

Between the Visible and the Intelligible in Asian Cinema

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Space, it is said, is both socially produced and produces the social; but to this we will have to add that it has become so complex and enigmatic that it cannot be directly described. Urban spaces in particular are like black holes: we perceive them only in the effects they produce; effects that we call 'architecture', 'cinema', 'new media' and so on. All these cultural forms can be thought of as different ways of performing space.

Film can be taken to be the paradigmatic case. By focusing on disconnections, including the disconnect between the visible and the intelligible, film--specifically the several films discussed as examples--allows us to glimpse a problematic space that looks recognizable enough but whose internal grids and coordinates have changed. Cinema enables us therefore to trace a spatial history that would otherwise remain hidden.

Counter-Performance: The Heartland and Other Spaces in *Eating Air* and *15*

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The history of Singapore's film industry is marked by two distinct periods: 1) its Golden Age in the 1950s and 1960s characterised by the prolific outpouring of primarily Malay films that ended after Singapore's independence from Malaysia and, 2) its so-called re-birth in the 1990s, when film production was revived after petering out in the 1970s and ceasing to exist altogether in the 1980s. These revival films are very different from the ones that were made during the Golden Age, just as the current constitution of the industry is also no longer recognizable as a legacy inherited from that Age. One of the most obvious differences is that cinematic images of Singapore's simpler *kampong* or rural past have given way to a new urban landscape of skyscrapers, public housing apartment blocks and satellite towns that reflect the cosmopolitan lifestyle of contemporary Singapore, reflecting the country's development "From Third to First World." Indeed, the story of Singapore's success is a familiar one, constituted and reinforced by narratives and representations that perform Singapore as a successful, vibrant, accomplished and affluent nation. To extrapolate from Judith Butler's theorizing of gender, the nation "ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather [it] is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts." These state-driven narratives and representations are performative gestures that perform a *Singapore*. Each site or citation becomes an act that is stylized and repeatable. These acts occur in a public space and, through their reiteration over time, become conventional ways of performing Singapore. In so doing, these conventional gestures have come to constitute Singapore's identity as a nation. However, according to Butler, "there always remains a chance within the performativity of identity for dissonant or disruptive gestures by that which such performativity produces as its outside" because "in producing the normal, it also produces the abnormal." For her, such performativity is a force that constitutes by exclusion. Thus, the nation state's performance of its Singapore also produces what it excludes—(an)other Singapore.

Indeed, the view of Singapore in films from the revival offer a different perspective and this paper looks specifically at the choice of location or setting in two of these films: Kelvin Tong and Jasmine Ng's *Eating Air* and Royston Tan's *15*. Of particular interest is the performance of the heartland in these films—those public housing estates that cluster the island and form a significant part of not only the nation's landscape but also its performance of success. This paper argues that the heartland and other spaces in these films function as more than the setting for the narrative. Instead, they operate as sites of performance, consistent with the way that films from the revival constitute a national cinema that counter-performs (an)other Singapore.

Space as Performance in *Raise the Red Lantern* and *12 Stories*

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In film studies, performance is usually thought of in the terms of acts, actions and activities: the speech, verbal and non-verbal, that screen-people utter, as well as the gestures and movements they enact. The performances of screen-people thus form a crucial structural and narrational pivot for kicking off the plot, sustaining the drama, and constructing the characteristics of screen-personae—their particular characterization as racialized, gendered, and at times sexualized, entities with distinct national and class identities that in turn have corresponding correlations with the audiences, in parasocial ways; such correlations circumscribe discourses of spectatorial effects and affects that account for instances of identification or disinterest (dis-identification), pleasure or displeasure, during the cinematic experience.

The screen environments in which performance-acts composing of utterances, actions and activities occur are typically called the settings. These settings which range from natural landscape to built spaces, indoor or outdoor, are classically conceived of as backdrops—that narrative background in and against which the performance-acts come to being and to pass. This figuration of the settings as passive, as somewhat remote and supplementary to, and at times even divorced from, the world of performance-acts constitutes the major focal point of this paper which posits an understanding of screen environments as a dynamic (as opposed to inert), intrinsic (as opposed to extrinsic) and complementary (as opposed to supplementary) component in cinematic narratives and performances. That is to say, settings—though typically exerting a motionless presence—too have a performative “agency”: they not only describe the space for performance-acts but also enact the performance it describes. To this end, my paper offers a formal analysis of the screen environments in two films about sad and tragic people found/caught in oppressive environments—namely, Zhang Yimou’s *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991) and Eric Khoo’s *12 Stories* (1997).

Between Ruins and Construction Sites: Performing Drifting Identities in Jia Zhangke's Films

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Cast through lenses of realism as well as rooted in historicized sensibility, local knowledge and lived experience, Jia Zhangke's cinematic cities articulate an emergent structure of feeling of drifting identities in an age of postsocialism in the PRC. Between city ruins and construction sites, the on-going processes of destruction and construction in Chinese cities can be vividly charted. Referring to Jia's "Homeland Trilogy" (*Pickpocket* (1997), *Platform* (2000), *Unknown Pleasures* (2002)), *The World* (2004), *Still Life* (2006), and *24 City* (2008), this paper explores how his cinematic cities perform an "art of *détournement*" in response to the domination of global capitalism and the historical legacies of the Maoist revolution. As the Situationist International critics would have called it, Jia's "art of *détournement*" reassembles and repositions Chinese contemporary reality into visual memories of diverse groups of drifting identities in postsocialist China.

What western thinkers call "creative destruction" in the context of capitalist modernity at the turn of the 20th century has been subject to new interpretations in Jia's film works in the new millennium. While philosophers like Nietzsche stress the importance of the vital energy of modernity, Jia's urban ruins and construction sites performatively construct new spatial and temporal configurations of Chinese cities in mutation. Rather than signifying a sense of pastness and futurity through ruinous spaces and construction sites respectively, Jia's cinematic cities hinge to the historicity of disjointed times and the cultural logic of postsocialism. His films explore the ways in which the breakdown of sequential chronological time gives rise to the invocation of the visual memories of the personal and the authentic. In such cases, when history in both ruins and construction sites is perceived as fragments and broken shards, time is spatialized. Instead of being seen as mere remnants of the past or as petrified landscape only, ruins point to an indefinite future as well as open up to other spaces metonymically. Similarly, the construction sites in Jia's films do not always foreshadow some teleological endpoints in the grand project of modernization and nation-building but suggest despair, death and inequality.

The complex spatial-temporal constructions of ruins and construction sites in Jia's films provide a stage for the drifting generation to perform and define their identities. These urban spaces are better associated with the psychological and semiotic-performative realms of Jia's film art. With an amazing array of drifters—migrant workers, floating artists, lost youth, anonymous border-crossers—Jia weaves together a tapestry of postsocialist identities in contemporary China. Some are the underprivileged and dispossessed whose victimhood demonstrates the darker side of modernization and globalization. Others are witnesses and participants in such processes, contributing to the shaping of their own histories through global popular culture and everyday experiences. Despite its documentary realism, the performativity of Jia's cinema is the main driving force that produces new and alternative perceptions of visualizing Chinese cities in transition. It demonstrates how auteurism and creativity interact to generate film art of independent spirit and vision within the global context.

**Dubbing *Nang Khaek*:
Laughter, Tears and Voice Performance in the Space of 'Thai Film History'**

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The political theorist Kasian Tejapira once mobilised the following memory image to underscore the disjunction between official Thai nationalism and the everyday experience of a Sino-Thai boy growing up at the height of the Cold War:

..in the middle of Bangkok Chinatown there used to be a moviehouse called, outlandishly, "Texas", which my mother and I attended frequently. Totally unrelated to its namesake in the United States it showed exclusively Indian movies dubbed in Thai. Its regular audience consisted mostly of Chinese, with some Indians and Thais, who all enjoyed themselves and applauded, laughed and cried together peacefully and harmoniously together for many years.

The paper approaches Kasian's richly condensed vision as a typical scene characterising the circulation of dubbed Hindi films in Thailand between the late 1950s and the mid 1970s. It identifies the performance styles of the dubbing artists as a key attraction sustaining the popularity of these films, whose scale of circulation was at the middling level and comparable to domestically produced entertainment features. During the period in question, the majority of dubbing was still performed live as each film reel was being projected. The placement of the dubbing artists – or, in their own English-language self-description, the 'versionists' – in this space in-between the projected images and recorded (diegetic and non-diegetic) sound, can be thought of in terms of an 'authorial' agency that translated Hindi films into a locally-rooted form of live entertainment vernacularly known as *nang khaek* ['the films of dark-skinned Asian visitors']. Of particular interest is the disruptive nature of the voice performance, historicised in this context as formally and aesthetically exemplary: a demonstration of the principle of disjuncture underpinning the history of cinema experiences in Thailand. The focus of the paper is, accordingly, the taste for two seemingly incompatible attractions: an appreciation of the Hindi film's special propensity for melodrama and for providing a pleasurable tearful experience, evident in the emphatic address to female viewers of *nang khaek* adverts, and an admiration for versionists who excelled at witty or ironic 'readings' of tragic scenes, regarded as a mark of their virtuosity. Buried in this babelistic world, now faded from view, is a history of a public sphere of sorts – one populated by multi-ethnic crowds brought into shape by the vernacularisation of films originating from a culture regarded as "different but samesame" rather than as threateningly/fascinatingly other, and via the Thai language in which the Hindi films were dubbed rather than by ideological Thainess. The paper's retracing of this world forms part of a broader project to theorise the disjunctive, non-synchronous, international and plebeian characters of Thai film history.

I Feel the Earth Move: Traversing Ground in Singapore

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It is just approaching dawn. A group has gathered on a grassy knoll. The atmosphere is cheery and the ground before them is laden with fruits, food and joss sticks. It looks like a family picnic but this group has congregated to appease the dead.

In the documentary *Moving House*, Singapore filmmaker Tan Pin Pin chronicles the Chew family's poignant journey in which the remains of their parents are forcibly moved from a Chinese burial ground into a modernized crematorium. The documentary shows the incompatible translations between local Chinese customs with modernized state imperatives focused on national development. Here, in the acts of exhumation and displacement, complex and often polarized narratives of tradition and modernization, Chinese beliefs and non-Eastern prerogatives, rootedness and mobility; are all condensed in microcosm.

Drawing on familiar issues such as identity, against other more perilous and unfamiliar subjects such as mortality, I would like to take Tan's film as a springboard to begin to travel as it were, between several realms. Here, I also want to reframe the notion of 'travel' as less to do with physical movement and more about a mobility of perspectives. In other words, there is a fluency (or discomfort) with crossing cultural boundaries, which may not necessarily be positioned far away. In the case of *Moving House*, which exemplifies the anxieties of living in 21st century Singapore, travel across such 'foreign' boundaries could occur on a daily basis as local and global flows of culture and capital converge sometimes seamlessly, and other times, as in the case of the Chew family, imperfectly. And of course, to travel, ultimately some ground needs to be covered.

Indeed in *Moving House*, it is the question of what ground may meaningfully constitute – a burial plot for perpetuity, or a shifting *tabula rasa* for lucrative development – which comes under scrutiny. Ground in the Singapore context is scarce, and hence always contested in its various guises as national symbol, desired real estate, ancestral land or speculative terrain. I will discuss that woven into Tan's documentary is how ground is after all metonymical of home, that is, ground structures one's sense of rootedness, or conversely, reframes one's perception of mobility. Here, complicated by the state's enthusiasm for land reclamation, 'ground' as the foundation for 'home' is already a concept, which has been set adrift.

The Return of the Repressed: Uncanny Spaces of Nostalgia and Loss in Trần Anh Hùng's "Vietnam Trilogy"

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Trần Anh Hùng is best known for three films, *The Scent of the Green Papaya* (1993), *Cyclo* (1995) and *Vertical Ray of the Sun* (2000), known as his "Vietnam trilogy." In this paper I propose the notion of the return of a repressed, painful and violent wartime past, which takes form narratively through a meditation on uncanny spaces – spaces of wandering, longing, anxiety, and loss.

I argue that Hùng's trilogy represents the return of themes that have been intensely repressed in Vietnamese cinema and literature, and in everyday life in general in Vietnam, until very recently. Themes of nostalgia and loss can now be expressed in film and literature, which was not possible until the 1990s. It stems from a reevaluation of wartime suffering occurring now, a generation after the end of war in Vietnam in 1975. It also results from a gradual easing of state controls and censorship on arts and media in Vietnam in the 1990s. Recent Vietnamese films and literature have begun to focus on the massive human costs and painful aftermath of the war. These are articulated through tropes of mourning, silences, and loss. My hypothesis is that the uncanny occupies a privileged place in contemporary Vietnamese visual and written narratives as a result of this "return" of themes that had been officially repressed for political reasons since the end of war in Vietnam.

I thus focus on the articulation of official memories and historiography with experiences of loss, suffering, abjection, and mourning, which I have analyzed in my ethnographic work in Vietnam since 1999.

Trần Anh Hùng was born in Vietnam in 1962. He and his family left as refugees at the end of the war in 1975. *Cyclo* (1995), filmed on location in the first large-scale foreign production in Vietnam, marked his return to his birthplace. Hùng re-embodies his torn Vietnamese identity through montage of uncanny spaces of poverty, street crime, and loss.

The chain-smoking poet, played by Hong Kong actor Tony Leung Chiu Wai, drifts silently through pastel interiors that seem to bear no relationship to the chaos and danger of grimy streets. I examine the spatial opposition between streets and interiors, and query why the main themes of poverty and street life focus so strongly on abjection and tropes of silences, amnesia, absence, and failed articulation of desires. The figure of the beautiful and poor young woman forced into prostitution to save her family from destitution is almost a cliché in Vietnamese fiction – and so is that of the poor young brother, victimized by criminals, who struggles for survival in a threatening urban underworld. I query whether these familiar narrative tropes of abjection provide new spaces for understanding the shift away from a war-torn Communist society, or whether they replicate a persistent, romantic self-Orientalizing thread in modern Vietnamese fiction. The other two films in the trilogy pose these questions in even starker terms: they readily oppose idealized spaces of rural purity and simplicity to the abjection and grim complexity of urban life.

The Persistence of the Tableau

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Before the popularization of the term “extra,” bit players with little narrative function appearing in the background were referred to as “atmosphere” (this term, of course, still is used today). In the opening of the 1959 Hong Kong film *Air Hostess*, star Ge Lan sings at a costume party of her dreams to fly into the sky, while gazed upon by a circle of masked party-goers who barely sway to the music. At the close of the musical number, she is rushed into another room by a man who playfully berates her for being childish. In the background comprising the atmosphere of the scene are a few other masked party-goers sitting around a table. But I suspect these figures in the background are not actually living human beings.

This scene, along with a few other moments I will note in films from Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan, is an example of what I want to call the “persistence of the tableau” - moments of stillness that stall the moving image. The term tableau can be used for various characterizations, and I will here use it in the tradition of the influence of the stage tableau on early cinema as a stylistic device that persists in various incarnations today. The tableau can refer to a scene during which the performers reach a pose and remain motionless for a short period, for dramatic punctuation. Such a gesture will necessarily also determine the scale of the shot and spatial representation. In the case of *Air Hostess*, the instance of the tableau coincides with connotations of the primitive, the absurd, and the grotesque. While the cinema has the power to animate the inanimate, the inverse is also possible.

30 Images from Yasmin Ahmad's Films

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The films of Yasmin Ahmad (1958-2009) achieve an unusual consistency of look and feel. Quite unusually among Malaysian filmmakers who sometimes made films financed by the studios, she had full creative control when it came to story, casting, locations and other aspects of the films. She also started making feature films at the relatively late age of 45, after more than a decade of successful commercials. This meant that her films, right from the start, had the benefit of an adult world-view.

All 6 of her feature-length films - starting with the made-for-TV *Rabun* (2003) to her final feature *Talentine* (2009) used the same Director of Photography, Editor and 1st Assistant Director. Many of them even used the same cast and would sometimes consciously reference the previous films. So the feature filmography represents almost a self-contained 'universe' -- or to use a homelier metaphor, and one more more in keeping with the cultivated simplicity of the work, the films feel like members of the same family.

This presentation takes a look at 30 of the images that were used in the book *Yasmin Ahmad's Films*. They are presented in chronological order of the feature-length films that were made. We literally start with the first image of *Rabun* and end with the last image of *Talentine*. These images can demonstrate several things: how the cinematic space is used to show the ways in which the characters relate to one another, or their environment; the juxtapositions within the frame that have brought a measure of home-grown controversy, and why; and finally the ways in which certain visual ideas cross over from one film (either her own or those of others) to another.

How do we make a Malaysian quilt? There are many things going on in, and under, these films, and this presentation gives an introduction to a filmmaker who made a significant impact in a country that is still afraid of telling its own stories with candour.

Projecting National Fantasy in *Thawiphop*: Historical Film as Performative Space

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Penned by Thommayanti, one of Thailand's most prominent authors, *Thawiphop* is a popular novel about a Western-educated young woman who discovers that an antique mirror can magically transport her back in time. The protagonist subsequently shuttles back and forth between the present and 1893, a year that was marked by heightened tension between Thailand and the French imperial power. With her knowledge of Western languages, the protagonist attempts to help the Siamese officials negotiate with the French. Through the process, she comes to appreciate traditional customs and values and to look back critically at the present when Thailand is faced with a foreign threat in the form of cultural imperialism. This technique of comparing colonialism in the past to the cultural imperialism in the present is also used in Suraphong Phinijka's *Siam Renaissance*, the latest adaptation of *Thawiphop*. The 2004 film belongs to a group of works that has been deeply influenced by the nationalist sentiments triggered by the 1997 economic crisis. Most of these works feature historical moments when the Thai people were faced with foreign invasion but were able to defend their nation. *Siam Renaissance* does likewise depict the country in peril. It portrays Thailand during the reign of King Mongkut (1851-1868) when it was threatened by both the British and the French imperial powers. By showing how the Thai people were able to negotiate with the two empires without ever losing a sense of themselves, the film offers a sharp critique of the present worship of all things Western.

I propose, in the first part of this paper, to read *Thawiphop* against the grain. I will argue that the novel is not about time travel but rather about a woman who derives narcissistic pleasure from watching herself in the mirror. As the novel is adapted into film, this mirror is transformed into the big screen on which the audience watches its ideal self successfully negotiate with the West. Since the film imagines this successful negotiation to have taken place in the past, the past does become a performative space where the Thai audience acts out its fantasies. I will explore, in the second and main part of the paper, this function of the past as a performative space and will argue that the fantasy of successfully dealing with the West also depends on a kind of performance. Scholars of Thai Studies have investigated the various strategies that the Thai people used to come to terms with the West. None, however, has touched upon the act of role-playing. Frantz Fanon examines in *Black Skin, White Masks* the negative psychological effects upon the colonized of having to accept and imitate the civilized ways of the white man. By investigating the film *Siam Renaissance* as well as writings of the royal elite in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, however, I will show that the Thai people turned the same act of donning the white mask of civilization into a positive strategy and claimed that it allowed them to remain essentially Thai while outwardly imitating the white man.

History Afloat in Lim Minouk's *S.O.S—Adoptive Dissensus* (2009): Performative and Cinematic Interventions into a National Space in South Korea

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As part of Lim Minouk's continued artistic interventions into the recent history and urban space in South Korea, her multimedia project *S.O.S—Adoptive Dissensus* captures in film a sound and light performance on the Han River. Flowing across Seoul, the Han River as a geographic location has attained its symbolic signification—"the Miracle of Han River"—during the country's breakneck-speed industrialization in the 1960s and 1970s. The strong, nationalistic will to rebuild the country in the aftermath of the Korean War (1950-1953) promoted the grand narrative of national survival, neglecting the complexity and variety of individual and collective experiences. Lim's 45-minute long video is the filmic result of a series of performance on the Han River on a breezy spring night in 2009. During the two-hour long ferry ride to which the public was invited, the captain's voice tells histories of each dock and island that are sparsely lit by search lights aboard. The ferry eventually journeys through three narrative-oriented performances on the shore, all coordinated by the artist. The first site is that of demonstration, a group of protesters voicing out on drum beats and holding aluminum panels that reflect the search lights. Then, the ferry takes the audience to the second performance on the Nodul Island during which a couple on a date exchanges conversations with the captain on the ferry via walkie-talkies. The final performance presents a monologue on freedom of speech recited by a long-term political ex-prisoner under the military dictatorship. The ex-prisoner's voice is transmitted from the dock to the ferry, but his face remains invisible to the audience.

The postproduction process through which Lim creatively and critically reconstructed the footage interests me no less than the poetic and allegorical nature of three performances that she staged along the river. Thus, I will practice a close reading of Lim's work as a way to respond to the following questions: How does the artist re-imagine the given space burdened with nationalistic imagination? How does the linear experience of a "sea voyage" is translated into more fragmented reconstruction in the film in both the temporal and spatial sense? How does the artist explore the conventions of performance and cinematic language in order to interweave the space with layers of narratives as a way of remembering the past and reinventing the present? What does the work of intermingling two mediums—performance and film—in *S.O.S.* tell us about the parameters and capacities of the mediums themselves, while providing an inventive way to reconsider the urban landscape ridden with national symbols?

**Imagining Nanyang across the South China Sea:
The Framing of Southeast Asia in Films by Wong Kar Wai**

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Although known internationally as an auteur for his stylized films, Hong Kong-based film director Wong Kar Wai not only inscribed diasporic Chinese communities and characters on celluloid, but also located them in various trans-national situations around the world. His 1997 film *Happy Together*, for example, placed a gay couple in Argentina's Buenos Aires' overseas Chinese enclave and spaces. Such cinematic constructions of "diasporic Chinese space" may be traced in many of his nine movies thus far.

Of the estimated 25-30 million overseas Chinese (*huaren*) living in about 140 countries around the world, 80% of them reside in Southeast Asia. Apart from geographical proximity of the region to China, the main reason for this figure was the historical outcomes of outmigration by ethnic Chinese from the 16th to 19th century from China's southern coastal areas, at the time when European powers had colonized most of the Southeast Asian countries. Thus far, scholarship on the space of diasporic Chinese at the turn of the 19th century has focussed on their sites of labour, their enclave or Chinatown formation, and the socio-economic spheres created and constructed in their new host villages or cities, especially through their hybrid or simulated renditions of built traditions and social networks. The coalescing into a common "Chinese" identity in those countries is an essential premise for such work.

This paper is an attempt to expand the discourse for other spatial forms of such communities, as chronotopic and cinematic space. I argue that in several films by Wong Kar Wai, there is a recurring inscription of specific locations in Southeast Asia, especially the Philippines, Singapore and Indochina. Examined against the narratives of these films, such inscriptions of Nanyang, albeit brief and sometimes citationary, are symptomatic and illustrative of a larger cultural inscription of Southeast Asia in popular and literary cultures generated from Hong Kong for consumption by a larger diasporic Chinese market. As a key space of not just diasporic Chinese culture but a specifically southern Chinese one, Hong Kong's imagination and production of Southeast Asia thrived in the post-war era. This space has been reduced with the subsequent rise of nationalist phases in Southeast Asia, but remains as fragments like those in Wong's movies.

The Meaning of Shadows in Domestic Spaces in Japanese Film

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In modern black and white film, the effect of shadows played significant roles in expressing the drama of social problems of the times and to clarify cultural issues in the process of modernization. The films of Japanese film director Yasujiro Ozu, particularly his *Tokyo Story* in 1953, are recognized as the representative of the Japanese aesthetic and emotion, but their most important characteristics lie in the effects of shadows visualizing the psychological and social meanings implicated in the people's movement in space. In this sense, the examination of the effects of shadows in modern Japanese movies enables us to study not only the Japanese aesthetics but also the question of how moving images can represent the relationship between social space, people's movement, and emotion.

This study deals with the film *Uma* (Horse) directed by Kajirou Yamamoto and Akira Kurosawa in 1940 to examine how they tried to describe common people's daily lives in their domestic spaces, and what kind of social meanings are implied in its sensitive expression of shadows. *Uma* is a drama about a peasant family's daily events in the northern part of Japan. In Japan, from the 1900's to the World War II, peasants suffered severely from the social and economical shift in its modernization. Particularly in the famine of 1934, many peasants in the northern part of Japan had to sell their daughters to bagnios. In the film, Yamamoto depicts these difficulties of peasant life and their traditional conventions, such as the social hierarchies among family members and the gender discriminations. The family's intimate relationship and contradicting emotions in problematic situations are expressed dynamically with Yamamoto's meticulous usage of shadows. Like Ozu's works, such close and intimate visions of shadows present the domestic space as the essential locus of problems in Japanese society at that period.

**Kings of Infinite Space:
Rendering the Singapore Dreamscape in 'Singapore Dreaming'**

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Hamlet:

*O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell, and count myself
a king of infinite space—were it not that I have bad dreams.*

In the feature film *Singapore Dreaming* (2006), the Loh family grapples with their aspirations and limitations all the way from their cramped 850 square foot public housing apartment into the afterlife. In this paper, the screenwriters/directors discuss the various spatial experiments that went into the crafting of their film, which has gone on to win multiple international awards, including the Montblanc New Screenwriters Award at the San Sebastian International Film Festival, the Audience Award for Narrative Feature at the Asian American International Film Festival in New York, and the Best Asian Film Award at the Tokyo International Film Festival. In particular, they examine the challenges of bringing the themes of the film from their origins as academic research data into the wider realm of popular media, and how they deliberately constructed and designed the sets and shots to represent the parameters of the relationships, politics, and dreams of a typical middle-class Singaporean family, finding inspiration not only from social realist filmmakers like Yasujiro Ozu, Mike Leigh and Michael Winterbottom, but also from feminist sociologist Dorothy Smith and her consideration of the quotidian as problematic. They will also reflect on the film's traversing of personal, academic, commercial, artistic, sociological and regulatory spaces.

Virtual Japan as Witnessed in *Coil-A Circle of Children*

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Created by Iso Mitsuo, “Coil-A Circle of Children” (*Dennō Koiru*) is a science fiction anime that aired on Japanese national broadcast television station (NHK) in 2007. The narrative revolves around the virtual reality city Daikoku, where the landscape infrastructure mostly consists of digital data and the Internet. Children run around the city wearing their special “augmented reality” glasses that can manipulate the data surrounding their daily lives. The glasses function as the Internet, but the space that they access and control are their own reality.

In *Coil*, temporal and spatial realities have no boundaries. The blurring of the digital and the physical external alters the linear notion of space and time. As the story unravels, we encounter a larger conspiracy that tries to cover up the danger of the newly developed virtual technology, which creates “ghosts” that are remnants of the left over old data. According to Azuma Hiroki, Japanese anime and its avid fans called Otaku have created a space where modes of communication have been altered into a postmodern “database-like” structure. The signified are codified into bits and pieces of information that can be summed up in the notion of “moe”, a term that summarizes and appealing and exciting element in a character. Moe elements do not have a linear history that can add up to the characters’ attractiveness. In fact, the characters themselves become an embodiment of the entire history of anime character development and thus, become a transcending figure of the otaku culture. In other words, contemporary anime (and its characters) are produced with prior creations as stepping stones, only to further blur the boundaries of narratives, visibility, and the history of the medium itself. Therefore, the entire genre of anime becomes an amalgam of postmodern pastiche and stereotypes, which appears to be epitomized in anime such as *Coil*.

Evoking the trite bias of techno-Orientalism, Daikoku (which echoes the term “great nation” in Japanese) as a virtual reality city replicates the notion of great economic and technological development that Japan once represented. When data virus-eliminating machines sweep the cityscape, the only spaces to which the children can safely evacuate are the old temple sites. Here, we can witness the tension among the past, present and the future. With the Japanese government’s concentrated international promotion of anime into the global market, and further embracement of it being part of Japan’s traditional arts, the production of *Coil* at this juncture of time presents an interesting development of Japanese anime as a whole. This study will examine the notion of space and time in *Coil* and situate its production against the larger socio-economic structure of the Japanese anime industry in the 21st century.

Harmonising the City: The Cinematic Construction of Urban Space in Shanghai

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This paper considers the mediation of urban redevelopment in contemporary Shanghai. I propose that cinematic form may be used as a theoretical framework for interpreting the development and promotion of Shanghai as a global metropolis. By examining a wide range of texts (including museum displays and music videos as well as films) I suggest that the official dominant representation of Shanghai's urban environment is inherently *cinematic*. This, in turn, raises questions about the efficacy of films to act as counter-imaginings of urban space, when certain cinematic strategies are already employed in the hegemonic representation of the city.

Shanghai has become talismanic of China's rapid modernisation, and the Shanghai World Expo 2010, with its slogan, 'Better City, Better Life', will shortly act as a showcase for the Chinese government's vision of a utopian 'harmonious society'. In recent years there has been a proliferation of visual media which persistently offer up the city as a space of harmonious enjoyment. Yet whilst urban redevelopment has improved the physical living conditions of many residents, it has also created and intensified residential differentiation in Shanghai, with lower-income inner-city residents frequently rehoused in 'fringe' locations of the city. In Lefebvre's terms, there is an increasing rupture between the hegemonic 'representation of space' and the emotional experience of the 'lived space'.

Interweaving a journey around Shanghai's Urban Planning Museum with a discussion of several film texts, this paper examines the cinematic qualities of the hegemonic representation of the city's environment. Beginning on the third floor of the museum, which houses a vast scale model of the city and a 360° video screening of a computer-generated film, entitled *Virtual World*, I argue that these exhibits, with their manipulation of movement and space, promise the resident of Shanghai the same freedom of mobility possessed by the camera. Such liberated mobility is also offered to the viewer in the film, *The Longest Night in Shanghai*, and a recent promotional music video for the Shanghai Expo, both of which market the city as an open, welcoming space for the performance of spontaneous expression. But such representations encourage a particularly homogenous conception of the city as performative space.

I conclude by suggesting that the relatively uniform portrayal of the city in the texts I have discussed is, ironically, totally contrary to the notion of harmony. If the city is truly to become harmonious, it is doubtful that this shall be achieved through the suppression of its various poly-vocal narratives. The challenge for filmmakers and academics is to find strategies to enable counter-imaginings of the urban space to be heard and seen.

**Monkeying with the Gods:
Framing and Claiming Urban Space in *Delhi 6* and *Let's Talk***

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My paper would look at two films *Delhi 6* (2009, Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra) and *Let's Talk* (2002, Ram Madhavani) that delineate urban lived spaces on the axes of the secular and the religious, myths and the banal-profane everyday, anxieties and the curative. I will attempt to address these binaries to problematize the stability of these categories in the way they operate to produce the particularities of contemporary Indian space, specifically in terms of their cinematic representation through which spaces are understood, accessed, experienced and claimed on "metaphorical, emotional, cultural and social registers" grounding and validating identities.

Incidentally, both films take as their points of departure two specifically Indian performative traditions.

In the former, the linear narrative is punctuated by the cyclical performance of the *Ramlila* every evening during *Dussehra* where urban space is transformed temporarily into a riot of 'religious' pageants. It is narrated from the point of view of a young man who comes home with his terminally ill grandmother to an old neighbourhood in Delhi. In his primary encounter this space unfolds in a chaotic simultaneity of registers strongly resisting subsumption into the nation's project of modernization that has as its subject the atomised, individuated, rights-bearing citizen. --Narrow lanes, curious and invasive neighbours, overlapping terraces, porous architecture, communal and gendered spaces, territorialities and collectivities are densely infested with residual symptoms of the 'pre-modern' (traffic suspended by a sacred cow, 'gomata,' giving birth), its curious deployment in the mechanics of a democratic electoral process, and the defunct state mechanisms manifest in the corrupt policemen.

Significantly, the film borrows from the monkeyman cases of May 2002 where nocturnal attacks by a mysterious monkey like apparition crystallized a host of anxieties around it (e.g. having been sent by the Pakistan secret service, the ISI, in the form of 131 monkeys from across the border to create terror). The film uses news telecasts as the other ironic leitmotif, the rational register that repeatedly fails to contain or explain the phenomenon (the real life culmination of which had been the Delhi Police producing a 200-page report debunking the entire 'monkey business' as a myth).

The latter film in contrast, made in English, structured curiously on the *Thumri* (a light classical vocal form where usually a single refrain is repeated with different emotional overtones) a middle aged affluent couple talk in an apartment in Bombay over whether the wife has been unfaithful. In the non-sequential narrative the conversations traverse, like the *thumri*, several possible developments (polite acceptance, jocularly, marital rape...) Television news in this case grounds the affect of the film in inexplicable sightings of Lord Krishna mythifying a format (DV blown up to 35mm) and spatiality that demand a secular atomized spectator/inhabitant.

I would focus most closely on how the films themselves privilege and hierarchise these registers in their respective modes of representation to understand the spectators/citizens they configure in the process and the concomitant spectatorial claims that are validated in terms of the meanings and possibilities of performing space as representation.

Opera Jawa: Performing the Nation in the Transnational Site

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As a part of the New Crowned Hope, a series of films commissioned to celebrate Mozart's 250th anniversary, *Opera Jawa* reaffirms Garin Nugroho's status as an international auteur. His films have been praised for distinctive and exotic imagery while offering political statements on contemporary Indonesia. In films such as *Surat untuk Bidadari* (A Letter for an Angel) and *Bulan Tertusuk Ilalang* (And the Moon Dances), Nugroho interrogates the notion of "Indonesian-ness" under the Suharto regime and posits a critique on how, within such construction of nationhood, the centralization of Javanese culture marginalizes other cultures in Indonesia. Thus the spaces in Nugroho's films often reflect the irreconcilable gaps between local tradition and the state vision of modernity. In *Opera Jawa*, however, Nugroho's curatorial project involving Indonesian contemporary performing and visual arts indicates a tendency to break the boundaries between the nation-tradition dichotomy. This paper attempts to explore Nugroho's idea of nationhood and how the geographical spaces in *Opera Jawa* serve as sites of performance of the nation for the transnational audience. We would argue that in negotiating between the effort to escape the essentialized conception of "tradition" and the need to perform "exotic" Indonesia in the transnational circuit, Nugroho projects the vision of "Java" that is not necessarily in opposition to the New Order paradigm he is critiquing. We would further argue that this vision is in conjunction with how the "Asian space" has been imagined and situated vis-à-vis the "West."

ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

ACKBAR ABBAS is professor and chair of comparative literature at University of California, Irvine. His best known book is 'Hong Kong-Culture and the Politics of Disappearance', published in 1997 by the University of Minnesota Press.

AMIR MUHAMMAD is a writer, publisher and occasional movie-maker from Malaysia. He has been writing for the Malaysian print media since the age of 14. From 2000 to 2009 he made several movies and documentaries, two of which (*The Last Communist* and *Village People Radio Show*) are banned in Malaysia. He is now concentrating on writing and publishing books under his Matahari Books imprint and has a target of publishing 50 books before his next movie. The first book in 2007 was Vol 1 of the best-selling series *Malaysian Politicians Say the Darndest Things*. *Yasmin Ahmad's Films* is book #12. He is currently working on a book called *120 Malay Movies*, that will cover the years 1948-72.

Paramita BRAHMACHARI is working on her doctoral thesis on post-liberalization contemporary Hindi mainstream cinema and its shifting ideologies and forms, and is jointly affiliated to the Jadavpur University and the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta. She did her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Comparative Literature (1999) and Film Studies (2002) respectively from Jadavpur University.

Thosaeng CHAOCHUTI received his Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from the University of California at Los Angeles in March 2008 and teaches at the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University. He is currently conducting research on early Thai crime fiction. His article "The Murderer of Bangkokphrom: The Semi-Colonial Siam and Its Early Literary Adaptations" is forthcoming in the journal *Manusya*, and an article entitled "Reading against the Grain: *Thawiphop* and the Narcissism of Maneechan," is forthcoming in the journal *Read*.

Lilian CHEE is a writer, theorist and designer. Trained at the Bartlett, University College London, and the National University of Singapore, where she is currently Assistant Professor, Lilian's research focuses on domesticity. Her publications include 'An Architecture of Twenty Words', in *Negotiating Domesticity* (2005); 'A Web in the Garden', in *Pattern, Haecceity Papers* (2007), and 'Living with Freud', in *AD Atmosphere* (2008). She is co-founder of WORM, an independent Singapore-based architecture-art publisher, and also serves as a regional editor for the *Journal of Architecture*. Lilian is currently working on a project that explores representations of Asian domesticity in architecture, art and film.

Esther M.K. CHEUNG is dedicated to teaching and research on Hong Kong cultural studies, contemporary Chinese fiction and film, as well as visual and urban culture in the context of globalization. She is a life-long literature student and a film lover. She embraces critical and cultural theories when they are engaged with history, compassion, hope and struggle. She is the author of *Fruit Chan's Made in Hong Kong* (HKUP), editor of *In Critical Proximity: The Visual Memories of Stanley Kwan* (in Chinese, Joint Publishing) and co-editor of two collections, *Xiang-gang Wen-xue@ Wen-hua Yan-jiu* [Hong Kong Literature as/and Cultural Studies] (Oxford UP) and *Between Home and World: A Reader in Hong Kong Cinema* (Oxford UP). Another book on independent cinemas is forthcoming. She is currently Chair of the Department of Comparative Literature and Director of the Center for the Study of Globalization and Cultures (CSGC) at the University of Hong Kong.

Kukhee CHOO is a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Cultural Studies Cluster at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. Choo received her doctoral degree in 2009 from the University of Tokyo with her dissertation "The Making of Cool Japan: The Japanese Government's Cultural and Economic Policies towards the Anime Industry in the Global Age". Her research interest lies in transnational media flow, gender and postcolonialism, and cultural policies in Asia. She has published articles on the Japanese governmental policy towards the anime industry, the shifting gender portrayals manifested in popular Japanese girls' comic books, and the influence of Japanese comic book culture on Korean audiences.

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Dada DOCOT obtained her Masters degree in Human Security Studies (Department of Cultural Anthropology) from the University of Tokyo in March 2008, under a Japanese Government Graduate Research Scholarship. After her graduation, she went back to the Philippines to concentrate on documentary and advocacy filmmaking. While not formally trained in the arts for she took Journalism during her undergraduate years at the University of the Philippines-Diliman, Dada has consistently pursued her interests in multimedia art. Her first film *Sablay* (2008) won the First Prize at the University of the Philippines Centennial Digital Filmmaking Festival. Her shorts *Performing Naturalness* and *Baad ng Pauno (Restless)*, as well as upcoming film *Sunday (E)scapes*, comprise her contribution to the research of Filipinos in international migration. Her films have been shown at film festivals in the Philippines, United States and Germany, and also presented at the University of Tokyo – Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ateneo de Naga University, Philippines. She is also involved in cultural advocacy in her hometown, and in 2006 she founded Nabua Forum, a non-profit online community for Nabueños living in the Philippines and overseas.

Colin GOH obtained his LL.B. from University College London and his Masters in Law from Columbia University, where he was named a Harlan Fiske Stone Scholar, in recognition of superior academic achievement. He was also called to the bar in England and Wales, Singapore and New York and practiced for several years as a commercial litigator, specialising in maritime law. He has since left the practice of law to engage in multimedia production. Goh and Woo's film *Singapore Dreaming* won the prestigious Montblanc New Screenwriters Award at the 54th San Sebastian International Film Festival, as well as the Audience Award for Narrative Feature at the 30th Asian American International Film Festival in New York.

Duncan HARTE is a research student at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. He graduated from Cambridge University with a BA in English Literature, before working in filmmaking in London and Shanghai. Much of his film work has been with the media collective YeastCulture. He has recently completed an AHRC-funded MA in Global Cinemas and the Transcultural at SOAS. His doctoral research, also funded by the AHRC, examines the representation of Chinatown spaces in film, with a particular focus on South East Asia. His research interests include Chinese and South East Asian cinemas, the relationship between film and cartography, and diasporic networks of production and reception.

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Izumi KUROISHI is a professor of Aoyama Gakuin University, and is teaching architectural and urban theory, history and Japanese modern design history. She graduated from Tokyo University, worked in a design office for 8 years, and obtained her Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania under Marco Frascari and Joseph Rykwert. She published "Kenchikugai no shiso: Kon Wajiro(The Exterior theory of architecture by Kon Wajiro)" in 2000 and related papers on Japanese traditional and modern architecture and cultural studies of urban phenomenology at international conferences. She co-organized the "Sensing Cities" project in both of Tokyo and London, and is now preparing for part 3 in 2010.

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Ugoran PRASAD is a writer, an artist, and a theater researcher. He has worked in several theater projects mainly with Teater Garasi Yogyakarta. He is the editor of *Lèbur Theater and Performance Journal* (www.lebur.or.id) and the program manager of Masyarakat Seni Pertunjukan Indonesia (The Indonesian Society of Performing Arts).

Christophe ROBERT received his Ph.D. in socio-cultural anthropology from Cornell University in 2005, with research fellowship support from Fulbright-Hays, the Social Science Research Council, the MacArthur Foundation, and the Wenner-Gren Foundation. He then taught at the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies and the department of anthropology at Princeton, and the Council on Southeast Asia Studies at Yale.

TAN Pin Pin's films include *Invisible City*, *Singapore GaGa*, *Moving House* and its follow-up *Gravedigger's Luck*, and *Building Dreams*. Recently she completed *9th August*, a permanent exhibit for the National Museum which consists of 40 years of National Day Parades squeezed into 7 minutes. She is a board member for Substation, the Centre for the Arts, and the National Archives of Singapore. She was an Artist in Residence at University of Technology Sydney, at Singapore's Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, the Institute of Policy Studies, and at the Asia Research Institute.

TAN See Kam (Ph.D. University of Melbourne) presently works and researches at the University of Macau, Macao SAR, China, and prior to this, at various tertiary institutions in Australia and Singapore. He has publications in *Asian Cinema*, *Cinemaya*, *Jumpcut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, *Screen*, *Social Semiotics*, *The South East Asian Journal of Social Science*, *Media Asia*, *Intermedia*, *Antithesis* and *Journal of Homosexuality*. They include reprints and book chapters in *Queer Asian Cinema: Shadows in the Shade* (New York: Harrington Park Press), *Between Home and World: A Reader in Hong Kong Cinema* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press), *The Cinema of Small Nations* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press) and *Chinese Films in Focus 2* (London: Palgrave Macmillan). He has also co-edited a special issue on "Gender in Asian cinema" for *Asian Journal of Communication* (2001), and is co-editor of *Hong Kong Film, Hollywood and The New Global Cinema* (London/New York: Routledge) and *Chinese Connections: Critical Perspectives on Film, Identity and Diaspora* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press).

JoyceIn WOO Yen Yen holds a doctorate in Education from Columbia University, New York (2004), and a Postgraduate Diploma in Education from the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University (1995). She is currently assistant professor in the department of Curriculum & Instruction at Long Island University, New York. Goh and Woo's film *Singapore Dreaming* won the prestigious Montblanc New Screenwriters Award at the 54th San Sebastian International Film Festival, as well as the Audience Award for Narrative Feature at the 30th Asian American International Film Festival in New York.