongst global proletarians about workplace mistreatment that do not necessarily lead to class solidarity, but instead to group commiseration on the subject of socio-economic dispossession.<sup>55</sup> The reality shown in many global cinema texts provide scenarios where the proletarian feels damned rather than able to articulate any radical pathways to emancipation. Consequently, neoliberalism has shaped a mentality whereby concerns over “us” have transformed into concerns about “me.” The interrelatedness of socio-economic circumstances, mainly the



proliferation of neoliberalism and its setbacks for all sorts of labour, prompts what Fredric Jameson calls a “comparison not of individual texts, which are formally and culturally different from each other, but of the concrete situations from which such texts spring and to which they constitute distinct responses.”<sup>56</sup> Lack of occupational mobility, subcontracting and invisibility are all conditions and employment constraints intensified by neoliberal policies, and they are harnessed in all four of my selected global geographies and visible in the proletarianized narratives I analyze—despite linguistic, stylistic and cultural differences.

Let me discuss how this global comparativist methodology holds together. I see “units of analysis” or “systems of scale” in Immanuel Wallerstein’s world-systems theory as useful for this project but not without also using Wallerstein’s ideas as a means, as opposed to simply a means to an end. What I wish to do is show how Wallerstein calls attention to market forces across history and how this relates to my study of transnational film distribution in this chapter as well as subjectivity more generally (Chapters 3-6) in global cinema. One could think of “the capitalist world-economy [as] a collection of many institutions, the combination of which accounts for its processes, all of which are intertwined with each other.”<sup>57</sup> Through Wallerstein’s world-systems theory, I wish to analyze Chile’s, China’s, South Africa’s and South Korea’s regional economic and cultural productions from an “extra-European world” perspective, grouping them in “peripheral and semi-peripheral zones of the world-economy.”<sup>58</sup>

In order to do this, however, Wallerstein’s comprehensive approach and “commitment to ‘system’ as privileged unit of analysis” according to Bruce Robbins

“and those habits of thinking in the humanities that appear to discourage such a commitment” appears to be the conundrum in appropriating Wallerstein “thinking systematically” for film studies.<sup>59</sup> I take Robbins’ point here that units of analysis can dissolve cultural specificity; however, being locked into this criticism of Wallerstein also leaves out the possibility to integrate his ideas with those scholars who are more committed to systematic complexity and cultural differentiation. Therefore, I propose that world-systems theory be rethought via a Gramscian historical materialist perspective, particularly if we are to firmly understand territorially specific forms of neoliberalism and capital’s structural power over labour and its culture. Where Wallerstein uses the analogy of astronomy to conceptualize his planetary world scale and system of capitalism, I would suggest the metaphor of Russian Matryoshka dolls, with their unfolding of layers, to stress the macro and micro cultural disjunctures and the uneven experiences for the proletarians. My notion here is that Wallerstein’s world-systems theory forms the outer most, largest Matryoshka doll shell, that Gramscian historical materialism nests inside it, that more precise cultural and postcolonial theory nests inside of Gramsci, and that finally, film theory forms the last, most innermost layer of theory. In sum, a theory, within a theory, within a theory, within a theory; but also a critical framework that if taken separately is fractal and incomplete, only animated when each collapses in on the other to provide a more complete picture of culture under neoliberal globalisation.

If Wallerstein provides the broadest theoretical layer to this project, then I see Stephen Gill and David Law’s modification of Robert Cox’s Gramscian interpretation of structural power and world order (1987) as a refinement, as they update globally with an

analysis of the multiple and particular power dimensions of neoliberalism today (national, supranational and transnational).<sup>60</sup> Where Cox's view of hegemonic capital-state relations in the mid-eighties was groundbreaking, due to his view of dominant power centres for enterprise and labour discipline (the United States and England in particular), Gill and Law's post-'89 interpretation of structural power in the international markets offers a way to think about job elimination and labour movements and their culture in ways no less crucial. They note different hegemonic centres and look further afield to developing nation-states, finding "the widening of the scope of the market, in the 1980s and probably during the 1990s, along with certain changes in technology and communication, contributes to the rising structural power of internationally-mobile capital."<sup>61</sup> My specific interest is in the "market power over prices and wages" that Gill and Law speak of, and how global cinema's cultural jurisdiction—in this case Chile, China, South African and South Korea—can conceptualize the structural imbalances domestic workers face in the market and the precarity they now experience. But I would also like to think about the fleeting autonomy of these proletarians and how Silva, Jia, Blomkamp and Park provide trenchant social critiques not just filmic caricatures of misfortune.

The harrowing experiences of precarity for Chilean, Chinese, South African and South Korean labourers needs to be carefully analyzed alongside the many brands of neoliberalism using Wallerstein, Gill and Law's theories. Such a layering of world-system theory with Gramscian historical materialism is, I think, vital, and it shall be integrated with more fluid theory and particular political theory, for example: David Harvey's meticulous historicization of neoliberalism and urbanization, Maurizio

Lazzarato's autonomist formulations about immaterial labour and Beverly Silver's comparativist labor history, Lauren Berlant's ideas regarding false hope inspired by neoliberalism, Timothy Brennan's thoughts on capitalism and cosmopolitanism and Alex Callinicos, Vijay Prashad, Shu-Mei Shih, Aijaz Ahmad, Fredric Jameson and Michael Denning's adroit sense of global history. These together, ground this project's Marxist cultural critique of labour difficulties for the proletarians. At the same time, I must view each developing country's struggle in this dissertation as "historically specific with their own infinitely variegated strands of residual, dominant, and emergent formations that need to be inventoried and configured within the world-system of actually-existing global capitalism."<sup>62</sup> By using native scholars' work, especially Xudong Zhang, Aihwa Ong, Jesook Song, Hein Marais and Peter Winn, it will be my intention to understand each individual culture from both filmic projections and literature gathered and interpreted in this dissertation. If Marxism is one theory to guide my methodological approach to interpreting proletarian subjugation in the global South then realistically I must seek a confluence between materialist critiques and postcolonial theory.

Postcolonial theory has for years argued for more discursive forms of analysis in relation to developing or ex-colonial states. Edward Said's famous assertion that any invested look at developing or ex-colonial territories must simultaneously work to dispel and reinterpret notions of eroticism and subjugation found in the Orient (Asia, Africa, and the Middle East) still remains an urgent rather than redundant metric of analysis. Moreover, the modern non-white proletarians in my project need to be considered because they face economic and cultural oppression different from rather than flagrant

colonial or governmental dehumanization their parents may have been subject to in decades past. As Said's Other transforms into Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's multicultural subject, we still need to consider the Other's position as still acutely "marginalized, subordinated, displaced or deterritorialized" under neoliberalism.<sup>63</sup> I will seek to explain under-development and difference in international neoliberal and state-regulated market systems and account for global cinema's pluralistic and multicultural reaction to the market's so-called invisible hand. Like Shohat and Stam, I hope to do this without "speaking of cultural/racial groups in isolation" but instead by understanding them "in relations without ever suggesting that their positions are identical."<sup>64</sup> In not losing sight of the notion of difference in my forthcoming case studies, I believe that through cinematic examples we can systematically trace not only racial oppression but also capitalist oppression from the global South. But capitalist oppression in postcolonial literature is often colorblind and I share in Vivek Chibber's theoretical proposition that postcolonial theory is incapable "to appreciate the fact that capitalism in the East turned out to have fundamentally different properties than did capitalism in the West."<sup>65</sup>

To highlight one of the comparative properties in my geographical case studies and my use of film theory, I see a type of DV naturalism emerging in Sebastian Silva, Jia Zhangke, Neill Blomkamp and Park Chan-wook's films. In many ways, filmic naturalism is interspersed with other styles in my four case studies, but it is the lowness of characters and settings that allows me to apply a literary concept to film studies. According to David Trotter, "Naturalism was perhaps the late-19th century's most significant contribution to the repertoire of plots and descriptive techniques available for figuring (and figuring out) human experience."<sup>66</sup> Naturalism can be expanded from

literary concept to filmic representation: it recreates a place, environment, space or mood that pushes realism to its limits; it is a “mutation of realism” and can perpetuate a lowness and alienation in its characters and settings that I see in many of the visual aspects of my forthcoming case studies. In other words, naturalism is a means to dramatize hard times, political constraint, urban blight, social decomposition and lowness that I see rendered in the visuality of Silva, Jia, Blomkamp and Park’s films.

In Neill Blomkamp’s *District 9*, which I see producing a type of DV naturalism in its focus on shantytown sprawls, debris and graffiti that is integrated with spectacular CGI special effects. *District 9*’s less-than-palatable spaces and dilapidated reality served to punctuate its social message through a multifaceted aesthetic sensibility, mixing the latest digital blue-screen effects with vistas of a divided city and its alien ragpickers. In *The Maid* the DV camera again works to get at the protagonist’s worn-down complexion, focalizing spotty skin, greasy hair and untidy uniform, visual details that come to contrast the interior design of the home, which functions as an emotional-spatial prison, sterile and rigid much like the family that employs her. The camerawork in this instance, probing and unglamorous in its DV aesthetic, is what complements the narrative’s almost banal exploration of a housekeepers’ daily life. South Korea’s Park Chan-wook hybridizes his style, oscillating between a meticulous rendering of drab, naturalistic surroundings and a fixation on delicate prop designs, from ornate-looking violet-coloured boxes in *Oldboy* to gentle watercolor paintings in *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance*—these art-like objects, contrast quite harshly, his sweaty and demoralized characters and the faltering sections of Seoul they occupy. Jia Zhangke’s style could be seen as naturalistic too, beyond what others have called a post-socialist realism in his

earlier work. Yet in *The World*, the DV naturalism of “lowness” in terms of his recording of the dreary details of living spaces, backstage changing rooms and worn-out coach buses and taxis is qualitatively dissimilar to the six animated moments, where a rich manga aesthetic comes to transform the dowdy Beijing cityscape momentarily in the film.

### III. World-Systems Theory

Despite my emphasis on the vernacular details of specific national cinemas, my framework to hold these case studies together pivots on the concept of world-systems theory. In its simplest terms, writes Wallerstein, the “world-system” is “the world in which we are now living.”<sup>67</sup> It is composed of modern states that rival one another for inter-state power, humanitarian legitimacy, production capabilities and profit and economic hegemony. The world-economy is thus the production processes found within the world-systems.

What we mean by a world-economy (Braudel’s *economie-monde*) is a large geographic zone within which there is a division of labour and hence significant internal exchange of basic or essential goods as well as flows of capital and labour. A defining feature of a world-economy is that it is not bounded by a unitary political structure. Rather, there are many political systems in an interstate system. And a world-economy contains many cultures and groups—practicing many religions, speaking many languages, differing in everyday patterns. This does not mean that they do not evolve some common cultural patterns, what we shall be calling geoculture. It does mean that neither political or cultural homogeneity is to be expected or found in a world-economy. What unifies the structure most is the division of labour which is constituted within it.<sup>68</sup>

World-systems as a theory has been constantly defended by Wallerstein (and Lemert and Taylor), for decades, because it rigorously postulates the decompartmentalization of not only disciplines—for Wallerstein history, the humanities and social sciences—to form a

single methodological concern to analyze social change, but also to diagnose and “scale,” unashamedly, the capitalist world-economy. In my view, film studies as a discipline could benefit from some Wallersteinian thinking. For example, in a 1979 essay, he conceived how to unite theory and praxis, acknowledging the “truths” of social forces and market flows on personal identity specifically, and culture, more generally.

He announces:

I am not merely perorating against the ‘ivory tower’. I am arguing for an integral connection between historical social science and politics which is avowed and unashamed. I do not believe this detracts from ‘objectivity’. Quite the contrary, I believe this is the *only possible* road to objectivity. The so-called disengaged scholar has merely erected some barriers to the observation of his premises. Objectivity can only be the vector of work representing fairly the totality of social forces in the social world. This is not truth as the result of Mills’ ‘marketplace of ideas’ but truth as the composite statement of existent social reality.<sup>69</sup>

Reflecting on the above passage, what seems to me absent in some film scholarship today is a clear evaluation, even an associative claim, that an “existent social reality”—in this context, the capitalist world economy—provides the basis for our comprehension of civilizations composed and reified by capital.

Seen in ethereal rather than concrete dimensions of reality, the capitalist world-economy largely escapes both analytic and historical formulations in film studies. But as I do in this project, others such as Kathleen Newman, co-editor of *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives* and like Jameson and Paul Willemsen before her, have advocated systematic movements of cinema and economics without losing the cultural specificity and demographic scale of their investigations. According to Newman, “hierarchies of scale” are important, largely because they make the contours of the



capitalist world-economy more tangible and thus less ephemeral for its film studies readership:

We can see in both these examples how difficult it is to describe with rigor dynamic social processes, yet phrases such as “hierarchies of scale,” fortunately for film theory and international film history, imply new, more complex “grids of intelligibility,” though ones slightly different than those that preoccupy sociological and economic theory, and preferably ones with a better vocabulary for the social sciences and humanities combined. Truly interdisciplinary theoretical and historical analyses, ones erasing the divide between the humanities and the social sciences, that is, between the theorists of meaning and the theorists of society, must make explicit their assumptions regarding representation and other social practices, the mediations between text and social context, the multiple determinants of social changes, and the role of language and other sign systems in the constitution of societies, including the social divisions they instantiate internally and across societal boundaries.<sup>70</sup>

To me, Newman’s thoughtful call to “erase the divide between humanities and social science” serves as a wake-up call and expands Immanuel Wallerstein’s world-systems theory in a double move for film scholarship. Firstly, Newman’s polemic wishes to announce the more subtle grey areas that exist between the “socially-conscious film theorist” and those less concerned with neoliberal exploitation as it registers and refracts in and outside of a number of transnational films. It echoes, in a cultural sense, Wallerstein’s notion that “[o]bjectivity can only be the vector of work representing fairly the totality of social forces in the social world.” Secondly, and more vitally, is how Newman recapitulates systematic thinking, insofar as she presses the transnational onto Wallerstein’s world economy modality, yet does so with a meticulous regard for “language, other sign systems and social divisions” to uphold the polychromatic creases in culture(s) under neoliberal globalization. This type of thinking by Newman therefore considers multiple scales of analysis (or degrees of interpretation) for global cinema studies.

Good as Newman is, I wish to go further. In fact, I wish to adopt some of Wallerstein's concepts, beyond his defense of political thinking in scholarship, to directly deploy his terms from world-systems theory—particularly, “core, semi-periphery and periphery”—as a means to articulate film distribution under neoliberal globalization. Derived from Trotsky's notions of combined and uneven development and later Latin American scholars like Anibal Quijano and her use of dependency theory, Wallerstein finds, “The axial division of labour of a capitalist world-economy divides production into core-like products and peripheral products and that core-periphery is a relational concept.”<sup>71</sup> The circulation of global cinema can be conceptually scaled, and, in my view, provides another systematic strand for this dissertation. I would like here to call attention to the political economy of neoliberalism and to the functions of formal and informal film distribution. To bracket, in other words Wallerstein's core, semi-periphery and periphery into a geo-industrial and cultural context for film distribution, as follows:

1. “Core film distribution.” We can interpret this capitalist pathway via transnational media conglomerates desire to circulate formal channels of goods while taking hard stances against copyright infringement, piracy and informal distribution of creative/intellectual property to unlicensed merchants and consumers; this is so chiefly because media conglomerates want to insulate and more importantly avoid potential damage to perceived markets. The six US majors—Fox, Sony/Columbia, Disney, Paramount, Universal and MGM—perpetuate this neoliberal view and have a major stake in formal distribution chains.<sup>72</sup> These media conglomerates have subsidiaries abroad or legal relationships with other core countries and their media industries such as

France, Germany, Italy and Japan.<sup>73</sup> In fact, each country has their own set of policies to ensure formal film distribution, both state-run and privately legislated, that keeps the circulation of film commodities and merchandise solvent.

2. “Semi-periphery film distribution.” This phrase refers to a less self-enclosed and formal market for the circulation of media content. It constitutes countries that are also developing and integrating into neoliberal political economic relations and its wider territorial grid, both in formal (WTO membership and media enterprising models) and informal terms (politically monitored, corrupt or inferior networks and circuits of supply). This category best exemplifies the case studies found within this dissertation, as each country has over time had to deal with restrictions on importing film or exhibiting film abroad, for example: Chile’s denunciation of left-wing and Third Cinema films entering the country as well as its constrictive control over the film industry under Pinochet’s autocratic government from 1973-1990. In China, since 1949, the censorship imposed on all imported global films means that roughly 80 hand-selected feature-length films make it to theaters and multiplexes in the country each year.<sup>74</sup> In Korea there still exists a group of morality laws and political censorship of material that, since the country’s military rule, has denounced the circulation of things like pornography or politically “sensitive” material (i.e., contraband from North Korean or pro-activist filmmaking). Equally, in South Africa, under National Party rule and its set of cultural doctrines in operation since 1945 through the mid-1990s, a ban was placed on all anti-apartheid material from abroad; simultaneously there was a bowdlerizing of the film market to produce pro-apartheid or politically acquiescent movie-making up until the democratic election in 1994.<sup>75</sup> Another issue is piracy which each country faces. China,

especially, with its grey area for online file sharing and where copyright infringement is not enforced under the State's view on rights to communal material, illustrates the formative force of formal film distribution and how its own industries and those of its territories, especially Hong Kong, feel the effects.

3. "Periphery film distribution." These distribution hubs exist in countries which are delinked, disconnected and deregulated and so suffer from inferior and/or informal networks that hinder or resist neoliberal systems for the delivery of film. Two quick examples are worth elaboration here. Perhaps the most obvious is Nollywood's informal and chaotic distribution channels for video films in Nigeria. Video films are short burst productions, made in less than a week of shooting, using actors and crews that must be swapped across projects, a necessary condition in these low-fi African melodramas.<sup>76</sup>

Due to a variety of factors, notably rampant piracy, the lack of a film infrastructure/government support for the arts, and the localized desire for video films, Nollywood filmmakers flog their wares at the edges of neoliberal supply-demand models. Another peripheral film distribution model can be found in Cuba. Not only is Cuba operating outside of the capital and media circumference of neoliberal globalization, but the film industry is also relatively unrestricted.<sup>77</sup> Despite how poorly funded the film industry is in Cuba today, the production of microfilms have emerged both to satisfy demand in this informal cinematic economy as well as to provide a platform for films critical of the socialist regime, even Castro himself.

To reiterate: many, if not all the case studies in this dissertation fall under the semi-periphery category I proposed above, as these national cinemas have both formal

and informal distribution networks. But to give a broader sense of core film distribution countries blocking access to particular products, let me provide an example from the United States first—where despite mainstream delusion about supposed unrestricted film distribution, even in this ultra-neoliberal media economy, films continue to come under market scrutiny, if not expurgated entirely from distribution chains. On the release of Richard Kelly’s second feature film, *Southland Tales* (2006), a contemporary homage to Kubrick’s *Dr. Strangelove* as well as an excoriating allegory of the Bush years, Kelly’s film was effectively shelved by its producers on completion. The film’s apocalyptic atmosphere—where an all-out civil war is being waged in a parallel universe to the US millennium, fought between neo-Marxists and hawkish neoliberals—received the same response that Michael Moore’s release of *Fahrenheit 9-11* (2004) did: political derision, albeit not nearly on the same scale. Though police officers were not stationed outside movie theatres on *Southland Tales*’ release as they were for Moore’s film, soft power rather than hard power was instituted. Its limited release was blamed on poor pre-screening tests with audiences, but the Marxian tone of the film, its iconographic images of Banksey-like murals of Marx, a smattering of quotations from the *Communist Manifesto*, and various characters and the places associated with the German radical, were provocative enough to cut off its circulation nationally.<sup>78</sup> “Whether at the level of style, sentiment or overt politics, whether for good or ill,” writes Ramon Lobato, “films are agents of change.”<sup>79</sup> Such a tone and interest in Marx and Marxism caused industry executives to scale back *Southland Tales*’ national release, committing it to just 69 movie theatres in liberal California and an immediate DVD pressing. Lobato would see this as one form of the shadow economies of cinema, wherein, “Whether formal or

informal, distributors place limits on the range of options available to us by supplying some films rather than others, and they shape our consumption of this sub-set of distributed audiovisual production through commercial technologies ranging from advertising and public relations to price differentiation, release strategy, release timing and so on.”<sup>80</sup> This range of options and the demand it places on distribution bears further discussion.

On the opposite end of the political spectrum to the United States is China, with its “socialism from afar,”<sup>81</sup> that is driven by a market-enthusiastic government, and to connect this to my upcoming case study of Chinese director, Jia Zhangke, much of his earlier work was subject to a nationwide ban and falls under my semi-periphery category. Despite the country’s opening up of its markets rather than its cultural views. Jia’s “Hometown Trilogy”—*Wu Xiao* (1997), *Platform* (2001) and *Unknown Pleasures* (2002)—can be conceived as films which are composed in stark and naturalist terms that portray China’s hinterland and his birthplace in Fenyany, Shanxi Province as inescapable for his protagonists. In these three films the underdevelopment and criminalisation of cities outside the prosperity of Shanghai and Beijing found an audience. Despite the bleak content in these films and their being once part of an independent film scene, Tonglin Lu observes that, like

several other young filmmakers, Jia chose to bypass censorship during the 1990s for fear of compromising his artistic expression. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, Jia and some of his underground colleagues have begun to change their minds—not necessarily because of political changes in China but because of economic changes, although it is true that film censorship has been a bit less severe recently. In other words, he gradually shifted his attention from personal expression to mass reception and commercial success in the vast local market.<sup>82</sup>

Much has changed in the new millennium, and, as Lu signals, “censorship has been a bit less severe recently,” especially for Jia. So much so in fact that in 2010, Jia was given a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), was an acknowledgement and an international accolade based on the phenomenal interest he has garnered on film festival circuits as well as the cult-like interest by film scholars in the West and those at home in the PRC. The Chinese government, rather than distance themselves from the filmmaker, began to recognize his global cultural capital. Because of this late embrace by the government, Jia is now at times distraught with the double-bind he now finds himself in: art house circles outside of China tend to ignore his focus on migrant-workers and instead remain fascinated with his DV aestheticism, in spatial and temporal terms, preoccupations that miss his allegiance to lower class subjugation; while the government, now content with his fidelity to WTO proletarianism, view him as a creative darling, rising out of the subaltern ashes and away from the current cadre of more radical filmmakers in the PRC, to bring to the world a socialist auteur. His critique of the government consequently now seems muted and brittle.<sup>83</sup> Ultimately, some have claimed Jia now endorses—like a cultural ambassador in differential rather than polemic terms—the lives of the dispossessed, and this, his detractors say, is due to his celebrated status and new-found government support for his film projects that suits my notion of semi-periphery distribution but one stuck in a double-bind. I believe this double-bind also creates a second way to categorize Jia’s popularity and transmutability to multiple parties, ideologies, audiences and institutions and this categorization is based on a transnational interpretation of his and others’ corpus of work.

To define the transnational, I believe it exists, when we are relating it to cultural commodities and their circulation, as above the national and below the global. The director's identity is a type of post-national citizenship, and his/her films do not come to express the national (specific), nor do they express the global (totality) in their narrative, allegorical or ideological scales of cultural reference. JungBong Choi, in an unpacking of the transnational in relation to Korean cinema, states:

I conceptualize transnational as an enzyme that prompts the organizational metabolism of the national. With transnational administered into the national body, the latter morphs into a semi-solid state with a higher degree of juridical, architectural and discursive elasticity. The hyphen also indicates that I view the national less as a sequestered isle than as a networked and conglomerated entity. The national has been a signifier overinvested with ethno-cultural singularity. For that matter, the national has been customarily construed as a dual marker of difference in relation to other nationals and of homogeneity that brutalizes internal heterogeneity. What get [sic] elided in this understanding are the zones of liaison, flirtation and conflation with other national or non-nationally based external forces. In other words, the national manifests itself in plural forms and characters, depending on the force with which it is articulated and on the mode of articulation, as instantiated by inter-national, sub-national, supranational, global-national, exilic-national and diasporic-national.<sup>84</sup>

Pinpointing the variations of transnationalism in global cinematic production year in and year out, and thus acknowledging how different transnational films are in dialogue and disagree with one another, is a tenet that should not be understated, especially in the age of YouTube and Facebook. Indeed, Choi continues with:

...the conceptual value of the transnational becomes apparent when compared with that of the global. While the global is fraught with obscurity in historical and geo-cultural references, the transnational can be constructed to displace the universalizing trope of the global and in its place visualize specific mechanisms of interpenetration over multiple spaces.<sup>85</sup>



These immensely popular media platforms represent and “interpenetrate” new modes of cultural exchange and allow instant access (either through clips or in segmented full-length format) to the latest films from Korean auteur (and socially engaged filmmaker) Park Chan-wook, searched for by fans as far afield as Brazil or the United States. Indeed, the dynamic nature of the transnational—as above the national and below the global—is at once a vague notion but at the same time a distinct way to think about the multiple combinations inherent to the term itself. Another conceptualization of the transnational amalgam comes from Mette Hjort, in her book chapter “On the Plurality of Cinematic Transnationalism.”<sup>86</sup> Her theory of transnationalism can serve in this context as a conceptual placeholder, highlighting the crisis of the nation-state economically but not culturally in relation to film studies debates. In other words, global cinema comprises not a monolithic or universal inscription of national culture but a snapshot in an album-like repository of diverse cultural experiences that trade on the global market.

In some respects, semi-periphery distribution is comprised in nearly all of Hjort’s nine categories: milieu-building transnationalism, epiphanic transnationalism, affinitive transnationalism, opportunistic transnationalism, cosmopolitan transnationalism, globalizing transnationalism, modernizing transnationalism, auteurist transnationalism and experimental transnationalism. Of particular interest here is “cosmopolitan transnationalism,” of she writes:

Multiple belonging linked to ethnicity and various trajectories of migration here becomes the basis for a form of transnationalism that is oriented toward the ideal of film as a medium capable of strengthening certain social imaginaries. The emphasis is on the exploration of issues relevant to particular communities

situated in a number of different national and subnational locations to which the cosmopolitan auteur has a certain privileged access.<sup>87</sup>

Hjort's cosmopolitan transnationalism echoes many of the debates raging in other disciplines about the legitimacy of cosmopolitanism, particularly in a world where many see cosmopolitanism pointing to an elite position in the global pecking order.<sup>88</sup>

However, in this context, it is important to highlight how Hjort acknowledges what she calls a "certain privileged access," and how such access is not necessarily a negative thing. In fact, Hjort weaves a connection between cosmopolitan and transnational terms using a Chinese exilic director: New York based filmmaker Evan Chen. Born in mainland China, raised in Macao and educated in Hong Kong, Chen creates films that push the boundaries of cosmopolitan identity and social mobility. Hjort argues that Chen "has the freedom to move back and forth between different sites, where a certain highly enabling insider status is available to him."<sup>89</sup>

In many ways, the directors Gavin Hood's and Neill Blomkamp's exodus to study outside of South Africa exemplifies, in my opinion, exemplify a type of cosmopolitan transnationality. Having both received their educations in North America (Hood in Los Angeles at UCLA, and Blomkamp at Vancouver Film School in British Columbia), they are highly versed in other film cultures and their politics, which could explain why both directors are not, to use Hjort's words, "locked into a set of purely personal experiences" but rather decipher filmically and politically a "particular mix of national, transnational, and postcolonial commitments and opportunities to which these trajectories give rise."<sup>90</sup> For example, Hood's Oscar-winning Best Foreign Language Film *Tsotsi* portrays a morally conflicted Johannesburg gangster who via its story,

comes to commodify the deep-rooted volatility of the post-apartheid period, explaining its global appeal on one level. On another level, the film is a testament to South African-themed prejudice, a subject matter that grossed nearly 10 million dollars outside of Pan-African markets alone. These transnational semi-peripheral trends are also found in Blomkamp's Oscar-nominated *District 9* (Best Picture, Writing and Visual Effects). Despite being a popcorn film with wide-ranging appeal to diverse audiences both in South Africa and elsewhere, the film also contains powerful reflections on extreme imbalances in economic power found in Johannesburg. Today's definitions of transnationalism claim the term evinces global belonging, inter-cultural sensitivity (however superficial or committed) and respect for difference (multiculturalism). But I believe these must be understood visually as a construction of a global media imaginary, a vision that can either protect or disputes an elite lifestyle both on screen and in actuality. In this sense, Hood's and Blomkamp's transnationalism in both films reveals rather than shrouds the effects of human degradation through filmic style and politics that ability to lay bare "real" urban conditions (inequality, urban ordinances of dispersal, redundancies, and homelessness).

#### **IV. Resuscitating Allegory**

The concept of allegory is crucial to this project. It reveals a connection to dispossession, because where dispossession is a social condition that breaks up and deprives the labourers of their sites and spaces of ownership and power, allegory allows these conditions to be refracted from the aestheticism of a particular film in question. One could say this comes through aesthetic devices, narrative, even the ideology of the director to convey forms of labour subjugation. But what does such a symbolic mode

indicate? What is the relation between the film text and the real world? I shall try to offer some answers to these questions below, to be developed in much more depth in my later case studies to follow in Part II.

Allegory in many ways is an “extended metaphor” that represents abstract ideas or concepts through an entire narrative that utilizes characters, milieu, tone, space and existence to facilitate a greater meaning. According to Brenda Machosky, in her Introduction to the edited volume *Thinking Allegory Otherwise*:

Allegory is perhaps as old as language itself and certainly as variable as the language and styles in which it has been written. The early readers of Homer allegorized the great epics. Philo of Alexandria adapted an allegorical system of interpretation for the Hebrew bible. Augustine carefully explained the structure of allegory inherent in language. Aquinas differentiated the allegory of the theologians from the allegory of the poets...De Lorris and De Meun, Chaucer, Tasso, Pizan, all produced fabulous works of allegory.<sup>91</sup>

To broaden this historiography of allegory and move past ancient Greece and Saxon parables, such encoded meaning was not lost on the Romantic poets, who many centuries later deployed the concept with a renewed currency. We find in their decadent musings on the human experience in Europe a delicate fondness for quotidian tales. Later many of the American Transcendentalists “were beneficiaries of European Romantic thought and aesthetics, and were also avid readers of Neoplatonist philosophical writings.”<sup>92</sup> In conjunction with this work, and to move this discussion away from the “under-meaning” of allegorical interpretation, of, say, van den Vondel’s Dutch baroque poetry from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Rousseau’s French Romanticism of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, or Ruskin’s penetrating view of aesthetics in 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain, where do the

less glorious and less celebrated allegories fit in this history of allegory? If one follows a divergent trajectory, how do the experiences of the working-classes and their worlds find such *anagogic* expression? What do the less ornamental devices that adorn these allegories look like? And how, if at all, do allegorically prone films in this project suggest levels for dispossession by the workers from the global South? Working-class experience and anagogic expression requires some elaboration.

One can connect this problem of working-class representation to allegory in Walter Benjamin's writings. Yet to the twentieth century's most prolific theorist of allegorical thinking, Benjamin's notion of the "ruin" to encapsulate the totality of twentieth century destructiveness and capitalist subjugation can and should be linked to the conflict that capitalist markets play in the condemnation and censorship of a multifaceted proletariat visual culture. In making use of the Benjaminian idea of allegory, which considers it as a fragmented form, as a ruined form, I see proletarian work in the interwar years right up to World War II as too provincial for those with more traditional tastes. Benjamin thought the same thing and was bothered that film was becoming too bourgeois in the interwar years. Esther Leslie, in her work on Benjamin, reinforces this notion and finds that he saw cinema as caught in a class binary:

Film smashes up the surface sense of the everyday. It records and disorders natural vision. But it runs into problems—that is, it negates its immanent form—when it attempts to make a logical narrative peopled by fully rounded characters. Such narrative and personality-fixated dramas squeeze film back into the confines of bourgeois theatre and so ruin it. What film needs, claims Benjamin, is a tendency. The Russian films of the post-revolutionary period have a political tendency. American funnies have a tendency too—they adopt a consistent attitude towards technology.<sup>93</sup>

The alienated proletariat as captured in Soviet films exemplifies the dialectical gesture as much as it does the allegorical gesture. It is an allegorical gesture because of its historical materialist visualization of class in a cinematic sense that filmmaker like Vertov composed to produce a trauma about previous proletarian suffering in Eastern Europe, using adjacent images to both educate and politicize the Soviet masses. Indeed, Benjamin had come to critique the constantly transitioning period of history that I see embedded in Soviet cinema of the 1920s and 30s:

A historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop. For this notion defines the present in which he himself is writing history. Historicism gives the ‘eternal’ image of the past; historical materialism supplies a unique experience with the past. The historical materialist leaves it to others to be drained by the whore called ‘Once upon a time’ in historicism’s bordello. He remains in control of his powers, man enough to blast open the continuum of history.<sup>94</sup>

The historical materialist would contend that Vertov’s Kino-Pravda films (film truths) are embedded with dialectical images and require audiences to decode them as they are bombard by the content found on screen. Such an experience blast open the continuum of history because the actuality of the present, shot by Vertov in unelaborate and drab style that captured streets, tramcars, and bars in Moscow reinforces the class condition may change but many of the proletarian spaces in the city do not. In Leslie’s understanding of allegory she sees Benjamin’s consideration of “ruination, fragmentation and shards that we conceive as aesthetic categories or “motifs” as something we should consider alongside a broader historical fragmentation” upon which this project insists—“the fragmentation, smashing, breaking up of the organized and self-conscious working-class” is actually beyond Benjamin’s “actuality.”<sup>95</sup> These

fragments can be pieced together in Part II of this dissertation, where read connectively they are “suggestive of the very condition of history and human temporality.”<sup>96</sup>

To help get us started in updating allegory in the global cinematic context I would now like to turn to Fredric Jameson and his radical conceptualisation of a network of Third World literature and film in his seminal 1986 article, “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism.” Here he postulates that work by Lu Xun (China) and Ousmane Sembene (Senegal) represent an almost totalized resistance to their respective countries under capitalism and its mechanisms of exploitation and homogenisation. Despite his important call for more teaching to be done on national literature and film from what he calls the Third World, there is a notable Eurocentrism in his tone. Indeed, Jameson’s totalized perspective regarding literature and film from the Third World found contestation from a comrade in intellectual arms, Aijaz Ahmad. Despite Ahmad’s fondness for Jameson’s work, he developed a prescient retort in “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the ‘National Allegory.’”<sup>97</sup> Ahmad’s article is illuminating because he sees native literature based in what Jameson calls the “Third World,” a flawed conceptual grid: to hold such literature as anything but a polyphonic and heterogeneous group, originating from countless countries around the world, risks placing such work, in Ahmad’s view, back into the worn binary of first vs. third world literary production. Ahmad focuses the epistemological shortcomings of grouping all literature from Asia, Africa, Latin America into Jameson’s Third World category by offering the singularity of a particular text. In this context, Lu’s “Call to Arms” (1923) and Sembene’s *Xala* (1971). This singularity becomes an “antidote against the general ethnocentricity,” in that it shows not only the particularities of artistic/intellectual

production but also how such production comes to form the “multiplicity of significant difference among and within both the advanced capitalist countries and the imperialised formations.”<sup>98</sup> Crucially, Ahmad also hastens that some literature from the global South is “bereft of any capacity for the kind of allegorisation and organicity that Jameson demands of them.”<sup>99</sup>

It is Ahmad’s notion of this bereft capacity for any direct kind of allegorisation that I will turn my attention to how the obscure allegory is found in the four case studies in this project. In my four case studies the allegorical impulse to focalize the depressed conditions for the precarians are not immediately apparent. I thus view Ahmad as crucial in my deployment of the allegorical, as his view of Urdu literature from colonial India is so instructive. For him, the experiences of colonialism and imperialism are not explicitly allegorized in this period of work. Instead, he writes, “All the novels that I know from that period are predominantly about other things: the barbarity of feudal landowners, the rapes and murders in the houses of religious ‘mystics,’ the stranglehold of moneylenders upon the lives of peasants and the lower petty bourgeoisie, the social and sexual frustrations of school-going girls, and so on. The theme of anti-colonialism is woven into many of those novels but never in an exclusive or even dominant way.”<sup>100</sup> Instead the emphasis is on communal or individual societal dilemmas—some sinister, others less so—but these dilemmas nevertheless evoke, indirectly the national experience at hand.

I view the same minor tragedies embedded in the narratives of Sebastian Silva, Jia Zhangke, Neill Blomkamp and Park Chan-wook, in that they are “predominantly about other things,” too: conceited employers and their children, spectacular urban development and the lives and loves of service workers, fictive science-fiction and its



brutally digitized violence, neo-noir that weaves a tale of postmodern revenge and incest. These films, like the Urdu literature mentioned by Ahmad, have “never been able to construct fixed boundaries between the criminalities of the colonialist and the brutalities of all those indigenous people who have had power in our own society”—or in global cinema context, between neoliberalism and its inimical effects on different societies from the global South. Indeed, though the global cinemas under analysis in this project are not able to construct fixed boundaries, I see the residues, encounters, traces and insinuations of a particular constellation of neoliberal oppression—the distorting mirror, to bring in Benjamin again—as found in these texts as nevertheless urging one to look more closely, more intently, at them and the lives they depict. These ideological and narrative tensions are “comprised of a tension (a mutually transformative relation) between the problematic of a final determination (of the ideational content by the life-process of material labor, for example) and the utter historicity of multiple, interpenetrating determinations.”<sup>101</sup>

Jameson’s influence and impact on the study of allegory in literature and film should not be overlooked, however. It is reciprocated in the work of a former student, Xudong Zhang, who looks for allegory’s visibility in Chinese literature. In his book *Postsocialism and Cultural Politics* (2007), Zhang’s primary concern is on literature and film from China in the 1990s, though my interest comes in his analysis of the influential short story “Sealed Off” by Zhang Ailing, published in 1943. Set during the Sino-Japanese War, the locus of the story takes place in cosmopolitan Shanghai, as an air raid siren wails throughout the city, momentarily bringing the metropolis to a grinding, halt, “frozen into frame.”<sup>102</sup> The potential catastrophe of human decimation by Japanese

bombing is handled via a daydream, or rather an internal conversation the author is having in her head as she rides a motionless tram car, inert as the shrieking siren away sends its warning in the distance, which produces an altered state. This profound moment in the text, an alternative to the chaotic, restless modernity of the city, depicts an eerie restlessness. Interpreting this short story, Zhang writes that “the tram car, a quintessential symbol of the urban,” traps “passengers, from all walks of Shanghai urban life,” into a cramped, interior space where the narrative suggests not the protagonist’s dread of what might be falling from above but rather of “ruinous boredom” found in the temporary and possibly deadly sanctuary of the tram car. Here the commuters “scramble to fill the void of their trained experience (*Erfahrung*) in order to ward off the damaging, traumatic moments (*Erlebnis*) of silence and the city’s stasis.” The urbanites occupy themselves with “anything, from the classified section of the newspaper to business cards, street signs and receipts dug out of pockets, just to keep themselves from drowning in ennui, from falling into a strange temporality, an inverted world of antimaterial.”<sup>103</sup> The allegory here is the mental blockage of possible deathly trauma by creating another trauma simultaneously: being “trapped in the unsettling, ruinous boredom” of daily life beyond the threat of bodily decimation, whereby the war of the mind proves to be possibly more fatal. But trauma derived out of the ennui and closed off claustrophobic space in the tram car is also rewriting wartime conditions and experiences in China. It tells a story based on the actuality of such an experience by Zhang Ailing in this frenetic city at a particularly torn moment of its (and her) history.

Contemporary allegory in global cinema is a much different affair, yet it is also another medium of expression that makes use of space and event, however traumatic or

mundane, just like Zhang Ailing. The films of Silva, Jia, Blomkamp and Park each replicate, even parallel, in some distant way Zhang's "unsettling, ruinous boredom" imprinted on a historically and spatially bound experience: wartime bombing in Shanghai ca. 1943. Through her writing, city space and "mechanic-temporal order" reveals "symbolic chains" simultaneously formulated and shattered, and these can be thought of in relation to my forthcoming case studies as the directors imagine their own neoliberal cities in equally, both destructive and mundane terms.<sup>104</sup> The allegories of dispossession I will be unpicking have dissolved into the intricate city spaces of Santiago, Beijing, Johannesburg and Seoul to express moments of melancholy, triumph, contemplation, boredom, even murder, and these run along the implementation of neoliberal policies and their cultural ramifications. The postmodern city—different to the modernity of Zhang's Shanghai—has been described elsewhere by James Tweedie and Yomi Braester in their analysis of cinematic cities in East Asia as indicative of a series of events, life changing and otherwise. They write, "cities open onto a multiplicity of urban forms and experiences" that veer between "glitzy hypermodernization accompanied by persistent and extreme poverty, and economic expansion on an unprecedented scale alongside relative stagnation and neglect."<sup>105</sup> Beyond mere representation in film then, we need to read between the cinematic lines "for meaning that is concealed but ultimately interpretable" to find hopeful and heartbreaking allegories about precarity in cinema from the global South.<sup>106</sup>

A disconnected global city paradigm is most evident in my chapter on populist science-fiction from South Africa and how reading against the grain shows that the allegorical gesture is still vital to grasp variegated neoliberalism in pan-African society.

In *District 9* the fantastic mise-en-scène that is appropriated from a cosmopolitan videogame template parallels the seductiveness of neoliberalism itself—a sensorium of social violence and fragility—that focuses our attention on one action (spectacle) in order to hide another, social action (anomie). To get at the allegory of social disintegration one must sit through a requisite number of CGI battle scenes of digitized aliens in combat with humans; however, after wading through the excessive gore and death, one finds a shattered existence and still segregated population in South Africa, something that must be decoded to infer, in my view, the injustice of neoliberal relations on black South Africans and immigrants new to the country (especially Nigerians and Zimbabweans). City space beyond its use as allegorical construct must also be discussed as a built space on screen, and is vital to this project’s view of four international capitals. It is the vernacular details found in cinematic Santiago, Beijing, Johannesburg and Seoul that present a way to distinguish the four national cinema case studies. These vernacular spaces produce for audiences recognizable architectural landmarks in the cities found in this dissertation, for example: the copper-coloured 63 skyscraper in Seoul referenced in Park’s *Oldboy*, to a miniaturized Eiffel Tower housed in a real theme park in Beijing in Jia’s *The World*, which both bear signatures of development and serve as visual reference points to Asia’s urban development.

Daily life in urban centres like Johannesburg, Santiago, Seoul and Beijing are not only necessitated by, but also reflective of the disparate, uneven, and polarized societal conditions of neoliberal globalisation, and film can blur distinctions of time and place in its pursuit of this discursive reality. Examples would include Filipino director Jeffrey Jeturian’s *Fetch a Pail of Water* (1999), a film about the recanting of multiple

temporalities and class specific localities in neoliberal Manila. The connection of cinema to districts and regions of a city in films like Jeturian's is elaborated in methodological terms in Mark Shiel's introductory chapter to his co-edited *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context* (2001). Here Shiel conceptualizes how the link between "cinema-city, then, provides a rich avenue for investigation and discussions of key issues which ought to be of common interest in the study of society."<sup>107</sup> Much global cinema today thus elicits what Linda Krause and Patrice Petro characterize as "mutable and unstable images [which] parallel the experience of the global city, their cinematic ambiguity permits all possibilities and potentialities."<sup>108</sup> It is this transmutable character of global cinema that must be accounted for in this project, linking labour issues to metropolitan places of work.

I find Andreas Huyssen's edited volume *Other Cities, Other Worlds: Urban Imaginaries in a Globalizing Age* (2008) radically original, from its consideration of non-G-8 cities (Beijing, San Paulo, Mexico City) to its reflection on globalisation theory (Ackbar Abbas) to multi-religious urban cities like Istanbul, each of which has influenced my interdisciplinary approach and aids my understanding of the rapid urbanization that shares its unheralded expansion with the global political economy at large. Perhaps less provocative but equally important is Huyssen's attention to what he calls the "neoliberal triumphalism of globalisation," deriding but also calling attention to "other cities, other worlds," a conceit for developing, postcolonial, postsocialist, or more timely phrases such as "invisible cities."<sup>109</sup> My understanding of Huyssen's theoretical perspective helps anchor this dissertation's understanding of urban development in a postmodern world because he acknowledges the vacuous nature of much of postmodern

aesthetics yet admits its connection to market realities on a global and commercial level, and in doing so underlines the complex processes reshaping cities.

Motivated by the extreme urbanity of the corporatized city, many filmmakers have come to focus on the more ephemeral concepts of filmic space on screen or, more accurately, urban space itself as a central motif. The conceptualization of “place-bound” centres such as Johannesburg, Santiago, Seoul and Beijing can be seen as an interlocutor into spaces that are “at once enchanting and oppressive, liberating and violent,” cities conceptualized in one way or another as a genderless, inanimate, faceless, even low-cost substitutes for expensive sound stages and simulated virtual worlds.<sup>110</sup>

In the next chapter I would like to move my analysis back to the proletarian rather than systematizing their allegorical nature, urban fixity or the methodology I used to hold this project together. Instead, I aim to explicate the world vs. global cinema discourse that is raging in film studies to further elaborate my position that these four case studies are bound by market and not intangible notions terms like globalization, and far less often, neoliberalism in film studies scholarship. Following this first section on global cinema discourses I will deepen my analysis of the proletarian in the age of neoliberalism by engaging with literature that theorizes the class struggle and identity associated with this socioeconomic grouping I am analytically concerned with, as well as pinpoint labour issues from each country in the global South.



## Chapter 2

### Film Criticism: Global Cinema and Labour Films in the World-System

#### I. Global Cinema Discourses

The globalizing nature of cinema follows earlier attempts in comparative literature to establish a connection between markets and cultural production, chiefly by analyzing literary texts from the global South. This was proposed as I discussed earlier by Jameson but also more successfully by Aijaz Ahmad, as well as Franco Moretti, David Palumbo-Liu, Giles Gunn and Shu-mei Shih as early as the 1990s. In light of this, I view Shu-mei Shih's overview of the aims of global literature postulated in a *PMLA* article as a precursor to what is happening in film studies currently, and her work, along with Ahmad's, Moretti's, Palumbo-Liu's and Gunn's sustains the argument that "world literature," and I would add "world cinema," is now a pejorative phrase. I posit this assertion because the world as conceptualizing mechanism for literature's geographical reach goes as far back as Goethe's interpretation of the term in the 1820s in Germany. Today, in our neoliberal moment however, commercial institutions such as Amazon use the phrase to homogenously group large blocks of music such as Yoruba hip-hop from Nigeria to electronic tango from Argentina as both an advertising slogan and marketing tactic. Equally, international film festivals also deploy the world cinema moniker to essentially designate a "foreign film" category, with all four filmmakers in this



dissertation slotted into this category and their work exhibited on circuits from Busan IFF, Toronto IFF, Abu Dhabi IFF, and so on.

Shih writes the “[r]ecent interest in globalizing literary studies has largely involved attempts to locate conjunctures between contemporary literature and the economic formation of global capitalism and thereby to name a new literary structure of feeling—*structure* in terms of the organization of various literatures into a world system and feeling in terms of the literary production of new affects in new forms, styles, and genres.”<sup>111</sup> Though Shih stresses Raymond Williams’s “structure of feeling,” it is not meant as a type of class consciousness but rather appropriated to imply a type of market consciousness—unabashedly connecting market regimes to assist in organizing “various literatures in the world system” to emphasize “new affects in new forms, styles, and genres” in literary production. The global as a term thus acknowledges not a world of difference beyond the West but that the world is globally integrated by market forces, “interethnic and intercultural politics of power” that exists in-between and across “West-non-West, First World-Third World, and majority-minority divides.”<sup>112</sup> In other words, the world as conceptual premise de-economizes, in my view, and thus restores a disavowal to real economic forces impinging on cultural production. To contest the notion of world literature, world music and world cinema is to admit that the de-economizing factor is a central principle in the promotion of Westerncentrism, which the phrase world literature, world music and world cinema actually denotes. That the world is not the West but rather that the world (or global South) is indispensable to Western-inspired markets that dictate what culture is and that such culture is an enterprising

category available for sale, reproduction and distribution, found outside of its local point of origin.

Another way to look at world literature, world music or world cinema is to reflect on Shih's and Moretti's acerbic prognosis, that: "world literature is operative as a concept today because it is an abstract of contemporary social relations in late capitalism, globalization, and the consolidation of the American empire."<sup>113</sup> I agree completely that world literature, world music and world cinema is in essence an abstract concept in contemporary social relations because it fails to view how these categories are both a tertiary services in the trade and demand of cultural products, which make it a window onto specific national cultures, using certain regional, paranational and transnational devices to reach beyond its home soil. At the same time, world literature, world music and world cinema responds as a quaternary service that educates through its cultural products, thus developing a certain resistance to market demand.

A good starting point to understand global cinema in film studies would be to view it as a discourse, an "epistemological premise," detailing how this new category in film studies has been discussed and conceptualized over the years.<sup>114</sup> Thus my contestation of the notion of world cinema is linked to its institutionally homogenous and problematic orientation to comprise new cultural capital, which continues what Stephanie Dennison and Song Hwee Lim call the "effect of colonialism in an age of globalization."<sup>115</sup> Despite the inadequacy of the phrase world cinema, Dennison and Lim do not, themselves, discard it. However, I view the rephrasing of world cinema to global cinema as a vital proposition because it acknowledges its own material

production as well as its artistic and social value, and the “global” promotes further questions about the limitations of world cinema discourses: For instance, where do political economic discourses fit within the parameters of world cinematic texts? And how do world cinematic texts continuously figure out subjectivities produced and understood in the market age today? Perhaps it is clear that hard intellections regarding world cinema’s legacy in the global project of neoliberal hegemony has been left out and curtailed to the impacts and dimensions of globalisation rather than the marketisation and commodification of cultural material that neoliberalism parasitically usurps.

One scholar who has picked up on the need to move past world cinema as a frame of analysis is Dudley Andrew. As one of the founding theorists and cognoscente in the studies of global film and literature, from Iowa to Yale, Andrew has pushed the boundaries of film studies as an imbricate replication of the geopolitical as well as of a polysemic “atlas” of twentieth and twenty-first century image production. His recent chapter “Time zones and jetlag: the flows and phases of world cinema” provides a historiography of cinema in an internationalist vein, recognizing the development of the paradigmatic nature of this set of global films as a political (though less economic) one: 1. the cosmopolitan phase (1918); 2. the national phase (1935); 3. the federated phase (1945); 4. the world cinema phase (1968); and 5. from world cinema to global cinema (1989). Andrew highlights these “eras of cinema with reference to major political dates,” with 1989 undoubtedly marking the reconfiguration of the world phase to the global phase, signaled by the cataclysmic Tiananmen Square protests and the fall of the Berlin Wall.<sup>116</sup> He states the following in relation to this phase: “World systems imply transnational operations and negotiations that encourage the spread and interchange of

images, ideas, and capital across and throughout a vast but differentiated cultural geography.”<sup>117</sup> This final phase, a politico-linguistic shift from what this thesis interprets as the transition from *world cinema* to *global cinema*, is crucial because it presents an association of geographical spaces and domains which have then produced different ethnic films and multi-million dollar productions, independent and diasporic texts, even the most amateurish of filmic representations that amount to global cinemas’ operational diversity of, and cultural subsistence to, one centralized system of political-economic modeling—neoliberal globalisation.

Andrew is aware of the global impacts that various manifestations of neoliberalism have had on global culture. In fact, he engages with this, albeit in less direct ways. But while Andrew hints at the predominance of neoliberalism, he is reluctant to call the 1989 historical juncture the rise of a “planetary marketplace.”<sup>118</sup> And it is this absence of naming the motivation and momentum of neoliberalism more explicitly, that I undertake the task of considering what neoliberalism means to the production of subjectivities in their variegated cinematic forms as political *and* economic narrative constructions. In acknowledging this globalist phase, as Andrew does politically, mention must be made of the periodic development of capitalism in accordance to his historic parameters (e.g. 1918, 1935, etc.). The films in this dissertation in some sense communicate how global cinematic imagery has captured the post-‘89 climate in various micro formations, coinciding with different neoliberal subjectivities, playing at (possible or impossible) lives on screen.<sup>119</sup>

We must also be open to thinking about films as needing to be firmly global, in that we understand any particular instance or space to be globally orientated. Paul Willemen seeks a way through the world cinema model by proposing what Andrew and I have reconfigured as the global phase.

From the start, Italian, French, Swedish, British and American films, along with performers and technicians, circulated internationally without carrying an ostentatious national logo or provenance. As such, cinema has always been uneasy with nationalism, preferring to indulge in fantasies of universalism based on a simple inversion of the language-national ethnos ideology, thus maintaining that romantically nationalist ideology intact while seeming to go beyond it: because image-discourses allegedly operated without having to pass through the narrow defile of a particular verbal language, cinema was often described as the first genuine universal 'language' capable of restoring humanity to its pre-Babel unity.<sup>120</sup>

In other words, whereas earlier treatments of the seven continents various film canons under the rubric of international or world cinema tended to regard each as a separate entity marked mostly by national origin, I am 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. Equally, it is not always such a straightforward conjecture that neoliberalism solely creates global identities, as individuals or groups "do not always follow the trajectory delineated for them in advance, and that they sometimes assume forms which are profoundly antipathetic to the existing social formation."<sup>121</sup> Cuban cinema is one example of this antipathetic subjectivity. In fact, Castro's Cuba has been delinked from direct neoliberal channels of economic hegemony which makes the island nation-state very unique economically, at least by today's standards.

Thus when Cuba is added to the fold we can interpret global cinema as a “complex ecology,” which includes films from the global North (Hollywood and Europe) as well as nation-states that operate via socialist political economies.<sup>122</sup> This complex ecology is also a politicized one and relates to theorisations about the historical development of Third Cinema, a mode of filmmaking and theory that champions a committed form of emancipatory politics and culture for the global South and other oppressed areas, even in the global North. According to Octavio Getino “The First Stage: 1966-1970/71” of Third Cinema

appeared in the Cuban film journal *Cine cubano* in March of 1969, in an interview with members of the Argentine *Cine Liberacion* group. At that time, the group maintained that ‘there is a growing need for a ‘Third Cinema,’ one that would not fall into the trap of trying to engage in a dialogue with those who have no interest in doing so. It would be a cinema of aggression, a cinema that would put an end to the irrationality that has come before it; an *agit* cinema. This does not mean that filmmakers should take on exclusively political or revolutionary themes, but that their films would thoroughly explore all aspects of life in Latin America today.’<sup>123</sup>

Later, the publication of “Towards a Third Cinema” (1969) by Solanas and Getino, led the way for thinking and making Third World resistance films possible. This text was followed by the Cuban Julio Garcia Espinosa’s classic Marxist manifesto “For an imperfect Cinema” which was published in *Cine cubano* in 1970 and championed an organic and creative partnership between artist and writer, theorist and filmmaker. Such were the terms Third Cinema insists upon, while pointing out its own visual defects, both aesthetic and narrational. More recently, Mike Wayne has provided a newer analysis for Third Cinema that views it as a conflated but also connected theory and practice to First Cinema (dominant/commercial) and Second Cinema (arthouse/auteur) categories. Wayne writes:

We need more nuanced and complex accounts of First and Second Cinema in order to rescue Third Cinema from the common conflation that is made between Third Cinema and the Third World Cinema. Third Cinema is not to be restricted to the so-called Third World. First, Second and Third Cinemas do not designate geographical areas, but institutional structures/working practices, associated aesthetic strategies and their attendant cultural politics. Thus, if we understand First and Second Cinema in more complexity, we will be more ready to understand that we can have First and Second Cinema in the Third World and Third Cinema in the First World.<sup>124</sup>

To draw a connection between First, Second and Third Cinemas, like Wayne does, I would like to apply my four national case studies to this “straddling” of “cultural interactions” occurring in these films.<sup>125</sup> It could be said that each film exhibits, in varying degrees, all three categories conceptualized by Wayne, which I shall explain below:

1. Chile. Sebastian Silva’s *The Maid* can be viewed as Second Cinema primarily due to its circulation and popularity on film festivals circuits and its screenings at art house theatres across the world. We can appraise its First Cinema qualities in regard to its status as a leading national melodrama and use of popular television stars from Chile. Yet, as postulate in my analysis of *The Maid*, Silva subtly, and with less Third Cinema critical practice, does critique the class hierarchy that has not withered after the ousting of the Pinochet regime, and has perhaps reasserted itself with more forcefulness as he shows us the bare life for his working-class protagonist.

2. South Africa. Neill Blomkamp best exemplifies the First Cinema strategy in his sci-fi action template that looks very much like other transnational/Hollywood blockbusters and their spectacles of violence. However,

in equal measure his radical tendency to fuse post-apartheid racial and economic subjugation to violent CGI imagery, and do so in an experimental, digitized way, could be associated to Third Cinema and Second Cinema practices simultaneously.

3. China. Jia Zhangke's underground status in the late 1990s as a filmmaker committed to the fractured identities of China's lower classes via his low-budget films established him a Third Cinema maker, a socially concerned practitioner in a socially deteriorating society. Now "successfully wooed by the state" and the greater freedom granted to him and countless other Chinese filmmakers, Jia's work brokers First Cinema strategies in that a great number of Chinese now watch his films in the country compared to one decade ago, while his Second Cinema aesthetic strategy continues to fascinate critics in the PRC and abroad who eagerly await his latest work on festival circuits.<sup>126</sup>

4. South Korea. Recent critical appraisals of Park Chan-wook's filmic work comfortably situate him in the art house category (Second Cinema) because of his ornamental mise-en-scène and the neo-noir-like atmosphere he creates in a criminalized Seoul. Just this year, Park guest-directed his first Hollywood production, *Stoker*, a film in the vein of David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* as much as it is Park's trademark penchant for the psychologically wicked that constitute a First Cinema labeling. Nevertheless, I see buried beneath these extreme exercises in aesthetic playfulness and a desire to have his work seen on



a global level, is a director critical of the neoliberal turn in Korea that has shaped the cultural scene.

The tension between viewing the national/regional from a globalized perspective is fruitful in order to value the cultures as determined by economics, and as evidenced in the wider global cinema canon. To put it another way, and to cite Willemen, the appeal of global cinema has been to show that the flows of capital allow for “comparisons to be made [which] is the universal encounter with capitalism, a process that has determined (although it never was the only determination) and accompanied every manifestation of cinema throughout the world and which, moreover, has massively accelerated since the 1950s...”<sup>127</sup> In thinking about what allows for such movements, Willemen’s aesthetic and politico-economic comparison, recently published after his death looks broadly at the “capitalist-industrial production of culture” for films, providing a sturdy overview of global cinema’s undeniable connection to market.

I hope to update Willemen’s historical-narrative construct by focusing on a small number of films and viewing how each is in direct dialogue with its nation’s economic development. This more singular approach is, one learned from Ahmad. But take also Fredric Jameson’s chapter “Remapping Taipei,” in his book *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* (1995), on the Taiwanese director Edward Yang’s *Terrorizer* (1986). Jameson’s account meticulously interprets capitalist development in Taiwan out of Yang’s aesthetic sensibility and visualization of Taipei via analysis of a single film.<sup>128</sup> Like Jameson’s fine-grained Marxist analysis of *Terrorizer*, I view in this dissertation the *representativeness* of certain films, although not conclusive or all-encompassing in any

regard, as a way to summon the power to explain a specific socio-economic situation within recovering and developing countries. The films I attend to in this dissertation, in some ways, best exemplify *the state of things* for their proletarian subjects.

The case studies that follow in Part II are emblematic or representative of neoliberalism without being totalizing. The city dwellers as fashioned in these films, many of whom live in utter despair, are afforded, much like Vittorio De Sica's Roman proletarians in *Bicycle Thieves* (1948), momentary triumphs which all too quickly fade. Like De Sica, the directors I analyze also share an openness to multiple viewing positions—aesthetic, socio-economic, political, ideological, industrial, cultural—which allow many filmic discourses to penetrate these films at once, and for the power of the representative single film to be a legitimate source of critical inquiry in itself.

Neoliberalism is staged in these films as a struggle, an allegory about competition amongst proletarian subjects (and of the squeezed middle class in a film such as *Oldboy*). But neoliberalism also points to real world socio-economic problems that film, in notable ways, has the capacity to show to its national and international audiences. In voicing discontent, the directors in my study articulate sophisticated “geocultural” reactions to the world system's flow of capital and its cultural exchanges. To take one example from my study: Sebastian Silva positions the Chilean proletarians amongst the rest of world in *The Maid*. This emerges from his focus on the service industry in the capital gathered from the daily life of a live-in maid named Raquel. The film is both localized in its criticism of the Chilean class structure, through its snapshot of an upper class family (snobbish and professionalized), and globalized in its realist

portrayal of the service professional (where mistreatment as well as attachment to an employer go hand-in-hand for labourers that serve). More profoundly, Silva seems to take his cue from Ken Loach's legacy in bringing indigenous workers' stories to the world.

In other ways, the national cinemas that serve as the context for the directors and films in my study derive their agency from locating global workers in leading metropolitan cities where flows of capital and culture inevitably converge. By focusing on both material and immaterial labourers directly, I will analyze their double-realities as urban inhabitants and as victims of neoliberal policies: on the one hand, they represent the casual workfare practices known all too well under neoliberalism; on the other, these labourers' sense of deserving status amongst other classes and fellow workers find a voice in each of my four global cinema case studies. For example, the characters in Jia Zhangke's *The World*, embody many of the problems neoliberalism creates in the Chinese context, as several lack legal residence cards in Beijing and are part of the roaming labour classes problem, restricted from ascending socioeconomically due to their transient status and fear of deportation, producing what essentially become "narrations of discomfort."<sup>129</sup> Still others in *The World* have access to new consumer goods (couture handbags and name brand clothing), which they buy and then flaunt to co-workers in the theme park barracks where they live, trapped in a fantastical one-way exchange of accumulation by dispossession. In South Korea, other types of indentured service industry workers are visible, but here to large neoliberal conglomerates, who employ what are known as "salary men." The narrative of Park Chan-wook's *Oldboy* reflects the frivolity of job-for-life salesmen who drink and philander to temporarily

displace their frustration at class polarization or sometimes their redundancy inherent to post-Tiger Market Seoul. This polarity, I argue, is found in all these global filmmakers' work, which explores the contradictory nature of a neoliberal rationale that binds poor plebeians (human and in the case of *District 9*'s extraterrestrial) to the city.

## **II. Labour theory and the Labour Film**

For more than three decades French filmmaker and critic Jean-Louis Comolli has championed work being done on screen. He “suggests that work-related films should concentrate on what is off screen,” too.<sup>130</sup> I interpret Comolli's statement as a rallying call to engage with labour experiences as they happen to those in actuality, particularly those events off screen, and then how these experiences are recapitulated in “work-related films” on screen. In what follows below I will explore labour events off screen to strengthen my forthcoming chapters that explore labour problems on screen that I see able to articulate the neoliberal dispossession from the global South.

The main subject of this dissertation is thus the global proletariat in their many filmic manifestations. My work seeks to examine global cinema texts that testify to the control structures that define the lives and worlds of different global workers. Because of neoliberalism's transcendence since the 1970s, a connection between economic imperatives to control wages and the pace of work for those of the global working-class is significantly underpinned in certain global cinema texts, which enables the constantly changing and morphing proletariat communities in these films to be revealed with startling clarity. Each national-cinema based chapter in this dissertation examines a

micropolitical commentary on proletarian subordination and agency. How we think about the proletariat reality in actuality and in global cinema is connected to certain class dynamics. These dynamics are crucial to, first, viewing class as a social concept and how it is manifest in these films between economic and political forces, helping us to think through the tensions between worlds and "the" world of economic asymmetry for the worker; and second, seeing film's ability to both trivialize class archetypes as well as capture the complexities as a type of tribute. It is this latter type of representation that I intend to theorize in this and the forthcoming chapters.

It is important to define class first before refining this concept with respect to film analysis. British labour historian E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) is an obvious starting point. Thompson distinguishes the British working-class struggle by elegantly structuring many of its particularities: ordinariness, provinciality and political organizations (like the London Corresponding Society).

Thompson argues, despite using an outmoded gender model, that

class happens when some men, as a result of a common experiences (inherent or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs. The class experience is largely determined by productive relations into which men are born—or enter voluntarily. Class consciousness is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value systems, ideas and institutional forms.<sup>131</sup>

What is striking here is the connection Thompson places on a class's own rendition and diagnosis of their traditions; certainly, films help us realize the formal configurations of any given class. In this context working people and their spaces become imaginable through their classic postwar visual manifestations—from the Fordist industrial

landscape of worker hangouts (*On the Waterfront*, USA, 1954), to their romantic trysts and bedroom antics (*Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, UK, 1959), to cankerous strikes caught on screen (*The Organizer*, Italy, 1963). Contemporary examples often emphasize leisure, so that some workers squander money at designer shops (*24 City*, China, 2009), while others temporarily suspend their malaise by trips to automated batting cages (*Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance*, 2002) or other protagonists who journey back home to stave off their despondency by reconnecting with relatives they had left behind (*The Maid*, 2009). Will these characters and settings continue to register with local/global audiences as their postwar counterparts have, or will they become unrecognizable over time? This remains to be seen.

But if setting/milieu “updating” is one way to conceptualize the different global proletarian classes under our “planetary marketplace,” then who are the scholars that point out and refine these class particularities? Joan Allen, for example picks up on Thompson’s discussion decades later, but engages instead with the complexities of the contemporary proletarian class in a global context, finding that “the principal, although not the exclusive instrument structuring experience in capitalist society” is worker exploitation. She follows thusly: “Class was the primary, but not the singular, prism through which most men and women in history had grasped the limits and possibilities of their lives.”<sup>132</sup> Unlike Thompson, Allen moves beyond “theories of patriarchy and whiteness” and analyzes “gender, ethnicity and other forms of oppression” as central to thinking about the global working classes today.<sup>133</sup> Given the heterogeneity of the multiple class of proletarian as found in the world-system, the globalized perspective toward labour offered by Allen is useful. Yet how do we understand class within a

corpus or single film text? Is family background and profession the sole or even primary “barometer of class identification” in film, or are there other clues to blue-collar culture?<sup>134</sup>

Toby Miller is worth quoting at length to articulate why class is such a discursive concentration made up of personal identity, family and economic demographics. It could be said that conceptualizations of a given class succeed in mediating relationships and understandings about who we are and who we are not, which Miller’s class formulation pursues:

Attempts to do class analysis in film involve a number of moves: literally observing how a class acts (it clothing, gestures, movements, work, leisure, home-life); seeing who controls the means of communication (technicians, producers, directors, censors, shareholders); analyzing the ideological message of stories (personal transcendence versus collective solidarity, the legitimacy of capitalist ‘freedoms,’ or the compensations in family and community for social equality); and noting which interests are severed by government-sponsored national film industries (local bourgeoisies, men, whites, distributors, the ‘people’). In textual terms, those films that foreground class through themes or identification (many 1960s British documentaries and British New Wave of that period, Michael Apted’s *7 UP* series...and Gillo Pontecorvo’s *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), for example do not exhaust the list of films ready for class readings.<sup>135</sup>

As sweeping in scope as he is, Miller nonetheless outlines an accurate way to formulate and analyze the dense class dynamics found in the institutional, ideological and narrativ/iconographical content of national cinemas. In what follows in this chapter I would like to build on and expand Miller’s and other labour-conscious theorists’ contributions in the hope of reiterating a place for class criticism in film studies. I see labour film scholars as particularly useful in this context because they make a career out of knowing and usually understanding the proletarians’ experiences as precipitated by

capitalism. One pertinent example comes from Tom Zaniello's historical and cultural guide to labour films entitled *Working Stiffs, Union Maids, Reds and Riff Raff: An Expanded Guide to Films about Labour* (2003). In this rare labour-dedicated text, Zaniello suggests five criteria for his grouping of 350 labour-based films in his book: 1. films about unions or labour organizations; 2. films about labour history; 3. films about working-class life in which an economic factor is significant; 4. films about political movements if they are tied closely to organised labour; 5. films that focus on production or the struggle between labour and capital from a top-down perspective, either entrepreneurial or managerial.<sup>136</sup> In agreeing with Zaniello's five criteria for what constitutes a labour film, I will expand upon his third and fifth categories, as the three others do not directly relate to my analysis.

To begin with Zaniello's third category, he describes certain labour films as expressive of "an economic factor [that] is significant": for my purpose this can be interpreted as neoliberalism's "rolling back" of state power and pervasive reduction of rights and welfare for the global proletarians since the late 1980s. The heightened visibility of variegated neoliberalism continues to hold substantial geo-political influence and permeate every aspect of media and art, for better—diasporic web blogs (Tibetan news), open source music (Wénwèi in China), independent and leftist art exhibitions (Stuckists and the Documenta series based in Germany), mainstream television (*Black Mirror*)—or worse, blockbuster films (the *Transformers* franchise), sadistic video games (from *Vice City* to Japan's rape computer game) and MTV music videos (corporate hip-hop like 50 Cent), which perpetuate market attitudes, militarism and hyper-individuality and relegate class as a non-denominator. Developing countries



have experienced the most debilitating mutations of this free market doctrine, spurring concepts of efficiency and competitiveness that translate and appear in these latter media platforms at the expense of poorer citizens across Africa, Latin America and Asia.

Next, Zaniello posits what he sees as the struggle between labour and capital “from a top-down perspective, either entrepreneurial or managerial,” which he situates across the spectrum of films he analyzes in his labour film guide. This top-down perspective is invoked with judicious clarity in Park Chan-wook’s *Oldboy*, as Woo-jin, the film’s venture capitalist antagonist, insidiously plans his underling’s demise through a life of social, economic and psychic imprisonment; Dae-su, the film’s besmirched central protagonist, thus goes from middle-class salary man to dependent working-class pawn via Woo-jin’s twisted game. Ultimately, Dae-su is controlled by his inability to overcome Woo-jin’s entrepreneurial supremacy. In the end Dae-su does not risk enough in the game Woo-jin creates to let him reclaim his middle-class life.

The woes of working-class citizens struggling to define themselves in different downsizing neoliberal economies is new to film studies, but they are reconciled somewhat by Beverly Silver, though not by filmic but rather empirical examples. For this reason, Silver’s macro-intuitive theorization of the precarians under neoliberalism since the 1970s is one of the most accurate and sound in the field of labour studies. Her accessible writing in *Forces of Labour: Workers’ Movements and Globalisation since 1870* (2005), on immaterial (post-Fordist) labour is drawn largely from her expansive and erudite understanding of material, post-war (Fordist) labour, marked by acutely different social and political forces.<sup>137</sup> The loss of bargaining power by labour and its

ability to successfully organize is masterfully discussed from empirical data and prudent historicizing. And her survey of global labour issues signposts more specific engagements by local scholars, working in a specific national context which I will also be drawing upon.

That said, nearly 40 years ago the film sociologist Andrew Tudor wrote that cinema can show distinctions between power and authority, which he theorized by focusing on Hollywood cinema of the 1940s. Here, Tudor sketched American class divisions in relation to class legitimation, which he sees as “controlled, manipulated, or exploited by particular ruling groups.”<sup>138</sup> But even the Chinese class system is not easy to define. For decades Chinese cinema has tried overtly or obliquely to conceptualize class and its representation on screen, moving beyond traditional *jieji* (rings on a ladder) descriptions. Such legitimation can be expanded to the global South, an area only now being really considered by way of global comparativist studies. Tudor continues to explain that “[p]articipants in the process conceived it as justified, as being the right way in which things should be done,” a sentiment that is useful to thinking more broadly about class.<sup>139</sup> Attempts are found in the Chinese Fifth Generation’s non-class considerations in the films of Zhang Yimou of course, but also in the realization by an Urban Generation director Jia Zhangke that labour is an unfixed and evolving category in the post’89 PRC.

Across geographies and histories, film scholars have proven uncomfortable in trying to understand labour, its movements and how it is represented across various screenscapes. Yet to grapple with these tensions, and to focus on textual imagery as a

way to measure the scope, importance, and social worth of labour (or more particularly, in the last 30 years, of the service industry), I would like to focus on several texts that necessitate reflection on the precarious conditions labour now faces in the twenty-first century. Inevitably, what connects these conditions is market and market value, which have reconfigured individuals to self-manage the way they work and live. Such reconfigurations lead both to inclusion and exclusion, largely tied to a multifaceted economic doctrine that looks to subjugate worker rights, benefits and even their livelihoods for endless accumulation and profit.

For as Christian Marazzi avers, neoliberalism, in the context of labour struggles and by way of a global context, “began by making the public sphere act against the particularities of the proletariat, against the demand for life of the unemployed at a time when the occupational crisis of the wage labour market was taking shape.”<sup>140</sup> Neoliberalism thus casts any form of social dependency as market inefficiency. The extraterrestrials in *District 9*, for example, see none of the so-called rewards the market offers. They are doubly victims of the market: they provide work contracts for a multinational corporation as they are managerially colonized in the film; while they themselves must live off of next-to-no subsidies, as welfare disappears in neoliberal Johannesburg. Representations of the proletariat or wider working-classes are only tangentially approached in films studies today, but this dissertation hopes to break new ground in theorizing not only how constructions of these social groups on screen are underrepresented, even obfuscated, but also how they form a new current for critical inquiry, in the era of neoliberalism, beyond stereotypes of union crowds, burly men, socialist agitators and general riffraff.

Recently, two monographs and one older anthology in film studies has dealt with labour in a contemporary context. Two are confined to the American postwar and OPEC crisis periods, while the edited volume focuses on class in relation to mostly Hollywood (but Russian and Chinese cinemas too): Derek Nystrom's *Hard Hats, Rednecks, and Macho Men: Class in 1970s American Cinema* (2009), Dennis Broe's *Film Noir, American Workers, and Postwar Hollywood* (2009), and the edited volume, *The Hidden Foundation: Cinema and the Question of Class* (1996), compiled by David E. James and Rick Berg.<sup>141</sup>

By way of a Marxist critique of New Hollywood cinema from the 1970s, Nystrom's *Hard Hats* provides a compelling theorisation of what he sees as the persistent appearance of working-class characters in American films of the 1970s, which reveals class conflict and identity crises in films as desperate as *Deliverance* (1972) and *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* (1977). These sentiments, according to Nystrom, reflect (in the films of this period) the "profound shifts in the national political and economic terrain, and during a period of aesthetic and industrial change in Hollywood—often testifying to a vivid sense of class difference not seen since the 1930s."<sup>142</sup> The political and economic shift that Nystrom notes in Hollywood films from the 1970s is found, in a different context, in Broe's work on pre-and post-war American noir. Broe's analysis maintains a deeper interest in working-class representations than does *Hard Hats*, as he anchors his study in the professional-managerial classes.<sup>143</sup> With his lucid rethink of Hollywood noir from the postwar period, Broe formulates in his book "social and spatial formations" to this genre group. It is these two concepts that I find appealing in relation to this project. The first and most important is Broe's appropriation of Raymond

Williams “structure of feeling” as a way to describe and give the working-class a particular reference point to their culture. These “representations through a cultural form of patterns of thought and emotion” are harnessed via detailed analyses of three cycles of noir by Broe. He periodizes these three film noir cycles in the following way: “in the first period (1941-45), labour is harassed by the law, as is the detective who straddles the law; in the second period (1945-50), labour is defiant and outside the law; and in the third period (1950-55), labour is back inside the law policing its own as the working-class cops patrol working-class neighborhoods.”<sup>144</sup> To draw a parallel between Broe’s appropriation of Williams and my appropriation of Harvey, the connection is that both look at how class is affected (Williams) and dispossessed (Harvey) by cultural-economic forces that leave “patterns of thought and emotion, most often by a subaltern group, that are not overtly articulated.” However, in Broe’s work film noir from the postwar period functions as an allegory of capitalist malaise and exploitation—and in my forthcoming chapters on global cinema from the late twentieth, and early twenty-first century, the allegory extends to treatments of social conditions and identities under neoliberal globalisation.

Also of interest in Broe’s *Film Noir, American Workers and Postwar Hollywood* is his contention that spatial formations are important to understanding the working-class condition in America after World War II, as it is helpful in the milieu I discuss from contemporary global cinema. He finds:

Hollywood has long linked crime and the working class, with working-class milieus being a favored setting for crime films from the first gangster film, D.W. Griffith’s *The Musketeers of Pig Alley* (1912). Working-class milieus such as seaside flophouses and warehouses of *Docks of New York* (1927), actual sites of

working-class organization, have been legitimized as areas of scenic possibility by being presented as sites of crime. It was then ingenious on the part of the noir directors to, for a while, reverse this polarity while remaining within the ordinary iconography of the crime film.<sup>145</sup>

The sites of work, rather than being hideouts or locations for crime, are vital in helping to contemporize work done in a neoliberal age. The private spaces as discussed in my cases studies of global cinema are more than just mere inventories—in fact, the theme parks, hotels, barracks, private prisons, corporate headquarters, even well-to-do homes, foreground class struggle and social relations, making visible circuits of cosmopolitan wealth available only for the few, and the spatial confines for productivity and life-making transformations for the many.

At the same time, I would suggest that *Hard Hats* provides a solid complement to part I of this dissertation. Nystrom's notion of anxiety as exhibited by those of the middle-class—or, echoing Ehrenreich's term, professional-managerial class—is used to frame the three cycles of Hollywood working-class films from the 1970s: "youth cult film, neo-Western Southern and new nightlife film." Here he posits in my view a real challenge to conventional scholarship and an insightful, politically-engaged reflection on New Hollywood and the class history which is connected to it from this period. Another claim in Nystrom's study that I believe resonates in my own research is to offer more "complex maps of class position, which suggested how people can find themselves situated in these positions in multiple, even contradictory ways."<sup>146</sup> Though Nystrom uses Marxist social theorists with a particular aptitude and knowledge of US class and capital movements, expressly Erik Olin Wright and Adam Prezworski, I propose to move their work, as brought into film studies by Nystrom, so as to expand it to address

global cinema, but via a different set of class-conscious scholars, working on the global South.

Finally, and in perhaps more direct Marxian terms, David E. James and Rick Berg's illuminating *The Hidden Foundation* provides historical examples of Hollywood, Russian and Chinese cinemas which acknowledge the class differentials and the surprising resilience of labour to be plotted through film history. In essence, their materialist case studies of film prove such a framework is still worth pursuing. Despite the relevance of Broe's, Nystrom's, James's, and Berg's theorization of class, they are motivated by a different set of concerns in the global North rather than the global South. In the last section, I conclude Part I of this dissertation by looking to localized critiques of labour suffering emerging in China, Korea, Chile and South Africa by scholars that possess extensive knowledge of a country's economic system and/or are native to it.

### **III. Labour from China, Korea, Chile and South Africa**

Because this dissertation is a four-tiered study of South Africa, Chile, South Korea and China, I would like to begin in reverse order with the PRC, and discuss two seminal texts that are groundbreaking in their sociological studies of Chinese labour. The first, more utilitarian study of migratory flows from rural provinces to Beijing comes from Chinese-born Li Zhang. Her empirical-based research, combined with political sociology, charts a rugged and competitive journey of what she calls "roaming labour," who move toward Chinese cities, in her *Strangers in the City: Reconfigurations of Space, Power and Social Networking within China's Floating Populations* (2002). Zhang fashions Beijing's floating population as a problematic social entity for the rising

middle class and elites, who see them “as a drain on already scarce urban public resources” and blame them for increased crime and social instability.<sup>147</sup> Too far away to be reached by rural authorities but not yet incorporated into the urban system of control, rural migrants are considered “out of place” and “out of control.”<sup>148</sup> Therefore, as mass migration has led to the formations of community-based migrant power, the state has developed new strategies to regulate the migrants (something my chapter on Jia Zhangke addresses directly). The ubiquitous commodification of the service industry worker is now an everyday reality in postsocialist China. This reality complicates the relationship between media and cinema and in what manner these mediums come to document the dispossessed immaterial labourers, leisure industry workers, and even the floating populations of illegal rural immigrants that crowd China’s city centres. These neoliberal workers are considered disposable ethnographic subjects—followed, recorded and organised according to non-ideological movements that are processed through the neoliberalisation of culture in China. These diverse cultures and ethnographic groups are pushed into what Aihwa Ong calls “sites of transformation where market-driven calculations are being introduced in the management of populations and the administration of special spaces.”<sup>149</sup>

The second text is by an American academic, Amy Hanser, who is interested in material consumption and the caste of workers employed to satisfy the demand of China’s growing consumer market. Hanser’s book is the first English-language study concerned with the service sector under a modestly affluent/*xiaokang* society in the PRC. *Service Encounters: Class, Gender, and the Market for Social Distinction in Urban China* (2008) paints an image of city life and its workers as accompanied by new



sets of societal relations and a reconfigured social hierarchy. The rise of economic elites has paralleled the fall of the urban proletariat, and China's cities have witnessed the emergence of new social groupings, including a small but comfortable salaried middle class, small-scale private entrepreneurs, and an influx of migrants and labourers from rural areas."<sup>150</sup> Hanser theorizes, using Western socio-cultural literature (e.g. Pierre Bourdieu and Raymond Williams), a new structure of entitlement (which is not the same as the latter's "structure of feeling") being cultivated in China through the marking of social distinctions such as material wealth, ownership of property, shopping, and access to education and healthcare. The modern shopper, from various classes (including the larger working class), deals with their own structure of entitlement in often-unconscious cultural and social sensibilities that make certain groups feel entitled to greater social goods.<sup>151</sup> This sense of entitlement extends from seemingly mundane aspects of daily social interactions—such as bickering over name brands and material wants to absurd property buying and decadent spending—all the way to more obviously consequential and overt claims to formal power and material resources.<sup>152</sup> Although Hanser's book signals an emerging field of inquiry in Sino Studies, it does privilege in my view an imbalanced European critical discourse. I thus intend in my study to counterbalance this tendency with Chinese political sociologists and labour experts (cf. Lin Chun).

In a similar vein to Chinese labour, unionism is intrinsically tied to and inseparable from South Korea's rapid capitalist modernization, proceeding from Jung-hee Park's coup in 1960.<sup>153</sup> Dealing with trauma in its epistemological and socio-political guises from the democratic period (1987-91) onward, film scholar Kyung Hyun Kim explicitly contextualizes labour's troubled role in an excellent chapter, "Post-

Trauma and Historical Remembrance in *A Single Spark* and *A Petal*,” in his monograph, *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema* (2005). His recontextualization of director Park Kwang-su's unusually timed but powerful film about the historical commemoration of one of South Korea's most iconic unionists, Chon T'ae-il, in *A Single Spark* (1996), theorizes the recuperation of a type of “psychological subjectivity” at a time pivotal in South Korean history, mainly its tragic (and continuous) rupture with labour during the 1970s. *A Single Spark* also serves as an allegory for the rise and fall of dissident labour outside the diegesis of this film. Through visual devices such as black-and-white flashes back to union demonstrations and violence and striking, as well as earthy-coloured images of women toiling away in cramped sweatshops in the Changsin section of Seoul, the film provides a voice “for collective reckoning and historical remembrance” through its focus on a disgruntled Korean labour power.<sup>154</sup> Equally, Jesook Song's powerful exploration of lower class grievances—job loss, security and pensions and the increase in homelessness is theorized in her *South Korea in the Debt Crisis: The Creation of the Neoliberal Welfare Society* (2009).

Moving to Latin America, the University of Liverpool has long dedicated an important series to political and economic changes to the Southern Cone. Their production of several invaluable texts—in this instance Benny Polock and Alan Angle's *The Legacy of Dictatorship: Political, Economic and Social Change in Pinochet's Chile* (1993) and David Hojman's *The Political Economies of Pinochet and Thatcher: A Comparison of the Chilean and British Free Market Models* (1996)—provide, key studies on neoliberalism in Chile. However, most substantial in my chapter on Silva's Chile is Peter Winn's *Victims of the Chilean Miracle: Workers and Neoliberalism in the*

*Pinochet Era, 1973-2002* and Steve J. Stern's *Reckoning with Pinochet: The Memory Question in Democratic Chile 1989-2000*. These two books are seminal linchpins in how I conceptualize labour struggles in the post-Pinochet era. Equally, Leo Zeilig's edited *Class Struggle and Resistance in Africa* (2001), Anne-Maria Makhulu, Beth A. Buggenhagen and Stephen Jackson, eds., *Hard Work, Hard Times: Global Volatility and African Subjectivities* (2010) both give an influential account of globalizing Africa. However, it is Hein Marais's dynamic critique of South African inequality in *South Africa Pushed to the Limit: The Political Economy of Change* (2011) that I see as unsurpassed in its detailed and excoriating examination of neoliberal policy since Nelson Mandela's election in 1994. Equally, Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff's "Occult economies and the violence of abstraction: notes from the South African postcolony" in *American Ethnologist* (1999) expressed the problems of "black magic" economies co-mingling with neoliberal policies, leading to forms of exploitation, newly invented.

As guided by these labour studies, the films in this project will be explored for their depictions of subordination and passivity in their lower class workers, and for how flexible labour is emblematic for thinking about these theoretically intertwined elements in the global political economy. In this project, I will go on to classify these labourers as one of the following in the films under investigation: the service industry worker; the undocumented or the underemployed; the metropolitan outsider (*waidi ren*); the vagabond; and even the extraterrestrial. Invariably, these labourers have had to be content with their own temporary citizenship—usually ending in early termination, redundancy, deportation, and even criminal behavior—while similarly facing the long-term effects of gentrification on cities in which they live.

#### IV. Materialist Film Studies

Antonio Gramsci and his theory of hegemony will help to broaden and expand the core concepts presented in this dissertation. I see hegemony as the political state of the dominant classes to envisage their own way of seeing the world so that those who are coerced by it accept it as normal.<sup>155</sup> Gramsci conceptualizes the dual poles of hegemony in a now famous passage from *The Prison Notebooks*, where he posits “domination” and “intellectual leadership” manifesting as:

A social group dominates antagonistic groups, which it tends to ‘liquidate,’ or to subjugate perhaps even by armed force; it leads kindred or allied groups. A social group can, and indeed must, already exercise ‘leadership’ before winning governmental power (this is indeed is one of the principal conditions for winning such power); it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to ‘lead’ as well.<sup>156</sup>

As I have alluded to in the Introduction of this project, it is my opinion that the global cinema text must compete against the “dominant” neoliberal industries and classes by creating narratives that lead away from financial or superfluous social messages. In essence, winning cultural power back is one role that global cinema can play, as it limits, even “liquidates,” the fetishization of affluent societies and their unimaginative cultural projections. Therefore, the purpose of looking at various forms of global cinema, particularly certain geographies that have histories with socialist policies or Marxist discourses, is that these regions produce directors (however small in number) that examine the relationship between forms of hegemony, *actual existing* urban conditions and the transformation of their milieus to a neoliberal economy. My methodological approach will utilize Gramsci’s ideas of hegemony, social acquisition and use of power as gathered from *The Pre-Prison Writings* (1921) and *The Prison Notebooks* (1929-35)

to explain the harsh logic of neoliberalism as it is refracted in key films from Johannesburg, Santiago, Seoul and Beijing.<sup>157</sup> In *The Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci asserts that workers actually carry in their heads two contradictory consciousnesses: “One which is implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all his fellow-workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and another, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed.”<sup>158</sup> In placing Gramsci's ideas as a signpost to contextualize various social realities in film, my framework seeks to recalibrate how realist (and at times experimental or surrealist) aesthetics in these global films resist a reductionist reading of either pure spectacle or apolitical rumination, and how fictionalized workers see themselves in a contradictory social sphere. As each chapter in this dissertation will consider the global precarians’s encounter with variegated neoliberalism, it seems appropriate to deploy Gramsci’s views on populism to better understand the real-life and fictional precarians’s dispossession. My historical materialist analysis hopes to unmask the ideological composition of dominant aesthetics to show a distinct social order at play in global cinema. And although there may be disagreements about historical materialism’s relationship to film analysis, I wish in this project to go against the grain by working with both art and popular cinema in order to rethink various regional aesthetics as indicators for resistance-style thinking in the context of global cinema.

The work of Benita Parry is indispensable to this project, too. Her hybrid model of postcolonial theory anchored by Marxist cultural theory echoes my own aims, particularly her *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique* (2004). Unlike Homi Bhabha’s deconstructionist theory for interpreting colonial or postcolonial texts (whose

work I reference in this dissertation but via a bolstering of his theory with a Marxist infusion of political economy), Parry prefers to see internationalism, the call for global solidarity, as forged in many ways. She calls for a

political allegiance grounded in class affiliation and to anti-imperialist partisanship: an Indian exiled by the Raj who assisted in the formation of the Mexican Communist Party (M.N. Roy); the participation in the Spanish Civil War of African-American volunteers to the Lincoln Brigade; a Caribbean intellectual (C. L. R. James) who involved himself in Pan-Africanism and metropolitan left politics; African insurgents who during the 1970s greeted the rise of popular anti-fascism in the imperial homeland while engaged in fighting the Portuguese army in Mozambique, Angola and Guinea-Bissau.<sup>159</sup>

These dissident movements Parry speaks of match, in less concentrated forms, my chosen films' interest in documenting global capitalism's spread via these directors' anti-neoliberal stance. Kuan-Hsing Chen's notions that "theory must be deimperialized" warrants larger discussions than this dissertation can hold, but it is a provocative angle I will discuss in subsequent chapters, though sadly in less direct terms. Chen stresses, and in a convincing manner, that we must look at the repressive impacts of area studies on East Asia to better address the legacy of colonialism and neocolonialism.<sup>160</sup> I intend to probe the intersection of imperialism and labour abuses in these regions by taking up Chen's de-westernizing principle in spirit.

Finally, a few words on some other works that have served as inspirations for this project and texts I return to often for intellectual sustenance. To begin with, probably the most widely read and cited texts dealing with neoliberalism and cinema are Toby Miller, Richard Maxwell, Nitin Govil's and Ting Wang's collections *Global Hollywood 1 and 2* (BFI, 2001 and 2007).<sup>161</sup> Miller *et al.*'s *Global Hollywood* offers an excellent collection of essays that grapples with the political economy of Hollywood, its

global reach and impact as it has actively participated in the neoliberal project. Another fine attempt in film studies to deploy a Marxist cultural theory framework in relation to global cinema texts is Mike Wayne's edited volume *Understanding Film: Marxist Perspectives* (2004).<sup>162</sup> With obvious parallels to what this dissertation hopes to accomplish, many of the contributors in this collection approach global cinema through a political economic and historical materialist lens. There is also a great deal of geography covered in *Understanding Film*, including less theorized areas of the world like North Korea and Senegal which is fascinatingly rich in detail. The book does not use neoliberalism as a particular frame of reference, choosing instead Marxist analysis based on class, commodity, and labour. This is not a criticism but rather a point of departure for me as I hope to continue Wayne's work on global capitalism and cinema by expanding the present literature dealing with locations outside his collection's purview.

Equally important in this context, although based on an anthropological study of visual culture, is Jean and John Comaroff's edited volume *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism* (2000).<sup>163</sup> This book offers a brilliant discussion of the profoundly transformative impact of neoliberalism on everyday life in contemporary society. Taking the contradiction between labour and capital as central to neoliberalism, with "enchantment" as a key existential phenomenon, the book convincingly weaves together work by Luiz Paulo Lima, Fernando Coronil and others to explore the stresses neoliberalism has placed on sexuality, governance, and civil society. In theoretical terms, Comaroff and Comaroff's introductory chapter helps to re-orientate discussions about neoliberalism's inherent contradictory discourse and practice, what they call "an odd

coupling, the binary complementarily, of legalistic with the libertarian; constitutionality with deregulation, hyerrationalization with the exuberant spread of innovative occult practices and money magic, pyramid schemes and prosperity gospels.”<sup>164</sup>

In sum, I offer different variations on the filmic representations of material and immaterial workers and how they come to deal with subjugation, local/global disenchantment and the cosmopolitan need for assimilation into a homogenous world culture under neoliberal globalisation. I will demonstrate how the films in this project skillfully articulate both fleeting moments of profligate behavior and bleak acts of socioeconomic alienation—realities that act as inconsequential and mundane as the everyday event—while also signifying harsher global criticisms. In many ways, Gramsci’s dual consciousness is as timeless as ever to perceive the layman’s common affairs or “affective desires” to self-organize and at the same time to exclude themselves in such work-related organizing. The ruling ideology since Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* has only hardened, and the apparatuses have only become advanced; yet proletarian global cinema could lay claim to the historical determination of neoliberalism and its ability to generate a new kind of alienation specific to material and immaterial workers.

What follows in this dissertation are four chapters, each a case study. My aim is to situate my concept of global cinema within the contemporary neoliberal context as well as to use this concept as a type of conceptual glue to hold together these geographically disparate yet assimilatory commonalities amongst the proletarians. It is hoped that this theoretical mapping will valorize how global cinema intersects and critiques the processes of neoliberal globalisation in the four individual chapters that



comprise Part II section of the dissertation. Each chapter will consider both individual identity and global culture as affected and compromised by the neoliberal phenomenon. In turn, the analysis in these forthcoming chapters will explore films that show fantastic, ludic or mundane moments for different proletarians and how these moments, usually found “on the job,” can be extended to labor activities as culture.

With the recent attempts to theorize neoliberalism, a fiercer, more adaptive market-wielding global capitalism has created new political-economic problems to reconcile (e.g. from cultural production that is influenced and even dictated by the need of market, to the creation of new stereotypes and fetishisms regarding a particular culture). This eroding of local/diasporic identity in the global context causes a cultural transformation, found in the identities of certain non-Western communities. Global cinema is a positive concept that diminishes the neoliberal “scale” of its market and exposes instability and anomie, implicating all things social and even cultural in its web. Moreover, the restructuring of the world’s economic system has had a causal effect not only on financial markets since the 1920s, but also on the less obvious cultural markets that are fused to the requisite infrastructure of monopoly capitalism, which is what we have currently: neoliberal globalisation. To fit the theoretical thrust of my argument, my four case studies need to deal with the potency of globalisation’s support of economic neoliberalism and the cosmopolitan condition it is pluralistically bound to. In this analysis, I will focus on the forms of class, race, fetishization and disorientation the working-class protagonist faces, and will argue that interest in local culture from recovering and developing areas of the world is dictated principally by the neoliberalisation of these cultures. On the one hand, I shall consider in these four

chapters case-by-case studies of different geographies that struggle to preserve their distinct cultural heritages and labour struggles, something that is continuously at stake. On the other hand, I stress that global cinema is a way to categorize these working-class narratives within wider film studies, to establish its place in the discourse of a now non-Western, minority cinema that acknowledges class structure without being overly bound to it.

## ***PART II***

### **Micro-Formulations: Proletarian Global Cinema and Neoliberalism**

## **Chapter 3**

### **Zones of Regulation, Zones of Despair: *District 9*'s Extraterrestrials in Post-Apartheid Johannesburg**

#### **I. Introduction**

In recent years, Comic-Con International, the San Diego-based fantasy-sci-fi convention, has turned to promoting certain global cinema texts amongst its mostly Hollywood fare. With an increased demand from attendees to see the latest teaser trailers for upcoming global blockbusters, both Comic Con programmers and filmmakers recognized the potential value in exhibiting these trailers alongside much of the paraphernalia up for sale (Spiderman comic books to Star Wars movie memorabilia, etc.). The 2008

convention saw a mix of anticipated trailers from *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* to *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen*, to other, lesser-known films at the time—notably, *District 9* (Neill Blomkamp, 2009). Following the screening of *District 9* at Comic Con that July, the film garnered considerable buzz over its hybrid combination of popcorn action and repressed extraterrestrials set in post-apartheid South Africa.<sup>165</sup> In many ways, the hype over this film at Comic-Con was understandable: an aesthetic similarity to the video game *Halo* (as well as blockbusters like *Transformers*), along with insectoid-like extraterrestrials rendered by the latest computer generated imagery (CGI); two seemingly complementary elements that, when the historical baggage of South Africa is thrown in, proved provocative, even at Comic-Con.<sup>166</sup> Viewing this film as a global cinema text, and to borrow Shohini Chaudhuri's illuminating claims that particular national cinemas "inflect regional patterns" that resonate with home and international publics "either for their high local impact or for their international resonance," is, in my view, another way to explain *District 9*'s arresting visuality and social content.<sup>167</sup>

On the face of it, *Halo*, a hugely popular U.S. video game with a first-person shooter template, was admittedly an inspiration to Blomkamp. Having cut his teeth on an earlier live-action rendition of this video game in 2007, he adopted many of its distinctive features in *District 9*—ranging from a first-person view of weaponry, diagonally shot action scenes, and a hologram readout in the battle droid helmet—to enhance the film's mise-en-scène.<sup>168</sup> But Blomkamp's *Halo* template, I will argue, delivers more than just thrilling action sequences that make compatible the virtual with the filmic for audiences. My claim will be that *District 9* makes visible new conditions

for the experience of a neoliberal landscape. In effect, the visual seductiveness of the *mise-en-scène* says something about the actually-existing socio-economic and racial conditions in places like Johannesburg. In this chapter, I will show that Blomkamp is not interested in valorizing the status of black South Africans who live with constant economic and social dissolution, but rather focuses his attention on what I see as the contagious nature of neoliberalism in the post-apartheid now. Blomkamp's *topoi*—poverty, racism and class inequality—relates to the transmissibility of neoliberalism as it creates a competitive and volatile environment that extraterrestrials and humans alike must try to overcome. The hegemons in *District 9*—large corporations and corporate cronies—see the extraterrestrials as *the* infection, a social group that is blamed for debilitating the city's commerce and culture.

This conflict between survivalist strategies by the extraterrestrials and the cynicism over urban destitution enacted by executive power in the film offers a formula for reading the overtones of neoliberalism in South Africa. And this can be traced to new political economic agendas as they continue much of the racial inequality and employment problems found under apartheid. Famously, Nelson Mandela, South Africa's first elected black president, initially supported the nationalization of the country's "banks, mines and other monopolies" on his release from prison in 1990. He reversed his opinion, however, after attending a world economic forum in Switzerland in 1992.<sup>169</sup> At least publically, Mandela chose to advocate neoliberalism as the country's way forward, but at a price. Despite the powerful "mining nexus, combined with the presence of pyramid conglomerates and the country's determined penetration into international markets, unemployment for black, immigrant and female South Africans

was nearly 40 % in the 2000s.”<sup>170</sup> By Hein Marais’s account “Traumatic realities are buried in those numbers.”<sup>171</sup> As a consequence many black South Africans were phased out of work, as this new free market agenda sanctioned “economic growth at any cost” together with the advocacy of casual labour practices.<sup>172</sup> This chapter will delineate those still worse off in the post-apartheid epoch by reading how neoliberal competitiveness plays out as neocolonial (alien and human) subjugation in *District 9*. But such elaborations on the neoliberal climate must be traced to the representational power of the image to confront the complexity of political struggle.

## II. Overview

*District 9* opens in present day with a media chronology of the arrival, rescue, segregation and later violent episodes of its extraterrestrials as they acclimatize to South African society. These tentacle-faced, 7-foot tall visitors arrived on earth in March 1982. We learn that their spacecraft has since continuously hovers above the city of Johannesburg and that these so-called socially maladjusted extraterrestrials (never given a chance to acculturate) now encounter public condemnation for their drain on the government’s resources after being brought to earth, and transported to a communal living space on the urban rim of the capital—inferred from footage of an already scraggly-looking Johannesburg cityscape. Such complaints about aid support in the film echo the dialogues between African nation-states and NGOs outside the diegesis, where donor agencies, often unable to eradicate mass poverty, see the cause of either the diversion of funds away from needy parties or political parties unwilling to subsidize ailing segments of their own populations. As this chapter will further elaborate, *District*

9 leaves the socialization of these extraterrestrials to the imagination of the audience, and, in the process, comments on fictional and real selective poverty alleviation, instead.

Here polarized human opinion is staged through sound bites, news footage and talking head interviews. This is accomplished via a documentary-style-cum-digitized aesthetic which constructs for audiences the trauma of social/species assimilation—gathered from rioting crowds, densely packed shantytowns and anti-alien posters hung on fences. Such imagery in the film is held together by various “experts,” from xenophobic journalists to left-leaning social anthropologists, who comment on the tense social climate. We learn that each commentator has either a direct link to Wikus van der Merwe (Sharlto Copley), the film’s central human protagonist, or knew of his actions through the mass media coverage and his metamorphosis into an eventual alien. These interviews oscillate in the opening 10 minutes of the film between public condemnations and more sympathetic views as to why Wikus was abetting extraterrestrials, known derogatorily as “prawns.”

The storyline quickly unfolds around Wikus, a corporate lackey who works for the corporation MNU (Multinational United) in Johannesburg. Much like its real-life US-based counterpart G.E. (General Electric), the company has multiple investment strategies and a type of corporate governance which extends to the evictions of the extraterrestrial population. MNU’s objective in the film is to relocate the aliens from District 9 to District 10, which resembles a prison camp. The new compound is shown in a flash, with rows of barracks that are cordoned off from the public by barbed wire fences and heavily armed security. The narrative moves quickly to the massive eviction

operation handed to Wikus by Piet Smit, an MNU executive and his father-in-law.

Less than 20 minutes in, the narrative focus shifts to three aliens—the Anglo-named Christopher Johnson, his son, and a friend—who search for alien technology to repower their command spacecraft hidden amongst the heaps of shantytown trash in District 9. While raiding the shack of Christopher's friend, Wikus discovers and seizes a container, which sprays an unidentified substance onto his face. The extraterrestrial fluid makes Wikus ill and begins to turn his DNA and body into those of the extraterrestrial. MNU finds out and forces Wikus to test various alien weapons which only function when used by an alien; strapped to a medical restraint, he proves able to use them. The MNU scientists then try to euthanize Wikus because his organs are deemed to be worth billions for its bioweapons division but he overpowers the scientists and escapes MNU headquarters. Wikus then seeks asylum in District 9 and the help of Christopher Johnson, who reveals that the canister can reactivate the dormant mothership and reverse Wikus's mutation. Wikus agrees to retrieve the canister and by force takes weapons from a Nigerian arms-dealer. Wikus and Christopher raid the MNU headquarters and narrowly retrieve the canister; they flee back to District 9, with MNU corporate mercenaries right behind them. After a heavy exchange of machine-gun fire and discharged alien weaponry that bombard the Chiawelo township, Christopher and his son escape back to the mothership while Wikus remains behind, his metamorphosis into alien complete.





Fig. 3.1



Fig. 3.2



Fig. 3.3



Fig. 3.4

### III. Transnational Cinema from South Africa

*District 9*, for all its fascinating socio-political commentary, must also be seen as a sellable sci-fi blockbuster. And it is important to understand the film's populist, broad appeal. To this end, the dual nature of *District 9* is important because it suggests that the film translates differently according to local and global audience reception. One could then paint *District 9* as a transnational film, due to its appeal to peoples from many

backgrounds and national origins. The film's use of global marketing tactics remains one of the commercial trademarks of transnational filmmaking; its visibility at Comic-Con, combined with its mimicking of Hollywood-style violence, suggest the intersectional nature of this hybrid post-apartheid work. No wonder then that *District 9* secured tens of thousands of internet hits that led to contracts with other major distributors outside of the United States, enabling the film to be seen in all parts of the world; and this says something about this new genre: *post-apartheid science-fiction*.<sup>173</sup> Populist based South African films such as *District 9*, in essence global cinema texts, attribute much of their success by following other country's models. For instance, Hollywood's blockbuster renaissance in the 2000s that combined scrupulous aesthetic features, marketing and polished production value as a means to bring audiences into movie theatres, is picked up on by Blomkamp. Yet, Blomkamp's subaltern images and subjects gives his film a deeper scope and sets it apart from Hollywood's trivializing narratives on developing Africa (i.e., *Blood Diamond*); and such cinematic experimentation and accessibility in the 21<sup>st</sup> century allows *District 9* a measure of success in the competitive global export market in an otherwise ghettoized "world cinema" category.

Industrially, it can be said that South African film now competes not only with US exports but also with pan-African film and the wider globally integrated film market in general, if we compare films on a one-on-one basis. For example, the tragic melodrama, *Yesterday* (Darrell Roodt, 2004) about a woman who contracts HIV from her miner husband was the first commercially produced film made entirely in Zulu in South Africa. It did remarkably well on film festival circuits (gaining nominations at Cannes and Toronto) and later was picked up for distribution by the HBO network in

America. Another film produced in 2004, *In My Country*, directed by John Boorman and starring the popular African-American actor Samuel Jackson and French actress Juliette Binoche, tells the tale of South Africa's difficult Truth and Reconciliation Commission. According to the official Truth and Reconciliation website, the aims, much like those of *In My Country* were to “enable South Africans to come to terms with their past on a morally accepted basis and to advance the cause of reconciliation.”<sup>174</sup> Despite *In My Country* being co-produced with American money and starring two global stars, it did modestly well in pan-Africa, and outsold many Hollywood imports that year in South Africa alone.

The above examples show notions of transnationality that constitute a diverse practice of filmmaking in South Africa. Moreover, transnationalism as a way to describe recent South African film has yet to be applied to its new blood of filmmakers, directors like Blomkamp and, before him, Gavin Hood. This is evident in recent scholarship dealing with post-apartheid South African film. And while South African film scholars have recently focused on violence, fewer have contemplated economic development and the consequences of decolonization as a form of violence.<sup>175</sup> Lindiwe Dovey's *African Film and Literature: Adapting Violence to the Screen* (2009) is one interesting example where trauma theory is deployed but little time is spent on the economic factors involved in older practices of oppressive labour, known as *chibalo* in Southern Africa, to newer class struggles inherent to South Africa's post-apartheid, neoliberal turn. Elsewhere, Kenneth W. Harrow's *Postcolonial African Cinema: from political engagement to postmodernism* (2007) seeks a radical rethinking in terms of how we theorize African films, and not with how violence—both allegorically and epistemologically is connected

to African capitalism.<sup>176</sup> Both Dovey and Harrow's interpretation of the postcolonial condition is, in itself, valuable yet both studies lack an explanation for the twin-nature of violence, that I see linked to class struggle. The double nature of violence to both embody the economic success of the film, while such violence is also found within the diegesis becomes a declaration of underdevelopment by neoliberalism, and is a profound angle to expound upon. An example of the twin nature of violence can be found in not only *District 9* but also Gavin Hood's South African gangster tale *Tsotsi* (2005). In *Tsotsi* there is a combination of *Boyz in the Hood* violence (John Singleton's 1991 Los Angeles gangland drama, which has now become a transnational template of sorts) with post-apartheid classism, as staged between its new centre (black South African yuppies) and old periphery (the remaining black underclasses). Both elements are dealt with in the diegesis—stylized violence (e.g. a stabbing on a train set to hip hop beats) alongside the theme of redemption. Hood in many ways validates the complex class dynamics of black South Africans via the sadism of its central character. Yet before I get to *Tsotsi* in detail, I see the broader use of violence as coming to negotiate a commercial pulse with socio-economic undercurrents to a wider black South African audience.

The closest quasi-materialist reflection on developmental pains and its permeation into national film is Lucia Saks's book, *Cinema in a Democratic South Africa: The Race for Representation* (2010). In it, Saks claims that "South African cinema...has never reached wide audiences locally or globally."<sup>177</sup> Her bleak appraisal of South African cinema is based on several interconnected factors. The most glaring one is industrial. Because the country lacks a centralized film-producing infrastructure—and with no sign of a Hollywood in Johannesburg materializing any time soon—post-

apartheid culture in South Africa has been troubled by funding mismanagement and capital being shifted away from the arts sectors. Only a handful of big-budget films were produced during the democratic nineties and noughties.<sup>178</sup> Nevertheless, the lack of large-scale film production does not reflect the desire by film people to create a unified and cohesive commercial industry, which has, and continues to be, an elusive end goal for filmmakers in the country. I think it is important to expand Sak's scholarship to include more *populist*, and by this I mean thematically and generically palatable post-apartheid science fiction and gangster filmmaking into the country's cinema matrix. Such wide appeal to different ethnic, national, and international audiences establishes films such as *Tsotsi*, *District 9* among others as a burgeoning genre in the country over the last few years. These films above *have* penetrated the multiracial and geographical coordinates within the national borders of South Africa, while encircling the globe via their transnational appeal and hybridity as texts. However, this type of transnationalism is specific and part of a larger typology that has gathered increasing significance.

#### **IV. Nation, Representation and Hybridity in South Africa**

When the Nelson Mandela administration asked for new cinematic expressions in South Africa in the mid-nineties, they received a kaleidoscope of film genres, styles and politics in the wake of their election victory. The high levels of cultural production came after the dissolution of apartheid laws and "the first democratic, non-racial elections that brought in the ANC (African National Congress) in 1994," which provided "a moment of nationalism when both television and cinema were called upon to perform in the name of the nation, to address the nation as one within a multicultural diversity, and to bring about healing and oneness between peoples by preaching diversity as central to

human equality. Hence the popular media jingle of those times: *simunye* (we are one).”<sup>179</sup> Yet the strengths as well as difficulties in providing a national voice via film is linked, in my view, to the diversity and density of populations and types of filmmaking found in the post-apartheid context: practices and methodologies that range from amateur collectives (Dv8), to independents who work in digital format (Teddy Mattera), to pan-Africanists (Akin Omotoso), to black South African politicians (Zola Maseko) to white-South African-born-North American-commercially-trained-transnationalists (Gavin Hood and Neill Blomkamp).<sup>180</sup>

Indeed, the era of democracy ushered in by the elections of 1994 promised equality and multiculturalism but these new governments also called on its *griots*/storytellers, artists and filmmakers to dramatically interpret the changes that took place. According to Frank Ukadike, “In broader ideological terms, in African cinema there has been a deliberate attempt to use the film medium as a ‘voice of the people;’” there has been a persistent mandate to interrogate narrative structures so as to develop new strategies for genuine indigenous film practice.”<sup>181</sup> This mandate has been rethought, in the last five years, by white South African directors making films about multi-racial, and now multi-species experiences in Johannesburg. Such changes, however, were supplanted by the historic scaffolding of the past, where the trauma of the last century was intertwined with South Africa’s present. The twentieth century trauma of the bloody union of two conquered Boer republics—the Transvaal and Orange Free State—and two British colonies followed by the racist ideology and divisiveness of apartheid conditions, difficult and disturbing experiences by any measure, was asked to be reconciled by the Mandela, and later, Mbeki governments. “The conflation of the past

and the present,” writes Mybe Cham in her theorization of contemporary African cinema, more broadly finds form “in the story of production, distribution and exhibition” as “a revealing and instructive aspect of African creativity and resilience.”<sup>182</sup>

Cinematic expression represents just one way to conceive national trauma in a diagnostic way; yet, it is one of most enduring mediums to deal with such historicity. A key film in this context is *Night and Fog/Nuit et brouillard* (1955) by Alain Resnais. This hauntingly poetic documentary probes several abandoned Nazi concentration camps by mixing present day footage with archival material in an essayist-style format. Resnais’s film examines various internment facilities and what we now recollect as its grim iconographic elements: barbed wire fences, gas chambers, and stacks of human bodies. Indeed, over the years this has come to connote the monstrous ideology and ethereal trace of mid-twentieth century Nazism. And it is this mode of historical probing of another atrocity, I would argue, that has been taken up by certain newer filmmakers in South Africa, particularly Hood and Blomkamp. Their excoriating allegories invite South Africans, to varying degrees, to think about traumatic moments like the legalization of apartheid law and the juridical residues that continue to separate black South African classes. Laws like the Development Regulations in 1993 or the Land Use Management in 2010 have attempted to sell off or redevelop sections or whole townships to better the urban experience in wider Johannesburg.<sup>183</sup> However, despite the initiative to improve well-being and community standards of long-time residents, many have found they were unable to keep up with the legal status of their land or were (and still are) priced out due to rent increases by local or international realty agencies.



The combination of legal separation of black inhabitants and gentrification is allegorized, to some degree, in Hood's *Tsotsi*, which serves as an illustrative example.

*Tsotsi*, a word which means “gangster” in Zulu-slang, focuses, in part, on the literal and metaphorical systems of economic and legal separation for David, aka Tsotsi. As the film's central protagonist, he is kept from making it out of the Alexandra ghetto, located on the outskirts of Johannesburg. Hood accomplishes this spatial fixity by staging David's socio-economic travails by way of barriers: the distance between urban centre and Soweto that David must contend with daily; the linguistic differences between David and the middle-class women he carjacks; the electric gate that guards against as well as separates David and the wealthier classes on a number of levels (physical, social, legal, economic). By the conclusion of the film, David confronts his alter ego by giving the child he unwittingly abducts back to his mother, and surrenders to a new formed hierarchy. The separation found in *Tsotsi*, between black classes in the film have been complicated by neoliberal policies in the post-apartheid epoch, something I will argue features more than intermittently in *District 9*.

These filmic residues of separation can be viewed from another perspective, too. *District 9* reveals both spatial and social inequality as they persist, even today, as a recalcitrant mutation of the same crisis facing the ANC: sustained urban poverty. Like a specter, past apartheid laws, of note, the Urban Areas Act of 1955 that permitted the removal of black people who were living as servants in white areas and in the townships, has since mutated more potently before the collapse of the National Party and apartheid

in 1991. This legal action I am referring to was District 6. According to the content published on the District 6 Museum website:

District Six was named the Sixth Municipal District of Cape Town in 1867. Originally established as a mixed community of freed slaves, merchants, artisans, labourers and immigrants, District Six was a vibrant centre with close links to the city and the port. By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, the process of removals and marginalization had begun. The first to be 'resettled' were black South Africans, forcibly displaced from the District in 1901. As the more prosperous moved away to the suburbs, the area became a neglected ward of Cape Town. In 1966 it was declared a white area under the Group Areas Act of 1950.<sup>184</sup>

By 1982, the most aggressive removal stage began, as black residents were forcibly removed from their homes which triggered much violence; and the registers of social strife in images of squatters clinging to scraps of debris and garbage, resonate, I believe, in *Tsotsi* and in *District 9*'s mise-en-scène. Both films articulate the nuances of class and economic stasis for its black (and alien) characters. At the same time, both films are explicitly and implicitly concerned with social and cultural volatility post-1994 in the Mandela years: prejudice (to varying degrees), multiculturalism, urban degradation, and, most judiciously mined, echoes of the District 6 riots, particularly in *District 9*'s scenes of eviction and urban combat.

This riotous reality becomes a historical trope in these two films, texts that engage “with memory work and history...retelling the African past and of looking at the present in the past from their own diverse subject positions.”<sup>185</sup> Yet both do so in different ways. *Tsotsi*'s realism is a social realism that is analogous to the decaying environment it represents, Alexandra shanties where Hood filmed; while *District 9*'s realism, by contrast, is a digital realism that goes beyond this model of representation

and is more aesthetically and narratologically concerned with reconciling the difficult projections of disguised and displaced anxieties about lower classes in Johannesburg. In other words, *District 9* entertains visually, and according to the codes of contemporary action cinema, but without losing its subtext: the impoverishment of the lower classes and the divisions among them.

If the juxtaposition of neoliberal poverty and digital realism via the *Halo* visual tableau can be read as a sleight-of-hand tactic to interpret the historical remnants of apartheid class suppression, so too, can the digitized aliens. But the strength of the film is that it is not just about the remnants of apartheid, but also about the post-apartheid influx of migrants from the rest of Africa (explicitly represented in the film by the Nigerian gangsters). In that sense, the collaboration of black and white South Africans to remove the aliens is quite realistic. Nevertheless, the decision to move away from direct representations of current and past black South African racial inferiority must be seen as deliberate: *District 9* uses digitized aliens, creatures that resemble seafloor Crustaceans, to comment obliquely on the residues of racism still encountered by black South Africans living in Johannesburg today. Here Blomkamp flirts with the legacy of apartheid in the post-apartheid present. I see in other expressive mediums, for example Art Spiegelman's graphic novel, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* confronting a similar type of trauma. Spiegelman's graphic novel chronicles his father's life during the Holocaust, illustrating this tale by using mice to represent the persecuted Jews and cats to represent non-Jewish Germans. Seizing the popular culture medium to historicize the Nazi atrocities against its European Jewry—I would argue the graphic novel does not debase the magnitude of injustices committed against this minority community but rather

exemplifies newer means (postmodern comic) to communicate a type of historical trauma. The extraterrestrials in *District 9* can be understood much like the mice in *Maus*. Blomkamp's substitution of South African blacks (but also African immigrants) for extraterrestrials illustrates a newer, technologically more sophisticated metaphor to locate dramatically the still occurring imbalances in South Africa. The hybrid combination of CGI aliens, layered on top of the legacy of racial discrimination still felt in the post-apartheid epoch, allows for the doubleness of these aliens as they are mapped onto a changing social sphere. The extraterrestrials in *District 9* constitute both suffering trans-galactic figures (who can be interpreted as doubling for Zimbabwean immigrants in real world South Africa), while at the same time, antagonists to other outsiders—in this regard—immigrant Nigerians. The immigration of Nigerians to large metropolitan areas such as Johannesburg constitutes one of the largest diasporic communities in South Africa. However, their presence has been met with mistrust, apprehension and xenophobia by a number of nationals. Compounding the prejudice shown toward Nigerians is South African media's obsession with portraying and covering stories of cult practices (animal slaughtering in residential areas, black magic, even belief in zombies) to high-tech pyramid schemes (empty stock options to straight-out swindles on the public) that Blomkamp envisions with little sensitivity. In *District 9* the Nigerians are played as villainous gangsters, living in squalor and robbing from those around them and exploiting the extraterrestrials themselves. If one was to grant Blomkamp some leeway in his misrepresentations than these Nigerian archetypes in the film build on spectacle images and spectacle politics. They are the action film villains and the clearly less contemplated and narrativized as characters than the extraterrestrials.

On a global level, these extraterrestrials share some similarities to other CGI-based alien films—for example, and to name only two: *The Host/Coemul*, (South Korea, 2006) and more recently, *Attack the Block* (UK, 2011). Each foreground their menacing aliens against a troubled homeland to which they arrive: South Korea's homeless problem after the Tiger Market crash on the other hand; South London, with its council estates and jobless teenagers, on the other. Blomkamp's use of wider Johannesburg in *District 9* likewise becomes ground zero for racial and class polarization in his film, a nodal point for the complexities of postcolony South Africa. And it is such broad links between urban degradation and science-fiction that put *District 9* in a *hybrid* category. These things, cobbled together, connote the conflicting and hybridizing nature of the film.

I see the formulation of hybridity as best considered in the work of Homi Bhabha. In an essay published with *Critical Inquiry* in 1985, Bhabha writes that “the effect of hybridity—at once a mode of appropriation and of resistance, from the disciplined to the desiring”—is bound up in the most unexpected works of art and degraded cultural forms.<sup>186</sup> Bhabha arrives at this conclusion by analyzing the writings of an Indian catechist named Anund Messeh against that of other colonial literature, namely Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902). Bhabha looks in particular at Messeh's 1817 Missionary Register letter, which describes his encounter with a group of 500 Brahmin under a shaded tree in Delhi. The letter reveals that Messeh pleads with the Brahmin to be baptized in accordance with English Evangelism—and Messeh, unaware of the group's curiosity toward the traditions and customs of Evangelical Christianity—finds that the group is willing to the baptism but on one condition. They refuse the Sacrament

on the grounds that it involves eating cow flesh, which goes against their indigenous customs. Bhabha asserts that English colonialism and its writing, in this case the Bible, are at once nationalist devices in an expansionist epigone, educational literature about Western normative ideals but at the same time, an ambivalent text of authority.<sup>187</sup> The Bible in this context exemplifies a dull sense of formal power, which connotes the underlying colonial subtext, however benign. In this way, hybridity as a postcolonial tool for interpreting colonial, anti-colonial and I would argue neocolonial literature is increasingly important, especially when viewing the relevance of this theoretical framework in relation to those still living in the urban periphery of emerging democratic states.

Within the postcolonial discourse, “Hybridity then, is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects.”<sup>188</sup> Bhabha’s trenchant ideas about colonial identity’s effects can be updated, as I do here, to interpret post-apartheid science fiction—a new genre, and one that reencounters and mimics older forms of institutional racism under apartheid, acting as a belated register in South African culture today. Neil Lazarus and E. San Juan Jr., have argued that postcolonial discourses ought to be placed within a wider historical materialist framework, which, I believe, is necessary to guide Bhabha’s painful straining toward an analysis detached from critiques of the capitalist system, and in the process, show the urgency of a systematic deduction of history, where I direct the reader here to my rehearsal of the key particulars of such a turn to “bring capital back in,” something I did in the introduction to this thesis.<sup>189</sup>

In light of this, my intervention into merging postcolonial theory with historical materialism must work together to critique two ongoing problems in South Africa—xenophobia and urban zoning as class divider—my analysis, therefore, will consider these two larger strands, which intensified under neoliberalism and mark not only the South African post-apartheid imaginary but double as the extremity the humans and aliens must face in the film. 1. Xenophobia is something I see attached to neoliberal austerity measures in South Africa. As most countries in the new millennium work to adjust to fiscal reductions and public sector cuts, the scapegoat of these shrinking economies often becomes the immigrant worker, new to a particular country. Like Greece, for example, with its illegal immigrants and rise in crime over the last 4 years, Zimbabweans and Nigerians as newcomers to South Africa face similar contempt, due in part to neoliberal reform and job loss that often leads to the resentment of non-nationals, a phenomenon of fear and cultural exceptionalism. 2. Johannesburg is a city that promotes a type of democratic unevenness through spatial and institutional zoning, which is conceptualized in *District 9* with incredible accuracy. The familiar Soweto shantytowns outside of Johannesburg become zones of despair in *District 9*, reminding audiences of real world indifference to these spaces by allegorizing it through extraterrestrials subordinate to multinational neoliberal modernity.

The overarching objective of this chapter is thus to demonstrate how these two above tenets are concerns within Blomkamp's fictional realm of oppression. Consequently, the two scenes I submit to close textual analysis are reflections on the representations of both aliens and humans and a reading of the Chiawelo mise-en-scène, as opposed to a prolonged appreciation of the film's formal style. Drawing from political theorists,

geographers/urbanists, and film theorists, these discursive fields will help underpin my case study of *District 9* and communicate how xenophobia and urban zoning are embroidered into this so-called sci-fi action film.

## **V. Neoliberalism and the Alien Precarians in *District 9***

Early into Nelson Mandela's presidency he faced accusations from within the ANC ranks of being a neoliberal turncoat. Mandela, having reduced worker empowerment considerably, despite a Keynesian alternative that was set out in the *Social Equity and Job Creation* (COSATU) in 1996, was largely ignored. According to Richard Peet this "advocated an expansion of the social wage through mass housing financed through public borrowing, a national health programme, all-embracing social security, and job creation" that never materialized into policy.<sup>190</sup> The decision to push for sustained growth at 6% and the initiative for an outward-oriented economy crushed, for many, the utopian vision of a rainbow South Africa. It seemed what Mandela spoke of while the country was in political transition was now far off for many as its economic policies hardened. Many black South Africans, who sought basic employment security and who were largely dispossessed under apartheid law now faced the reality of being part of the "flexible" labour market. This provocative move was modeled after what Peet correctly highlights as "neoliberal structural adjustment policies outlined by the World Bank and the IMF" in the mid-1990s.<sup>191</sup>

Later, under Thabo Mbeki things only worsened for many of the black lower classes. Marais provides the empirical evidence for the ghastly reality facing black workers:



The number of working poor has increased markedly. Using a purchasing power parity USD 2 per day poverty line, Casale et al (2004) calculated that the number of employed workers living in poverty increased from just over 900,000 in 1995 to about two million in 2003. One quarter of them were deemed self-employed. Of the 18 million people living below the poverty line in 2004, four million lived in about 700,000 households that contained at least one income earner (Meth, 2006). Most—but not all—of those workers toiled in the informal sector, with scant or no regulatory protection. Almost half (43%) of domestic workers earned less than R 500 a month (USD 62) in the mid-2000s, as did one third of other workers employed in the informal sector...Driving these trends are two factors: the sustained shift towards the use of casual and subcontracted labour, and the related decline in real wages for low-skilled workers.<sup>192</sup>

With the shift to urban development, the shades of neoliberalism in Johannesburg intensified, causing and encouraging not the rectification or disappearance of urban deprivation but the regulation of such conditions. And the instability of the job market protracted job security further, leading to unemployment in the nineties despite the country's successes in the financial sector and privatization of public utilities like electricity, though not without fierce resistance in some cases. Indeed, as cultural anthropologist Anne-Maria Makhulu observes in her historical survey of peripheral urban development from the post-war to the free market periods in Johannesburg, "while apartheid explicitly promoted housing scarcity through reductions to the black social wage, neoliberalism has tended to encourage poverty enabling or alleviating policies that seek less to replace slums and shantytowns than to 'improve' them as a less ambitious goal of public and private intervention."<sup>193</sup> Makhulu and others see this as a specifically Hernando de Soto initiative.

De Soto, a neoliberal economist at the Institute for Liberty and Democracy which he created in Lima, Peru, has since the mid-nineties encouraged urban inhabitants in wider Latin America to turn themselves into micro-entrepreneurs. The Institute has

championed access to capital for small business in Lima, where merchants take out high-interest loans to finance anything from vendor food carts to small restaurants. But the little surplus generated in the economy and the difficult repayment options available to borrowers left many defaulting on their loans. Indeed, much the same has happened in Johannesburg with micro-businesses models similar to Lima: small food stalls, grocery shops, and clothing depots were encouraged but faced a similar economic downturn. The National Small Business Act, passed in 1996, was one government venture initially lauded in the South African media because it provided loans to many small businesses to capitalize their investments. Trouble emerged, however, as these loans were opened up to private, small firm banks.<sup>194</sup> Repackaged via small bank loans from private lenders rather than government agencies, with no locked in interest rates, saw many black South Africans defaulted on repayment during the early 2000s.<sup>195</sup> Equally, barriers to small businesses such as low employment and little retail experiences also exacerbated the problems. *Star* and *City Press* newspapers ran many features in the late 1990s of individual entrepreneurs and their problems sustaining healthy businesses. Such examples underscore the increasingly “underserved” by “the push to privatize” in places like Lima and Johannesburg, that conflict with de Soto’s rosy analysis about micro-entrepreneurialism.<sup>196</sup>

Still, others blame failed businesses on occult economic practices. Indeed, many unorthodox businesses have become part and parcel of the lax regulation in neoliberal South Africa. Jean and John Comaroff have focused on these occult economies in their ethnographic work on the post-apartheid period. Their ideas resonate with the traditions of scams and “illicit accumulation” in cities like Johannesburg. These illegitimate

pyramid schemes, including the macabre selling of animal and human body parts also find loose association in *District 9*. Jean and John Comaroff provide a picture of this variegated form of neoliberalism as it dissolves into indigenous traditions and crime:

Postcolonial South Africa, like other post-revolutionary societies, appears to have witnessed a dramatic rise in occult economies: in the deployment, real and imagined, of magical means for material ends. These embrace a wide range of phenomena, from “ritual murder,” the sale of body parts, and the putative production of zombies to pyramid schemes and other financial scams. And they have led, in many places, to violent reactions against people accused of illicit accumulation.<sup>197</sup>

The doomed-to-fail business practices and money magic schemes mentioned above by the Comaroff’s are in some way fictionalized in *District 9*. Blomkamp presents these realities by way of extraterrestrial joblessness and the illegal schemes they fall prey to. These citizens from below, a social group similar to those found in 18<sup>th</sup> century Berlin, Turin or Manchester, are now reanimated in this 21<sup>st</sup> century narrative. In several fleeting moments in *District 9*, we see the extraterrestrials trying to purchase cat food from Nigerians at ridiculously inflated prices. They are presented as haggling over the food with gun-waving Nigerians, forcing them to pay either through addiction or threat of physical harm. In other brief interludes, we see Nigerians selling slaughtered animal parts to hungry extraterrestrials. Ravenous, some are seen running off with their food or even devouring it on the spot. These interludes are not just a nod to occult economies in *District 9*, but a bona fide cultural reference to real problems with the mixing of magical superstition and neoliberal opportunism. Put differently, Hilton Judin writes that there is in Johannesburg a dual economy, rural and urban, and that “many versions with distinct customs, beliefs, desires, stories, and organised environments that can never be traveling in any one direction.”<sup>198</sup>

The extraterrestrial urbanites of *District 9* are also forced to perform the most desperate acts: begging, scavenging, crime and prostitution. Some scenes show female aliens paraded around for what appears to be an exposé, featuring black bars that cover genitalia like those found on 6PM newscasts. In other, more lurid images, humans can be seen having sex with aliens. Such moments of sexual explicitness in *District 9*, particularly its portrayal of prostitution, is a filmic reality of other world cinema texts, too. For instance, *Dirty Pretty Things* (Stephen Frears, 2002) looks at illegal UK immigration and the detrimental experiences of those at the very bottom of urban service industry. This tale focuses on millennial London, where a Turkish illegal, Senay (Audrey Tautou), is employed in a garment factory after being fired from her hotel job. Once on site she is immediately put in a compromising position, as her new boss demands sexual favors in exchange for continued illegal employment. While in Johannesburg, and in *District 9*, smaller zonal centres like the shantytowns house aliens who face deplorable and powerless contracts, beyond their control and a central problem in Blomkamp's narrative. In a slightly different way, while the characters in *Dirty Pretty Things* struggle to keep afloat, in *District 9*, there is no obvious employment for the extraterrestrials (the film does not show nor comment on their labour). Instead, the extraterrestrials exist largely as scabrous bottom-feeders, given limited state subsidy to live on. In many ways, these extraterrestrial precarians are in much worse off shape than Frears's hotel workers, prostitutes and hospital orderlies. They have no visible use value and produce next to nothing as labourers, and wear precarians rags or tattered clothing they find in the trash—suggesting the most basic underclass in this fictional South African society. They drudge out a living as stateless and worldless immigrants, a

problem which is amplified in host countries where real world immigrants face constant deportation.

Moreover, *District 9*'s extraterrestrial precarianss can also be tied to a displaced class, signaling the *dirempt* nature of the term. Their subsistence relies upon scavenging and individual pursuits (some fetishize discarded objects like women's clothes or cat food)—a situation that allows one to think of these creatures as a helpless class. They are what Makhulu calls new subjects—individuals “shaped not so much by practices of consumption as by self-abnegation (or negative consumption)—they are not only moral or rational but have a highly pragmatic orientation to the lived world.”<sup>199</sup> In the first half of the film, extraterrestrial Christopher Johnson and his son search to find the missing fuel element to power their command ship. They forage through heaps of discarded rubbish to eventually recover the elusive material—which exemplifies, in this regard, an example of self-abnegation, using rather than consuming. Such hard work to improve their socio-economic condition and return to the mothership occurs not through material consumption but through intelligent gathering. However, Christopher's move away from jobless precarians, highlights the limitless possibilities of this under class species, only realized through solidarity with his son and the most unlikely of fraternal bonds: with Wikus van de Merwe, the film's central protagonist.

## **VI. Ethnic Stereotypes and Xenophobia—Wikus van de Merwe**

The Wikus character in *District 9* is a jovial buffoon, at first. He begins as the foil to and then becomes, the radicalized protagonist of Blomkamp's film. His physical appearance

and gestures are typical of a comfortable but apathetic Afrikaner middle-class manager. And what struck me most about Wikus, at least in the first half of the film, is his living up to the unambitious ideals of the status quo, in what Gramsci long advocated as a “subordinate class.”<sup>200</sup> There is a technique, I think, on Blomkamp’s part to show Wikus’s subordination through costume. In the film he appears almost boyish, wearing beige chino pants and a pale-coloured short-sleeve shirt, matched by a greasy but neatly parted hairstyle—a naiveté uniform and style of sorts. The audience gathers their first impression of Wikus seconds into the film as he appears overwhelmed by the enormity of the mass-scale eviction he is about to oversee. The various cuts in opening of *District 9* show Wikus bumbling around MNU headquarters, recorded by a cameraman on the day of eviction as the units prepare to mobilize toward District 9. One can discern from Wikus’s mannerisms that he is tense about the political implications of the illegal land seizures; and to cover his nervousness and any political apprehension, Wikus preoccupies himself with flat, ill-timed jokes that fail to lighten the mood.

Such dopey traits fall in line with the Wikus surname, which is an important cultural reference in South Africa: “van de Merwe” is a generic name given to characters who are the butt of ethnic jokes against Afrikaners. In general these are spoken by black South Africans about white South Africans and the witticism is so popular that hundreds of blogs provide different variations. Some examples can be found below:

‘South African jokes make use of a named stereotype: van der Merwe. “van der Merwe” is a common enough Afrikaans surname, from the Dutch “from the Merwe”, the Merwede (or Merwe) river being near Dordrecht in Holland.

*How do you confuse van der Merwe?  
Give him two shovels and tell him to take his pick.*

The jokes are often the standard repertoire adapted to local tastes. Van der Merwe jokes are a fairly juvenile pleasure.

*"These rooinecke are not so bad when you get to know them," said Van on return from a visit to England.*

*"Hey, they take you home, share their bed with you and give you breakfast in the morning - all for no charge."*

*"Did that really happen to you, Van?" asked van Tonder.*

*"No, but it happened to my sister," said Van.<sup>201</sup>*

Such colloquial, and at times distasteful, jokes fill *District 9*'s dialogue exchanges. In particular, Wikus's gross mistreatment of the aliens is important. An extreme case is found in one of the scenes of eviction, where Wikus displays complete disregard for the new species and their incubating (and un-hatched) alien foetuses. He demonstrates for the camera how to abort one of the 40 eggs found in a JV-766 shanty shack by pulling out its incubation feeder, cutting off the alien from its food supply. He then radios for ground support, whereupon a soldier arrives and torches the shanty hut with a flame-thrower. Once set alight, Wikus makes the following callous remarks:

Wikus: "To go in and abort each egg one at a time would take a very long time. So this makes a lot of sense." [referring to burning the hut with the unborn foetuses inside]

Wikus: "Do you hear that?" [asking his eviction team and the cameraman if they hear the noise]

Wikus: "That's a popping sound that you're hearing. It's almost like a popcorn. What the egg does is, it pops up. The little guy, what's left of him, pops out there. So that's the sound that you are hearing with the popping."

Wikus complete lack of compassion to this specicide is appalling, even in the fictional context. This is, Wikus's most unsympathetic, in fact debauched point in the film. But his behaviour also points to the absolute fetishization of time as a neoliberal ideal.

Wikus is thus a poster child for time management and the clock watching in the allegory of *District 9*. In a larger sense, the rapid pace of the film hints at the speed of Wikus's

professional, biological, social and political metamorphosis on the one hand (Evolving from once cold and bigoted middle manager, to eventual alien). While on the other hand, Wikus becomes conscious of the severe inequality grasped from his new underclass perspective and treatment by his former capitalist employer.

Time is also a central tenet of neoliberalism. Broadly speaking, managerial efficiency is connected to time management, and it is no surprise that Wikus's character is complicit in rushing the eviction process to completion. Historically, and relating the managerial figure of Wikus to a neoliberal common denominator, there is a consensus amongst scholars that the manager has been given increased power over the last 30 years. In the United States, several laws were passed under Clinton that increased management's discretion to hire and fire employees with little legal recourse. In more extreme cases, corporate spies have been hired to literally survey and track a supposedly underperforming employee by counting minutes spent on given daily tasks to clocking bathroom and lunch breaks to the second. And this power shift has been directed toward reducing and in some cases rendering unions impotent in labour relations. Such a shift is and continues to be a worldwide phenomenon. The most illustrative examples are: The 1980 and 1982 Employment Acts in the UK which made solidarity acts illegal and large demonstrations such to criminalization; while the United States Air Traffic Controllers in the Aviation sector dealt with similar conditions, while Pinochet's continuous professionalization of the middle class at the expense of the working classes in Chile is on-going, beginning in the early eighties as well. Fast-forward to today, and the new millennium has seen the anti-union climate only worsen in developing countries like China, Brazil and parts of Africa.



The problems such as unbalanced management, friction with clients and extreme insensitivity are similar in *District 9*. No doubt the neoliberal characteristics found via Wikus's micromanaging of projects, one of thousands for the company, and, in this instance, his and MNU's inhuman demands on levels of productivity during the eviction, led to the specicide. Ultimately the specicide found in this scene characterizes Wikus's managerial disregard for the unborn fetuses which he relegates to just another policy in the name of effectiveness and cost saving for MNU. To be sure, Wikus is an absurd example of the vigorous role played by neoliberal management. Or to put it more succinctly, what Beverly Silver sees as the "constantly revolutionizing production and social relations" found in the global workplace that Wikus is representative of in some small way.<sup>202</sup> Conversely, time allows Wikus to abandon his profession, initially not by choice but through his own reluctance. And by film end, Wikus is much more aware of the socio-economic inequality he once legitimized in his corporate role at MNU, gleaned from his polarized position.

Faced with the seemingly unethical position Wikus upholds, Zborowski problematizes, and ultimately condemns, the Afrikaner.<sup>203</sup> Yet Zborowski faults the film for not moralizing Wikus enough, typical of an analysis which views the film as *text* rather than *social text*. Zborowski throws up for discussion the visual language, characterizations, and narrative in *District 9*, but leaves insufficient room for deeper contextualizations of South Africa's culture and political economy. His article contends that Wikus's moral traits are flimsy action-film fodder, and a character one cannot "believe in or value." However, in my view, he misses what Wikus stands in for in the still-tense climate of post-apartheid South Africa: an archetype for the destructiveness of

neoliberalism. It is crucial, in my view, that Zborowski be careful not to read this film as mere generic sci-fi action flick because, as I have begun to outline, socio-economic tensions are rife in this film, and ought to be considered. However, Zborowski insists:

The character of Wikus is left little room to breathe because of the conflicting roles he must fulfill: figure of fun, allegorical pawn, central identification figure. Like the aliens, Wikus is not granted a social existence that we can believe in or value. This makes the home that he wants to return to nothing more than a stock concept, and limits the movie's ability to effectively dramatize a theme that, given its genre and action, is crucial to it — that of identity.<sup>204</sup>

Although Zborowski's reading of the Wikus character is not without merit, allow me to add a further reading. I am of the mind that Blomkamp, as someone from South Africa of certain generation, understands institutional modes of racism, and thus conceptualizes this in Wikus's political and cultural awakening. Indeed, Blomkamp's real-world recognition of race and inequality, his conceptualization of Wikus as a class-consciousless white male, is vital to understanding the film's ideology over racist archetypes against the larger neoliberal landscape. It is an important concept in this chapter because it renews what Immanuel Wallerstein professes as "the consequence of xenophobia" as it surfaces in this sci-fi global cinema text. Wallerstein, who has written extensively on racism and class in South Africa, is instructive for uncovering the racist imprint found in this film. In order to do so I must differentiate between his "hierarchize and partition society," provided in his sociological study of apartheid South Africa from the 1980s, and how some of these concepts are still appropriate in gaining a deeper understanding of *District 9* and its post-apartheid context.<sup>205</sup>

Wallerstein sees collective memory as one way to "draw the parameters of present racism."<sup>206</sup> It is such fluctuation in anti-apartheid culture in the 1980s, due to

political pressure that a lack of black national literature had emerged, and only now can we better sketch such parameters of racism more clearly in the post-apartheid present. In this regard, I see *District 9* building on not only the legacy of anti-racist cinema in the country but also not presuming that racism has indeed ended with apartheid in the early 1990s. Because of Blomkamp's probing of racism, Wikus, becomes an obvious straw man for the guilty white South African in the post-apartheid present. However, Wikus's acquiescence to this separation of new species echoes not only the largely middle class white South Africans who turned a blind eye to racial segregation but also the culture that produces such an oppressive reality.

At various moments in the film, and despite working in the Department of Alien Affairs, Wikus views the extraterrestrials as a consenting group. His use of the derogatory word "prawn" implies, in my view, a racist usage. *District 9* codes the term in the film's dialogue, a term Wikus utters nearly 15 times in the first 20 minutes. But his usage does not connote a hatred for the new species, rather, it registers as a hegemonic slur in the fictional world, one that is normalized, rather problematically, in the semantic usage by Blomkamp's mostly white characters. The importance in drawing attention to the word and use of Prawn is that it has parallels to real-world South Africa, where Blomkamp interrogates the historical baggage of "kaffir", an ethnic slur for black (Zulu) South Africans. The etymology of the term comes from the word "non-believer" and originates from Arabic. In South Africa it connotes a dim-witted and useless black South African and was disseminated amongst apartheid literature, news media, film and television. In a historical context Callinicos avers that kaffir is a "generic term of abuse for all Africans (not just or indeed initially Zulu, since the first Africans whites

encountered in South Africa were Xhosa-speaking), as opposed to Indians, ‘Coloured’, Khoisan, and, of course, whites.’<sup>207</sup>

Perhaps the most troubling filmic portrayal of the “Kaffir” as central character came in the international cult hit *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (1980). Directed by Jamie Uys, the film has received a good deal of derision; particularly apt is Jacqueline Maingard’s recent critical appraisal.<sup>208</sup> She sees the apartheid regime weaving propaganda in the film through supposed satire. And this view is accurate. This apartheid era comedy deploys crude references to pre-modern, tribal culture, spun in the narrative of a Khoikhoi (indigenous tribesman) lost in modern South Africa. The dialogue in the film tries, with little success, to satirize the idea and usage of Kaffir, done similarly but more successfully in America by Spike Lee’s postmodern use of “Nigger” in *Bamboozled* (2002). A similar racist epithet to Kaffir, Lee however, discards irony as yet another way to legitimize Nigger and looks instead to suture not severe the historical resonance of the term to contemporary African Americans and its dissemination and linguistic usage in wider American media (from the Klu Kluk Klan to black comedian David Chappelle). This is masterfully accomplished via the film’s intelligent historiography of the term. Lee draws from US film archives to comment on sustained racist representations via black face and minstrel shows, making a point about the contemporary stereotypes found in media and Hollywood, largely indistinguishable from earlier racist silent-era films—i.e., *The Wooing and Wedding of a Coon* (1904), *The Slave* (1905) to D.W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation* (1915).

In contrast, *The Gods Must Be Crazy* presents a negative and rather unsophisticated parable about indigenous culture in South Africa, and thus fails, despite some humorous moments, to delegitimize the racist stereotypes of the Kaffir. Connecting this to *District 9*, the film's linguistic play on Kaffir, substituting it with Prawn is both ingenious in the way this neologism allows audiences to understand the severity of apartheid culture while at the same time, using science-fiction aliens instead of Uys' Khoikhoi to explore the implications of racial and racist notions of difference.

Now, to move to the film's use of consent, during another scene of alien eviction, after an MNU soldier loses an arm trying to restrain an agitated alien, Wikus opens a bag full of cat food and throws a tin to the violent alien. The voiceover from one of the interviewees claims the addiction is so strong that it is much like catnip for felines. Yet Wikus' action in this scene—looking to contain and then coerce signatures for so-called legal evictions—harks back to the Cape Town evictions in District 8 starting in 1968.

Indeed, the whole eviction in *District 9* is a clear allegory for the brutal 1968 campaign to move black South Africans to a different zone, farther away from city-centre Johannesburg. I see the role of Wikus as white middle manager and his use of coercion to achieve MNU's tactical goal of removal from the shantytown as a form of soft power communicated via this film. Yet, on the other hand, when Wikus' form of soft power fails (duping signatures or preying on addiction or ineptitude), neoliberal mercenaries are brought in to advocate and use more hard-line approaches—similar to those used by Cape Town riot police in 1968. The riots occurred due to police violence against the black South African community when clearing of areas occurred. The

aggressive evictions exist today as a crucial endnote in apartheid oppression. In real and fictional worlds, police and mercenaries use different containment strategies when self-eviction fails. The MNU mercenaries are governed by and thus contain the extraterrestrial species through deadly force. The scenes of eviction illustrate one form of containment as ground forces raid District 9 and encircle the area by helicopter and monitor it by bird's eye remote CCTV cameras. We sometimes get views of eviction through black and white closed circuit cameras, reinforcing the panopticon culture present in fictional (and real) South Africa. When surveillance and the threat of violence are resisted by the extraterrestrials, they are either warned or shot dead. In the case of Christopher Johnson's friend he is killed and thus exemplifies the use of deadly force to regulate the population. The shooting occurs when Christopher Johnson's friend is questioned by Wikus for supposed gang affiliation and, under duress, suddenly attacks one of the MNU security officers, which then triggers a mercenary sniper to kill him. Such social control intensifies as the narrative pivots on Blomkamp's sci-fi action formula.

Finally, one could also say *District 9* is also careful not to place any black South African characters in compromising roles. Indeed, the few black actors given speaking lines mostly make up Wikus' eviction team—Fundiswa Mhlanga (Mandla Gaduka) and Thomas (Kenneth Nkosi). These sequences find the most interaction between Wikus and the black urban South Africans. In this regard, the political correctness of the film is somewhat heavy-handed but it does not deter the film's exploration, in populist rather than polemical terms, of the immigration and subsequent xenophobic conditions inherited to the post-apartheid era. In the final section of this chapter, I would like to

consider more fully the annexed spaces of oppression *District 9* models a new, yet grotesque cityscape.

## VII. Deprivation and the Chiawelo shantyscape

In the last section of this chapter, I turn to an analysis of the Chiawelo shantyscape and one modernist building found in *District 9*'s mise-en-scène. Specifically, I am interested in the sweeping aerial shots of shack shanties that occupy a central position in the film and are a mainstay in the cultural tapestry of most South Africans living with this *other* city on their doorstep. The poverty conditions captured in *District 9* also provide the backdrop to other popular entertainment mediums, namely Hip Hop music videos and trendy vernacular photography that appropriate these spaces for little more than commercial gain and street credibility. James Ferguson surmises the contradictory visibility and palatability of the shantytowns in mainstream news and film:

The “New South Africa” has not done away with townships, shanties, or extreme poverty. Indeed, while a prosperous new black middle class is growing, the plight of the urban poor has by many measures actually worsened under the ANC's neoliberal regime and the mass unemployment that has come with it (Terreblanche 2003; Bond 2005; Seekings & Nattrass 2005). But if widespread urban poverty endures, the *image* of South Africa's poorest urban areas, and especially of the vast periurban shanty towns, has changed radically. No longer a scandal or a horror demanding to be exposed and denounced, the poorest sorts of informal housing are now actively celebrated in a clutch of new, glossy coffee table books with titles like *Shack Chic*, whose vivid, colourful images and cheerful text document the creativity, ingenuity, and aesthetic flair of those who build and decorate these makeshift shelters. Upbeat “cultural tours” of Soweto and the Cape Flats are now popular among visitors to South Africa.<sup>209</sup>

Blomkamp, in my opinion tries to avoid the cliché appropriations of the Chiawelo by doubly casting it as sci-fi fantasy-scape and a visually anthropologic rendering of post-

apartheid poverty. Alexandra and Chiawelo are indeed milieu-building wastelands in *Tsotsi* and *District 9*. But I would argue that these two films make statements beyond the tacky Hip Hop videos or street photography that fetishize these lower class makeshift shelters. The geographical specificity of these two shanty townships, are of course unique to twentieth and twenty-first century cinema in South Africa. They challenge, one could argue, Saskia Sassen's notion that all cities relate via their financial interlocked networks. Inversely, however, the predominance of Johannesburg and its fractured realms of commerce and poverty calls to question how globally integrated these townships actually are. *District 9* conceptualizes this division via its unwaged and unused extraterrestrial labourers, what I see as the disconnected sections within a neoliberal autonomous city like Johannesburg. The geography of these wastelands, where destitution is found and is turned into economic opportunity, drives Blomkamp's narrative. "Thus, on the one hand expressions of need and, perhaps even more significantly, of desire—few are immune to fantasies of wealth and conspicuous consumption—echo erratic market speculation; on the other, more modestly, hopes of fulfilling basic needs are increasingly associated in the popular imagination with a concept of work that had far greater currency in the past."<sup>210</sup> The desire to achieve basic standards of living is an overarching concept *District 9* elegantly wrestles with, and it is compounded repeatedly by the constant visualization of the Chiawelo.





Fig. 3.5

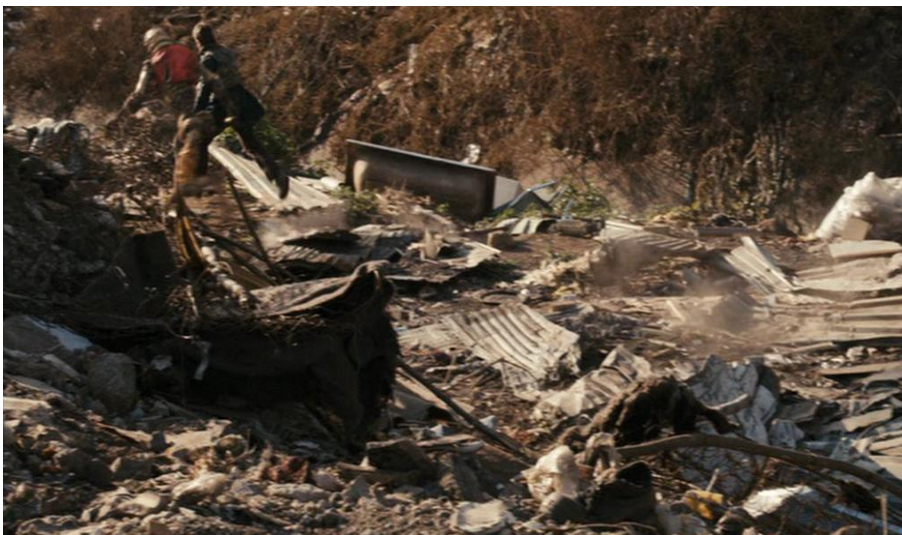


Fig. 3.6



Fig. 3.7

The Chiawelo township is part of the larger Soweto suburban sprawl, an abbreviation for “South Western Townships.” It comprises just one suburban area in a roughly 60 square mile patch of townships that encircle most of Johannesburg city proper. In this regard, think of the banlieues and their relation to metropolitan Paris. In much the same way the Soweto configuration of townships are similar to Paris, at least in centre and periphery terms, yet are architecturally speaking, worlds apart. These Soweto townships in wider Johannesburg are home to nearly 1.4 million inhabitants and make up 35 different suburban residences, ranging from—Braamfischerville to Jabulani to Orlando (once home to Nelson Mandela) to Zola, to name only a few. Each township has its own cultural and economic life and architecturally speaking, are anything but homogenous in form. Some, for example, were built in the 1950s for black labourers and are nothing more than one-story brick and mortar dwellings with two to four rooms for living. These bare-bones “homes” were made visible in Lionel Rogosin’s *Come Back*,

*Africa* (1959) and in Oliver Schmitz's late eighties anti-apartheid film *Mapantsula*.

These homes constitute a more typical but crudely designed and constructed post-war residence. In contemporary Johannesburg, and years later, after Schmitz's successful anti-apartheid film *Mapantsula*, he began filming his second feature in Chiawelo ghetto; *Hijack Stories* (2000), another film dealing with gangsterdom that revolves around criminal tales of car-jacking, which contain unbelievable dialogue and low-budget special effects that have gathered much comment online. However, it is this cheap-looking realism that also attempts to create a spatial and social orientation to Chiawelo. It carries on much of the tradition of the city film via a tactile engagement with this township's ramshackle architecture. The film zooms in on the structures of Chiawelo—shanty huts pieced together with discarded tin, corrugated metal, wood blocks, salvaged doors, bright-coloured tarps and reclaimed window frames. A built space that delights Harvard architects like Rem Koolhaas for its postmodern bric-a-brac “style” but a horror for those forced to live in these dwellings.

Like *Hijack Stories*, *District 9* was also filmed extensively in Chiawelo. Its blemished and colourful shacks grayed down for maximum affect in postproduction. Today shantytowns like Chiawelo have become the cityscape of choice for many directors. As my earlier discussion of Alexandra in *Tsotsi* suggests, the use of the centre (Johannesburg's gated communities for middle class whites and now middle class black residents) and periphery (Alexandra's slum areas, home to a mostly destitute black population) offers a shifting dialectical strategy to convey urban inequality amongst its black community. Such a dialectical approach by Hood underscores the debilitating problems of black class stratification. But I see *District 9* articulating levels of poverty

better; it does so through the urban geography mapped out in Blomkamp's film. We get a sense of the physical edges of Chiawelo but also the scale of these shantytowns. At one point in the film, when Wikus evades capture after his run in with MNU scientist, we see him on top of a hill, flanked by endless gray and white rubbish bleached out by the African sun, trash that fans out in every conceivable direction for miles. Off in the distance, we get a glimpse of the modernist architecture of Johannesburg and the extraterrestrial's hovering space craft. And it is such cinematic framing of Wikus that is crucial to my notion of visualizing poverty.

The violent action found in *District 9*, stitched into the images of incredible destitution relies on the rubbish and shanty shacks to make the battle environment realistic, but, at the same time, these milieu downplay these images of action. After all, the spectator is aware they are seeing poverty as a backdrop as it can be read as both compelling social criticism and art. Indeed, these destitute images draw in the spectator by the rows of corrugated metal that appear otherworldly. In many ways, audiences are exposed to this zone of despair as characters and the narrative get absorbed into this Chiawelo labyrinthine. Impoverishment is what the spectator looks at and is what they are given. Indeed, they are subjected to such conditions that in my view outweigh the momentum of the sci-fi-action plot.

In other scenes, when Wikus begins to operate the battle droid stolen back from the Nigerian drug lords, we get another example of urban rendering as most of this scene is shot either in first person, as Wikus engages his MNU enemies or, of equal interest, diagonal tracking shots of Wikus, in battle droid suit leaping and maneuvering Chiawelo

shacks. The acrobatic cinematography, at moments, zooming in on close-ups of shanty shacks, provides detail through the multi-colour paint, flaking off or the graffiti tags by local gangs, which both heighten the vernacular contours of the mise-en-scène. The cartography of suffering provided in the violent last chapter of this film reinforces the desperation of the film's characters and could be understood as an allegory of African destitution.

Finally, to move from Chiawelo labyrinthine to the modernist skyscraper found in *District 9*, one is struck by the dialectical imagery. The MNU building is a reminder of the efficiency and panoptic-like control of the previous apartheid system and its encroachment on District 9. In the film, for example the MNU building acts as headquarters, which rises above the entire capital, protruding and overshadowing the urban sprawl for miles. Its modernist structure, sleek and functional, also elicits the scope of apartheid, a remnant to systematic bureaucracy; if the shantytown is a hive, buzzing with activity. The MNU corporate headquarters then is a network of approved regulatory procedures that stricture movement and reinforce the eviction process (and in real life sustained apartheid initiatives). Put another way, the MNU building is a structural and architectural landmark in Johannesburg unmistakable and in some ways symbolic of the previous system.





Fig. 3.8



Fig. 3.9

## VIII. Conclusion

*District 9* was in a number of respects a film interested in investigating notions of regulatory control as an extension of economic supremacy in twenty-first century neoliberal Johannesburg, a commentary and political resonance I argued was found beneath, and at times worked with, the superficial action and CGI special effects.

Looking to the synergy of spectacle and political projections, I attempted to identify many real world features as allegories within the film—post-apartheid xenophobia, economic subjugation and urban poverty—that despite the past economic constraints due to colour, “Chicago school” rhetoric over innovation and self-adjustment has replaced white centred nationalism of an older capitalism, but with devastating consequences. Equally, this chapter also demonstrated how *District 9* is still a powerful medium in thinking about the structural, spatial, culture, even subjective failures of post-apartheid South Africa. In the process, the indifferences found by the South Africans in the film carry strong ideological and social signification to the past: the extraterrestrials encode the urban landscape which is then decoded by audiences as they interpret the haunting remnants of racist segregation and urban poverty as now reanimated by immigrant aliens and Nigerians, who experience this inequality in the diegesis. More importantly, via the substitution of subservient extraterrestrials for black South Africans, the film throws up for discussion many discourses over race, politics, remembrance, inequality—tropes in this very palatable world cinema text that seem more perceivable and comprehensible, and reveal decades old problems recalibrated in *District 9*’s sci-fi dystopia; while at the same time, these same tropes equate an almost novel hybrid mash-up, an important new marker in contemporary South African film culture, and an expression of the “industry’s” new found vitality in the works of transnationally-minded Blomkamp (and Hood).

## Chapter 4

### **Made to Serve: Neoliberalism's Social and Psychic Devaluation and the Familial in *The Maid***

#### **I. Introduction**

Jennifer Lopez seems the last person one would expect to play a Queens-based, Upper East Side maid, but she does just this in *Made in Manhattan* (Wayne Wang, 2002). This romantic comedy—built on the Cinderella paradigm sees Lopez's character Marisa Ventura, a hotel cleaner primed for a management position unexpectedly fall in love with a political hopeful, Christopher Marshall (Ralph Fiennes) after a chance encounter and mistaken identity in the Roosevelt Hotel. Soon after, Marisa loses her job for cavorting with Marshall (a hotel guest) and is further chastised by her Catholic mother for the affair. Yet the film ends on a happy note as the audiences find the two together, embarking on their desired careers. *Made in Manhattan* is worth mentioning here for a number of reasons. Given Lopez's real-life entourage of help—rumoured to be a small army of up to twenty assistants ranging from publicists to stylists to buyers (people that catered to the every whim of the Hollywood star)—her commodification of service-based labour seems an odd way to start a chapter on domestic maids and their devaluation. However, if we can get past several nasty stories that surfaced regarding her diva behaviour in the past, then I believe Lopez's role in *Made in Manhattan* is not a stretch for “Jenny from the Block,” considering she was born and raised in the Bronx, New York to working-class Puerto Rican parents. This brings me to a second, more crucial point. Not only does she represent a small but burgeoning Latino community that



has built a presence in Hollywood over the last few decades (though Lopez is clearly less gifted than James Edward Olmos, Benjamin Bratt and Selma Hayek), but she also paints a positive picture of an ambitious and growing Latino community in the United States. Indeed, her modest roots both in reality and in this fictional film make the fantasy aspect of Wang's film more palatable.

In what follows in this chapter I will look not to a transnational Hispanic star like Lopez but rather to a naturalist performance from a Latina regional talent named Catalina Saavedra. Saavedra's acclaimed role in *The Maid/La Nina* (2009) by Chilean director Sebastian Silva portends another version of a Hispanic service worker but this time with a degree of fragility and lugubriousness: Saavedra plays a maid named Raquel who we perceive as wishing to be valued by the family she serves. As a class-conscious film it provides the inverse to the transnational star power of Lopez, in and outside of North and South America. Raquel's seemingly disenchanted view that hard work will bring her mobility and the dream of contentment also differs greatly to Marisa's neoliberal managerial dream in *Maid in Manhattan* (to run a hotel on her own some day). Instead, Raquel seeks an "aching life-making activity;" but is often routinized and worn down due to her live-in position where the film depicts her as prone to contest "every day to merely survive."<sup>211</sup> The film constructs a behavioural realism that subtly comments on class polarity in the post-Pinochet era that was otherwise off limits to critique because of dictatorial censorship in the past. More broadly: "The postdictatorship cultural climate, as in many other Southern Cone countries, has been marked by increased attention to the peripheral, forgotten characters of national history and their often unheard and unseen identities."<sup>212</sup> Despite this increased attention in the

region, the country's devaluation of lower skilled workers within the Chilean class system is still stubbornly persistent.

## **II. Social and Psychological Devaluation**

*The Maid* weaves its narrative web around Raquel's daily activities: waking up, showering, making herself and the family breakfast, packing the children's lunches, cleaning and vacuuming the home, greeting the family after school and work, then serving them dinner before retiring for the evening, having to repeat the same mundane activities the next day. Raquel provides a routinized domestic service for the Valdes family, who accommodate her in a spare room in the guest quarters of their upscale residence in the foothills of Santiago—one of the most stratified cities in Latin America, whereby Silva's tale is one of the first fictional films to address the affective patterns and tricky socio-psychological dynamics of live-in help in the post-Pinochet era. I wish to emphasize what I term "social and psychological devaluation" hinted at in this film and how maids like Raquel reflect the real-life anxieties as well as attachments that go along with the families they serve. Fearful of losing her job and the family she looks after, Raquel (like real-life hired help) experiences the abuses of social and psychological devaluation: the knowledge that there is a surplus of cheap labour ready to replace her at any time, complicated by her obligation to family above all else; she is equally hampered by the docility she must show to her employers to stay in her position until retirement. These neoliberal conditions, or what Aiwah Ong labels "techniques of servitude," are common for domestic servants who must contend with a continuously weakening bond with their employers; and the entitlement these maids feel to care for their family's well-being is a concern that continuously chips away at their sense of self-

worth and respect.<sup>213</sup> This structures a bizarre Hobson's choice. In *The Maid*, there is a "take it or leave it" scenario that Silva narrativizes: Raquel, above all else wants to be given "*consideracion*/understanding and acknowledgement that" she has a life and family of her own; yet under the commodification of her work and the sterility she faces as a live-in maid, the economic relationship outweighs any acknowledgement by the Valdes family.<sup>214</sup> But this is by no means all that Raquel must contend with. In fact, Raquel's Hobson's choice is compounded when the Valdes family decides she needs help sharing the household responsibilities after suffering a serious fainting spell, and while recovering she must work with a rotation of new maids (Mercedes, Sonia and Lucy). But as we come to find out, Raquel is not willing to give up the intimacy she shares with the Valdes, at least not without a fight.

To help structure my thoughts on the social and psychological devaluation of live-in help found in *The Maid*, I wish to weave in Lauren Berlant's notion of normality as an outcome faced by many precarious domestic workers cut from the same cloth as Raquel. Berlant's assumption in her analysis of two precarity films from France—*La Promesse* (1996) and *Rosetta* (1999), both directed by Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne—is refreshing and her analysis gets at what Raquel's character signifies in *The Maid*: the "bare minimum of social recognition" and the desperation felt by all low-skill, immaterial labour not to fall through the cracks.<sup>215</sup> Normality is thus sought to fend off social decomposition as well as to attract attention from her employer, the Valdes family, with whom she has shared over two decades of her life. It is this family that is central to Raquel's sense of worth yet the brutal market rationale implicitly devalues her due to her

working-class roots and her paid not paternal duties to the Valdes family, something I will develop in forthcoming sections.

Much like the characters that appear in the two Dardenne brothers films—a Belgian, an African, a Russian—Raquel is also too late to stave off “hyperexploitation and entrepreneurial atomism”; instead of dying on a construction site, being displaced in a new country or complacent in the exploitation of other labourers as shown in *La Promesse* and *Rosetta*, Silva’s maid succumbs to a slow state of depreciation. Like these precarious domestic workers in *La Promesse* and *Rosetta*, Rachel is kept going by “hegemonic promises about the present and the future experience of social belonging that can be entered in a number of ways” according to Berlant. However, for Raquel all that sadly remains are “affective transactions that take place along the more instrumental ones.”<sup>216</sup> Despite fleeting affiliations and affections by the Valdes family toward her—a birthday celebration, a hug, even a family secret—these moments give way to her social fantasy that despite their mounting distance, she will ostensibly rise above it. Certainly this is a possibility for Raquel, however it becomes obvious that her deteriorating importance to the children she has raised and the children’s parents that employ her will provide no assurances for long-term employment.

### **III. Film History in Chile: A Overview**

Film history in Chile has not yet been given the scholarly attention it deserves in English. Like other national cinemas from Latin America, notably Mexico, Brazil and Argentina, Chile shares a rich cultural practice. Tragically, however, nearly all the films produced from “1902 to the mid-60s have rotted in basements or been melted to recover

the ‘valuable’ nitrate,” which makes the historical recovery of this national cinema difficult. But this physical absence of past films and the lack of an accurate film history have never deterred stubbornly creative individuals from using cinema to document the country's history of popular struggles.<sup>217</sup> Chilean filmmakers followed much of the radicalism enveloping the continent during the late 1960s, however, by the early 1970s many experienced the dissolution of political and artful expressions which had been severed by Pinochet’s authoritarian government.<sup>218</sup> One of the last allegories about underdevelopment and war was *Caliche sangriento/Bloody Nitrate* from 1969 by Helvio Soto. But this content would soon be lost in the civil upheaval in 1973. Because of the small canon of literature on Chilean cinema in Spanish and English before 1970, I would like to focus on cinema from the start of the 1970s and move through to the different generational taxonomies established to provide a cursory picture of film produced under what I am terming “Pinochet’s security state,” (and what little of it there was) and then move directly to the emergent democratic period and cinema since the early 1990s. After this, I will turn to a survey of global cinema films about maids and the social conditions expounded from these features, followed by a close analysis of *The Maid*.

Echoing Chinese cinema scholars’ deployment of a generational taxonomy, though beginning much earlier than the 1960s, the Chilean First Generation (1960-1973) of filmmakers was influenced by Latin American and European cinemas and themes (radical politics from Cuba, neorealism from Italy and the “New Waves” from France, Czechoslovakia and Britain). This body of work consisted largely of continental themes and epic storytelling and included the following directors: Miguel Littin, Raúl Ruiz, Helvio Soto, Patricio Guzmán. The Second Generation (1973-1980) which falls under

what I am calling a “security state cinema” was produced under the thumb of a surveillance network and censorship bureau that harshly limited the possibility to pursue a professional career in film industry if it deviated from the conservative agitprop cultivated under Pinochet. The business tactics of the free market coupled with new working conditions to gradually erode the traditional rhetoric of Latin American cinema in Chilean film; while those that stayed in Chile had to adapt to sanctioned propaganda in film but more so in television production. This generation includes the following directors: Pablo de la Barra, Pedro Chaskel, Alvaro Ramírez and Beatriz González, Sergio Castilla, Claudio Sapiain, Gaston Ancelovici, Orlando Lübbert, Angelina Vázquez, Jorge Fajardo. The Third Generation (1980-1990) consisted of those filmmakers who made work in exile and who had marginally been involved in cinema before 1973. They include: Reinaldo Zambrano, Luis Roberto Vera, Sebastián Alarcón and Luis Mora. Finally, the newest generation, dubbed the Post-Pinochet Generation (1990s-- ) constitutes a radical return to Latin American issues that defer back to Southern Cone dictatorships. Many of these films created remembrance/memory narratives about those that disappeared or vanished under the military junta and include more contemporaneous themes that sought to address democracy, consumerism and queer identity (doubly suppressed under dictatorship and Catholicism in decades past). These post-Pinochet directors include this chapter’s directorial focus on Sebastian Silva as well as Tiziana Panizza and Leighton Aguero, among others.

What follows will be an outlining of Second and Third Generation, ending with a lead-in to the Post-Pinochet Generation. To begin with the Second Generation, the security state was assembled around different, interconnected ideologically apparatuses

(television, radio, film, new print as well as import restrictions on foreign media) but its chief mode of administering public consent was through television. In this era, particularly in the mid-1970s, media manipulation and the maintenance of the Pinochet's militaristic aesthetic was crucial to its hegemony. Following the coup d'état on September 11<sup>th</sup> 1973 and the shelling of the Presidential Palace, the first public announcement at 6 PM was a live televised press conference that sought to immediately legitimize the military's deposing of President Allende. The televisual image arranged Pinochet and his three conspirators-in-arms (other generals), dressed in military uniforms as the country's new hegemons, all sat middle-ground between the camera streaming out to audiences, behind them an oil painting by Jose Gil de Castro of another Chilean revolutionary, Bernardo O'Higgins. This drew a clear association to O'Higgins founding of the Chilean Republic in 1810, when he led the country out of Spain's colonial rule: "the presence of the Father of the Nation symbolically legitimized the new historical protagonists." As Carmen Oquendo-Villar avers, "Through the use of careful camera framing, however, a particular visual relationship was established that placed the other three juntistas into Pinochet's shadow. Proximity to the Father singled out Pinochet as the new leader of the drama, who would become the lone ranger of Chile's mountainous geography, the solidary leader and eager protagonist in what would prove to be a prolonged one-man show."<sup>219</sup>

From this moment on, television, and its immediacy became the key ideological weapon to broadcast major political decisions as well as entertain the public during Pinochet's reign of terror. Pinochet "molded himself into Chile's second liberator" and this role needed a consistent visual language to convince the public of its "national

epic.”<sup>220</sup> For such a fashion conscious *capitania*, Pinochet had encouraged as did his government a business/*Empresa* environment for the television and film industries in Chile. Neoliberal strategies prevailed and a fierce set of standards were put in place where the creative process was reduced to investment return possibilities and financial backers were given unrestricted access to the filmmaking process. Indeed this *carte blanche* strategy was one of efficiency principles that replaced public art initiatives of past decades, not to mention the rescinding of government subsidies for film. Like television, only a patriotic film, with plenty of support through free television propaganda was available to the public. One of the most flagrant examples of propaganda films made under Pinochet was *El Ultimo Grumete/The Last Cabin-Boy* directed by Jorge Lopez Sotomayor which achieved box-office success and is analogous to the farcical American comedies made by Mel Brooks. However its clowning mood seems alarmingly inappropriate when one thinks of the atrocities being carried out in the country when the film premiered in 1983. Such a ludic film can be considered a device to obfuscate stories of disappearance or torture by showing campy playfulness, and *El Ultimo Grumete* implies a time of light-heartedness and folly rather than the security-state reality found outside the narrative.

But *El Ultimo Grumete* was not just a one-off agit-prop film. Rather much of the country’s cultural policy revolved around deterring counter-hegemonic artistic expression vis-a-vis “neutralization” (healthy entertainment), which complemented an unfettered consumption. This agenda of course overshadowed *desaparecidos*/disappearance stories and denied these and other issue-based narratives a place in film and television programming. As a result of such tight-fisted cultural policy,



Marxist film in Latin America and more progressive creative work was eviscerated with suppression of leftist culture in my view, tantamount to the book burning that took place on the first few lawless nights in Santiago after the constitution was suspended in the wake of the coup d'état.

If direct political expression via film was prevented in Chile, then an exilic cinema was developed in Europe by Chileans fearful or absolute in their determination not to return to the junta-run country. Many contend that talent fled the new regime and that their production in exile became the alternative to security state cultural products. One of the most decorated Chilean directors, Raul Ruiz, produced “a body of work, notably in France, which distinguishes him professionally; a story which unfolds infinitely, an opacity peculiar to the fictions of the exile.”<sup>221</sup> Films about the exile of Chileans usually adhere to the following motifs: (a) the unwavering desire of Chileans to return to their country; (b) a lack of adaptation to the environment in which they have come to live; (c) their despairing affirmation of their belonging to Chile through a political rhetoric aimed at the maintenance of noble ideas and utopias; (d) focus on milieu/environment and scenery of their surroundings. These films were dependent on foreign financing and the following institutes became involved in producing Chilean exilic cinema: the National Film Board of Canada, Channel Four in Britain, Das Kleine Fernsehspiel of West Germany, Culture Ministry in France, and Cuba’s ICAIC.

The post-Pinochet cohort of filmmakers faced the arduous task of catching up after decades lost to the authoritarian government as well as questions about what type of cinematic material should populate and take form in the new democracy. The answer

was an assortment of filmic styles, political ideologies and new narratives gaining notice in Latin America and beyond. One of the most interesting cinematic turns relates to polemical documentaries determined to unearth what was suppressed for nearly two decades by the junta. What were once only ineffective whispers about torture in the country fast became a public concern as films were often used to reconcile Chile with its past. In less polemical terms but returning to concepts of class and labour, Silva's *The Maid* shows the persistence of dispossession and devaluation which is far from resolved, even with the gloom lifted and labour rights and representation no longer a taboo subject.

#### **IV. Neoliberalism and Labour in Chile: Pinochet's Reign and its aftermath**

In this section I will historicize the political climate under Pinochet, particularly the regime's aversion to granting labour its own bargaining power under its new economic policy and how different creative energies became manifest in the cultural sphere decades later. Before I delve into the disciplining of labour, I must give a context for the radical changes which occurred in early 1970s that led to labour exploitation and abuse in Chile.

On September 11 1973 a violent coup rocked Chile. That very afternoon the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende was forcibly removed from power and the installment of a right-wing junta regime led by General Augusto Pinochet took its place. The military coup was the first to be televised in Latin America and served an important ideological moment, as it signified Pinochet's authority and legitimacy, on the day, and throughout his dictatorial rule in the country (1973-89). "Media served [as] the

principal scaffold” to hold, disseminate and “manipulate perceptions and ideologies” after the regime took power.<sup>222</sup> Through this and other militaristic and machismo images the regime was imagined and painstakingly chronicled in Chilean media. Decked out in Prussian-inspired military regalia and put on display via parades and army exercises in the 1970s and 1980s, the Pinochet junta was determined to use an aestheticized public spectacle to promote its conservative ideology primarily through the country’s televisual platform. And this became the visual logic of the junta. In more horrendous terms, many of Pinochet’s acts of violence were captured also by photographic images that, in some tragic reversal, served as rare evidence to the military’s atrocities—mutilated bodies subjected to “multiple gun shots and brutal hacking,” imagery that nonetheless incited a state of fear and paranoia in Chile.<sup>223</sup>

This offensive also led to economic violence as atrocities against labour should also be considered in this chapter. Wasting no time after taking power in 1973, the Pinochet regime sought a reversal from state-sponsored socialism in the country. In order to reverse Allende’s road to socialism, the junta argued about whether a neoliberal policy should be implemented. There existed an internal battle between a gradualist approach supported by Fernando Leniz against that of the “Chicago Boys” led by Sergio de Castro and his strong advocacy for neoliberal shock therapy to the Chilean economy. However, in the state of siege period (1973-78), de Castro’s “arrogant certitude” and the “assistance and connection to US and multilateral banks” appealed to the supreme commander as a way to stabilize his regime. This nod to neoliberalism began a quick succession of heavy reprivatisation of nationalized industries, as Pinochet’s policy favored an export economy thought to save Chile from “a half a century of errors.”<sup>224</sup>

From 1974 until the economy's breakdown and brief period of strikes in 1980 "the regime initiated its neoliberal economic policies, including a new set of privatizations and lowered tariffs that detonated a wave of bankruptcies and lay-offs. These hard-line policies were accompanied by the flouting of labour regulations by employers and a failure of state officials to enforce them."<sup>225</sup>

To complicate matters, and in "place of union democracy, Pinochet offered the workers labour gerontocracy: the oldest workers became union officers, usually company men or workers too fearful or feeble to do much more than hold informational meetings that no one attended, write minutes that nobody read, and administer declining social funds. Collective bargaining was banned, as were strikes and union elections."<sup>226</sup> In many ways, this environment for labour discouraged rebellion on the job and prohibited open organizing because of the ban on trade unions that had deterred any work stoppages because of the threat of military force. However, in the face of the anti-working-class climate and knowing the consequences for labour action, many workers' organised strikes and this signaled a return to labour's militancy. But this action was short-lived and only spanned the first two years of the 1980s. With the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 the tides shifted again, despite soaring foreign debt at 17 billion by 1983. Not surprisingly, Chile was back in the good graces of Washington with Jimmy Carter gone and its human rights violations and labour disciplining no longer a concern to the Reagan administration. With another economic slump in the mid-eighties and authoritarianism losing its grip on populist fears, Pinochet put himself up for an eight year expansion of his presidency. The country voted by ballot in a plebiscite and Pinochet lost by a large majority that rejected his proposed constitutional amendment.

Yet even with Pinochet gone by democratic elections in 1989, he was never fully extirpated from Chilean politics and public life. Today, even after his death in 2006 the institutionalization of neoliberal policies and its cultural realities seems a specter the country cannot rid itself of. In fact, much like the rhetorical jingle of the “Third Way” espoused by New Labour under Blair, if you strip away the Giddens’s conception of democracy and equality, the market impact on decisions pertaining to growing social programmes have always prevailed in Britain. In this exchange, however, we find an impulse to bridge liberal social reforms and neoliberalism, perceived as a socially courageous and politically daring maneuver by any standard. But as the Thatcher legacy embedded a neoliberal economic policy into Britain’s political landscape, the Pinochet legacy too, with its perpetuation of free market supremacy above all else, was especially hard to shake. Under both regimes neoliberalism became a permanent clause in Labour’s policy decisions as well as those put forth by the democratically elected Patricio Aylwin in the 1990s. Any attempt to subvert this was an effort to challenge such hegemony. According to Callinicos the Third Way is impossible if there is no “significant redistribution of wealth and income” and such a neologism I believe should be thought of as simply masking neoliberalism’s inattentiveness toward social responsibility. In effect, Callinicos found Blair’s (and Brown’s) claim of the so-called “end of the class war” to be erroneous.<sup>227</sup> And he was right. But we must see the Third Way optimism of the 1990s extending beyond the United Kingdom to the democratic transitions in Chile and Argentina—a variation of the Third Way that materialized in something called “Social Concertation.” Volker Frank, writing on Chile’s political economy in this decade found that the country continued “to follow an aggressive, market-driven,

individualistic, and inegalitarian model of development, despite a decade of centre-left democratic governments pursuing policies of social concertation.”<sup>228</sup> Though social concertation is less aggressive in its rhetoric and violence toward labour than Pinochet’s unlawful policies, President Aylwin’s backtracking on his campaign promises to reverse attacks on labour witnessed instead his institutionalization of measures that limited rights for workers and extended the workweek (similar to Mandela’s false claims to protect labour and South Korea’s cow toeing to harsh labour reforms required by the IMF).

On the surface and under the democratic euphoria experienced in Chile in the early 1990s, labour was governed by flexibility and casualization rather than blatant anti-unionism and human rights violations. “Thus what took place in the 1990s was an ever increasing tendency to substitute permanent contract workers with temporary or subcontracted labour, a lowering of income for the total labour force, a decrease in fixed individual incomes for Chile’s workers, and an increase in incomes tied to productivity gains, bonuses and other incentives.”<sup>229</sup> But how is this encapsulated in filmic representations? The answer might in fact be the stark divisions between classes even after Pinochet, which continues to valorize neoliberal work policies for labour.

What I am interested in demonstrating in *The Maid* is how “even if not explicitly suggested, [the film shows a] community of vertical relations” in post-Pinochet Chile.<sup>230</sup> And such is Pinochet’s legacy, one of trenchant class immobility, even disdain for the working-class Chilean. It is widely held that society changed nearly overnight in Chile; this was due to the transition toward service based professions or

what I see as *de profesion de trabajar*/professionalized work such as banking, medicine, insurance, law and public planning/architecture—all professions linked to immaterial production and services that caused a creative brain drain. Industries such as film and the visual arts were stymied for decades. Perhaps it is no surprise that both the Valdes parents in *The Maid* represent the professional, neoliberal white-collar class in Chile. Pilar Valdes is a university professor at a Santiago university by day and is a wife and mother to the children at night, while Edumido Valdes is an architect by trade and an aloof husband and father when outside his office. In many ways, the narrative builds not just a class distinction between the Valdes family and Raquel but also reinforces this notion in their exchange of dialogue; certain intonations by the characters as they speak in the film are noticeable and elicit what Hardt and Negri call *affective labour*, which relates to class difference and servitude. A lexicon of advantage in the use of expression and argumentation could be equated to the uneven dynamic in the employer-employee relations found between Pilar and Raquel (and a wider symptom of live-in maids in Chile and worldwide). We see in the film Raquel respond to Pilar's requests in prosaic, monosyllabic answers, spoken with a regional dialect that stresses the lack of formal education and her inability to articulate with authority her own appeals or requests.

Unaccustomed to rebuking employers' requests to do work, maids like Raquel know their station and often lay claim to protest in less direct ways (i.e., denying food to other house guests or the family members themselves, waking a family member against their wishes, even hoarding objects from the family they work for). But let me return to this later. In linguistic hegemony held over "the help," many of the conversations between Pilar and Raquel pertain to either Raquel's ailing health or are veiled domestic

requests that both relate to how efficiently she is completing her household tasks. Efficiency in terms of performance seems reasonable however in domestic services with live-in help, it is much more complicated, especially as Raquel's work involves child care, which "produces relationships that fall somewhere between family and employment yet are often regarded as neither. Caught betwixt and between, the domestic worker also finds herself on the losing end of a highly asymmetrical balance of power and privilege between employer and employee. Taken together, these conditions comprise a recipe for abuse and abrupt job endings."<sup>231</sup>

Understood in such a way—"caught betwixt and between"—let me address the linguistic domination present in the opening scene of Raquel's birthday. After a brief set of well wishes on Raquel's forty-first birthday, we find in this scene Raquel looking distraught about the superficial nature of her birthday celebration. She retreats to the kitchen after the children are sent to bed. Pilar follows her and offers to lend a hand to wash up and dry the dinnerware used for the birthday cake. Noticing Raquel is still taking medication for frequent migraines, Pilar makes small talk over the dishes, linguistically dominating the conversation.

Pilar: "Shall I help you, Raquel? You're still having those awful headaches, huh?"

Raquel: "It's nothing. I'm getting old, that's all."

Pilar: "If you're getting old, what's left for me? Oh, Raquel, you've got so much work. I've been thinking that we could hire someone to help you out."

Raquel: "No. No."

Pilar: "Raquel, accept that this house is too big for you. Oh dear. You can't stand anyone, can you? You were the one who kicked Rita out."



Raquel: "She was a thief. Lucas called her the poacher."

[Camila enters the kitchen with a friend.]

Camila: "Raquel, We're going to study all night, so please don't vacuum near my room too early."

Raquel: "Ok."

[Camila's friend wishes Raquel a happy birthday with a kiss. And Raquel shoes away Camila and her friend from the refrigerator.]

Raquel: "Hey Camila, I've got everything tidied up here. Get out."

Camila: "But, Raquel, she's starving."

Raquel: "Sure, since I do the cleaning. She should eat at home."

[Camila's friend pushes Camila to leave the kitchen.]

Camila: "Damn it, Raquel!"

Raquel: "Do whatever you want. And thanks for swearing at me on my birthday."

[Pilar exits the kitchen while Raquel and Camila quarrel.]

This scene is important because it sets up the power relations for rest of the film as it is waged in the kitchen and the entire house between maid, mother and daughter along linguistic and social lines. In more specific terms it shows language as indicative of service commands. Pilar tries to convince Raquel, who is defensive and deflects the subject, that hiring on more help is necessary. Raquel remains silent here, and does not use words to clearly express herself. Instead she mounts an inaudible protest.

Subsequently, Raquel's manner is similar to that of a small child afraid to hear the evitable truth of a situation as she plainly declines the request for help. However, the offer here is not entirely one of generosity and concern for Raquel's health but also a management decision made on Raquel's behalf to level out productivity in the house. It is clear that tasks are not being performed adequately anymore, and Raquel's age is

suggested as the reason why Pilar wishes to hire a new maid. In many ways, Raquel is not “available enough” for the Valdes and this indicates one element of social and psychological devaluation.

Despite the linguistic and educational hegemony held by Pilar and her concern over productivity waning in the home, Raquel is not represented as a passive victim to domestic overwork in the home either. Rather she both manages and counters her exploitation in several ways common to other immaterial labourers pressed into precarious situations. I have and will continue to discuss Raquel’s vulnerability and social and psychological devaluation but let me first return to Lauren Berlant who quotes the Greek sociologists Vassilis Tsianos and Dimitris Papadopoulos and their list of precarity symptoms caused in the production and sustainment of immaterial labour:

(a) vulnerability: the steady experience of flexibility without any form of protection [sic]; (b) hyperactivity: the imperative to accommodate constant availability; (c) simultaneity: the ability to handle at the same [time] the different tempi and velocities of multiple activities; (d) recombination: the crossings between various networks, social spaces, and available resources; (e) post-sexuality: the other as dildo; (f) fluid intimacies: the bodily production of indeterminate gender relations; (g) restlessness: being exposed to an trying to cope with the overabundance of communication, cooperation and interactivity; (h) unsettledness: the continuous experience of mobility across different spaces and time lines; (i) affective exhaustion: emotional exploitation, or, emotion as an important element for the control of employability and multiple dependencies; (j) cunning: able to be deceitful, persistent, opportunistic, a trickster.<sup>232</sup>

To show how these precarious symptoms can be read in *The Maid*, I would like to appropriate several of Tsianos and Papadopoulos’s terms, notably “hyperactivity,” “affective exhaustion” and “cunning” and associate them to actions and responses I see as part of Raquel’s subjectivity in the diegesis. To start with hyperactivity, Raquel is

seen in many scenes frantically trying to complete her tasks: straining to vacuum sofa cushions, stripping dirty bed sheets, washing bathrooms sinks and showers, dusting and scrubbing bathroom tubs to stay ahead of the tasks; in addition to this work she has to prepare breakfast and dinner meals for the Valdes family. She performs all these tasks stooped over as a result of two decades of repetitious service which has led to her poor posture and one assumes arthritis. Not only does this hyperactivity take its toll on Raquel's physical health but about 30 minutes into the film she faints while trying to keep this pace going, a pace not possible for someone in their early forties. In our neoliberal epoch, age and mounting work can potentially kill. Yet hyperactivity is asked of most live-in maids, no matter their age or physical health. One also assumes that Raquel will have these symptoms long after her employment ends and with no pension or healthcare a bleak reality awaits her.

In another important scene, Raquel lays bare her aching need for normality, chiding another maid named Sonia for calling the Valdes family "ingrates." Visibly hurt by the jab at the family leveled by the more brutish Sonia, Raquel explains why she takes pride in the little things, in this instance bringing Lucas and his friend's lunch while they swim in the pool. In my view this is a type of affective exhaustion.

Sonia: "Why do you make such an effort for these ingrates? Just do your job and you'll be happier."

Raquel: "I am happy."

Sonia: "With someone else's kids? Before you know it they've grown up...they're gone and they don't even remember your face. Those damn ingrates."

Raquel: "I love them and they love me. I'm part of the family."

Raquel's affective exhaustion comes from years of trying to prove herself to the Valdes family as more than just a live-in maid but rather a surrogate relative, tasked with caring and keeping order in the home for the parents. She views herself as a third parent of sorts, proud to manage the childcare and domestic work, which also leaves her constantly bidding for the Valdes' emotional attention. It is therefore a vicious circle of providing services on an emotional level and only ever being compensated on an economic level, whereby these transactional services build up Raquel's emotional affections but are looked at presumably by the Valdes family as only family care.

The last term I would like to appropriate here is cunning. Raquel exhibits this rather dubious characteristic as a way to manage the asymmetry the family holds over her and is a way to resist what other maids face: neoslavery. If another person or object of affection encroaches on Raquel's familial territory, she acts in a deceitful and sometimes vindictive manner. In one scene, Camila's boyfriend brings her a kitten as a present. Annoyed by the animal and its infringement on the love she feels is waning in the Valdes home, Raquel in a latter scene and in a fit of hysteria pushes the new kitten over the wall of the home and off the property. As the family members search for the lost kitten, Raquel acts as if nothing is wrong and continues to perform her household chores, not fazed by her own cruel actions.

In other scenes and in more competitive terms, Raquel pits herself against the newly hired maids in several other scenes in the film. She is often seen ignoring the doorbell and once one of the new maids answers it, locking them outside of the house. The two maids—Mercedes and Sonia—both react in different ways to the trickery of

Raquel. On the one hand, Mercedes is traumatized by being locked out and is subject to other nasty behavior by Raquel (in another scene Raquel disinfects the shower after Mercedes uses it or has her do tasks multiple times, chiding her for being incompetent or too slow). Mercedes, after being left outside and tearful about Raquel's lamentable behavior, she quits her new post and heads home to Peru. Days later, Sonia, a much older and more experienced Chilean maid is brought in to the home. However, she reacts with hostility toward Raquel, getting into a cat fight with her after being locked out of the house and having to scale the roof of the house to re-enter the premises. In the middle of the commotion between the two maids, Mr. Valdes's model ship is crushed and Raquel locks herself in the master bedroom closet, to avoid more of Sonia's wrath. This cunning act by Raquel also ends with Sonia quitting prematurely and Raquel regaining her sole caretaking position in the home. Raquel is able to keep her post and the Valdes family blame Sonia for destroying the model ship and the event is all but forgotten until the third and final maid, Lucy, is hired.

## **V. Devalued Labour, Housekeeping and Neoliberal Chile**

Maids hold a special place in film history. Their narrative function in global cinema was—and still is—discursive and fraught with complexity. Representations bordering on the simplistic are harder to come by because most filmmakers refrain from envisioning or scrutinizing these maids, servants, nannies or casual domestic help as anything more than simply staging “work” or immaterial commodity. There are exceptions. Take for example, Claire Denis's Francophone tale *Chocolat* (1988) where the nurturing role is interestingly inverted along race, class and gender lines by a young black man who that

assumes the role. Set in colonial Cameroon, a young French woman named Aimee recollects her past and the family's "houseboy," Protee, observed through flashbacks. Via recollected memories she contemplates how Protee raised her, was submissive and at times challenged her (and the colonial) authority through a quiet restraint. Another example of a global cinema text about a maid is Kim Ki-young's 1960 *Hanyo/The Housemaid* which tells the story of the intimacy one young couple shares with the hired help, leading to an unforgiveable indiscretion. Known for his class-conscious films made in Korea's "Golden Years," Kim's film was shot almost entirely within the domestic confines of the set-piece home which lent to a socially and psychologically claustrophobic tension between the unbalanced housekeeper and the married couple caught in-between. Elsewhere, in Vietnam *The Scent of Green Papaya* (2001) by Trần Anh Hùng tells a delicate and uplifting story about a ten year old working-class girl named Mui who for half of the film is employed as a maid by a mourning mother, and after a decade of service is hired by another family: a pianist and his wife. The film ends with Mui having an affair with her employer and in the process rising above her class position, through a "forgivable" infidelity. A less traditional film about a maid is Kingsley Ogoro's supernatural tale about a reincarnated businesswoman, now occupying her former housekeeper's body in *The Return* (2003, Nigeria). Typical of Nollywood's occult realism to get at social problems in the country, the film depicts the upper-class woman forced to see things from a different class perspective and this adds to the appeal of this risqué but otherwise dark comedy about domestic work. On a grander scale we find that those who work as maids often encounter debilitating stereotypes and presumptions about the nature of their services by those of a higher class, as the global

cinema examples above attest. It is this stereotyping and presumptuous attitude about profession and class standing that I would like to explore further here.

In today's "post-race" era where the colour of one's skin is not meant to matter, we still hear that skin colour does demarcate class and professional lines in most parts of the world. In Korea, for example, fishermen who are a deep shade of sienna brown after decades in the open waters off the coast of Busan attribute their tan lines to harsh labour activities. However, back on shore many of these fishermen encounter classism and derogatory comments by other local Koreans just because their skin is darkened and presumed that colouring means they are automatically of a lower class. Another example from Asia is Japan. Many Indonesian and Filipino women are constantly assumed to be domestic workers given their mocha skin tones and genetically darker appearances as compared to those of their Japanese employers, and this raises questions over ethnic stereotyping in this hyper-modern society. Such assumptions can be heard when Indonesian/Filipino women gather outside of work at cafes or stroll Tokyo streets, forced to hear comments from native Japanese. In Italy, those that hail from the Southern regions of the country, darker in skin colour, due to their ancestral lineage and often agrarian professions, are frequently exposed to prejudice by their compatriots in cities like Milan; a historical consequence for being Neapolitan and settling in Northern Italy. Elsewhere, Mexican-Americans in the United States are also familiar with discrimination and stereotypes due to their work as groundskeepers and roofers, where they are exposed to powerful ultraviolet rays that darken their skin. The point in raising these four examples is that whiteness as a desired complexion extends beyond geographies and cultures, and it is still an indicator of class and professional position

across North America, Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America. More generally, this issue over complexion corresponds to material and immaterial labour and the work they do outdoors as well as indoors with back-breaking physical excursion or psychological mistreatment.

To move to some filmic examples, Zhang Yimou's *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991) set in the Republican era China explores the dynamics of four concubines living with their personal maids and servants. The internal antagonisms that go along with this patriarchal system are composed for audiences with painstaking detail. Zhang goes to some lengths to emphasize the whiteness of Songlian (Gong Li), whom is educated, striking in complexion and from a higher class than the other concubines. Bathed in luxurious light or lit in such a way to soften her features and to amplify her pearl skin, we find Songlian as part of Zhang's self-Orientalizing, and this can be read in one of two ways: as commodifying Li's Asian beauty for Western audiences; and presenting the stark difference between Songlian and her maids in the film through discrimination based on flesh and language as they relate to class. Yan'er (Kong Lin), Songlian's rebellious servant is much darker in complexion due, presumably, to her work in the courtyards and lower class standing, and by aesthetic standards is filmed in the most unflattering natural light or in monochromatic blues, yellows and reds that flatten her dull features all together. Like Yan'er, Silva's choice of Catalina Saavedra in *The Maid* is interesting given the popularity of the actress and the list of roles she has starred in prior to the 2009 production. Nevertheless, Saavedra goes to some lengths to appear naturalistic and unglamorous. Most scenes in *The Maid* shows Saavedra's character Raquel appearing ruffled, exhausted and captured in a DV aesthetic that shows more



skin blemishes and wrinkles than films that choose not to record in this documentary-style mode. The naturalist composition is deployed to lend a social realism to the film but also to demonstrate the class differences in terms of clothing, manners, dialects and even the claiming of spaces. As appearances go, and in contrast to the Valdes's family, Raquel is dark in complexion, and this is highlighted when she tries on Mrs. Valdes's expensive cream coloured sweater in one scene or in other scenes where she wears beige or white clothing. Interestingly, too, the other three maids are also darker than their employers and connote the obvious class differences inherent to Chilean society. Consequently, Raquel preforms traditional, age-old tasks: scrubbing and mopping, rather than using more contemporary devices to aid her cleaning routine. Her appearance and complexion sadly highlight the class differences that Silva wrestles with in his contemporary drama and that shows how, even in democratic Chile, these lines are not easily worn away.

## **VI. Raquel's feelings of resentment and attachment**

If skin colour is a cumbersome weight for those of the Chilean working-class, then many deal with these hard lessons via leisure activity. In the final scene of *The Maid* Raquel takes up exercising. As she sets off to rehabilitate her body through a jog at night and seemingly distance herself from the Valdes family by going out on her own—this final scene is bittersweet because as an audience we realize that at some point, her services will no longer be needed by the family. Although she adores the Valdes family she also displays hostility towards them. Raquel's trouble in articulating these conflicting feelings of attachment/belonging and resentment/autonomy becomes a reason why she decides to exercise in the first place which presumably provides a type of social and

psychic release. Yet no matter the social and psychic distance she is building to fortify herself, even providing herself with a degree of agency, such preparation will not save her from her own devaluation over time: her skills, abilities and resilience will only deteriorate as *her* family's attachment and need for her diminishes. This is truly a sobering thought but allow me to provide some earlier examples in the film that support my analysis.

One of my central claims in this chapter has been Raquel's desire to attain "normality," a concept I have borrowed from Berlant and reformulated to my notion of social and psychological devaluation. If normality is the lie we tell ourselves to get by each day, then the actual neoliberal forces associated with an uncommitted employer in the domestic environment is particularly harsh when we consider the treatment of live-in help. Take the opening scene of the film, which illustrates one of several instances where normality is desired by Raquel but devaluation ends up collapsing this fleeting gesture, the celebration of her forty-first birthday is an example par excellence of the affective exhaustion waged under neoliberalism. After serving the Valdes dinner and looking drained physically and emotionally—dark circles hang from under her eyes, hunched shoulders prop up her disheveled maid's uniform—she picks at her dinner while sat at the kitchen table. Aware of the surprise birthday party planned for her and nervous with anticipation, the Valdes summon her back with a jingle from the servant bell. Lying in wait for Raquel is a candle-lit birthday cake that they present to her and place on the dining room table for her to make a wish. Standing rather than sitting to celebrate, she is invited to sit by the Valdes parents. However, as if just another required show of faith that Raquel is part of the family, Mr. Valdes all too quickly excuses

himself from the table and Raquel glumly retreats back to the kitchen to tend to the dishes after curtly finishing her slice of cake. Afterwards, Mrs. Valdes offers to help Raquel but she hears her mobile phone ringing from the bedroom and returns to answer it, presents in hand. What is significant and attentive on Silva's part in this scene is his decision to film the birthday scene fleetingly in the dining room before Raquel awkwardly returns to her zone of the house: the kitchen and staff quarters.

Such separation of the home into "employee" zones (kitchen) and "employer" zones (dining room, den, study, bedrooms) much like spaces of access, is a dramatic effect and mirrors the reality of those real-life maids who, like Raquel, perform duties in Chile and elsewhere in the world. Silva draws presumably on his own experiences living in the house where he shot *The Maid* and recollections of his and his family's interactions and treatment of their own live-in maid. The intimate knowledge of his own house and the fictive reality he creates in the opening scene does offer up all the nooks and crannies of a believable "set" and builds a milieu for a precarity narrative to unfold. The camera work in my view, is clearly indebted to not only earlier styles from Chile and the post-Pinochet documentaries known for their naturalist lighting by Christian Ignacio and Leighton Aguero, but also the hand-held close quarter aesthetic found in Dogma 95 and films like Lars von Trier's *The Idiots* (1996) and Thomas Vinterberg's *The Celebration* (1998) as well as earlier "direct cinema" in the vein of the Maysles brothers' *Salesman* (1969).

Each global cinema example much like Silva's *The Maid* comment on class differentials visually and ideologically and achieves this to varying degrees: post-

Pinochet documentaries leave audiences with a marked sense of historicity which was intended to make close observations about the aggressive market reforms and its consequences on Chilean social norms and cultures (vis-à-vis archival footage, interviews and television clips); Dogma 95's more playful, even postmodern detachment reveals the social spaces that its characters occupy and, beneath the cinematic "rules" exposes a muted middle-class unrest in Denmark; and perhaps closest to *The Maid*'s class antagonisms, is the Maysles brothers' structurally tedious but socially poised treatment of traveling salesmen in Post-Fordist America, who go door-to-door selling bibles in Florida. The salesmen's weekly devaluation to hit quotas is particularly stark in its finality. If this direct cinema style paints immaterial labour practices as both "schtick" (personalized sales pitches) and repetitious necessity (each sale equates the endless tally of yet another required sale to keep them financially afloat), then in comparison to Raquel, whom tries desperately to build emotional capital, the salesmen each clamor to build monetary capital, desperate to close the next sale.

Returning to *The Maid* and much like the New England salesmen and their hotel rooms, the kitchen for Raquel is not simply an employee's space but also a liminal, gathering nook for her and the Valdes family. In slight contrast, the hotel rooms in *Salesman* are captured in a barren homogeneity: tacky curtains, dusty window blinds, worn out mattresses and cedar-ply board interiors that together establish an impersonal and unsentimental interior set of spaces. Yet these hotel rooms (which they also use as call centres) do, however, momentarily become spaces that capture something more than shabby accommodation: a phone call back home to a lonely wife or camaraderie with other salesmen, preaching about better days gone by. The kitchen in *The Maid* in its

depersonalized and industrialized look—steel amenities, bland white tiling and knick-knacks that only adorn the door to the refrigerator—does not equally carry with it the tradition of a family communal area or a space. Instead, the kitchen is for other people’s labour, not those that live in the house but the servants that run it. In another context, Barbara Ehrenreich posits a problem with live-in maids, as such: “As your home becomes a workplace for someone else, is it still a place where you want to live?”<sup>233</sup> This is intriguing because the Valdes family doesn’t seem to mind living with Raquel’s workplace, but when it comes at Raquel’s social and emotional expense they ignore her despondence.

To return to the scene of Raquel’s birthday celebration, I would like to point out the subtle assertion over designated family spaces: on the one hand, the Valdes’s dining room is their hearth, rigid but boisterous due to the noise of the young children and clanging of silver cutlery it serves as refuge, while on the other hand, the kitchen, a zone of preparation and staging, remains not Raquel’s but a symbol of utility and service. Traditionally, the kitchen is associated with the heart of the home and a space that provides sustenance. However, in this context Raquel is the producer of sustenance rather than the beneficiary of such emotional and social contentment. In a latter scene, for example, we find Raquel busy serving the Valdes dinner and once finished laughs quietly from the kitchen as she peers onto the dining room where Lucas performs a magic trick. (He is clearly Raquel’s favorite family member, something she does not hide, and she finds Lucas’s magic a distraction in an otherwise joyless routine.) Yet this is a fleeting moment of joviality as Lucas is asked by his father to get up from the table and close the dining room door to the kitchen to give the family some privacy. The

gesture of closing the dining room door literally separates these two household spaces, leaving Raquel on her own, required to carry on the place settings for the next morning's breakfast, on her own and out of direct familial recognition.



Fig. 4.1



Fig. 4.2

If space is a type of social and psychic devaluation for Raquel, as I have illustrated in the opening sequence, then private space, in this case Raquel's own room is not off limits to her employer's inspection and curiosity either. In another important scene in the film, Pilar develops some angst over Raquel's behavior as she becomes more erratic nearer to her dizzy spell and her fight with Camela. Armed with a fear of her maid's unpredictability and temperamental mood, she enters Raquel's room without her permission while Raquel is out shopping on her day off. This violation exemplifies the asymmetry in their business relationship. Aware of her snooping and the unethical implications, Pilar still ruffles through Raquel's belongings and keep-sakes in a nightstand next to her bed. Upon discovering hidden snacks kept from the children and more disturbingly, old photographs of the family, she notices that Raquel has scratched out Camila's image from several snapshots. Pilar then retreats back to her zone of the house unnerved by the things she has found in Raquel's room. With her suspicions confirmed and Raquel bordering on succumbing to a nervous breakdown, Pilar confronts her husband about the photographs and what they should do: either reprimand her or hire more help to allow her to cope with the mounting household duties. In the end, uncertainty rules and Raquel is allowed to stay for what might be 10 more years or 10 more days. Superficial compliance by Raquel is the only social mediator left.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Class does matter. Raquel is bound to class devaluation as represented in Silva's subtle

narrative about post-Pinochet Chile. To cite Max Weber as quoted by David E. James, class is “a specification of ‘life chances,’ defined not by a position in productive relations but by one in market relations, determined by ownership of property and possession of skills and education.”<sup>234</sup> Neoliberalism in Latin America, and in particular Santiago, reinvigorates the longevity of this Weberian view: life chances are few for those not fortunate enough to rise above their lower class station. Indeed, market relations under Pinochet and in the democratic period following his reign are in some small way symbolized by Raquel as she can be seen as one of the countless victims of market rationality and the social reality of precarity. Complicating this reality are the messy dynamics and attachments that goes along with live-in maids. Conceived in the diegesis as not willing to give up her sole care of the Valdes family, Raquel perseveres but is forced to endure indirect emotional and social abuses by the family. She is willing to be devalued in order to find normality; what she finds in the end is the status of valued and loyal employee never the status of true family member.



## Chapter 5

### **Fragments of Labour: Neoliberal Attitudes and Architectures in Park Chan-wook's *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* (2002) and *Oldboy* (2003)**

#### **I. South Korean Labour**

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 with Korean society: material and immaterial labour. Iconographic elements of the working class and "salary men" litter Park's mise-en-scène, from the precarians 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 office blocks, cosmopolitan high rises and lifeless cubicles.

Equally, and perhaps more importantly, the tools themselves of the labourer and the corporate crony signify horrific modes of work in most of Park's earlier films: iron pliers, carpenter hammers, scraps of lumber, box-cutters, electrical tape, and jumper cables, objects that pertain to work done by hand, become weapons for defense or torture. Salary men, overworked and loyal to their neoliberal providers connote less strenuous physical modes of production, and their attire and accoutrements remain unmistakably corporate—briefcases, dark-coloured business suits, worn topcoats and black umbrellas for Seoul's damp climate. But collectively, these animate and inanimate objects doggedly represent both the working and bourgeois classes as equally deprived

of any socioeconomic power, a fact that Park also privileges in his fictional worlds.

In this chapter, I will revisit some of Antonio Gramsci's writings little used in film studies. Through his *Pre-Prison Writings* (1916-26), and thus to depart from Marcia Landy's highly applicable and innovative application of Gramsci's other work,<sup>235</sup> I will use Gramscian theory to articulate what Park's *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* (2002) and *Oldboy* (2003) say about metal workers 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. In essence, these two films remain committed to labour struggle by both the plebian and the conventional middle classes, and to the marginalization these workers resist. *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* and *Oldboy* also happen to examine the apathy, vileness and the corporate dilettantism of an elite that runs current to neoliberal policies in South Korea in the 1990s, as they did in a similar context in Gramsci's Italy in the earlier decades of the twentieth century.

Labour's image is a difficult subject to bring to life filmically.<sup>236</sup> But it is a subject that nonetheless notably refracts Korea's historical imaginary on screen, propounded explicitly by social upheavals since the end of authoritarian power in 1987, the establishment of a democratically elected Roh Tae Woo regime from 1988-93 and its entry into the WTO in January of 1995.<sup>237</sup> Korea's emergence onto the global economic stage, still with the visible scars left by the Korean war (1950-53),<sup>238</sup> the abuse of power under its former dictatorship and newer political corruption scandals<sup>239</sup>, brought with it new forms of socioeconomic suppression levied against the worker under a neoliberal

imposition at the state and corporate levels. Overnight, the strident but tenuous connection that Korean labour and the middle class shared with the privately run companies known as *chaebols* was eviscerated by the Tiger Market crash in 1997-8.<sup>240</sup> The economic downturn and its consequences for the working and middle classes seem to have triggered Park's narratological impulse to annihilate forms of labour on screen, but for socio-political (rather than simply economic) reasons. Identifying these problems as such has for Park on some occasions been called a "crisis concerning the loss of cultural identity in the rise of South Korean cinema,"<sup>241</sup> amongst other things, and is seldom associated with the rise of free market policies and practices in South Korea—a culture and a cinema that accounts for one of the fiercest and most potent form of neoliberalism in East Asia.<sup>242</sup>

Because of the financial crisis, "both state and capital executed a series of unprecedented attacks against labour 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."<sup>243</sup> These neoliberal variables are conjured in Park Chan-wook's *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* (*SFMV* hereafter) and *Oldboy*, as a reckless neoliberalisation that has created greater "austerity policy, liberalization of trade and capital markets, privatization of public companies;" leading to scant government regulation and cheap foreign capital that escalated the crisis for the worker.<sup>244</sup> 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 labour 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,”<sup>245</sup> causing further indiscriminate class divisions and the rise of the technocratic elite. The stark unemployment figures rose, and the impervious nature of economic deprivation continued, these types of exploitation and uncertainty permeated many Korean films made post-1998. It is thus important to read films like *SFMV* and *Oldboy* not strictly as horror films—acknowledging yet moving away from this tendency to label them as such—but to also see them as films with an enduring fidelity to class.<sup>246</sup>

Park’s decision to leave unresolved the boundaries of class oppression through a grandiloquent narrative speaks not to audience concerns but to certain tensions as they transmute into filmic fabrication. Park then, to counter Kyu Hyun Kim’s assertion, *is* “concerned with the evils of capitalist exploitation” and constructs victims whose “refusal (or inability) to transcend [these] subjective perspective [do not] enter into communication with one another,” as a central symptom of neoliberalism: self-reliance and reserved behavior to social communities large and small.<sup>247</sup> With an increase in personal autonomy, much civic and artistic dialogue is muted for the spurious, messy and constraining end goal of corporate capital which accommodates the agenda of neoliberalism in Korea. According to Harvey, “Control over information flow and over the vehicles for propagation of popular taste and culture have likewise become vital weapons in competitive struggle.”<sup>248</sup> It is no wonder why the neoliberal agenda in an institutional context has made the creative compliance to apolitical critique like Kim’s all the more prescriptive for the time, particularly when his chapter was published in the mid-2000s. For before the financial crisis in 2008, labour representation and its agitator, neoliberalism, was not even a marginal concern in film studies and other disciplines. The disdain for this (Marxian) theoretical perspective partly explains why little has been

written on Park's labour fascination, except in a pejorative context. With taglines like "Skulking Stalinism" which typify the gamut of reviews on *SFMV*, Chong Song-il's neo-formalist connotation follows an incorrect conflation of Stalinist bureaucratic authoritarianism as a Marxists-Leninist compassion for class. But such apolitical and neo-formalist sentiments must be interrogated via relevant critical inquiries that do not dismiss these tendencies out of hand, but instead embrace Park's films as a type of politically committed (filmic) literature.<sup>249</sup>

Following this logic to unpick the extreme management of the lower classes, identity is an issue for others working on Park's films. Elsewhere, Joseph Jonghyun Jeon points to market entitlement over the preference and security labour once held, yet focuses nonetheless on traumatic impulses as they pertain to contemporary 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.<sup>250</sup> Through a psychoanalytic framework, guided specifically by a Derridian 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.<sup>251</sup> What this signals is that South Korea no longer had what Chang Kyung-Sup calls "a de facto entitlement to work ever since the onset of industrialization – a sort of 'developmental citizenship'" and that job trimming had occurred in every sector to ensure the financial and service sectors stayed prosperous.<sup>252</sup> Chang continues with the following that shows the bleak reality facing labour in the post-Tiger Market Crash:

Interestingly, but not surprisingly, the IMF and other major representatives of global finance soon agreed on this ostensibly developmental initiative of the South Korean government. It was not surprising because large shares of major South Korean corporations and banks had already been sold off to foreign investors at IMF-set bargain sale terms (in an environment of plummeting nominal prices of stocks, depreciating exchange rates, and shock therapy interest rates). As new major stakeholders of numerous South Korean manufacturing firms and banks, global financial institutions and investors were favorably inclined to the reinstated proactive industrial policy of the South Korean state which is financially buttressed by taxes to be paid by South Korean citizens. For the same reason, they did not limit praise for the neoliberal side of the government's policy that would ensure sustained increases in corporate profits at the expense of suppressed labour incomes.<sup>253</sup>

These measures above also were tied to the once communitarian-oriented *chaebols* which are family run and controlled business conglomerate: Samsung, Lotte, LG Group, etc. Indeed under new IMF measures in the 1990s many *chaebols* were forced to lay off both factory workers and salary men in “a breakdown of corporate paternalism, demonstrating...just how different a *chaebol* was from a family.”<sup>254</sup> Interestingly, these changes provided exemption for some smaller groups of technocratic elites and their family-run *chaebols* in exchange for their compliance with the re-negotiation of a harsher, more hostile environment for Korean labour. Despite *chaebols* being mentioned at some length by leading film scholars, discussions have centred exclusively on investment practices in the Korean film industry or neoliberal cultural policies.<sup>255</sup> I wish to call attention to a condition that I label the *neoliberalisation of chaebol culture* as it seeps into popular cinema in 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 globalisation, thus, has resulted in internal fractures within the Korean ruling bloc. In contrast to their full support of neoliberal labour policy

intended to enhance labour flexibility, *chaebols* have vigorously opposed reform measures that have been targeted at them, including regulations on investment and management restructuring.<sup>256</sup>

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 capitalist firms, the new ruling bloc that emerged was highly mobile and versed in corporatist tactics. These neoliberals touted a transnational stance for the absolution of free market supremacy, influenced by the “Big Five” US Business schools (Wharton, Harvard, Stanford, Sloan and Kellogg) whose ethos for instituting newer means of labour 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, discusses hostile mergers over his mobile phone as if these financial exchanges happen daily, unfazed by such transactions and calculated in his role as corporate raider. Presumably, his business school training in the United States exemplifies both a Friedman-esque penchant for business dealings, and 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 in this and other films the disjuncture pitting labour and the middle classes against the technocratic elites. Lee can then be seen as a callous profiteer and with his transnational outlook and belief in the “masters of the universe” mentality espoused by most real-world neoliberal CEOs—wealthy executives like Lee come to subjugate the sometimes docile, sometimes ferocious, service industry worker.

## **II. Neoliberal Policy in Seoul**

Park fictionalizes the neoliberal nineties and the early years of the new millennium through subterfuge, artifice and stylized violence. By weaving labour exploitation and its subsequent disintegration around motifs of revenge and human carnage, labour is historicized, 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 demarcating 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 effectively show how a reconfigured and disastrous political economy is examined 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.”<sup>257</sup> 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 film, these themes can be used to explore how the neoliberal project destabilizes Korean communities in an age of “survivalist capitalism” during the unhinged 1990s and early 2000s.

Similar problems with earlier forms of capitalism in Korea have been fictionalized elsewhere through period-piece narratives. Chuck Kleinhan, for example,



considers misogynist undertones and excessive violence as a political metonym in another film about tough socioeconomic conditions, in Kim Kiduk's *Address Unknown* (2001). As a film that tackles US military presence (as a form of neo-imperialism), and the beginnings of Confucian capitalism in the country during the 1970s, *Address Unknown* calls attention to the "assertion of Korean culture" from a historical lens. Kleinhans makes a valid point to revisit this film despite critical derision and "negative commercial regard at home," and makes a case for this film's re-articulation of a troubled and scared Korean past.<sup>258</sup> By providing a careful analysis of Kim's conceptualization of America's presence in the country (and Korea's larger turn to global capitalism in this period), Kleinhans goes beyond the brutality of the narrative to extract kernels of knowledge that otherwise might go unnoticed. In both Kim's and Park's films, the suffering of characters are presented in excoriating detail, revealed in two different ways: Kim's narrational technique focuses steadfastly on American hegemony and its daily reminders in 1970s Korea (i.e., military bases, mixed-race children of Korean women who were either sweethearts or prostitutes, or both to American soldiers, increased violence in these communities, and the contradictory fascination/repulsion by Koreans toward the U.S. presence in the first place); Park structures a film like *SFMV* and *Oldboy* to comment more subtly on contemporary labour, particularly in terms of its problematic legacy in both militancy and fair wage campaigns, and as tarnished by the media during the mid-1990s.

Both directors' decisions to revisit these periods procure new responses to the infusion of capitalism in the Pacific Rim. Korea in the 1970s is one of state-guided capitalism that owed its developmental status to U.S. neocolonial interests, both

economically and militarily, as well as a *chaebol* syndicates that competed in pan-Asia and something that Kim demonstrates in his depressing yet historically accurate narrative. The foreignness of soldiers and military bases in the film echoes the hierarchy between relationships between Koreans themselves and Koreans and servicemen. In Park's depiction of Korea in *Oldboy* during the 1990s, the film provides a sense of hypermodernity and the developmental issues no longer being distinctly registered to U.S. geopolitics in the region. Capital's restructuring of lives and cities themselves in Korea become the subject of interrogation for the director. While in *Address Unknown* Kleinhans goes on to say that these polemical topics nonetheless "raise larger questions about films that both criticize and in some ways remain within the dominant ideology, and how we can understand them politically."<sup>259</sup> This binary of a socio-political filmmaking embedded within populist discourses of "violent domination" with respect to both Kim and Park, is telling.<sup>260</sup> For Kim's and Park's films structure these cruel realities and the disappointments of everyday life in different periods of capitalist development in South Korea. These cruelties are regulated by both external forces—victims of government policy, capitalist markets driving competition to extreme measures—and more general personal misfortunes, like homegrown-racism and masochistic impulses.

In Kim's *Address Unknown*, dogs are beaten and tortured and then sold for meat, a delicacy and also source of nourishment in this impoverished area outside glitzy Seoul. Similarly, labour in *SFMV* and *Oldboy* is subject to beatings, torture and even becomes a cheap commodity for the elite to buy and sell. The proletariat are disposable producers of goods, organ harvesters or "fall guys" for complex traumas that relate back

to capitalism's unequal social determinism on class throughout its economic development in the region. Both Kim's *Address Unknown* and Park's *SFMV* and *Old Boy* portray "social and ethical issues in terms of behaviors rather than characters articulating ideas," and these notions ask the spectator to take a closer look at class as well as labour, enmeshed as they are in a world of sordid visualities.<sup>261</sup>

### **III. *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance***

*SFMV* revolves around Ryu (Shin Ha-kyun), a green-haired, deaf-mute labourer whose layoff from the *chaebol* firm Ilshin Electronics pays tragic dividends for him and the firm's nouveau riche owner, Park Dong-jin (Song Kang-ho). The film opens with a female radio personality in Seoul reading a letter from a listener, a declaration of a strong work ethic read aloud only seconds into the film. 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, the film shows 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 watercolour painting 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 painting also connotes an auratic impulse for labour and for familial relationships as unique social and psychic modalities of modernity, what Gramsci saw as a “human community within which the working class constitute itself as a specific organic body.”<sup>262</sup> For Gramsci, the labourer class was compromised of men, united by their commonalities, their goal being either the production of goods or the regulation of these goods to determine their pecking order in public life. While the labourer for Park is also an organic thing—organised around physical toil, which then produces a commodity object—he too sees the labourer at the service of market. Yet Park constructs his labourer cinematically as also susceptible to pain, devaluation and, to echo Marx, “abstraction.”<sup>263</sup> Eventually put in a state of constant decomposition because of the corruption and exploitation of capitalist policies, the utopic, childhood 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 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 while wondering Seoul comes across 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 the 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 exemplifies the real life organ trade in the Pacific Rim, a brand of neoliberal price gouging wherein the end game here is selling Ryu's kidney to the highest bidder. Furthermore, black market organ selling is a consequence of skyrocketing healthcare in South Korea, where the marketization of individual patient care has become an institutional norm. This has made possible "a system in which body parts like kidneys and hearts become commodities for which one either pays or else dies."<sup>264</sup>

Desperate after losing both his kidney and his 10,000 Won of severance pay to the organ traffickers, Ryu and his leftist girlfriend Yeong-mi (Bae Doona) brainstorm and then begrudgingly scheme to kidnap his ex-boss's young daughter, Yu-sin. They rationalize this decision to save 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, and understanding herself as his financial burden. Gripped with anguish after finding his sister's bloodless body in the bath tub, Ryu travels outside of Seoul to bury her by their childhood vacation spot, as brought to life filmically by Ryu's postcard from the opening of the film. The delicate watercolour is now a neoliberal burial ground, the earlier image transformed into a garish and jarring visual epitaph. Both film image and painting become sites of misery, trauma and death.

Near the same time, and after her kidnapping and bored and accosted by a vagrant wonderer while she tries to sleep in Ryu's car, the boss's daughter Yu-sin runs in a panic from the disturbed man toward Ryu, where she slips and falls into the mountain stream. The grief-stricken Ryu, busy burying his sister never notices her trashing about in the water for help, drowning eventually and floats lifelessly by in the river. Following the death of his daughter, the former boss Dong-jin hunts down Ryu and his anarchist girlfriend. Finding her first, at home in her apartment, Dong-jin binds 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 Achilles tendons and bleeds him to death in the same river where his daughter drowned, Dong-jin then dismembers him on shore. But shortly, Yeong-mi's radical group finds Dong-jin, and in retribution for Yeong-mi's murder, the group stabs him viciously to death. *SFMV* thus concludes with all of its characters succumbing to fatal 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 variable in Park's storytelling, a capricious thing which I will examine in more detail below.

#### **IV. Precarity and Oppression in *SFMV***

Park Chan-wook's ability to mine the effects of neoliberalism on South Korean society is uncanny in some respects. By poignantly juxtaposing image and socio-cultural

meaning, he produces surprising results. In one striking scene a newly redundant welder named Peng throws himself in front of his ex-boss Dong-jin's SUV, on his way back with his daughter and colleagues from the American chain restaurant T.G.I. Friday's. Dong-jin leaps out to see who he has struck, finding Peng clutching his right leg. Dragging himself out from underneath the SUV, and once 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 tee-shirt (see Fig. 5.1 & 5.2). 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 they run to grapple with Peng over the box-cutter as the self-mutilation continues to take place. This action, however, seems motivated more by paternal protection—for Dong-jin's daughter and his colleague's wife and child—than by concern for his ex-employee from doing any further bodily harm.

This scene is shot from the point of view of Ryu, also recently laid off, who is waiting in a nearby car and plotting with his girlfriend Yeong-mi to kidnap Dong-jin's daughter. The long shot positions Ryu so as not to empathize with the labourer and his act of physical desecration but instead to question whether their kidnapping will work with all this sudden attention brought by Peng. It parallels strikingly Gramsci's writing at a turbulent time in Italian history, after the Great War when the workers started to become an indifferent mass. They lacked a "clarity and precision to form a workers' consciousness," as when social movements at this time were weakened by capitalist

consolidation of factories and labourer's sentiments for equality waned.<sup>265</sup> In similar ways, the contemporary workforce of Park's neoliberal Seoul lacks the clarity and stamina to counter or at the very least challenge, the IMF's restructuring. Yet Gramsci simultaneously considered these same workers as revolutionary (violent in the context of Park's films), wanting to remain productive to support each of their families: "...the working masses will acquire an awareness of their indissoluble unity—a unity based on production, on the concrete act of work. This awareness of theirs will take on an organic form, as leadership emerges."<sup>266</sup> In the neoliberal present of Park's Korea, work is taken away and the leadership sadly becomes a forced individualism—or more crudely, a forced predatory action to attain and produce their own brand of capital (child abduction in this case, leading to monetary ransom). There seems to be in the film an almost undeniable desire for a modest quality of life which dooms their labourers to professions and actions that expose the barbarous side of their class, all to ensure their spirit of existence, however shadowy.

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."<sup>267</sup> We can look at this sequence in *SFMV* as a class deferential, between the hegemon (Dong-jin) and Peng (the consenter). The latter represents Gramsci's characterization through the mutilation of 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 unfettered by his use value, Dong-jin predetermines this sort of reaction: Peng's sacrificial gesture to reassert



his loyalty and labour value is nothing more than flexible labour under neoliberalism. However, Dong-jin remains resolute in his decision to cut Peng from his *chaebol* organization.

Park also highlights the sharp division neoliberalism creates by using costumes to show such disproportionate prosperity, avoiding direct ideological alignment with the worker, and creating the “boundless power of the proprietor” in an action that is reinforced by action and attire. Dong drives a new Korean-built SUV, wears designer clothing and Oakley sunglasses, eats at expensive American chain restaurants, buys his pre-school daughter a mobile phone, a talking doll and fashionable dresses, lives in a contemporary styled 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 eastern periphery of Seoul, called ‘Pig Village’, “jammed between high-rise development and an expressway...[and] home to about 3,500 people.”<sup>268</sup> This temporary housing site has become permanent, and is important within *SFMV* because, after Dong’s daughter is kidnapped, he searches for the obvious suspect, Peng, there, only to find he and his family poisoned in their filthy, leaky roofed dwelling. Important to the narrative, and in accordance with Park’s biting social criticism, the dwelling becomes another means to measure survival and economic supremacy in the faltering Tiger market. Here the filmic and real worlds converge, highlighting global capitalism’s “aggravated master/slave class dynamics in sites like South Korea to such a sadomasochistic extent that predatory and vampire-like habits of antagonism generate an endless cycle of male patriarchy and resentment, a will to class and gender vengeance

and mutual violence.”<sup>269</sup> Labour in *SFMV* becomes a dogmatic expression of neoliberalism’s effects on the labour classes in South Korea, as well as an “allegorical gesture...[which] turns politically loaded cinematic motifs into signs that are intelligible without an understanding of their historical and cultural contexts.”<sup>270</sup>

This scene in Park’s film is also notable for being is remarkably politically conscious without being didactic. The desperate move on the labourer’s part illustrates his loyalty to the 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 this Illshin Electronics.” His pride in his nearly perfect error rate as a metal welder (“only .008 were faulty goods”) and in his not having taken a sick day in six years points to a different economic time before the post-IMF Korea. Peng’s remarks thus illustrate his mastery of his trade, at the same time as they also concretize Korea’s disregard for skilled workers in this climate of economic consolidation and precarity. This disturbingly competitive environment signals the desperation of the worker to remain employed in South Korea.



Fig. 5.1

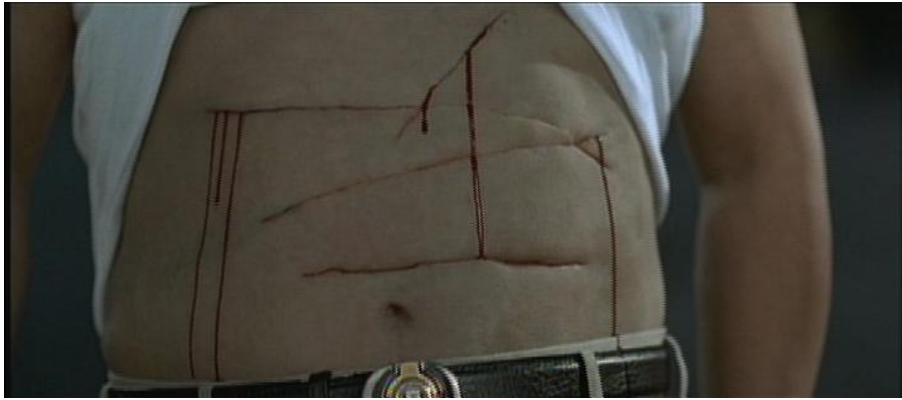


Fig. 5.2

In another crucial and plot-changing sequence we see Ryu exerting pure energy on the shop floor of Ilshin Electronics (see Fig. 5.3 & 5.4). This sweaty and tactile environment corresponds to Ryu's daily routine: he is responsible for the continuous molding of metal brackets, labour that is painful to watch because of its perceived 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. It is a toned and slightly gaunt Ryu who stands in front of a metal works furnace and guides hundreds of amber glowing molten metal pieces into a waiting wheel barrel. He then transports this white-hot aluminum across the factory floor to be 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. This action then abruptly cuts to the firm's office block, which is composed in lifeless opposition: an administrative wing filled with cubicles, muted and colourless office furniture, and staff wearing indistinguishable grey suits. The visual acuteness of the two spaces creates a dialectical image. This office space is in striking

aesthetic and material opposition to the shop floor, its vapid corporate operation lacking the intensity of the material-based work and “organic structures of production.”<sup>271</sup>

Park’s purposeful juxtaposition and contiguous editing in this sequence enable 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 an inert world of unemployment (and later to criminal behavior, unspeakable violence, corruption and finally homicide). Yet to evoke Gramsci’s thoughts are evocative in this context, as they come to reveal a centuries-old process of capitalist social reality in relation to this scene, “The worker is, then, naturally strong within the factory, concentrated and organised within the factory. Outside the factory, in contrast, he is isolated, weak and out on a limb.”<sup>272</sup> Ryu is indeed out on a limb now, and his predicament chimes with the privatization of human interest that is geared toward a survival of the fittest amongst both firms and even human beings. Park’s Benjaminian dialectical image in this regard is historically timeless, a cinematic technique that decodes and deconstructs various modalities of the world market in Seoul and elsewhere.

In other words, Park in this film refabricates many 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.<sup>273</sup> To paraphrase Henry Giroux, he sees neoliberalism as having “found its material expression in an all-out attack on democratic values and on the very notion of the public sphere.”<sup>274</sup> This expendable public sphere, as represented in this scene through Ryu’s termination, could be said to mirror the attitudes that management shows toward labour more

generally. Unconcerned with Ryu's plight or struggle as a labourer in contemporary Seoul, and unaware of Ryu's terminally ill sister at home, the Illshin Electronics manager's sheer disregard for the old *chaebol* loyalty and security for its workforce is tangible in this scene. Joseph Jeon adds:

The fantasy of the discourse that pervaded life in the chaebols suggested that work remained somehow outside of the economy of exchange, that one worked diligently not for the sake of financial compensation, but on behalf of a family structured and of the nation at large....it is important to distinguish here between the idealization and the practice of everyday life.<sup>275</sup>

The justification for Ryu's termination is done in the name of neoliberal efficiency and rationalized via terms like synergy, downsizing and consolidation of labour and this scene is as powerful as it is muted within this office space. The disregard of a management class that adopts a business school ethic, a neoliberal attitude to labour, finds these precarians classes as uncivilized and ultimately non-compatible instruments in a firm's bottom-line agenda. Yet even at an almost primal level, this sequence through its deliberate and corporatized mise-en-scène equates a stolid attitude and space. It is this very attitude that suggests that human compassion is concealed for the illusory sense of profitability in the newly managed *chaebols* like this one seen in *SFMV*.

Such an attitude is only compounded by the unnamed manager who rushes off to an offsite lunch, utterly unconcerned with his firm's decision to lay off Ryu and what he will do next. Neoliberalism's erasure of social safety nets in South Korea is thus magnificently composed in this sequence: a dubious and "inadequate" welfare system, widespread unemployment, and unraveling social fabric suggest that, in economic terms, the free market has transformed Korean citizens into "disposable people."<sup>276</sup> These

neoliberal attitudes come to devalue a Confucian lifestyle as seen through the more sadistic actions of the film's central characters. However, these actions are never provoked for psychic reasons alone (with the exception of the black marketers, who rape and kill for money and for fun), largely because they disregard emotional resonance in order to stay alive. By the end of the film, we learn that it is both management and labour 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 (in this case by suicide, drowning, electrocution, dismemberment and ordered execution).



Fig. 5.3



Fig. 5.4

## V. *Oldboy*

In *Oldboy* one finds something more financially insidious. The film builds on a complex narrative that centres in a structural (though not necessarily visual or narrational way) 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,”<sup>277</sup> to echo Gramsci, and he is determined to direct all of his energy not to achieving economic success, which he already has plenty of through his presumed *chaebol* family connections, but to revenge. The social and psychic control he wields, in the way of a 15-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 window pane, finding them in a tender yet compromising embrace). Putting the blame on Dae-su for his beloved sister’s suicide, Woo-jin’s vengeful wrath takes the form of a civilian garrison where Dae-su must toil away his time for a decade and a half: keeping detailed journals of all the people he had scorned and dishonored in his lifetime, training himself as a competent fighter through shadow boxing, 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 a particularly bravura sequence in which a series of images from the television are juxtaposed to Dae-su’s busy-work in his cell-like room. The images on the right of the

screen follow the temporality of Korean presentness and its spectacular contemporary history, over 15 years of forced detention, showing Dae-su's countless hours of tele-visual consumption as both disparaging as well as enlightening. On the left of the screen Dae-su performs various types of material and immaterial work: writing in a journal, exercises, paints, masturbates, etc. As in *SFMV* a dialectical strategy is again deployed, yet in this instance Park's socio-historical reality is artificially created by paralleling a South Korean media's construction of a linear 'breaking news template,' next to the temporal "real" reality of Dae-su's lived experience in forced confinement. It 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 "here and now" of South Korea, part of a spectral world with its own cells and walls that demand a state of subservience, both to larger and ephemeral global hegemonies (the IMF and U.S. investment and capital) and to polylocal hegemonies of wealthy technocrats and corporate *chaebols*. These intangible and tangible "glocal" forces require a careful historical reexamination, inside as well as outside Park's diegesis.

This dialectical sequence is soon followed by Dae-su's release from the civilian penitentiary, due to his hypnosis he begins, unknowingly, an incestuous relationship with his long-lost daughter who he finds working in a Sushi restaurant (and this reunion is prompted by Woo-jin). Incest as a trope is handled by Park to equate a perversion 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.<sup>278</sup>

Unbeknownst to Mi-do, Dae-su's daughter, is the fact that Woo-jin has secretly supported her since she was given up for adoption after the death of her mother. Returning to Seoul, Mi-do finds work as a sushi chef and encounters Dae-su on the night he is released from the civilian garrison. Both under hypnosis, they form a bond after Mi-do takes Dae-su home after he faints in the restaurant and agrees to help him track down his missing daughter (not knowing it is she) and to confront Dae-su's captor. 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 to which Dae-su is held and leaves money and clothes on his release, while also paying for his daughter's upbringing and education abroad 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 labour and socioeconomic disadvantage, an easy target given his drunkenness, general bourgeois malaise, and reprehensible behavior as a salary man. These social traits play savagely into Woo-jin's planned revenge. The flexibility of immaterial labour embodied in Dae-su's personality and attitude reflect the bourgeois males—the Korean salary man—in Park's fictional

Seoul who are complicit to neoliberal disciplining. And this echoes Gramsci's thoughts in many ways in his very same fascination with class: "Human society is undergoing an extremely rapid process of decomposition, corresponding to the process of dissolution of the bourgeois State."<sup>279</sup> Because of the deterioration and an expendability of the middle class under neoliberal globalisation, new spaces for exploitation that had occurred according to Gramsci, in Italy between the wars can also be found in *Oldboy*'s South Korea.

Control is key to *Oldboy*'s narratological development, and this too echoes Gramsci's understanding of power, for the police played a key role in Italy during the 1920s. They adopted disreputable practices to suppress worker solidarity and revolt—through brutal force, infiltration of union organizations, disinformation and general arrest. In Park's contemporary Korea, Woo-jin utilizes similar yet more technically advanced tactics, mastering the hegemonic modes of suppression by way of surveillance, regulation, alienation and perverse physical and sexual bondage regulated over Dae-su's mind and body. However, what is little understood in *Oldboy* is the other side of this logic for socioeconomic hegemony, explored through an ingenious allegory by Park: a top-down control over architectural space under neoliberalism. For the real and fictional cramped and jumbled city blocks of Seoul are what make such surveillance 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, mirroring the competitiveness of other global metropolises. This neoliberal ramification to city space is shared by geographers who 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.”<sup>280</sup> Park picks up on these “deleterious impacts, particularly on disadvantaged groups and locations”<sup>281</sup> in Seoul and this theme is reticent in *Oldboy*. Against the foreground of exploitation by characters we get a perspective of architecture configurations in the background of the film that puts us in vernacular (Dongdaemon and Hong dae) and generic (Gangnam and Myeongdong) sections of Seoul; a motif that looms heavy in the diegesis, and something I will return to shortly.

While 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. For example, because of the national financial crisis in 1997, families or family members were often forced onto the streets, as jobs became increasingly scarce. In Jesook Song’s fieldwork in Seoul, she characterizes different types of homelessness, positing that during the Asian Debt crisis females were no longer the “needy” subjects, while the “deserving” subjects, mostly out of work men had been given preference “with the potential of returning to or creating normative families.”<sup>282</sup> The often times indiscernible victims became what Song calls the ‘invisible homeless women.’ Thus if neoliberalism indoctrinates these destructive and cutthroat social realities and deterritorialized metropolitan milieus, who or what imposes, even fortifies, such a reality?

In filmic terms, the cityscape of Seoul becomes a topographic chess board where Woo-jin allows his opponent Dae-su to discover and mobilize his own revenge

for his nearly two-decade long imprisonment. Yet Dae-su's seemingly autonomous search for Woo-jin is never out of Woo-jin's grid of discipline. Dae-su is followed by "for-hire" neoliberal gangsters that 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 sublimation to Woo-jin's scrutiny and social jurisdiction.

Park's cinematic imagery is visualized through smooth, almost style-less residential and commercial buildings which adorn its skyline. 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 coloured 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 which keep some of the provincial and vernacular customs intact).

In many ways, Seoul is what Gramsci would call a modern space, what he saw in developing cities in Italy (Turin, Rome, Sicily) in the 1920s as a mere material extension of the capitalist class, where "bals tabarin and gross, showy luxury"<sup>283</sup> transcend class as much as physical urban space. Architectural surroundings to Gramsci and to Park are built spaces that buttress various stages of Industrial and post-Industrial power in Italy and in Park'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, *Oldboy* deals with architectural space and its relation to neoliberal urbanization in an observant and resourceful way. My brief close analysis will focus on the penultimate sequence in Woo-jin's penthouse apartment, where Dae-su's in a fit of rage after being taunted by Woo-jin, attacks his bodyguard, a more 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 pans in on this violent scene of grappling, choke-holds, and deflected bodies. Yet one finds in this scene where Dae-su and Woo-jin share screen time that the most interesting camera work presents itself. 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. A violence that comes to parallel the effects of neoliberalism on society as the two jockey for positions to the elite and often clandestine flows of power (both capital and psychic) that Woo-jin holds over his so-called nemesis Oh Dae-su and his employed bodyguard, Mr. Han. Here the hegemony of technocratic prowess echoes this minimalist, albeit concrete architectural form, where the cosmopolitan space of this penthouse apartment, much like Woo-jin himself, are stoic and purposeful, altering the destiny of Oh Dae-su while also allowing him to navigate the spatial confines of the penthouse, he even prods Dae-su to later open a photographic album which identifies his daughter as new lover.<sup>284</sup>

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 coloured plate glass windows, smooth grey concrete interiors reminiscent of Louis Kahn's museum designs, running-water floor installations (lit green from beneath), along with a mechanized monolith wardrobe which slips open into four sleek forms to reveal Woo-jin's impeccable collection of clothing, an ornate and gaudy show of material wealth on Park's part. There are also vintage photographs and photographic equipment (a reference to historical documentation, its mawkish formalism and falsity as truth-object) hung about the polished cement. In essence, we see this ensnared reality of neoliberal urbanization in the confines of such an empty architectural spaces: revealing its contradictions and subjective histories.

This scene also comments, in large part, on the overarching social stratification as architectural forms themselves become topographical zones of control. What Saskia Sassen has developed as convergent modes of control that discriminate different, usually lower class urbanites that parallels Park's interests with filmic architecture and its relation to class. 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."<sup>285</sup> Ultimately, *Oldboy* comes to expose the logic of social stratification and urban transformation through the wider themes of class warfare and architectural mapping, both tenets which are analogous to the contradictions that urban and economic neoliberalism have brought to South Korean society. The rise of a top down neoliberal

capitalism and its cache of cronies could be seen as a highly subjectivized and coerced reality, one understood best in its filmic conceptions: from the hegemony imposed over the lower classes, to the architecture and dwellings themselves, to the deliberate camera angles opening up zones of control and a topography of human and economic submission.

## VI. Conclusion

In South Korea since at least 1997, the bourgeois and working classes now answer to a new capitalist class and preexisting capitalist instrument: the elite technocrat and their restructured corporate entity, the *chaebol*. Perhaps it is no surprise that little time has been spent on the ramification of neoliberalism's free market policies on these lower classes because this policy and ideology has allowed for such wide-spread prosperity for these upper class old boys. Wedding their hegemony to an expanding capitalist expenditure that has given rise to a disturbing human cost imposed by IMF measures, *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* and *Oldboy* come to employ both latent and overt metaphors in contextualizing South Korea's brand of neoliberalism. Often overlooked by Western scholars who have written on Park's polyphonic work in the past, many ignore the severe class antagonisms and labour exploitation that are an everyday reality in South Korea and more specifically Seoul. Rather it has become increasingly obvious that postmodern tropes in New Korean Cinema have thus superseded issues of class and labour exploitation. From a Marxist lens, I have instead recontextualized these themes as they are tied to the hegemony of neoliberalism. In many ways these two films fly in the face of neoliberalism's duplicity, a set of texts for the workers and bourgeois, at a time

when this extreme form of capitalism has come to privatize these same workers' health care benefits, rights to free or subsidized education, livable pensions, as well as seeking, successfully, to normalize free-market exclusionary practices in Seoul.

In short, the inflections I have provided here within have worked to tease out an alternative meaning and cultural relevance to these otherwise sadistic or sensationalized filmic tropes associated and embedded in *SFMV* and *Oldboy*. This chapter has highlighted two central strains in the theorization of Park's work, bringing together political economic theory and discussions of labour and urbanism to reject the notion that Park's Pacific Rim aestheticism, albeit Hollywood-stylized cinema, is anything but non-partisan and a socially unconcerned set of films. In fact, it seems on closer investigation that these postmodern tropes of visceral violence and sexual perversion are metaphors themselves to comment on the vicious cycle of neoliberal hegemony in South Korea, notions that ultimately point to values of market incentives above all else.



## Chapter 6

### **Jia Zhangke's Neoliberal China: the Commodification and Dissipation of the Precarians in *The World/Shijie* (2004)**

#### **I. Migrancy, Urbanism and *Suzhi***

In large-scale venues and half-built high-rises, Chinese workers find themselves toiling away beyond what the Global Industry Convention view as a civilized workweek: 48 hours on the job. In millennial China, leisure and construction workers punch in for the usual fourteen hour workday, and serve their employer for weeks on end, with high-levels of productivity.<sup>286</sup> Yet materialism and brand loyalty breach the rank and file Chinese migrant community, where despite the long and grueling hours occurring in the country over the last 20 years—window shopping and name-brand purchases fill the precious free time they are allotted, typically once, every three weeks, in the nearly month-long cycle of repetitious work.

Such a reality is one *The World/Shijie* (2004) envisages. In its cinematic treatment of Beijing, *The World* presents a constructed and reconstructed capital city and not the demolition common to its “material topography” of earlier periods as discussed by Zhen Zhang in her anthology *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (2007).<sup>287</sup> In her Introduction, Zhang argues that there is a link between the postsocialist moment in Urban Generation filmmakers pre-2004 and the massive spatial alterations of Chinese cities, particularly Beijing, where “old communities of commerce and culture have been torn down to give way to

expressways, subway stations, corporate buildings and shopping malls—all in the wake of a ruthlessly advancing market economy and the incursion of global capitalism.”<sup>288</sup> In critiquing the phase after demolition, *The World*’s director Jia Zhangke brings to centre stage Beijing as an emerging mega-city. And where Zhang and others communicate the tectonic changes to Beijing’s material topography, I see *The World* evoking for its precarians subjects a tantalizing topography, too. Indeed, the razing of older buildings has shaped the new-fangled infrastructures and institutions we see today in the capital. And such cosmopolitan branding allows nearly every Chinese class a familiarity with international architecture (Beijing Tengda Building and the China World Trade Centre), multinational banks (Citi Bank and HSBC), and fast food chains (McDonalds and the “Chinese KFC”), as well as luxury items ranging from accessories to import sedans (Burberry to Lexus).

These spatial changes could be said to be precipitously attached to individual and heterogeneous interactions that are embedded in Beijing’s urbanization, a mark of Chinese identity that is “subsumptive to capital, and thus labour we can view as a value articulation of that very unique human subjectivity.”<sup>289</sup> Put another way, the labourer are at once responsible for tremendous economic growth and at the same time they participate in consumptive practices, now more possible in China than previous decades. According to South China Morning Post, “If you look at China’s consumption, it is now at 35 per cent [of gross domestic product]. We think it will go up to at least 50 per cent.”<sup>290</sup> Such high levels of consumption find many labourers now congregating at mega-malls in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou where “retail sales grew 18.4 per cent last year” instead of older, more stereotypical images of these workers gathering in state-

run centres or roaming the streets.<sup>291</sup> Indeed, the consumptive habits are indicative of a new consumer identity that I argue complicates how Chinese service and industrial workers view themselves in postsocial Beijing and what is fictionalized in *The World*.

Along these lines, new forms of consumption give way to the Dengist refashioning of *suzhi*/quality. According to anthropologist Yan Hairong, “*Suzhi*, for which ‘quality’ is in many respects an inadequate translation, refers to the somewhat ephemeral qualities of civility, self-discipline, and modernity. *Suzhi* marks a sense and sensibility of the self’s value in the market economy.”<sup>292</sup> Involving the shedding of the migrants’ self-perception of themselves as poverty stricken and incapable, in many ways labourers out of touch with Chinese modernity, new images and literature have emerged, such as glossy magazines and even government reports that are designed to shape their consciousness to view the market economy in China as providing self-worth and new direction. The real-life World Park as captured in Jia’s film presents a distorted image of Beijing, one in which the cosmopolitan message of worldliness and inclusion pressed onto its service and industrial workers is another form of *suzhi*. More significantly, their personal behavior comes to challenge notions of *suzhi* as each character embodies a double-bind: they repudiate white collar civility and self-discipline but at the same time desire various cultural-material qualities enjoyed by more privileged classes. Moreover, the precarians navigates a difficult topography as older notions of communal dependence and economic frugality have given way to newer, impermanent ideas about cosmopolitan autonomy and personal spending gleaned from television, film and theme parks themselves in Beijing.

If these urban conditions allow the Dengist concept of *suzhi* to flourish, then *The World*'s two-part opening sequence calls such market optimism into question. The first two minutes of the film open with a showgirl named Tao calling out backstage for a Band-Aid minutes before the start of her performance in The World Park, which cuts abruptly in the next cutaway of opening credits with a static extreme long shot of Beijing's skyline. These shots meld the service industry and the modern Chinese city as the subject and location of the narrative. In the title card shot, Jia creates an urban cinematic space where residential and commercial high-rises flank a phantasmagoric replica of the Eiffel Tower housed in The World Park, all while a peasant in the foreground slowly traverses the frame from left to right, occasionally stopping, breaking the fourth wall by looking directly into the camera (Figs 5.1 & 5.2). Yet, in this brief, fragmentary long take, even disjointed precarians lives also express the importance of work (either as lowly service professional or lumpen-proletariat scavenger), and foreshadows one of the things the film will later critique: how Beijing is now an uncertain and ever-changing experience for the precarians classes due to the marketplace measures happening to its urban core. The professional and socio-economic positioning of Jia's protagonists in *The World* enable two crucial questions to be asked that hold this chapter together conceptually: How does this film problematize the millennial workers' struggles in neoliberal Beijing as well as situate these precarians as a source of commodification through their creative activities and employment? What has the dissipation of the precarians classes meant for a post-socialist, even cosmopolitan Beijing? Before I address these central questions, I must first provide be an updated definition of China's unique political economy since 2000.



**Fig. 6.1**



**Fig. 6.2**

## **II. Chinese neoliberalism 2.0**

At the present moment, neoliberalism has grown into a far more potent and contagious form than my previous discussions of its legitimization in the late 1980s suggested. In the

new millennium, neoliberalism has drastically changed the migrant workers' condition in the capital city. Organised primarily by the government's integration of free market policies since the 1980s and the gradual dismantling of the socialist planned economy, neoliberalism has now become a mature doctrine, as industrialists acting harmoniously with party officials to further maximize the impacts of its policies. Indeed, the most serious policies in relation to this analysis come with the dissolution of work units for casual labour.<sup>293</sup> Increasingly, due to these conditions the picture that emerges in the 2000s has far greater consequences for those moving from rural regions of the country to the power centres—urban, usually coastal, areas.

Beijing, as a highly dense and post-socialist city, is now a site of relocation for labour, and its promise of tantalizing prosperity and economic security away from older agrarian livelihoods has made relocation ever more common. The conception that Beijing has now become a metropolis where the compulsive pressure to break with the older image of the country as the “iron rice bowl” has instead led to rife wage reductions and life lived in cramped, company-owned dormitories for its precarians is a measure of Chinese precarity. The physically altered terrain of Beijing—both actual and filmic—carries a sense of place for its urban inhabitants. *The World*, with its worker dormitories and shanty apartments are part of a lower class population management that Yomi Braester frankly discusses as the lack of “viable housing plans for those who cannot find a place in the new, chaotic economy.”<sup>294</sup> We find Jia's itinerant workers taken out of the cosmopolitan environments which they impact each day through their shifts at The World Park, and when they retire for the evening—hidden away, quite literally, in backlot dormitories in the theme park for those lucky enough to sleep on the premises or left

to worse living conditions (such as dingy hostels, or subleased rooms)—ultimately these filmic portraits calcify the breakdown of living standards and rent increases under neoliberalism. For example, in *The World* Tao's boyfriend Taisheng must sleep in a hostel each night, making intimacy and basic privacy impossible. The simple luxury of companionship at the end of the day must be shared, with other itinerant workers, resting alongside them in the barracks-like rooms.

Beyond the difficult living conditions and rent increases associated with the Sino design of neoliberalism, it also corresponds to a variety of regulatory issues that relate to employment insecurity and consumer preference that has “become accepted practice” (*bei shehui renke*) in the twenty-first century PRC.<sup>295</sup> Several neoliberal policies articulated by Jamie Morgan are important in this study of contemporary China, particularly if we are to grasp the nuances affecting labour from say, South Korea or South Africa's distinct marketplace models and service sectors.

1). “There should be fewer restrictions and fewer regulations.”<sup>296</sup> In my view, the government's granting of Free Trade Zones (FTZ) to transnational corporations like Nike allows these conglomerates to operate freely and set up labour camps that employ peasants from all over the country, providing only poverty-level salaries and condoning inhuman work conditions that exacerbate the powerlessness of the precarians classes.

2). “Unions distort markets translates into workers' rights are wrong.”<sup>297</sup> My understanding is that the anti-union stance by the Party has only recently been scaled back at least for certain industries in the country i.e., auto manufactures and consumer

goods workers due to a wave of suicides by employees; yet other key sectors have had little bargaining power and this is a theme taken up by Jia in *The World*.

3). “Protectionism undermines global competitive efficiency translates into least cost is best no matter who bears the cost.”<sup>298</sup> Despite the doublespeak by the Party that Morgan keys in on, the communists still seek to control production rates and over-production of goods, while following the basic neoliberal model that low overhead for producing these goods is necessary for business. In other words, neoliberalism with its democratic valorization of the rational individual, mirrors certain concerns of a polity that fears the collective possibilities of civil society, and of organised labour.<sup>299</sup>

The current rural and city-based labour movements, and their galvanizing efforts against not only the Chinese government’s adoption of neoliberal policies, as outlined above, but also the determination by transnational corporations to intervene in labour disputes, have caused new conflicts for the precarians classes. Take the summer of 2010 for example: when 2,000 autoworkers went on strike to oppose wage reductions by Honda, where news coverage in Beijing was granted on the side of the autoworker in contrast to a strike eight years earlier, where several hundred hotel workers protested their lack of overtime compensation and received scant press coverage by CCTV, Beijing TV or Jinhua.<sup>300</sup>

But it is also important to recognize how compared to the government’s willingness to illustrate the solidarity of the factory workers on the picket line in 2010 was absent from their political line toward the often feminized and invisible hotel worker. Gender inequality, though not a significant subject in post-socialist China does



exist, as lower-waged female workers take jobs not masculine enough or, in fact, “worthy” enough for their male counterparts; today these female service workers make up 60 percent of China’s production capability on the assembly line. In recent decades, all-female workforces can be found in Taiwanese-owned-China-based factories that employ cheap Chinese labour, in Free Trade Zones near the garment, textile and “small goods capital” Guangzhou. These prison-like work environments, much like heavy industry jobs across China, harbor similar worker dissatisfactions with their Taiwanese and Chinese employers over medical treatment, overtime compensation, factory conditions and employment security. In many ways, *The World* counters notions that cultural production passively stands by in the face of inevitable economic situations. This is not to say Jia Zhangke’s film is free of propagandistic allegories, nor is *The World* a complete condemnation of modernization and neoliberalism altogether. What this film does seek is a truer than representation of the Chinese precarians classes in the market age. Accuracy is therefore a concern in *The World*’s narratological portrayal of these very classes.

For his choice of subject matter, Jia has himself been dubbed a “cinematic migrant worker” (*dianying mingong*).<sup>301</sup> Such a gesture to align oneself with formulating how the working-classes have been represented across the gamut of world cinemas is relevant to this analysis. Nevertheless, it is cinema’s ability to record the imprint of an event or class struggle that enables us to capture one angle of this fragmented temporality and labour’s cinematic representation that makes it such a genuinely imaginative medium to work with. In other words, film’s potential in this context to imagine such class issues in newer and more drastic ways is tied as much to

socio-political allegory as it is to enticing audiences visually. The visual astuteness sets Jia's *The World* apart from more politically didactic Chinese films. For example, Li Yang's *Blind Shaft* (2004) is a documentary-styled neo-noir about two murdering miners from Shanxi Province that collect life insurance payouts from their victims. Within the diegesis of *Blind Shaft* there is an obvious leitmotif over the perilous mining profession and its disregard for safety, something left unchecked by the Chinese government, yet interrogated by Li. Increasingly, over the last few years, NGOs have also begun to monitor China's coal industry to give a face to this real-world problem that *Blind Shaft* fictionalizes.<sup>302</sup>

The attention that a film like *Blind Shaft* calls to provincial injustice via the representation of the worker is a wider concern Urban Generation filmmaking from China cultivates, and a concept *The World* in particular addresses. As Paul Willemen recently states, "is not a question of whether representations reflect or construct the real. It is a question of how the real, that is to say, history, is present in the very fabric, as well as in the organization, of representations."<sup>303</sup> In using less typical Chinese precarians workers—dancers and security guards—Jia's observation of these more agreeable looking global workers is also too, a measure of real life labour difficulties. I see Jia's dealing with the streaming nature of representation, a trope in his filmmaking that helps us to conceptualize the service workers' presentness and twin identity, even their antinomic *suzhi*—as Chinese workers and as Chinese consumers.

On the one hand, each service industry worker in *The World* is unquestionably united by feelings of disenchantment, espoused as characters contemplate their

indentured status—to Chinese corporations, black market peddlers, even knockoff “fashion houses.” On the other hand, it seems these workers’ realities are marked by superficial searches, what is essentially frivolous self-improvement or what political philosopher Ci Jiwei calls the shift from “utopianism to hedonism” in the post-Mao period.<sup>304</sup> Moreover, *The World* is a film that explores a shallow self-identity under neoliberalism—e.g., the luxury shopping of one female dancer from The World Park is highlighted when she parades her new Chanel handbag in front of two fellow performers who enviously look on; while other employees gamble and accrue sizeable amounts of debt—two types of expenditure that encapsulate a limited access to surplus capital, even though spending continuously happens throughout the film.

In many ways, the effects of modern capital on Chinese labour mandates a form of superficial prosperity at all costs, a reworking of productive labour exchanges, and in this context how China’s *other* consumer citizens produce commodities for their own sake is what Marx called “excess value in the product itself and above the value of the capital consumed in it.”<sup>305</sup> These materialistic impulses are reflected in the behavior and outlook of some proletariat found in *The World*, who generate, at the same time, a black market predilection for newer exchange value in China’s evolving market-based system (peddling “knock-off” designer handbags to invalid SIM cards for mobile phones)—an outcome of the decomposing socialist planned economy which once monitored such illegal activity more scrupulously. What I mean by this is that an alternative political economy has developed in tandem with the market system, and it too features in *The World*’s narrative. The most obvious black market products sold in China, and which appear in *The World*, are knock-off, high-end foreign goods (i.e., Gucci handbags and

Burberry scarves). One female character in *The World* named Qun owns a fashion house where expertly trained migrant workers, (exemplifying Jia's attention to migrant labours' black market activities) manufacture illegal "fakes," essentially copies of name-brand fashion items, mostly European-style dresses. Underworld activities bring together Qun and Taisheng (the boyfriend of Tao, the main female protagonist) through their gangster boss, as these characters run in the same circles in Beijing. Taisheng's illegitimate business dealings in Beijing have him partaking in jobs that range from bribes to mobile phone scams to being paid as a courier to facilitate these and other criminal transactions in Beijing and in other provinces. Such shifting moral boundaries come to tarnish notions of *suzhi*—e.g., inequality allows the self-realization that "making it" in Beijing requires rural migrants to unlawfully bend the rules to improve themselves amongst the urban population. Such unlawful liberties taken by Qun and Taisheng within *The World*'s narrative illustrate the material nature of cosmopolitanism in China and how cosmopolitan items such as individual fashion and mobile phones come to equate (semi)social mobility, and sadly, nothing more.

### **III. Urban Precarians Films from Beijing and beyond**

In viewing how *The World* structures labours' commodification, one is struck by Jia's empirical formulations. For instance, about twenty minutes into the film several Russian dancers arrive to the World Park and are asked by their line manager to surrender their passports, "to keep them safe" as he puts it. Here, the sequence implies the indentured nature of these Eastern European performers as entertainment capital and their use value in the Chinese context, e.g., to add a multicultural element to the World Park's daily performances. Conversely, Jia's depiction of precariansism is also artistically eccentric

at moments. The opening of the film, for example, shows the new precarians (stage performers in full costume) and old precarians (vagrant scavenger with debris-filled rucksack) as beautifully composed through a long take and extreme long shot of Beijing that both amplify these precarians' various forms of domestic service. Jia achieves such a dialectic, in my view, through distanciation. The film paints a complex picture about two migrant workers, Tao and Taisheng, and their deteriorating relationship told alongside stories of other stage performers and security guards, namely Weiwei, Youyou, and Erxiao, who are similarly indentured to this Chinese Epcot Centre. The film's realism is tied to the consequences of casual employment; The World Park's employees, with their expectation of low wage competition and future job loss (and refusal to return to worse socioeconomic conditions in their home provinces or move to a sweatshop boomtown such as Guangdong), ultimately fail to assimilate into the new urban cosmopolitanism found in Beijing. The remainder of this article will delineate a new cinematic image of Chinese labour in this period through extensive reflections on *The World*, coupled with summaries of earlier films based in Beijing, as well as precarians films based outside of the capital.<sup>306</sup>

It would be foolish to put forward one film as encapsulating the totality of migrant issues found in contemporary China. Yet *The World* and its representative features are nonetheless faithful to the conditions and realities of neoliberal reform. To this end, Jia concretizes the new immaterial services these labourers now perform and this form of work becomes the film's central loci. Because existing political economic discussions of this film have largely been broad brush assertions about China's handling of developmental adjustments—mainly, the country's entry into the WTO in 2001 and

the reality of globalisation—the specificities and formulae that mark Beijing’s continuous and unfettered modernization projects under neoliberalisation are largely left untreated, leaving the study of labour incomplete.<sup>307</sup> I see these singularities (i.e., types of employment, salary, consumption, housing, ect.) as having a direct effect on the rights and values of the Chinese labourer, and my work centrally departs from other scholarship that only loosely addresses this angle.<sup>308</sup>

*The World* reinserts an often ignored figure in screen culture in China.<sup>309</sup> I understand the recreation of a precarians class in Jia’s filmmaking strategy through the lens of a Marcusean hermeneutics.<sup>310</sup> *Social hermeneutics*, as I shall put it, is a type of artistic impulse by way of an interpretation of older events and culture as relevant to a particular insight on those very events and cultures in the present day. Jia is in some ways acts as an interpreter of precarians culture by way of his experiences growing up in Fenyang and his knowledge of the Chinese working classes beliefs, customs, politics and culture as well as their repression in a pre and post-Maoist era. But Jia’s filmic representations are by no means politicized, nor are they solely apolitical manifestations, instead he shows us the heterogeneity of the precarians, marked by what Fredric Jameson has declared elsewhere as men and women whose “protopolitical character will remain visible, even for citizens of a world fatigued by politics.”<sup>311</sup> In other words, through the film, Jia encourages us to rethink the “quality of experiences” incurred by lower class Chinese in the present day metropolitan context.<sup>312</sup> In light of this, we must also consider the migrant precarians found in the *The World* as part of an entrepreneurially-minded rural class; these Dengist generation migrants (born after 1978) and working during the Huist regime, all share an advantage over their parent’s

generation of peasant farmers and agricultural workers. Leslie T. Chang describes these rural roaming labourers as “younger, better educated [though this usually just means the completion of grammar school] and more enterprising than the people they leave behind. Migrant workers use a simple term for the move that defines their lives: *chuqu*/to go out.”<sup>313</sup>

Chronicling the *chuqu* nature of migrants to Beijing is not limited to Jia Zhangke’s *The World*. Xie Fei’s *Black Snow/Benming nian* (1989) Ning Ying’s *Police Story/Minjing gushi* (1995) and Wang Xiaoshuai’s *Beijing Bicycle/Shiqi sui de danche* (2001)—each, like the *The World*, examines the city’s vast infrastructural changes and regeneration initiatives as seen through the eyes of criminals or migrants, returning or new to the city. Xie’s *Black Snow*, an older film by comparison, traces Li Huiquan’s return to his dead mother’s home in Beijing after being released from prison. Unmistakably bleak in tone, many of Li’s continuing depraved decisions—beating up a lowlife music producer—stem from his own disenfranchisement and his desire to impress a pop singer he befriends at a bar. Li consciously clambers to vindicate himself after prison, though it must be said. Trying, fruitlessly through self-employment, only to be left dejected by the disciplining power of neoliberal competitiveness; a world he seems out of sorts with. Moreover, Li’s plight signals the “vacuity of a purposeless existence” which embodies those in China that entrepreneurialism has left behind.<sup>314</sup> Even *Black Snow*’s closed off topography captures the city in a series of tight, shadowy blue-grey alleyways, grimy train stations and the filthy street conditions that Li must contend with, and is later contained by—a dingy set of ethnographic markers that builds a new prison of sorts for him. These Beijing streets are also where Li is brutally stabbed

after being mugged and dies amongst the anonymity of unconcerned city dwellers at the end of the film. Yet beyond the stylistics of the mise-en-scène, *Black Snow* does not flaunt the dynamism or vast ecology of Beijing; instead the camerawork lends a realism that is characteristic of Ken Loach, showing, like the British socialist filmmaker, the degrading nature of work and life, with Li's performance outweighing any aesthetic devotion to the city.

Different than the late 1980s punishing urbanism, the 1990s cycle of city films bears witness to continuous developmental issues unique to this epoch (mainly, housing reinvestment and demolition and further crackdown on vagrant communities and illegal migrants) and away from *Black Snow*'s claustrophobic vision of Beijing. The new urban cinema of the 1990s is best exemplified by what Jenny Kwok-Wah Lau calls the "Beijing Trilogy." During this period, Zhang Nuanxin's *Good Morning Beijing/Beijing ni zao* (1990), Zhang Yuan's *Beijing Bastards/Beijing Zazhong* (1992) and Tang Danian's *City Paradise/Doushi taintang* (1999) all pivot their narrative concerns around different social strata as they adjust to tough conditions in the capital city. Lau goes on to say that the "urban is not simply a place of corrupt or greedy commerce, as was portrayed in classic cinema, nor does it simply represent new opportunity, albeit a challenging one, as was reflected in the films of the 1980s. The films of the 1990s are instead concerned with the immense tension created by the fundamental spatial and temporal rearrangement brought about by urbanization."<sup>315</sup> This tension Lau discusses in the context of the Beijing Trilogy from the 1990s has increased tenfold in terms of regeneration and gentrification facing Beijing from 2000 onwards.



The new millennium film *Beijing Bicycle*, for example, witnesses the capital's gentrifying topography through painstakingly choreographed cinematography. The story centres on a seventeen-year old protagonist, Guei, who comes to the city from rural Shanxi to find work and is hired as a bike courier. However, after his bicycle is stolen the narrative arc of retrieving it becomes an excuse to explore the frantic construction of new, internationalist styled glass and steel architecture, built for commercial and residential purposes. The gentrification, even the razing of older *hutong*/housing compounds, occurred at the time of the film's production; and the neo-realist cinematography, distinctive to Zhang's Urban Generation, is also reminiscent of De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*, where Ricci, like Guei search for their stolen bicycles.

To move outside of Beijing for a moment to Shanxi province, Jia's *Unknown Pleasures* (2002) identifies regional turmoil for the precarians, too. Jia's early focus on his "hometown" and the slow liberalization in non-power centres comes to illustrate a frank portrayal of men and women living with such hard times in remote parts of China. It could be said that Jia's steady and unflagging focus on different precarians groups in China explains his focus on Beijing two years later with *The World*. The common desire in China to relocate to Beijing, a place where many go to work or dream of going, is often idealized much like London and New York. Yet those who stay at home, like the characters in *Unknown Pleasures*, find hardship of another form: social inertia. Moreover, as capital's reshuffling of Chinese society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has produced an economically consolidated Beijing, which means that the resources have been drained away from more industrialized, smaller cities like Datong in *Unknown Pleasures*. Xudong Zhang calls this experience in rural areas of China *xiancheng*, which "means

county-level city.” Zhang contends that “consciously or not, zooming in on the under belly of Chinese Reform and Chinese socialist modernity in general” that *xiancheng* is “shapeless and unattractive, exposing spatial and social organization based on necessity and with no prospect of overcoming. 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 modernist alike.”<sup>316</sup> This “unruly reality” and materialistic desire brought on by market supremacy is located in *Unknown Pleasures*. Here the central protagonist, Xiaoji, robs a bank to impress Qiaoqiao due to his desperate economic circumstances as a poor, jobless Northerner. The frantic narrative becomes an allegorical technique to remind Chinese and Western audiences of their continuous neoliberal adjustments, even as they occur in China’s own rustbelt. Because of Jia’s attention to the industrial landscape in *Unknown Pleasures*, particularly low-flung buildings, decrepit roadways, and crummy-looking signs found on location in Shanxi, such iconography signals the precarians landscape and those that occupy it; but the desire by Xiaoji to strike it rich seems out of place in such a poor area of the country. At the same time, it seems these tensions between urban poverty and prosperity associated with neoliberalism’s selective economic rejuvenation of cities ought to be given further consideration in light of how the precarians classes realize their own self-worth. The example of Xiaoji’s violent criminal behavior illustrates the desperation and nothing-to-lose behavior which captures one aspect of a more desperate condition and demographic of the precarians North and refracts, painfully in *Unknown Pleasures*. The failure by Xiaoji to realize his own self-worth and his jailing by the conclusion of the

film point, like *Black Snow*, to the inability of some to acclimate to China's neoliberal reforms; ultimately, the neoliberal myth of easy money and social status cloud both protagonists' judgment in these two films and is a way to demonstrate that social tensions exist in most Chinese cities.

#### **IV. Chinese Labour and its Commodification in *The World***

The commodification of the service industry worker is now an everyday reality in post-socialist China. This reality highlights cinema's specific capacities to image and document the leisure and construction industry workers as floating populations of illegal rural immigrants that crowd Beijing's living quarters, slums, industrial parks, cultural hubs and entertainment and shopping centres. I see migrant problems in China, suggested in the dense term floating labour/*liudong renkou*, as addressed candidly in *The World*. Jia's sobering film brings to life many of the claims made by Li Zhang in her sociological study of roaming labour occurring in Beijing. Zhang posits that floating labour is bound to industry needs, yet "their primary goals are the same: to make money and get rich in the cities."<sup>317</sup> However, the majority of the peasant workers who come to the cities have nothing but their labour to sell. Armed only with prepared bed rolls, cooking implements and striped polyester bags bursting with their belongings, many are unprepared for the intense housing shortages and simply don't know where to deposit their belongings.

*The World* conveys this spatial and temporal movement, showing how enormous groups migrate to Beijing overnight to constitute an ensemble of migrants hailing from countless regions across the country—and who, like the two new characters introduced

into the narrative of the film, appear messy, rustic and out-of-sorts within the modern capital. *The World's* migrant labourers, one who calls himself Little Sister, the cousin (not a blood relative but what in China is considered a close family friend) of Jing, arrive together, fresh off a dusty coach bus that zigzags across rural provinces before its arrival in the capital. Jia depicts the disorienting experience of such dislocation as his two rural migrants enter The World Park for employment. At the heart of these migrants' unfamiliarity with their new environment, and what Jia's precarians find in this fictional context, is a startling and surreal spatial order. Awestruck by the replicas they encounter—Notre Dame and Big Ben among them—they make their way to meet Taisheng, their friend from home, who is currently a security guard in The World Park. Taisheng offers his assistance but is only able to get Little Sister and not Jing a job in the World Park; they later both find employment on a construction site in Beijing.

The modern experience of Beijing is elegantly presented in this scene not only in terms of its phantasmagoric visual motifs of miniaturized models of world monuments and historic sites, but also in how these scaled-down replicas are bound to what Peter Osborne elegantly calls a modernity that is a “qualitative, not a chronological category.”<sup>318</sup> The arrival of Little Sister and Jing to the capital and, in particular, to the theme park functions as a metaphor for the transformation of time and space on a local level. Their experience is a type of subjective, multi-layered personalisation of the world. As Osborne goes on to argue, “modernity is a dynamic process of development and permanent revolution that is nonetheless a subjective stance in how one reinterprets and understands the modern experience, not only in Western systems of industrialisation, capitalisation and technological innovation” but also in non-Western

systems: Beijing is retrofitted and reconstituted at the same time to the experiences of these two labourers.<sup>319</sup> Jing's new orientation on his entrance to this scenic section of the park, full of replicated foreign icons relocated to Beijing, is not dependent on a monocultural conception of Western modernity, nor is his (dis)orientation outside any one particular modern experience. In other words, Jing (and even Little Sister) react to these recognizable monuments not from their limited travel experience in China but rather in how these factitious replicas register their individual memories of these specific sites as seen in cosmopolitan mediums such as film or on the internet. The localization or even nationalization of these monuments in Beijing are vital in this scene because it sheds light on what Liu Kang underlines as "internal tensions and contradictions within modernity, understood as the global experience."<sup>320</sup> As China has now entered the global arena of market speculation and financial exchanges post-2001, and with an increased sense of cultural prowess given its new-found pecking order under neoliberal globalisation, the global experiences of travel and prosperity are transmuted through the simulacra of these park replicas (Fig. 5.3).

Taisheng: "That's America. Manhattan." [pointing to a miniature version of the Twin Towers]

Jing: "The Twin Towers were bombed on September 11th."

Taisheng: "We still have them."

Jing: "Great."

Taisheng: "That's Big Ben in England... Very famous... And that's France's Eiffel Tower." [Pointing off screen to the park's replica of the French architectural icon.]

[*Silence*]

Taisheng: "That's Notre Dame. Heard of it?"

Jing: "I've seen it in the movies."

Taisheng: "What do you think of my workplace?"

Jing: "Not bad. You're in the capital. You're protecting imperialist property."

Taisheng: “I’m just a security guard.”



Fig. 6.3

Indeed, this exchange throws up how the World Park follows the logic of the Chinese government in their manufacturing of cultural heritage sites from around the world in a transnational vein. These objects can be understood as contrived spectacles, and Jing and Little Sister bring to such a fantastical commercial space their provincial understanding of worlds beyond them. But they are not the “beneficiaries of these changes” in the PRC, only workers who make such realities those of others, more privileged. In other words, Jing and Little Sister and many others like them ensure this reality is kept running and is experienced by those who are cosmopolitan enough to enter this theme park space for leisure and escape, but cannot experience it in the same way, as their reality is one that consists solely of immaterial, even touristic labour.

In another scene in *The World*, these actualizations of non-productive labour resonate with almost empirical clarity, exposing yet another microcosm of the precarians classes that has perished in this film via a work-related accident. After Little Sister is fired for petty theft, Jing finds him a job on a construction site where he hauls steel. But

it is not long before Little Sister is crushed by a dislodged bundle of steel I-beams and is rushed to a Beijing hospital where he lies dying in bed. Typical of many accidents that occur in real-life, workplace injuries (that lead to fatalities) like Little Sister's correspond to the causal effects of legitimatizing cheap labour practices in the PRC. This is a process Lin Chun identifies as a morbid consequence for the lower classes in the post-Mao era:

The number of work-related accidents and deaths had rocketed since the 1990s due to mismanagement and neglect. This picture is encapsulated in an angry line in the poet Shao Yanxiang's 'Mourning the Coal Miner: Cheap labour, cheap lives'! The violation of labour rights in China was put before the U.S. Congress in a petition to challenge the artificial and severe reduction of China's labour costs below the baseline of comparative advantage defined by standard trade theory. While public funds and private profits flowed into the pockets of the super-rich, a significant portion of the population were impoverished.<sup>321</sup>

Lin's comments, although related to the coal industry, highlight the human cost to practices urban manual labour as well, as management violates safety protocols and workers' rights in equal measure. Still, Little Sister's death is due to another double shift at night where he works in a construction crew ordered to hurry the completion of a luxury condominium to satisfy the demands of the commercial property developers and its future tenants. We are initially told of this incident by mobile phone, followed by a cut to a non-descript and dilapidated hospital in Beijing where Little Sister is framed dying in bed of head trauma. Outside his room, Taisheng quarrels with Jing over the circumstances of the accident.

Taisheng: "He's younger! You should've watched over him!"

Jing: "Nothing I could do."

Taisheng: "But you're much older! Were you drunk again?"

Jing: “I don’t drink anymore.”

Taisheng: “What will you tell his family?”

This dialogue is interrupted by a text message to Taisheng from Tao, contrasting the naturalist detail of the hospital corridor with one of the film’s six animated scenes. The message is viewed in close up, from the point of view of Taisheng, who reads that Tao has finally relinquished her prudishness in the form of a request: “I’m waiting in Room 306 of the Hongyun Hotel.” Despite the calamity and seriousness of the situation, it is striking how the once shabby hospital interior resonates differently in the computer-generated, manga-like aesthetic. The colour palette of the animation drastically alters the peeling mint green walls in the scene to a flat space awash in a yellow-brownish glow, the earthy colours achieve compositional balance in the frame with a single corridor lamp that has attracted a stray moth (Figs 6.4 & 6.5). The fluttering moth is not a sign of improper hygiene associated with this medical facility but instead connotes Tao’s warmth, a loving gesture of sustenance in an otherwise grim situation. The moth can be read as a less than striking metaphor for Tao’s love—lacking the delicate features or natural habitat one would find for a butterfly, this hovering creature is more provincial and ordinary by comparison, much like the female character it is supposed to represent.





Fig. 6.4



Fig. 6.5

In turn, the animated scene cuts abruptly back to a type of *effacing realism* typical of Jia's filmmaking: a doctor presents Taisheng and Jing with a bill for the medical treatment, which sends Taisheng down the corridor to pay it—a sequence as barren as it is poetic. There is then another cut to Little Sister's hospital room where Taisheng transcribes the labourer's dying words on the back of a cigarette pack. It is here that the commodification of the worker is most cleverly and poignantly imbued, because after it is revealed that Little Sister has died, a pathetic epitaph is produced. Yet the meaning

here is to signify both class decomposition and the everyday object as precarians art. This image is created out of the focus on Taisheng's cheap pack of Chinese tobacco. Little Sister's last words signal a socio-economic position which is not immortalized according to any type of socialist agitprop/collective recognition, but rather is rendered unremarkable, even simple, bound to capital, and a slow pan right draws our attention to the commodity form. Here Little Sister's labour and flesh have dematerialised into both numeric specter and artful expression, Chinese characters that translate on the hospital wall as:

My debts: Liu Shuhe 35 yuan, Zhi Gang 18 yuan... Wang Jianjun seven yuan, Shao 60 yuan...and three yuan to the Noodle Stand in front of the school. Chen Zhijun alias Little Sister

Inevitably, the trace of Little Sister, his untranslatable remainder through a simple list of his existing debt, will live on in some respects. It would appear that Jia's reconfiguration of capital from Little Sister's existing debt points to the kind rigid exchange that *is* translatable. Here, Little Sister's escapist activities—borrowing and gambling, not uncommon to most other classes in China—becomes an interesting motif as a form of postmortem art, a cinematic expression that illustrates Little Sister's single concern at the time of his own demise: the repayment of his debt. (Figs 6.6 & 6.7)



Fig. 6.6

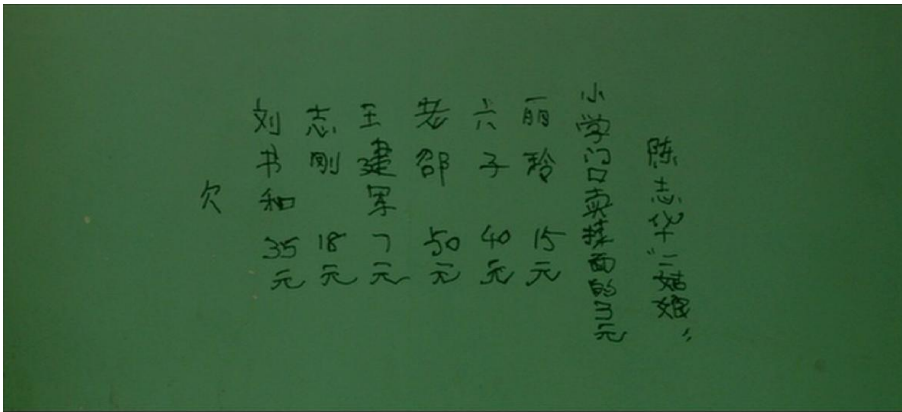


Fig. 6.7

This haunting image becomes an entropic message in this scene. His toil as a Beijing construction worker and his strenuous productivity are not a means for him to see his way out of the migrant class in Beijing through his weekly earnings, but instead the bottom line of his awareness of his own life insurance and the creation of new capital. And Little Sister, despite a lack of education or cultural awareness, is perceptive enough to realize this; exchanging the value of his life to the commodity exchange he has entered in afterlife, he fulfills repayment for his outstanding debt. While what remains,

tragically, is a pathetic RMB life insurance payout that is later handed to his grieving relatives after their silent arrival in Beijing.

In aesthetic terms, the Chinese characters, which are superimposed over the once low-lit mint green wall, appear emerald in colour, both a haunting and clear evocation of these two otherwise difficult, interrelated premises: art and economics. This scene in *The World* delivers an aesthetic not of hollow political substance or obscure familial trace but rather one that highlights the pace and consequence of hazardous development in Beijing, signaled in this context by Little Sister's insignificant sacrifice in the grand scheme of this global city's continuous growth. This scene ultimately jettisons emotional attachment in favor of a detached (albeit beautifully composed) commentary on dubious developmental progress for the labourer.

## **V. Cosmopolitan Dissipation and the Chinese Worker**

As the last section illustrates, Jia Zhangke's systematic denunciation of Chinese labour commodification in *The World* is politically, and, at the same time, artfully composed. I will now move to discuss the film's multilayered conception of cosmopolitanism as it guards against the redistribution of resources and the exclusion of provincial culture, allowing for the participation of the workers as they unroot themselves from customary differences and become what I call *factitious cosmopolitans*. What I mean by this is that workers like the ones found in *The World* become manageable citizens who give up their regional particularities to serve those of a higher Chinese class. In this regard, Jia's film provides an exemplary case study of leisure workers in Beijing immersed in transnational flows, diasporic detachment and multiple identity politics that for Jia, and

must be seen as an attempt to “pin down the substance of cosmopolitanism” that creates both material incentives and ephemeral socio-physical conditions.<sup>322</sup> Valerie Jaffee has commented on the appearance of cosmopolitan ideals in *The World*: “The main characters have presumably left their homes in search at least in part of the cosmopolitanism associated with China's large cities, but what they find is a sham cosmopolitanism.”<sup>323</sup> In this section, I intend to explore cosmopolitanism beyond its aggregate meaning as per Jaffee; instead, I will discuss cosmopolitanism as a trigger to social entitlement over repressive inequality, and how these mutually embedded principles in Beijing relate to this film. In other words, much of the expanded and expendable citizenry found in Beijing are deemed cosmopolitan only as long as their shift allows them to be.

Jia's fabrication of cosmopolitanism and its effects on the workers as seen in *The World Park* does, however, have one universal inscription, inasmuch as it presents their services as a series of events that piece together a certain reality—it is a reality that can be understood as an immense storehouse of events, images and peoples that are held together within the theme park's proposed utopian vision, its collected and representative structure. Thus, promoting a utopian village like the one found in *The World Park* is based in many ways on certain malleable notions grounded in orthodox definitions of cosmopolitanism: world delegations, global citizenship, cultural mixing and equity in city life. However, as cosmopolitanism is a complicated premise, it needs elaboration, looking with a critical eye on its shortcomings as a democratic concept. Elsewhere, Timothy Brennan has discussed the cultural merits of cosmopolitanism, and finds its repressive nature as the flipside to this Janus coined vision of the world:

mobility verse restriction.<sup>324</sup> Yet it is Brennan's skepticism that will no doubt help us to understand the precarians community's position in Jia's modern China, particularly in relation to the ideas about cosmopolitanism, propounded in this film.

Brennan's criticism of cosmopolitanism is valuable in this context because, in his words: "If cosmopolitanism springs from a comfortable culture of middle-class travelers, intellectuals and businessmen...the realities of global interpenetration and homogenization, mass migration and mass culture, under the dominance of capital—is an ideology of the domestically restricted, the recently relocated, the provisionally exiled and temporarily weak."<sup>325</sup> The last two words of this quotation bear repeating: temporarily weak. The migrant workers in Jia's *The World Park* are temporarily weak in economic as well as social terms due to their respective positions: they are lowly casual labourers employed in an amusement park that resembles Disney World. Yet it is the temporary weakness engendered by these conditions that allows the concept of cosmopolitanism to thrive. *The World's* protagonists move to Beijing and begin work in The World Park as a temporary means to stay afloat as they strive for bigger things in career and in life. They may or may not achieve the comfortable culture attributed to middleclassdom—but sadly, as Jia's narrative portends, most will not.

In opposition to this reality faced Tao, Chinese media has fabricated a more than socially distinct set of professions: white collar managerial classes made up of high-ranking bureaucrats, real-estate brokers and luxury goods retailer, a group that exude power, entrepreneurial choice and unrestrained opulence that contrasts the unglamorous social strata made up of showgirls (like Tao), crane-operators and security guards who

lack “formal power and material resources.” Social esteem—the notion that one is aware of social difference should not then be viewed as a germane sociological concept in my view—but must be localized to look at the multiplicity of Beijing’s urban residents. One micro-formation of the localization happening to culture in the capital can be found in the programming on Beijing TV (BTV). Founded in 1979, BTV’s characterization of the middle and upper-middle classes since the mid-1990s has noticeably changed. Janice Hua Xu maintains that while BTV’s earlier programming focused on ordinary citizens, “more recent consumer programming has become increasingly specialized and upscale, addressing and shaping the growing middle class market with programmes on everything from the latest technological gadgets and foreign travel to art investment.”<sup>326</sup>

For instance, the High-Tech Observer which debuted in 1999 is one of the first programmes explicitly catering to middle class tastes. Its success lies in how it marketed the latest gadgets and electronic equipment (i.e., IBM laptops and pricey Japanese mobile phones) to an audience of business professionals who coveted these “must have items.” More recently, though, in 2003, these same white-collar professionals, of a mostly male variety now feature in a boom of dating shows on BTV, the most provocative of which, *If You Are the One*/*fei cheng wu vao* typify a haute materialism and fetishisation of women. But such shallow personification of one’s identity through wealth and status in China is not limited to male entrepreneurs alone; in fact, consumer choice pervades and affects its female contestants, too, as they decide on potential partners on air that will fulfill economic security over emotional compatibility. In one particular episode, a female Beijinger proclaimed, now famously, that “she’d rather cry

in the back of a BMW than laugh on the back of a bicycle.” In today’s Chinese society such an image of well-to-do Beijing men having their choice of twenty striking urban women arranged in semi-circle, is unsettling, even in the post-socialist present, but the spectacle of game show speed dating is important not just as a new social phenomenon linked to the middle classes, but one packaged as hip and modern, and therefore cosmopolitan by default.

Finally, for television dating shows like *If You Are the One* rely on an international brand of cosmopolitanism, a city slicker aesthetic that mesmerize its audiences through lavish studios (resembling the American studio template used in *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*), along with state-of-the-art production capabilities (fiber optic teleprompters for its contestants, multiple camera positions and postproduction sound effects and music) that together produce a glossy mirage of Chinese yuppie culture. Indeed, cosmopolitanism then, in its BTV televisual guise is a perspective that finds multiple affiliations, loyalty to Chinese middle classes, to material identification, and beyond that, global retail chains and transnational corporations that spread cosmopolitanism by alluding to culture and worldliness as an actively manufactured process that now reaches Beijing. While High-Tech and *If You Are the One* have come to replace the obvious agitprop of government television programming, still, these newer, more consumer-friendly TV shows also signal, purportedly, a harmonious life, one without social tension.

Of course, service-style employment merely prolongs the inevitable truth that cosmopolitanism is only a condition, a guise, and not really transcendable for the



underprivileged as they work to create it for wealthier classes. The imagined sense of a cosmopolitan reality as envisaged in *The World* shows how these lower classes are managed by fantastical edification by allowing these same workers, once released from their service duties in a given day, to experience the guise of cosmopolitanism from the prevue. In one scene, Tao and Taisheng are found embracing in the cockpit of a decommissioned 747 aircraft, as each daydreams what it might be like to travel beyond the confines of Beijing. The scene ends with Tao imaging she can escape the capital by flying away in one of the six animated sequences that expresses unrestricted travel and mobility; but the fantasy is cut short as we see her in different Park costume later in the film, at work once again. In other words, each service professional co-mingles with China's new urban classes, joining in on their excesses but only as they perform, entertain, and even solicit these new consumer classes. Their subordinate status must be seen as an indentured service through a performative-based labour—a labour that likens their identity in Beijing to that of replaceable porcelain marionettes—a stolid actuality for the dancers found in nightly shows at The World Park. The dancers become objects “to be looked at,” not only in strict Mulveyian gendered sense but also as fetishized commodities able to mobilize the subject desires of a Chinese middle and elite classes in this context.

Viewing the worlds of which they are intimately a part can be equated to a revolving stage. They enter and exit at specific points in their performances—and in one scene, must “act” as escorts to wealthy corporate elites, another form of flexible work beyond their demanding and demeaning daily stage performances (in 12 hour shifts in skimpy, gaudy costumes). These same stage performers at one point in the film were

ushered in to a garishly styled entertainment room somewhere in The World Park, a sci-fi themed bar full of plush leather couches, fiber-optic lighting and a high-end sound system. In the scene in question, a group of eager, middle-aged businessmen awaits Tao, WeiWei and several of her co-workers for drinking games and hours of karaoke. Tao's would-be male suitor for the evening, shown awkwardly leering at her as she looks on next to him, makes several sexual advances during their encounter. In a seemingly sly way, although visibly drunk, the businessman asks for Tao's mobile number by clumsily claiming that he had misplaced his own mobile phone in the noisy atmosphere of the upscale bar. Minutes later, unable to hear an incoming call, Tao excuses herself to the corridor where she is followed by the businessman, who then solicits her with a corny pick-up line, whispering in her ear that she is the girl of his dreams. Once his line falls flat and she pushes him away, he recollects himself and more brashly insults her sense of style through a disapproving glance, head to toe, of her modest attire. Insisting he could help her reach her physical potential through expensive spas and new clothing, he asks her to accompany him on a Hong Kong business trip, an invitation she quickly declines.

Much is to be made of the notions of economic and social mobility in this scene, something I would argue makes us aware of the temporary condition that is embedded in cosmopolitanism. Through the solicitation of her body, Tao in *The World* is promised border crossing, an access to capital and comingling with a higher class than her own. Yet it is a scenario one can see as key to the *factitious cosmopolitanism* found in the film's narrative. Travel to a destination allows movement that for Tao is bound to a limited use value—a value based on a sexual exchange that may or may not allow for new lifestyle choices, inherent to truer cosmopolitan values. Preying on the so-called

feebleness of migrant labourers like Tao, who are more privy to sanitized, even hollow versions of more pristine and uncorrupt zones of commerce, real estate and leisure industry images, Tao is expected to be seduced by these images and locales the businessman's claims to offer. In the end, Tao takes her chances and remains loyal to Taisheng and her dreams of making it out of these precarious work-life situations she faces in Beijing (Figs 6.8 & 6.9).



Fig. 6.8

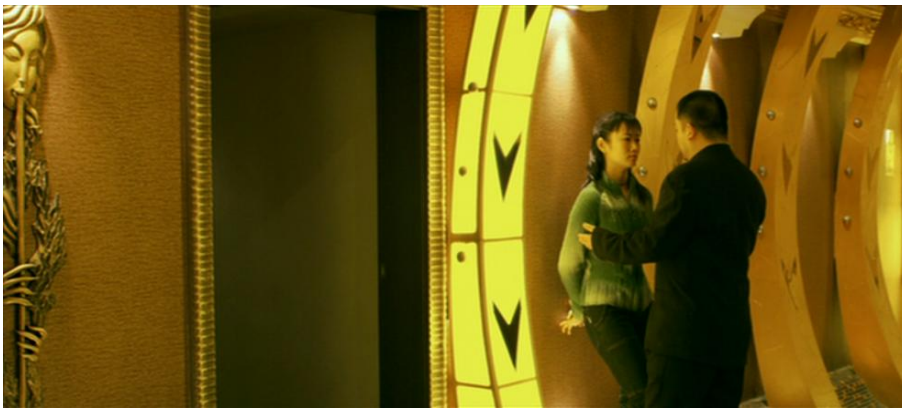


Fig. 6.9

Far from being a minor social problem in China today, consumer tastes have now “trickled down” to the precarians classes; notions of affluence are striking in the way address spaces and citizens found in real-world Beijing equally as much as the spaces and characters in *The World*. In many ways, Jia’s narrative seeks to explore what Wang Jing characterizes as the “rise of a social economy based on emulation.”<sup>327</sup> The idea of patterning material entitlement not just on Euro-American consumption practices, but more importantly trends from neighboring territories and countries such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan and South Korea have become a testament to China’s dramatic new consumerist face and one of the many transformative developments occurring in the country. Amy Hanser, a sociologist who studies the quite drastic spending and consumption habits of these emergent social groups, tends to focus on the middle classes almost exclusively; but this materialism, in my view, is also applicable to the precarians classes and their increased access to credit, and, at times, disposable capital. She has argued that a “new structure of entitlement” is being cultivated in China through the marking of such social distinctions.<sup>328</sup> Hanser goes on to define the structure of entitlement as referring to “the often-unconscious cultural and social sensibilities that make certain groups of people feel entitled to greater social goods. This sense of entitlement extends from seemingly mundane aspects of daily social interactions...to expression in the realm of work, leisure, and daily social interaction. It is a practical expression of one’s place in society and a fundamental part of the cultural scaffolding that supports larger systems of inequality.”<sup>329</sup>

The urban reality that has evolved in the post-socialist context, an environment where Chinese cosmopolitan culture is in many ways a thoughtless, consumer-driven

and class-bound reality, has procured the degradation of truer local solidarities—where the parochial is erased entirely for what Brennan calls the “rhetorical advantage” of the frequent traveler. What this means is that Jia’s precarians service workers from *The World Park* buy into this construction almost wholeheartedly, showing an enthusiasm for a “unified polychromatic culture” that does not blend and merge these precarians into “multiple local constituents.”<sup>330</sup> This belief in retail value and commercial image over a truer understanding of and acknowledgment of their localism in the urban context of Beijing is, literally, fatalistic in its orientation for these protagonists. Taisheng and Little Sister never break free of the regional stereotypes that define them (rough dialects, cheap attire, strange customs and a fleeting sense of belonging), and along with Tao they find similar grim fates. *The World*, like its main characters, is a film that is caught simultaneously between continuous transformation and constant reorientation; the precarians worker is a figure in it on a sliding scale of earned prosperity and social decline, the latter being the imputable result of China’s new cosmopolitanism.

## **VI. Conclusion**

The central focus of this chapter takes neoliberalism as a starting point to help explain its logic in developing China. The polyvalent image of Chinese workers, particularly those found in the leisure and construction sectors in Beijing assert multiple identities which I argued were informed by a sense of history—socialist and post-socialist—and the local and global contexts of private intervention into public communities is something *The World* interweaves into its complex narrative relief. I have traced certain features of Chinese capitalism and how it remakes labour policy and city living as a radicalized phase in both the Dengist and Huist eras, a development which should underpin any

discussion of contemporary Chinese culture. But, on another conceptual footing, I have argued that the production of culture in the new millennial period via *The World* can act as a lens to decipher the increasing trend toward neoliberalization and precarious labour practices in the PRC.

At the same time, this chapter also argued that *The World* embodies many of the inimical problems that neoliberalism has since created in the country—of particular note there is the contradictory aim of *suzhi* found amongst the precarians classes in real-life Beijing and in Jia's projection of these working class migrants as they negotiate their dispossessed selves in the capital city. Tonglin Lu figures Jia's and other Urban Generation directors' filmic realities as interrogating "the process that has given birth to their own production and question the value system that has formed the basis of their existence—the capitalist mode of production—by portraying the 'localized' lifestyle of an underprivileged urban population."<sup>331</sup> Within this discourse over Urban Generation directors' determination to document the dissipation and commodification of cultural and national identity in China, *The World* speaks out against such things. As if coming to this moment of political consciousness earlier than other Urban Generation directors, Jia clearly proposes a form of collective action that restores agency—not for his individual characters but for the precarians communities they represent, in not only *The World* but also the world.

## Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation, I have explored cinematic representations according to what Lauren Berlant labels “social brittleness,” particularly the precarious situation that global proletariat now faces: flexible, temporary, re-scaled, dead-end work contracts.<sup>332</sup> There is no doubt that the three recent financial crises—the Tiger Market Crash (1997), Global Tech-Bubble Meltdown (2000) and the ongoing Global Recession (2008-)—all played a hand in the reorganization of work, decade-by-decade. The manner in which these three economic downturns can be grasped in the narratives and ideology of numerous global cinema texts, also serves as a reflection, however abstractly, of two decades of neoliberal restructuring of culture to market. In so far as Berlant approaches the current Global Recession with a lens toward animating discussions about “affect atmospheres” in a shared sense of what Raymond William’s calls a “structure of feeling,” my driving motivation was to make sense of precarity and the “atmospheres” or “feelings” of dispossession by those at the very bottom.<sup>333</sup> Representing what this proletarian culture not only looks like but also what it was feeling was central to each of my case studies. Equally, how this culture came to terms with its own dispossessed workers has motivated my discussion of the proletarians dual-consciousness and how this is realized in the fractious and sometimes desperate need to transcend precarious labour situations through shopping, exercise, sex, crime and in some cases murder.

At an economic level I have sought to foreground class and class dynamics as a way to come to terms with neoliberal policy and culture across three continents. By bringing back into the fold how the global proletariat is conscious of, and at the same time repellent to, classification is a symptom of neoliberalism's wider dissolution of class lines and an attempt to arrange citizenship along consumer and identity lines. These new social realities of reduced security and uncertainty on the job have meant that for those outside white-collar comfort zones, increased stratification and precariousness is the "new characteristic of the production cycle of immaterial labour."<sup>334</sup> Thus, in many ways the films discussed in this dissertation have made me reformulate how to treat new forms of production on screen: from cosmopolitan culture at a Beijing theme park to tracking down one's tormentor through cyberspace, cityscapes and newspapers in *Oldboy*.

To recognize these new forms of production on screen, this project has used systemization or "segmentation" to adopt Giovanni Arrighi's terminology, as a way to compartmentalize economic crisis as also a crisis of the iconology of the labour image itself. In other words, the dynamic nature of cinema to encompass the appearance or trace of history as it relates to social problems for different classes makes the proletarian segment of global cinema a mediator between "social structure" and the "artifact."<sup>335</sup> The dramatic characters and actions discussed in this dissertation provide or infer patterns of meaning to demonstrate how lower classes react and are victims to neoliberalism under duress. In light of this, Jeff Kinkle and Alberto Toscano wrestle with several iconic finance films that have tried throughout history to give form to different crises. They find that



[t]he works of past filmmakers and theorists struggling with the experience of economic collapse remain alive with lessons for the present, and the ongoing financial crisis has been the object of noteworthy, if rare, attempts to give narrative and visual form to its underlying causes and effects.<sup>336</sup>

Their informative survey comes to analyze Great Depression films such as *Kuhle Wampe* (Bertolt Brecht and Slatan Dudow, 1932), to the OPEC crisis film in the 1970s such as *The Parallax View* (1974) *Roller Over* (1981) and current Global Recession films such as *Company Men* (2010) and *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* (2010). What these films demonstrate, I believe, is how economic crises, in the United States but also the rest of the world, have etched their effects on film style and narrative form throughout the history of the medium. And global cinema is the most recent development in this moving image medium to be thought of in these terms. Global cinema, as I argue in this project and like Hollywood as Kinkle and Toscano indicate, is a category of films that transform the invisible threads of economic crisis “connecting disparate characters and locations, sudden reversals of fortune, personal fates buffeted by inscrutable structures—for all of the representational problems that they present, one cannot say that finance and capital are devoid of drama.”<sup>337</sup> My conception of *proletarian global cinema* is by no means devoid of drama and makes use of populist genres to push the entertainment factor that purports strong social criticisms: Neill Blomkamp’s *District 9* and his cool-looking CGI aliens who face dispossession and racism in Johannesburg; Sebastian Silva’s *The Maid/La Nana* (2009) and his inventive use of DV realism, pronouncing not just imperfections in the complexion of its characters but also the class imperfections that bubble to the surface; Park Chan-wook’s *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* and *Oldboy* and his use of slick cinematography and references to many national cinemas but also his commitment to allegorizing class

antagonisms; and, finally Jia Zhangke's *The World*, which the Chinese director envisions Beijing through a glittering mise-en-scène, which both aestheticizes the migrant labourers experience in scenes of stage performances and manga-animation, as well as politicizing the same experiences with particular attention to precarious work and discontented lives in the capital.

Another way to understand the economic is to invest in a working understanding of the terms used to obfuscate casual work and precarious tasks asked by management and legalized in countries like South Africa, Chile, South Korea and China. The most common term to conceal the human costs associated with neoliberal policy is the ugly sounding “negative externality.” Originating from the lexicon of neo-classical economics, a negative externality is defined as a transaction spillover and corresponds to a loss occurred in a competitive market for a third party, uninvolved or unaware that such a transaction took place—yet one that detrimentally affects their well-being. Indeed, the deliberate choice for such technical vocabulary, in linguistic terms, softens the impact of the fallout related to casualization practices, deunionisation, wage reductions, sudden termination, even accidents caused by the reduction of workforce numbers—a turn of phrase that both socially and psychologically makes these austerity practices less visible, and thus less tangible. This dissertation has sought to assess these less visible forces; and in doing so to turn the phraseology back onto the neoliberal system itself.

The result of accessing these negative externalities is that one finds a cinematic landscape near or close to penury. Not quite impoverishment on a physical or emotional

level, however, the characters and the places found in this global comparativist project deal with precarious work conditions that only slightly raise these same characters' coping mechanisms, with poverty always just around the corner. If democratic choice is part of neoliberal life in the various urban centres found in this dissertation—Johannesburg, Santiago, Seoul, Beijing—then why is democratic choice such a consolidated and protected experience, far from the labourers and their incommensurable daily lives as depicted in *District 9*, *The Maid*, *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* and *Oldboy* and *The World*? Incommensurability is at the heart of trying to articulate the vast difficulties and unjust social practices for these *other* urbanities. As Alex Callinicos observes elsewhere that it is these transformations to income which are symptomatic of neoliberalism with its “relentless drive to reduce costs in the face of international competition places the jobs, wages and conditions of the bulk of the working population under constant pressure.”<sup>338</sup> Such an evaluative claim by Callinicos, matches, I would argue, the social criticism found in Blomkamp, Silva, Park and Jia's texts. As I have laid out in this dissertation, these millennial global cinema directors localize the imperfections and distortions inherent to neoliberalism, as much as they reveal those who have been exposed to something out of their control.

Having scrutinized the political, social and cultural problems caused by neoliberalism, its ideology and policy orientation may be viewed as pervasive on all levels, pushing for a total assimilation of every facet of society into its domain—including cinema. Yet what can cinema actually do in this disjuncture between living with neoliberalism and portraying neoliberalism in visual metaphors and allegories of dispossessed lives? If the films themselves are not capable of impacting directly

different types of social change, on a level consistent with what Third Cinema from Latin America achieved in the late 1960s (rallying an already politicized continent), then is a recessional aesthetics via my *proletarian global cinema* concept a documentation of structural transformation? Or is it about the action/inaction inherent to neoliberal globalization and how this might look? I think it is both, actually. One way to explain the action/inaction of the fictional characters is to follow Stephen Gill's thoughts about action/inaction in international relations theory:

Therefore, this reality [neoliberalism's structuring of political economy] is to a certain extent independent of, but nonetheless interdependent with, the processes of knowledge production. Further, the 'truth' of social reality is made more intractable because it involves the thought and inter-subjective meanings of individuals who have different forms of self-consciousness and awareness as to the social nature of their action/inaction. The social organization of production, as an aspect of the social world, is thus necessarily constituted partly by inter-subjective meanings, which can be identified and understood, however imperfectly.<sup>339</sup>

In many ways my *proletarian global cinema* concept shows the "inter-subjective meanings of individuals" spanning four nation-states and how their action/inaction is a complicated and discursive rendering of culture under neoliberal globalisation. If this rendering is not overtly polemical in the vein of *The Hour of the Furnaces/La hora de los hornos* by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino and the wider canon of Third Cinema, then perhaps we can view *proletarian world cinema* as a counter-hegemonic movement, not fixed but rather organically or creatively organised. I see *proletarian world cinema* forming part of a vastly more significant "counter-hegemonic bloc" which includes Amnesty International, Green parties and ecological groups, socialist think-tanks like the Transnational Institute, peace groups such as European Nuclear Disarmament, development agencies such as Oxfam, and religious organizations such as

the World Council of Churches.”<sup>340</sup> Of course this comparison may be a stretch, but *precarians world cinema* does parallel these movements and institutions, however tangentially in its general aim: to provide, however small in scale, an opposition to neoliberal oppression by making cultural artefacts a seminal means to distinguish the market from capitalism’s impingement of culture more directly.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Stutesman, editorial introduction, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Polivka, p. 55.

<sup>3</sup> de Sousa Santos and Rodriguez-Garavito, p. xviii.

<sup>4</sup> Ranciere, p. 23.

<sup>5</sup> See E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968).

<sup>6</sup> See Ralf Dahrendorf, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959).

<sup>7</sup> See Robert Blackburn, *The Working Class in the Labour Market* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1979).

<sup>8</sup> See Erin Olin Wright *Class, Crisis, and the State* (London: New Left Books, 1978); *Classes* (London: Verso, 1985)

<sup>9</sup> See Beverly Silver, *Forces of Labour: Workers' Movements and Globalisation since 1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> Wang Hui, .....

<sup>11</sup> In 2011, Barot gave a paper on this subject titled, "Has the Proletariat vanished? Contemporary lessons from the debate between Marcuse and Mandel" presented at the Historical Materialism conference in 2011 in London. The link for his paper abstract can be found here:  
<http://www.historicalmaterialism.org/conferences/8annual/submit/has-the-proletariat-vanished-contemporary-lessons-from-the-debate-between-marcuse-and-mandel>

<sup>12</sup> Brennan, "The Italian Ideology," p. 114.

<sup>13</sup> Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right of the City to the Urban Revolution*, p. 56-7.

<sup>14</sup> Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, p. 137.

<sup>15</sup> Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism*, p. 52.

<sup>16</sup> David Palumbo-Liu, Bruce Robbins and Nirvana Tanoukhi's "Introduction: The Most Important Thing Happening" in Palumbo-Liu, Robbins, Tanoukhi, eds., *Immanuel Wallerstein and the Problem of the World: System, Scale, Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Kalb, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> Ross, p. 34.

<sup>19</sup> Ross, p. 6.

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<sup>20</sup> One of the most compelling examples comes from the Dardenne brothers and their important films *La Promesse* and *Rosetta* and its look at social disintegration for a corrupt French family and a Belgium women; or more recently in Derek Nystrom's article in the journal *Post-45*, examining, interestingly, upper-middle class redundancy from the United States in his analysis of *Company Men*, which portrays the reality of the upper middle class unemployment and ageism for those we often consider impervious to financial ruin. Though uncertainty and unpredictability on the job is an important point to expound upon in the EU and US, the purpose of this project is to show how different forms of precarity extend well-beyond the walls of Europe and the United States.

<sup>21</sup> Cowie, p. 7.

<sup>22</sup> For more on the sharp increases on food prices worldwide please see both the *Telegraph* and World Bank websites:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/economics/8386246/US-food-price-rise-is-steepest-in-decades.html>

[http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/2012/09/13/america\\_latina\\_crisis\\_precio\\_alimentos](http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/2012/09/13/america_latina_crisis_precio_alimentos)

<sup>23</sup> Take for instance American news network CNN who constantly aired specials in the 2000s about both US born and émigré entrepreneurs who made it out of their working classes predicaments, emphasizing their material possessions. In these shows we find countless garish clips of working class entrepreneurs parading to a public their SUVs, multiple homes and name-brand clothing and accessories that delineate a type of materialism over class-consciousness. What these CNN specials do, in my view, is contemporize Cowie's earlier assertion about 1970s suspicion and degradation by media over the working class condition but in the new millennial period through "common sense" materialism and a comeuppance discourse. Dressing up the proletariat in the 2000s as a competitive, take charge individual, boastful about their new wealth is curious and continues the media's history of discrimination toward the blue-collar worker. In other words, the new proletariat is thus portrayed in conservative media as echoing the neoliberal ethos for dissipation and welcomes the frills of measurable excesses, trading any sign of civic dissent or discordance to simply exist in this new world.

Although America is a noteworthy example, similar things were happening in media across the rest of the world. China's presence on the global stage coincides with its postsocialist outlook and finds an increase in dating shows that until recently chronicled wealthy bachelors and the flock of women willing to date them for social and material mobility—principally Beijing TV's *Are You the One*. As a particularly sordid example, *Are You the One* gained notoriety and a large demographic of viewers before its eventual cancellation by the Chinese government in 2010 because of its flagrant love affair with wealthy nationals. However, reality dating show such as *Are You the One* characterize but one of "a complex terrain of textual circulation, reception, and appropriation in the 'postmodern era'" according to Michael Curtin, where today media in China also produces the inverse to nouveau-riche contestants: labouring folk, too (2010). The under-privileged as a subject matter from other developing nations now constitute another fractal dimension of the media ecology emerging from China and other developing areas of the world and an essential part of the world cinema covered in this dissertation.

<sup>24</sup> Wendy Brown has pointed out in the early 2000s how this free market rationality "is a constructivist project: it does not presume the ontological givenness of a thoroughgoing economic rationality for all domains of society but rather takes as its task the development, dissemination, and institutionalization of such a rationality (2003: 14)." In other words, neoliberalism is a reflexive ideology and policy in that it

pushes for what Thatcher misperceived as markets somehow being neutral and immune to bias—a euphemism for justifying an unbridled enterprise society in Britain. To convince others of the inescapability of market the Thatcher regime coined the acronym: TINA (There Is No Alternative) as the preferred neoliberal slogan of the 1980s. It was so devastating that British culture, mainly cinema severely declined despite *Chariots of Fire* and *Gandhi* winning Oscars on the back of American capital in 1981 and 1982 and the growth of an oppositional avant-garde.

<sup>25</sup> Harvey, *Conditions of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, p. 145.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 145.

<sup>27</sup> Lazzarato, p. 46.

<sup>28</sup> Capital's restructuration to neoliberalism in 1970s America is crucial to understand other non-Western economies and cultures later in this project. One brilliant account of the cultural history of the United States and its roll-back of working-class power is explored in Jefferson Cowie's *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (2010). The book makes a convincing case for why American working-class culture was dismantled and how financial hegemony replaced Keynesianism in this pivotal decade. Cowie shows how the cultural expulsion of the working classes took place via aesthetically crippling images of picket-line protests and general unruliness portrayed in US media as a way to weaken public allegiance for labour's cause. The denunciation of the working-class "to faraway times and places—including the most distant isolated hearts of working people themselves" was visualized, in another way, as Cowie purports, through a series of Hollywood "blue-collar blues" films (2010: 17). This important insight as to how films helped to identify "working-class themes across the spectrum—from Peter Boyle's portrayal of the neo-fascist Joe to Al Pacino's brilliant identity meltdown in *Dog Day Afternoon* to Jack Nicholson's use of the blue-collar world as a playground of authenticity in *Five Easy Pieces*" matches what I will try to do by identifying the global proletariat and their plight since 1997 (2010: 10).

Unlike the hardhat fury found in Joe or the worker dissatisfaction in *Dog Day Afternoon*, the plebeian's adjustment to flexible work patterns and high turnover rates on the job point to early stages of neoliberalism in the 1970s; however, by the turn of the eighties, two important films, *Norma Rae* (Martin Ritt, 1979) and *9 to 5* (Collin Higgins, 1980) address newer neoliberal intervention and its effects on the female worker. The former film shows a textile worker-turned-teamster played convincingly by Sally Field who organizes her fellow co-workers to unionize, while in *9 to 5* a cohort of corporate secretaries-turned-arbitrators played by Jane Fonda, Lily Tomlin and Dolly Parton bind management, literally, in this class-conscious comedy romp. *Norma Rae* and *9 to 5* also focus on the feminization of the American workforce which sheds new light on the slippery moral terrain of female empowerment over sexism and capital in the early 1980s. For the Marxist-feminist Valentine M. Moghadam such feminization of labour in the 1980s required that "women began to be disproportionately involved in irregular forms of employment increasingly used to maximize profit; at the same time, they remained responsible for work related to the family" (2005: 7)." In many ways, these two films provide a fiercer response to worker subjugation and particularly the labour incarceration that vulnerable working women in the Global South also faced in this period, and even more so today. Yet, the narratives of resistance in *Norma Rae* and *9 to 5* are reactions to either draconian factory conditions or the devaluation of the clerical worker, which see the characters in both films coming out on top of their circumstances, a much different reality than my case studies of Chinese, South Korean, Chilean and South African global cinema portend.



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<sup>29</sup> Dumenil and Levy, p. 94.

<sup>30</sup> Prashad, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Prashad, p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> See Richard Phillips, Jeffery Henderson, Laszlo Andor and David Hulme, “Usurping Social Policy: Neoliberalism and Economic Governance in Hungary” in *The Journal of Social Policy* 35 (2006), p. 588.

<sup>33</sup> Saad-Filho and Johnston, p. 10.

<sup>34</sup> Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Monica Prasad, *The Politics of Free Markets: The Rise of Neoliberal Economic Policies in Britain, France, Germany and the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Ravi K. Roy, *Neoliberalism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>36</sup> See ...

<sup>37</sup> Stillerman, p. 165.

<sup>38</sup> Stillerman, p. 165.

<sup>39</sup> Winn, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Stern, p. xxiii-iv.

<sup>41</sup> Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> See, also Lin Chun, *The Transition of Chinese Socialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>43</sup> Marais, p. 6.

<sup>44</sup> Song, p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Sassen, p. 25.

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/12/arts/television/12foot.html>  
[http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/living/2008118738\\_compulsiveshopping18.html](http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/living/2008118738_compulsiveshopping18.html)

<sup>47</sup> See CNN Money section for economic figures over worst job losses globally since 1945.  
[http://money.cnn.com/2009/01/09/news/economy/jobs\\_december/](http://money.cnn.com/2009/01/09/news/economy/jobs_december/)

<sup>48</sup> As neoliberalism continues to infiltrate more radical political organizations, which the coalition government of Tory and Liberal Democrats exemplify, the joining of political parties illustrates how the conservative and liberal divide now both advocate a free market ethos despite pre-election claims otherwise. In England, for example, we have now seen university tuition hikes, the slow de-nationalization of NHS and the do-no-wrong attitude toward the financial sector, touted by the younger and possibly last neoliberal generation—David Cameron and Nick Clegg. Their packaging, albeit haphazardly, of austerity measures as “Big Society” is nothing more than rhetorical Toryism, harsher, in some ways than Thatcher’s assault on the underclasses in Britain.

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- <sup>49</sup> The elusive hegemons, rarely understood beyond the elites who sit on *Forbes* 50 companies, those that pass through special lines at airports, those that own massive percentages in commodities and those that in effect influence economic policy, symbolize, in my mind a neoliberal aristocracy.
- <sup>50</sup> Berlant, p. 3.
- <sup>51</sup> Dumenil and Levy, p. 314-15.
- <sup>52</sup> Shohat and Stam, p. 29.
- <sup>53</sup> Andrew, p. 23.
- <sup>54</sup> Durovicova & Newman, p. 4.
- <sup>55</sup> Lazarus, p. 14.
- <sup>56</sup> Fredric Jameson quoted by Neil Lazarus in "What Postcolonialism Doesn't Say, p. 14.
- <sup>57</sup> Wallerstein, *Geopolitical and Geocultural: Essays on the changing world system*, p. 24.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 3.
- <sup>59</sup> Robbins, p. 14-15.
- <sup>60</sup> Cox, *Production, Power and World Order*.
- <sup>61</sup> Gill and Law, p. 98-9.
- <sup>62</sup> San Juan, Jr., *Beyond Postcolonial Theory*, p. 23.
- <sup>63</sup> Ponzanesi and Waller, p. 7-8.
- <sup>64</sup> Shohat and Stam, p. 6.
- <sup>65</sup> Chibber, p. 22.
- <sup>66</sup> Please see the University of Cambridge and their M.Phil programme, entitled Screen Media and Cultures for module outline and David Trotter's definition of naturalism.
- <sup>67</sup> Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction*, p. 23.
- <sup>68</sup> Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction*, p. 23.
- <sup>69</sup> Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World Economy*, p. xi.
- <sup>70</sup> Newman, "Notes on Transnational Film theory," p. 8-9.
- <sup>71</sup> Wallerstein, *World Systems Analysis*, p. 28.
- <sup>72</sup> See Meehan, "A Legacy of Neoliberalism: Patterns in Media Conglomeration" in Jyotsna Kapur and Keith B. Wagner, eds., *Neoliberalism and Global Cinema: Culture, Capital and Marxist Critique* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

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<sup>73</sup> See Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, Eva Tsai and JungBong Choi, eds., *Television, Japan and Globalization* (University of Michigan Press, 2010).

<sup>74</sup> See Michael Curtin, *Playing to the World's Biggest Audience: The Globalization of Chinese Film and TV* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2007).

<sup>75</sup> See Jacqueline Maingard, "Framing South African National Cinema and television" in Ntongela Masilela, ed. *To change reels: film and culture in South Africa* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2003).

<sup>76</sup> Most video films since the late 1980s have evolved into an institutional critique of daily life which tries to reconcile artistically the social and moral decline in Nigerian society. The impetus for this localized critique emerged out of the history of Anglophone colonial rule, as many Yoruba were exposed to UK films and film units and were even hired to use this equipment to document Lagos's colonial occupation. Yet after independence and with the British leaving behind 16mm cameras, studios, and production laboratories to work from many took up low-fi filmmaking. Equally video films also came about due to the lack of infrastructure and capital to build a centralized film industry in Nigeria. Despite the lack of infrastructure, "Nollywood" or Nigeria's video film industry is a top producer of global films, trailing only India, China, Korea and Hollywood in terms of production numbers.

<sup>77</sup> Soon after Castro's revolutionary victory he wasted no time in setting up the *Instituto Cubano del Arte y Industria Cinematográficos*—the Cuban Institute of Film Art and Industry—an industry separate from the direct ideological control of other state organs (i.e., radio, television, publishing). In effect, giving primacy to Cuban cultural formations like the ICAIC, as Michael Chanan writes, proved inventive and exemplary because it represented a new type of leftist autonomy in the creation of cinema without direct ideological intervention (think of Eastern Europe where this happen frequently). Equally, Cuban audiences were "eager to see the cinematic representation of their own living reality in its moment of upheaval and flocked to watch the small but steady stream of new Cuban films, for several years bucking the international trend of falling cinema attendance."

<sup>78</sup> Not only do the reified elements in the film prove too controversial at a time when the US was embroiled in war on two fronts (Iraq and Afghanistan), an economy that was steadily slipping into recession and the country bitterly divided along partisan lines; *Southland Tales* also held a repeated, if not superficial narrative aspiration to Marx the political philosopher and Marxism, the twentieth century intellectual movement critical and antagonistic toward capitalism.

<sup>79</sup> Lobato, p. 16.

<sup>80</sup> Lobato, p. 18

<sup>81</sup> See Li Zhang and Aihwa Ong, eds., *Privatizing China: Socialism from Afar* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

<sup>82</sup> Tonglin Lu, p. 128.

<sup>83</sup> See Paul Pickowicz, "Social and Political Dynamics in Underground Filmmaking in China," pp 1-2.

<sup>84</sup> JungBong Choi, pp. 3-4.

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<sup>85</sup> JungBong Choi, p. 4.

<sup>86</sup> Mette Hjort, "On the Plurality of cinematic transnationalism" in *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives* eds. Natasa Durovicova and Kathleen Newman (New York: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, p. 20

<sup>88</sup> See Craig Calhoun, *Cosmopolitanism and Belonging: From European Integration to Global Hopes and Fears* (London: Routledge, 2007); Garrett Wallace Brown and David Held, eds., *The Cosmopolitanism Reader* (London: Polity, 2011).

<sup>89</sup> Mette Hjort, pp. 20-21.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, p .21.

<sup>91</sup> Machosky, p. 1-2.

<sup>92</sup> Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck, p. 9.

<sup>93</sup> Leslie, p. 111-12.

<sup>94</sup> Benjamin, "On the Concept of History" which was published in 1940.

<sup>95</sup> I received and am quoting this set of comments by Esther Leslie in her examination of this PhD project and this has helped me to see Walter Benjamin ideas as indispensable in my rethinking of allegory in the global cinema context.

<sup>96</sup> Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck, p. 10.

<sup>97</sup> Aijaz Ahmad, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the "National Allegory"

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p 13.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>102</sup> Xudong Zhang, "Postsocialism and Cultural Politics" p. 181.

<sup>103</sup> Xudong Zhang, "Postsocialism and Cultural Politics" p. 183.

<sup>104</sup> Xudong Zhang, p. ...

<sup>105</sup> James Tweedie and Yomi Braester, eds., *Cinema at the City's Edge*, p. 5.

<sup>106</sup> Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck, p. 3.

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- <sup>107</sup> Shiel, p. 2.
- <sup>108</sup> Krause and Petro, p. 9.
- <sup>109</sup> Huyssen, p. 2 & 7.
- <sup>110</sup> Zhang, *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century*, p. 18.
- <sup>111</sup> Shih, p. 16.
- <sup>112</sup> Shih, p. 17.
- <sup>113</sup> Shih, p. 19.
- <sup>114</sup> Dennison and Lim, p. 2.
- <sup>115</sup> Ibid, p. 2.
- <sup>116</sup> Andrew, "Times zones and jetlag: the flows and phases of world cinema," p. 80.
- <sup>117</sup> Ibid, p. 80.
- <sup>118</sup> Comaroff and Comaroff, p. 17.
- <sup>119</sup> Rofel, p. 15.
- <sup>120</sup> Willemen, p. 96.
- <sup>121</sup> Silverman, p. 2.
- <sup>122</sup> Andrew, "An atlas of world cinema," p. 19.
- <sup>123</sup> Getino, p. 99.
- <sup>124</sup> Wayne, p. 6.
- <sup>125</sup> Wayne, p. 8.
- <sup>126</sup> Pickowicz, p. 1.
- <sup>127</sup> Willemen, p. 97.
- <sup>128</sup> Jameson, *Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space*, pp. 114-159..
- <sup>129</sup> See Yang Kui's novels for themes of Taiwanese working class struggle.
- <sup>130</sup> Martin O'Shaughnessy quoting Jean-Louis Comolli in "French Film and Work: The Work Done by Work-Centered Films," p. 156.

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## Chapter 2

<sup>131</sup> Thompson, p. 1.

<sup>132</sup> Joan Allen, Alan Campbell, John McIlroy, p. 12.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, p. 12.

<sup>134</sup> Ross, p. 180.

<sup>135</sup> Miller, "Introduction: Class and the Culture Industry," p. 543.

<sup>136</sup> Zaniello, p. 2.

<sup>137</sup> See Beverly Silver, *Forces of Labour: Workers' Movements and Globalisation since 1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>138</sup> Tudor, p. 55.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, p. 55.

<sup>140</sup> Marazzi, p. 5.

<sup>141</sup> Derek Nystrom, *Hard Hats, Rednecks, and Macho Men: Class in 1970s American Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Dennis Broe, *Film Noir, American Workers, and Postwar Hollywood* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2009); David E. James and Rick Berg, *The Hidden Foundation: Cinema and the Question of Class* (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 1996)

<sup>142</sup> Nystrom, p. 5.

<sup>143</sup> Broe, xxvii.

<sup>144</sup> Broe, p. xxvii.

<sup>145</sup> Broe, p. xxi

<sup>146</sup> Nystrom, p. 9.

<sup>147</sup> Zhang, *Strangers in the City: Reconfigurations of Space, Power, and Social Networks within China's Floating Populations*, p. 2.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>149</sup> Ong, p. 3.

<sup>150</sup> Hanser, p. 3.

<sup>151</sup> 'Migrant Labour, *The Economist* (London) May 3-8, 2010, pp 31-35.

<sup>152</sup> Hanser, p. 3.

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<sup>153</sup> See, for example, Bruce Cummings's *The Red Room: Stories of Trauma in Contemporary Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009).

<sup>154</sup> Kim, *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema*, p. 109.

<sup>155</sup> Fontana, p. 20.

<sup>156</sup> Gramsci, *Selections From the Prison Notebook*, p. 57-8

<sup>157</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Pre-Prison Notebooks* (London: Intl Publishers, 1971); Antonio Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks* (London: Intl Publishers, 1971). Also see Marcia Landy's *Film Politics and Gramsci* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994) is an inspired look at the intersection between some of the more obscure theories by Gramsci, particularly their relation to western cinema and film theory. But it lacks a proper handling of hegemony and subjugation in a comparative sense to film theory and more refined case studies on world cinema in general. This oversight is this project's point of departure.

<sup>158</sup> Gramsci, *Selections From the Prison Notebook*, p. 333.

<sup>159</sup> Parry, pp. 11-12

<sup>160</sup> Chen, p.3.

<sup>161</sup> See Toby Miller, Richard Maxwell, Nitin Govil, eds., *Global Hollywood 1 and 2* (London: BFI, 2001 & 2008).

<sup>162</sup> See Mike Wayne, ed., *Understanding Film: Marxist Perspectives* (London: Pluto, 2005).

<sup>163</sup> See Jean Camaroff and John Camaroff, eds., *Millennial Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

<sup>164</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

### Chapter 3

<sup>165</sup> According to box office receipts, *District 9* grossed \$204 million worldwide as of August 9, 2011. See Box Office Guru for more details: <http://www.boxofficeguru.com/intlarch2.htm>

<sup>166</sup> Michael Bay's *Transformers* trilogy, like *District 9*, also utilizes cutting-edge post-cinematic imagery. But Blomkamp's use of robotic battle droids, ascribes a different type of violence in Bay's war-torn earth. Blomkamp's use of violence, in my opinion, goes much deeper than the shock and awe computer generated effects of its final act, while still borrowing many of the Hollywood tropes commonly found in Bay's (and James Cameron's) shamelessly hegemonic films: mechanized and agile robots (and aliens in *Avatar*), stunning virtual/real cityscapes and an arsenal of cool bio/plasma/fusion-derived weaponry.

<sup>167</sup> Chaudhuri, p. 1.

<sup>168</sup> In 2007 Blomkamp directed *Halo: Landfall*, a short live-action film based on the popular video game of the same name.

<sup>169</sup> Peet, p. 71.

<sup>170</sup> Marais, p. 177.

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid, p. 177.

<sup>172</sup> Makhula, p. 29.

<sup>173</sup> It is worth noting that Peter Jackson ensured distribution deals in America, Australia and New Zealand as D9's executive producer and chief endorser of the project.

<sup>174</sup> See the Truth and Reconciliation website for more details, at: <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/>

<sup>175</sup> See Lindiwe Dovey, *African Film and Literature: Adapting Violence to the Screen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

<sup>176</sup> See Kenneth W. Harrow, *Postcolonial African Cinema: from political engagement to postmodernism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007).

<sup>177</sup> Saks, p. 17.

<sup>178</sup> Capital in the post-apartheid period was earmarked for more profit-sharing sectors such as the service sector and government programmes.

<sup>179</sup> Lucia Saks, p.14.

<sup>180</sup> DV8 is a South African film collective that has released, amongst others, film such as *Zimbabwe* (Darrel James Roodt, 2008) or *Shirley Adams* (Oliver Hermanus, 2009); while Teddy Mattered, though affiliated with DV8, has found success outside of the think-tank-like funding, releasing commercial films like *King of Tears* (2004); Pan-African Akin Omotoso looks at the intercultural dynamics of South Africa and Nigeria in his *Man on the Ground* (2011); Swazi born Zola Maseko, was of the most outspoken critics of apartheid and much of his filmmaking revolves around themes of injustice in and outside of South Africa.

<sup>181</sup> Frank Ukadike, p. 34.

<sup>182</sup> Mbye Cham, "Film and History in Africa: A Critical Survey of Current Trends and Tendencies" in Françoise Pfaff, ed., *Focus on African Films* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), p.66

<sup>183</sup> See the official City of Johannesburg website for more information.  
[http://www.joburg.org.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=552&Itemid=9](http://www.joburg.org.za/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=552&Itemid=9)

<sup>184</sup> District 6 Museum

<sup>185</sup> Mbye Cham, p. 66.

<sup>186</sup> Homi Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders" in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 12:1 (Autumn 1985), p. 162.



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<sup>187</sup> Ibid, p. 149

<sup>188</sup> Ibid, p. 154.

<sup>189</sup> See Crystal Bartolovich and Neil Lazarus, eds., *Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002); and E. San Juan Jr., *Beyond Post-Colonial Theory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).

<sup>190</sup> Peet, p. 73-74.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid, p. 74.

<sup>192</sup> Marais, p. 181.

<sup>193</sup> Makhula, p. 33.

<sup>194</sup> See <http://www.southafrica.info/business/trends/newbusiness/smallbusiness.htm>

<sup>195</sup> For a government commission on loan defaults by working class Black South Africans from 2000-05 see [http://www.finmark.org.za/documents/COD\\_final%20report.pdf](http://www.finmark.org.za/documents/COD_final%20report.pdf)

<sup>196</sup> Makhulu, p. 34.

<sup>197</sup> Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, "occult economies and the violence of abstraction: notes from the South African postcolony," p. 279.

<sup>198</sup> Judin, p. 127.

<sup>199</sup> Makhulu, p. 37.

<sup>200</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebook*, trans (London: Penguin, 1971).

<sup>201</sup> See the following site for more on Van der Merwe jokes: <http://everything2.com/title/van+der+Merwe>

<sup>202</sup> Silver, p. 19.

<sup>203</sup> Zborokski, NP.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid, NP.

<sup>205</sup> Balibar and Wallerstein, p. 39.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid, p. 41.

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<sup>207</sup> I would like to cite my conversation with Alex Callinicos over the history and use of the term kaffir in South Africa.

<sup>208</sup> See Jacqueline Maingard, "Framing South African National Cinema and television" in Ntongela Masilela, ed. *To change reels: film and culture in South Africa* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2003).

<sup>209</sup> Ferguson, p. 75.

<sup>210</sup> Makhula, p. 29.

#### **Chapter 4**

<sup>211</sup> Berlant, p. 162.

<sup>212</sup> Barrios, p. 149.

<sup>213</sup> Ong, p. 2001.

<sup>214</sup> Hondagneu-Sotelo, p. 68.

<sup>215</sup> Berlant, p. 162.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid, p. 167.

<sup>217</sup> Pick, pp. 66-70.

<sup>218</sup> Despite the ups and downs of revolutionary action in Latin America, growing radicalism in Cuba became a productive force as well as one to reckon with in the eyes of Latin American juntas and the U.S. intelligence community. Leading up to Cuba's 1959 revolution, for example, many perceived the economic and cultural "laying down" to foreign hegemony as reaching a crescendo in the mid-1950s, with the wholesale commodification of the country to American business interests (and their international alliances), along with legal prostitution and gambling, and the more painful selling of national resources to U.S. companies. Yet almost immediately after Castro came to power he renationalized these same industries in the country in the name of the people. Rallied by the socialist turn on the tropical island, many radical organizations began to flourish in Latin America by the mid-1960s: Acción Democrática (AD) in Venezuela, Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA) in Peru, Movimiento Nacionalista and Revolucionario (MNR) in Bolivia. Cinema on the continent also tried to render obsolete the following caricatures of Latin American women.

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<sup>219</sup> Oquendo-Villar, p. 270.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid, p. 270.

<sup>221</sup> Skarmeta, 1997

<sup>222</sup> Oquendo-Villar, 2011.

<sup>223</sup> For more on the execution of political opposition and prisoners see Steve J. Stern's Introduction in his *Reckoning with Pinochet: The Memory Question in Democratic Chile, 1989-2006* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp 13-64.

<sup>224</sup> Winn, p. 27.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid, p. 24.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

<sup>227</sup> Callinicos, *Equality*, p. 102.

<sup>228</sup> Frank, p. 72.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid, p. 74.

<sup>230</sup> Berlant, p. 9.

<sup>231</sup> Hondagneu-Sotelo, p. 67.

<sup>232</sup> Berlant, p. 197.

<sup>233</sup> Ehrenreich, "Maid to Order," p. 90.

<sup>234</sup> James, p. 10.

## Chapter 5

<sup>235</sup> See Marcia Landy's *Film, Politics, and Gramsci* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

<sup>236</sup> For example, South Korea's continuous rupture with material labour is sometimes a trivialized thing by its mainstream media. Teamster demonstrations from outside factory walls are too often presented to the public through manipulated sound bites, while segments on workers' rights come as filler on nightly news, put together with little journalistic care or commitment to the widespread labour abuses by various domestic or transnational corporations. This outlook does little to help cast these left-wing plebeians as anything but a violent and susceptible sector of Korean society. Labour is chastised for being unable to cope with economic change or accused of trying to impede Korea's progress.

<sup>237</sup> [http://www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/countries\\_e/korea\\_republic\\_e.htm](http://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/countries_e/korea_republic_e.htm)

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<sup>238</sup> See Bruce Cummings's *The Red Room: Stories of Trauma in Contemporary Korea* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009).

<sup>239</sup> See S. Haggard & J Mo's "The Political Economy of the Korean Financial Crisis" in *Review of International Political Economy* 7:2, 2000.

<sup>240</sup> Labour as subject in Park's films parallel 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 labour 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 labour strategies" (Hochul, 2007). From this strike, temporary gains were made for the workers and the KCTU.

<sup>241</sup> Lee, 'South Korea: Film on the Global Stage,' p. 182. 2006

<sup>242</sup> CRS Report for Congress, The 1997-98 Asian Financial Crisis

<http://www.fas.org/man/crs/crs-asia2.htm>

PBS Online Newshour 'A Wounded Asian Tiger' [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/asia/july-dec97/skorea\\_12-4a.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/asia/july-dec97/skorea_12-4a.html)

World Socialist Web Site 'Daewoo collapse threatens further financial crisis in South Korea'

<http://www.wsws.org/articles/1999/oct1999/kor-o08.shtml>

<sup>243</sup> Hochul, p. 209.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid, p. 205.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid, p. 209-10.

<sup>246</sup> See Jinhee Choi and Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano, ed., *Horror to the Extreme Changing Boundaries in Asian Cinema* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009).

<sup>247</sup> Kim, "Horror as Critique in Tell Me Something and Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance," p. 115 .

<sup>248</sup> Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 160.

<sup>249</sup> Kim quoting Chong Song-il in "Horror as Critique in Tell Me Something and Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance," p. 113.

<sup>250</sup> See Kyung Hyun Lee's *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004). Jeon, Residual Selves: Trauma and Forgetting in Park Chan-wook's *Oldboy*" *positions*, 17:3, p. 714-5.

<sup>251</sup> Jeon, p. 718-9.

<sup>252</sup> Chang K.S., p. 68.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

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<sup>254</sup> Jeon, p. 720.

<sup>255</sup> See Shim “Hybridity and the rise of Korean popular culture in Asia,” *Media, Culture & Society* Vol. 28, No. 1, 25-44 (2006); Paquent “The Korean Film Industry: 1992 to the Present,” *New Korean Cinema*, ed. Stringer & Shin, 2005. See Dal, “Cultural politics in Korea’s contemporary films under neoliberal globalisation” in 2006.

<sup>256</sup> Hochul, p. 206.

<sup>257</sup> 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.

<sup>258</sup> Kleinhans, p. 182.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid, p. 183.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid, p. 184.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid, p. 184.

<sup>262</sup> Gramsci, p. 166-7.

<sup>263</sup> Marx, *Capital Vol. 1.*, p. 63.

<sup>264</sup> Wilson, p. 125.

<sup>265</sup> Gramsci, *Pre-Prison Writings*, p. 130.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid, p. 130

<sup>267</sup> Ibid, p. 164.

<sup>268</sup> <http://www.newint.org/issue263/pig.htm>

<sup>269</sup> Wilson, p. 124.

<sup>270</sup> Cho, “Korean Cinema Bids Farewell to its Allegorical Legacy—Reading Old Boy on the Global Scene”

<sup>271</sup> Gramsci, p. 175.

<sup>272</sup> Gramsci, p. 252.

<sup>273</sup> Wilson, p. 124.

<sup>274</sup> Giroux, “Neoliberalism and the Demise of Democracy: Resurrecting Hope in Dark Times” in *Dissident Voice* at <http://dissidentvoice.org/Aug04/Giroux0807.htm>.

<sup>275</sup> Jeon, p. 720.

<sup>276</sup> Hsu, “The dangers of biosecurity: *The Host* and the geopolitics of outbreak” in *Jump Cut* Vol. No. 2009.

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<sup>277</sup> Gramsci, p. 151.

<sup>278</sup> Lee, "The Shadow of Outlaws in Asian Noir: Hiroshima, Hong Kong and Seoul" in *Neo-Noir*, p. 130.

<sup>279</sup> Gramsci, p. 105

<sup>280</sup> Helga Leitner, Eric Sheppard, Kristin Sziarto and Anant Maringanti "Decentreing Urban futures: Decentreing Neoliberalism" in *Contesting Neoliberalism*, p. 4.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>282</sup> See Jesook Song, 'Family Breakdown and Invisible Homeless Women: Neoliberal Governance during the Asian Debt Crisis in South Korea, 1997-2001,' *positions*, 14:1 2006.

<sup>283</sup> Gramsci, p. 151.

<sup>284</sup> We see this more generally throughout the film, where Woo-jin seems not to infringe Oh Dae-su supposed rational choice. Rational choice inflects the totality of the neoliberal market in this context. Ultimately the sites of architecture in *Old Boy*, some cosmopolitan, some not, work to zone off Oh Dae-su to participant in disadvantaged groups and locations that are in the end governed by Woo-jin himself.

<sup>285</sup> Sassen, p. 25.

## Chapter 6

<sup>286</sup> Real world leisure and construction workers' labour intensity is discussed in a variety of places and these issues are implicated in Jia Zhangke's film through casualization of the Chinese workforce and even one characters death due to such unjust policy formations. For more information on these problems see: Yale Globalisation Online <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/> or Global Vision Corporation is an independent non-profit, NGO that analyze China's labour problems; women's labour issues are also covered by various East Asian NGO, namely <http://www.isiswomen.org/>

<sup>287</sup> Zhang, Z., *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*, p. 5.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>289</sup> Hairong, pp. 493-523.

<sup>290</sup> Sito, "CapitaLand to double its malls on mainland" in *South China Morning Post*, February 28, 2011 <http://topics.scmp.com/news/china-business-watch/article/CapitaLand-to-double-its-malls-on-mainland>

<sup>291</sup> Ibid, *South China Morning Post*

<sup>292</sup> See Yan Hairong, "Neoliberal Governmentality and Neohumanism: Organizing Suzhi/Value Flow through Labour Recruitment Networks" in *Visual Anthropology*, 18, no. 4 (2003): pp. 493-523. Also see Ann Anagnost, "The Corporeal Politics of Quality (Suzhi)" *Public Culture* Volume 16, Number 2 (Spring 2004).

<sup>293</sup> Anderlini, "China cracks down on property development" *Financial Times*, March 23, 2010.

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<sup>294</sup> Braester, p. 235.

<sup>295</sup> Hanser, p. 47.

<sup>296</sup> Jamie Morgan “Words of Warning: Global Networks, Asian Local Resistance, and the Planetary Vulgate of Neoliberalism” in *positions: east asia cultures critique*, 11, no. 3 (Winter 2003): p. 545. And see Naomi Klein’s *No Logo* for more on these Free Trade Zones in China.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid, p. 545.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid, p. 545.

<sup>299</sup> “Audits find fraud is rampant among Chinese businesses” *The Epoch Times* January 4<sup>th</sup> 2004. <http://www.asianresearch.org/articles/1835.html>; “Foxconn faces fresh suicide fears as 14th worker dies” *The Daily Telegraph*, August 6<sup>th</sup> 2010 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/china-business/7929938/Foxconn-faces-fresh-suicide-fears-as-14th-worker-dies.html>;

<sup>300</sup> “As China Aids Labour, Unrest Is Still Rising” *New York Times*, June 20, 2010 <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/21/world/asia/21chinalabour.html?pagewanted=all>

<sup>301</sup> Braester, p. 301.

<sup>302</sup> See the United Nations Development Report where they discuss China’s safety issues in the past and how the Coal Industry can be improved: <http://www.undp.org.cn/projectdocs/53962.pdf>

<sup>303</sup> Willemen, p. 253-57.

<sup>304</sup> Pickowicz, p. 14.

<sup>305</sup> Marx, *Capital: Volume III*, p. 132.

<sup>306</sup> My use of the term proletariat relates to the Marxist understanding of the lowest classes in global capitalist society, as they contribute their labour power to the interconnected nature of vertical and horizontal production processes worldwide. In relation to China and its dissolving image as a socialist command economy, their political economic system negotiates its production, investment and surplus in the global neoliberal order differently, and therefore, a clear-cut definition of the Chinese labour classes is not possible. Instead, it is crucial to view these classes in association with specific historical conjunctures over the last 50 years and how these epochal shifts shape class politics.

<sup>307</sup> For more information about China’s urban development see Fulong Wu, Jiang Xu and Anthony Gar-On Yeh, eds., *Urban Development in Post-reform China: State, Market and Space* (London: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>308</sup> For example, for less direct engagements with neoliberalism and Chinese migrant labour see Jason McGrath’s *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature and Criticism in the Market Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008). In journal format see cogent Kin-Yan Szeto’s “A Maoist Heart: Love, Politics and China’s Neoliberal Transition in the Films of Jia Zhangke” in *Visual Anthropology*, 22:2 (2009); and Arianne Gaetano’s “Rural Woman and Modernity in Globalizing China: Seeing Jia Zhangke’s *The World*” in *Visual Anthropology Review*, 25:1 (2009).

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<sup>309</sup> This is due largely to the Fifth Generation's preoccupation with visual deconstructions of patriarchal society in pre-Maoist China i.e., Zhang Yimou's *Raise the Red Lantern/ Da Hong Denglong Gaogao Guo* 1991, and the ubiquitous celebration of the worker in Maoist era film—i.e., *The Life of Wu Xun/Wu Xun zhuan* 1950 by Sun Yu—both directors have taken this class for granted. Despite Zhang Yimou's avoidance of the labourer directly (focusing instead on feminist/patriarchal critiques of feudal/Maoist China) and the peasant labourer that exemplifies a one-dimensional revolutionary figure of the 1950s and 1960s in *The Life of Wu Xun*, what are essentially two ornamentalized worlds on film, *The World* arguably, recreates the labour class again through filmic representations under neoliberalism; yet *The World* resists embellishing these figures for aesthetic or political reasons alone.

<sup>310</sup> See Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (East Sussex, UK: Beacon Press, 1964).

<sup>311</sup> Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature*, p. 86.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid*, p. 84.

<sup>313</sup> Chang, L., p. 11.

<sup>314</sup> Tang, p. 127.

<sup>315</sup> Lau, p. 224.

<sup>316</sup> Zhang, X., p. 142.

<sup>317</sup> Li Zhang, p. 1.

<sup>318</sup> Osborne, pp. 65-84.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid*, p. 71.

<sup>320</sup> Kang, p. 2.

<sup>321</sup> Chun, p. 9.

<sup>322</sup> Vertovec and Cohen, p. 8

<sup>323</sup> Jaffee, *Sense of Cinema*, NP.

<sup>324</sup> Brennan, p.2.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid*, p 42.

<sup>326</sup> Xu, p. 134.

<sup>327</sup> Wang Jing cited by Amy Hanser in *Service Encounters*, p. 51.

<sup>328</sup> Hanser, p. 3.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3.



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<sup>330</sup> Brennan, "Cosmopolitanism and Internationalism," p 41.

<sup>331</sup> Lu, p. 124.

### **Conclusion**

<sup>332</sup> Berlant, p. 11.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

<sup>334</sup> Lazzarato, p. 140.

<sup>335</sup> Tudor, p. 147.

<sup>336</sup> Kinkle and Toscano, p. 39.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid, p. 40.

<sup>338</sup> Callinicos, *Inequality*, p. 11.

<sup>339</sup> Gill, "Epistemology, Ontology and the 'Italian School,'" p. 27.

<sup>340</sup> Gill and Law, p. 122

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<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/china-business/7929938/Foxconn-faces-fresh-suicide-fears-as-14th-worker-dies.html>

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### **Filmography**

- A Corner in Wheat* (Dir. D.W. Griffith, 1910, USA)
- A Day Without a Mexican* (Dir. Sergio Aran, 2004, Mexico)
- Address Unknown* (Dir. Kim Ki-duk, 2001, South Korea)
- A l'attaque* (Dir. Robert Guediguian, 2000, France)
- Araya* (Dir. Margaret Benacerraf, 1959, Venezuela)
- A Single Spark* (Dir. Chon T'ae-il, 1996, South Korea)
- Attack the Block* (Dir. Joe Cornish, 2001, UK)
- Avatar* (Dir. James Cameron, 2009, USA)
- A Workingman's Dream* (Dir. 감독, 1908, USA)
- Bamboozled* (Dir. Spike Lee, 2002, USA)
- Beijing Bastards/Beijing Zazhong* (Dir. Zhang Yuan, 1992, China)
- Beijing Bicycle/Shiqi sui de danche* (Dir. Wang Xiaoshuai, 2001, China)
- Bicycle Thieves* (Dir. Vittorio De Sica, 1948, Italy)
- Birth of a Nation* (Dir. D.W. Griffith, 1915, USA)
- Black Snow/Ben ming nian* (Dir. Xie Fei, 1990, China)
- Blind Shaft* (Dir. Li Yang, 2004, China)
- Blood Diamond* (Dir. Edward Zwick, 2006, USA)

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*Boyz in the Hood* violence (Dir. John Singleton, 1991, USA)

*Caliche sangriento/Bloody Nitrate* (Helvio Soto, 1969, Chile)

*Cama Adentro* (Dir. Jorge Gaggero, 2004, Argentina)

*City Paradise/Doushi taintang* (Dir. Tang Danian, 1999, China)

*Chocolat* (Dir. Claire Denis, 1988, France & Cameroon)

*Come Back, Africa* (Dir. Lionel Rogosin, 1959, USA & South Africa)

*Deliverance* (Dir. John Boorman, 1972, USA)

*Dirty Pretty Things* (Dir. Stephen Frears, 2002, England)

*District 9* (Dir. Neill Blomkamp, 2009, South Africa)

*Dog Day Afternoon* (Dir. Sidney Lumet, 1975, USA)

*El Ultimo Grumete/The Last Cabin-Boy* (Dir. Jorge Lopez Sotomayor, 1983, Chile)

*Entry Level* (Dir. Douglas Horn, 2007, USA)

*Fetch a Pail of Water* (Dir. Jeffrey Jeturian, 1999, Philippines)

*Fi Baitouna Ragoul/A Man in Our House* (Dir. Henri Barakat, 1961, Egypt)

*Full Monty* (Dir. Peter Cattaneo, 1997, England)

*Giving Care* (Dir. Clarissa de los Reyes, 2008, Philippines)

*Good Morning Beijing/Beijing ni zao* (Dir. Zhang Nuanxin, 1990, China)

*Grap Freeter Toki* (Dir. Kenichi Fujiwara, 2011, Japan)

*Green Card* (Dir. Brutus Sirucha, 2004, Kenya)

*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (Dir. David Yates, 2009, England)

*Hijack Stories* (Dir. Oliver Schmitz, 2000, South Africa)

*Human Resources* (Dir. Laurent Cantet, 1999, France)

*In My Country* (Dir. John Boorman, 2004, South Africa)

*Joe* (Dir. Peter Boyle, 1970, USA)

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*Kilo Tissa wa Tissaine/Kilometer* (Dir. Ibrahim Hilmay, 1955, Egypt)

*King of Children/Haizi wang* (Dir. Chen Kaige, 1987, China)

*King of Tears* (Dir. Teddy Mattera, 2004, South Africa)

*Labourer's Love* (Dir. Zhang Shichuan, 1922, China)

*La Promesse* (Dir. Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne, 1996, France)

*Lawrence of Arabia*(Dir. David Lean, 1962, UK)

*L'emploi du temps* (Dir. Laurent Cantet, 2001, France)

*Looking for Mr. Goodbar* (Dir. Richard Brooks, 1977, USA)

*Made in Degenham* (Dir. Nigel Cole, 2010, UK)

*Made in Manhattan* (Wayne Wang, 2002, USA)

*Mandabi* (Dir. Ousmane Sembene, Senegal and France)

*Mapantsula* (Dir. Oliver Schmitz, 1988, South Africa)

*Marqaret's Museum* (Dir. Mort Ransen, 1996, Canada)

*Mondays in the Sun* (Dir. Fernando Leon de Aranoa, 2002, Spain)

*My Name is Joe* (Dir. Ken Loach, 1998, England)

*Night and Fog/Nuit et brouillard* (Dir. Alain Resnais, 1955, France)

*Norma Rae* (Dir. Martin Ritt, 1979, USA)

*North Country* (Dir. Nick Caro, 2005, USA)

*Office Space* (Dir. Mike Judge USA, 1999)

*Oldboy/ Oldũboi* (Dir. Park Chan-wook, 2003, South Korea)

*On the Waterfront* (Dir. Elia Kazan, 1954, USA)

*Pepe le Moko* (Dir. Julien Duvivier , 1937, France)

*Police Story/Minjing gushi* (Dir. Ning Ying, 1995, China)

*Raise the Red Lantern* (Dir. Zhang Yimou, 1991, China)

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- Red Sorghum* (Dir. Zhang Yimou, 1988, China)
- Righteous Revenge* (Dir. Kim Do-san, 1919, South Korea)
- Rosetta* (Dir. Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne, 1999, France)
- Salesman* (Dir. the Maysles brothers, 1969, USA)
- Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (Karel Riesz, 1959, UK)
- Shwiri* (Dir. Kang Je-gyu , 1998, South Korea)
- Song at Midnight* (Dir. Ma-Xu Weibang, 1937, China)
- Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance/Boksoonun naouguk* (Dir. Park Chan-wook, 2002, South Korea)
- Terrorizer* (Dir. Edward Yang, 1986, Taiwan)
- Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* (Dir. Michael Bay, 2009, USA )
- The Battle of Algiers* (Dir. Gillo Pontecorro, 1966, Italy & Algeria)
- The Celebration* (Dir. Thomas Vinterberg, 1998, Denmark)
- The Crab Cannery Ship* (Dir. Tanaka Hiroyuki, 2009, Japan)
- The Gay Shoe Clerk* (Dir. Edwin Porter, 1903, USA)
- The Gods Must Be Crazy* (Dir. Jamie Uys, 1980, South Africa)
- The Host/Coemul* (Dir. Bong joon-ho, 2007, South Korea)
- The Housemaid/Hanyo* (Dir. Kim Ki-young, 1960, South Korea)
- The Hour of the Furnaces/La hora de los hornos* (Dir. Fernando Solanas & Octavio Getino, 1968, Argentina)
- The Idiots* (Dir. Lars von Trier, 1996, Denmark),
- The Life of Wu Xun* (Dir. Sun Yu, 1950, China)
- The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun* (Dir. Dijbril Diop Mambety, 1997, Senegal)
- The Maid/La Nana* (Dir. Sebastian Silva, 2009, Chile)
- The Organizer* (Dir. Mario Monicello, 1963, Italy)



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*The Quarry Man/La Carrier* (1908, USA)

*The Return* (Dir. Kingsley Ogoro, 2003, Nigeria)

*The Scent of Green Papaya* (Trần Anh Hùng, 2001, Vietnam)

*The Song of the Shirt* (Dir. D.W. Griffith, 1909, USA)

*The Winds of the Aures* (Dir. Mohammed Lakhdar-Hamina, 1966, Algeria)

*The Wooing and Wedding of a Coon* (1904)

*The Workers Leaving the Factory* (Dir. Lumiere brothers, 1895, France)

*The World/Shijie* (Dir. Jia Zhangke, 2004, China)

*Tout va bien* (Dir. Jean-Juc Godard, 1972, France)

*Tsotsi* (Dir. Gavin Hood, 2005, South Africa)

*Wittstock, Wittstock* (Dir. Volker Koepp, 1997, Germany)

*Unemployed and Unemployable* (Dir. Lewin Fitzhamon, 1908, USA)

*Unknown Pleasures* (Dir. Jia Zhangke, 2002, China)

*Up in the Air* (USA, 2009)

*Xala* (Dir. Ousmane Sembene, 1975, Senegal)

*Yaskut al Istiamar/Down with Imperialism* (Dir. Hussein Didky, 1953, Egypt)

*Yeelen* (Dir. Souleymane Cisse, 1987, Mali)

*Yellow Earth/Huang tudi* (Dir. Chen Kaige, 1984, China)

*Yesterday* (Dir. Darrell Roodt, 2004, South Africa)

*You Are the One/Fie cheng wu vao* ( 2003, Beijing TV)

*7 UP* (Dir. Michael Apted, 1952, UK)

*9 to 5* (Dir. Collin Higgins, 1980, USA)

*4 City* (Dir. Jia Zhangke, 2009, China)

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