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Book Review

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The East-West Center is a public, nonprofit educational institution with an international board of governors. Some 2,000 research fellows, graduate students, and professionals in business and government each year work with the Center's international staff in cooperative study, training, and research. They examine major issues related to population, resources and development, the environment, culture, and communication in Asia, the Pacific, and the United States. The Center was established in 1960 by the United States Congress, which provides principal funding. Support also comes from more than twenty Asian and Pacific governments, as well as private agencies and corporations.
DESPITE differences separating one phase of the evolution of city from another, we can legitimately say that the city as a generic term connotes an identifiable set of meanings. Robert E. Park says, "The city is something more than congeries of individual men and of social conveniences — streets, buildings, electric lights, tramways, and telephones, etc.; administrative devices — courts, hospitals; schools, police, and civil functionaries of various sorts. The city is rather, a state of mind, a body of customs and traditions, and of the organized attitudes and sentiments that inhere in these customs and are transmitted with this tradition. The city is not, in other words, merely a physical mechanism and an artificial construction. It is involved in the vital processes of the people who compose it; it is a product of nature, and particularly of human nature." This observation enables us to frame the question of filmic representation of urban experience more productively. Lewis Mumford makes a similar point when he says, "Mind takes form in the city; and in turn, urban forms condition mind."

If city is a state of mind, then when it finds expression in cinema, culture assumes a very important role indeed. The diverse cultural discourses that inform urban experience and the cultural codes that are inextricably linked with the cinematic narration merit closer attention. Therefore, we have devoted this special issue to an examination of the relationships that subsist among city, cinema, and culture.

The relationships that exist among city, cinema, and culture are as complex as they are interesting. City is decidedly a product of culture; but it is also a producer of culture. Being a generator of social modernization, cities influence and shape the evolving patterns of culture even as they reflect
certain essential currents of those cultures. Hence, there is an intriguing interplay between city and culture. The words *city* and *civilization* are derived from the same Latin root, and in many Asian languages the word *city* carries with it connotations of cultural refinement and elegance.

City is a producer of cultural meaning. To read a city, whether it be New York or Paris, Tokyo or Bombay, in terms of cultural meaning is to gain a vital entrance to the deeper layers of the culture that produced the city in question. It can legitimately be said that the city is the most significant imprint that a culture can place upon the natural landscape of a country. Consequently, we can read a culture through the cities that it creates and read a city through the culture that created it.

"Reading the city" is indeed an interesting theme. Roland Barthes says that Tokyo has no center out of which the rest of the city radiates as with cities of medieval origin in the Western world. He views everything as writing, and, as in a literary text, the city becomes a galaxy of signifiers. Wittgenstein, approaching this issue from the opposite angle, says that our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight, regular streets and uniform houses.

It is sometimes presumed that cities all over the world are the same, constituting as they do symbols of modernization. But this is a mistaken belief; cities are far less universal and far more culture-specific than is generally perceived. They bear the stamp of history, culture, tradition, worldview, and change characteristic of a given society. This makes the study of the relationship between city and cinema even more challenging and illuminating.

This special issue opens with three papers that have considerable theoretical value and deal with city and cinema in terms of the ongoing dialectics between the perceived present and envisioned future, synthetic and authentic cultures. Vivian Sobchack deals with the urban science fiction film; she points out how the imaginary city of most contemporary science fiction films, while not lamenting the failed aspirations of its past, is unable to envision its future. Janet Staiger explores contemporary representations of visionary cities. She sees the mise-en-scène of cities in science fiction films as utopian commentaries centering on hopes and failures of the present or implicit criticisms of contemporary city life and the socioeconomic system that gave rise to it. Patricia Mellencamp, with her character-
istic wit, examines the intriguing relationship among city, women, and cinema. She demonstrates how image hides the city, its inhabitants, and its legends, and authentic culture.

Following these three, we have five papers that deal more specifically with case studies. Donald Richie discusses attitudes toward Tokyo on film. He points out how the attitude to city in Japanese films differs considerably from those in Western films; it is more benign, but still one of disapprobation. Chris Berry focuses attention on Chinese urban cinema in relation to two highly talented post-Cultural Revolution directors who have succeeded in introducing stylistic innovations – Zhang Liang and Huang Jianxin. He characterizes their respective styles as “hyper-realism” and “absurdism.” Chidananda Das Gupta, in his paper on the Indian case, examines the impact of urbanization on the social fabric and the concomitant changes in terms of values, life-styles, beliefs, tradition, and how these find expression in Indian cinema, both artistic and popular. Bae Chang-Ho surveys the ways in which the city of Seoul has been represented in Korean cinema; he makes a plea for dealing with the more positive aspects of the urban experience. Finally, Robert Stam investigates the portrayal of two cities in film – New York and São Paulo. Using a Bakhtinian framework, he examines how the diverse ethnicities that characterize these two large cities meet, clash, and interact.

The eight papers gathered in this special issue on city and cinema, we hope, will call attention to some vital aspects of this relationship in terms of East and West.
Cities on the Edge of Time:  
The Urban Science Fiction Film

Vivian Sobchack

In 1952, science fiction writer Clifford Simak published *City*, a loosely related collection of short stories unified by their location in a city that—over thousands of narrative years—radically changes its shape, its functions, and its citizenry. This episodic and millennial history of urban transformation is framed and synopsized by its narration as a “bedtime story”—told by a golden robot to a pack of articulate young dogs gathered around a blazing hearth, wondering if it is true that once, and very long ago, the nearby city (and the world) was populated by animate, warm-blooded beings called “humans.”

Like most of the cities in science fiction literature and film, Simak’s city and its fabulous transformations over time is clearly a city of the imagination. Owing no necessary allegiance to representational verisimilitude, such an imaginary city serves as a hypnogogic site where the anxieties, desires, and fetishes of a culture’s waking world and its dream world converge and are resolved into a substantial and systemic architecture. This imaginary architecture—particularly as it is concretely hallucinated in American science fiction film images—is more than mere background. The SF film city’s not-always-made-of-concrete spatial articulations provide the literal premises for the possibilities and trajectory of narrative action—inscribing, describing, and circumscribing an extrapolative or speculative urban world and giving that fantasized world a significant and visibly signifying shape and temporal dimension. That is, enjoying particular representational freedom as a genre of the fantastic, the SF film concretely “real-izes” the imaginary and the speculative in the visible spectacle of a concrete image. Thus, it could be argued that because it offers us the most explicitly poetic figuration of the literal grounds of contemporary
urban existence, the SF city and its concrete "realization" in American cinema also offers the most appropriate representational grounds for a phenomenological history of the spatial and temporal transformation of the city as it has been culturally experienced from the 1950s (when the American SF film first emerged as a genre) to the present (in which the genre enjoys unprecedented popularity). Indeed, not as radical in its transformations as Simak's City (nor as long-lived), the imaginary city of the American SF film from the 1950s through the 1980s offers us a historically qualified and qualifying site that might be explored as both literal ground and metaphoric figure of the transformation of contemporary urban experience and its narratives in that period now associated with "postmodernism."

My purpose, then, is not to analyze the American SF film from the perspective of classical urbanism, which describes the city as an "object" distinct from the subjects who inhabit it – or from the perspective of sociology and political economy, which see the American city as essentially shaped by general "laws" of social formation and capitalist modes of production. Rather, my project is best summed up by the editors of Zone (a new journal focusing on the city), who announce their desire to:

let "the city" emerge, in the complex and shifting fashion proper to it, as a specific power to affect both people and materials – a power that modifies the relations between them. This power is neither a side-effect nor an attribute of a city-substance which transcends them; it is itself the very fabric of the city's consistency (Zone 1987).

What I intend here is to describe phenomenologically the nature of this affective power as it historically appears in a set of dominant and poetic SF film images, and then to thematize these images as they diachronically constitute a lived structure of meanings and affects for the embodied social subjects who inhabit, endure, and dream them.

Given this historical as well as phenomenological project, it might seem strange to begin by focusing on a series of "detached" images – images of the SF city described and given importance "out of context" and not in relation to the specific texts and narratives in which they play a major or minor part. However, as Gaston Bachelard (1964, xix) tells us in The Poetics of Space, the poetic image "has touched the depths before it stirs the surface," and by its very novelty, it "sets in motion the entire linguistic mechanism." Thus, the poetic image can be seen as constitutive of its nar-
rative context. It generates, coalesces, condenses, embodies, "troubles," and transforms the more elaborated text of which it is ultimately a part, and is itself open to transformation as it performs the semiotic and affective work of adjusting the systems of representation and narrative and the demands of the psyche and culture each to the other. The following "detached images" of the American sf film city, then, are not to be seen as ahistorical or absolute and essential. They are not really taken "out of context," abstracted from the "text." Rather, it could be said that their poetic reverberations generate and configure not only the discretion of their individual texts, but also a larger historical narrative—one that generally dramatizes the transformational character of the American city and its shifting affective significance for us. It is that larger narrative which is of ultimate concern to us here. To configure that larger narrative, however, we first must grasp its figures and treat each of them phenomenologically—that is, as Bachelard (1964, xv) says, "not as an object and even less as the substitute for an object," but rather in "its specific reality." That is, prior to thinking or narrativizing the poetic image, we should be receptive to its reverberations within us, to its compelling originality, which is nonetheless understood as not only immediately significant but also immediately familiar—an image we have deeply lived but never before imaginatively projected.

As previously mentioned, the American sf film only emerges as a genre with a marked corpus in the 1950s. Yet to appreciate the poetic significance of this postwar and postmodernist genre’s various spatial and temporal transformations of the city from the 1950s to the present, we need to evoke an image of the city as it figures in American film fantasies made before this period. The following images, therefore, circumscribe the spatial and temporal boundaries of the fantasized city of the 1930s—a city, one must remark, that reverberates quite differently from the city temporally coded as "contemporary" and figured prominently in the popular and acknowledged 1930s genres of the gangster film and the musical.

Indeed, the first fantasized image I want to evoke appears in Just Imagine (1930), a bizarre wedding of sf futurism with musical comedy. Temporally and spatially projected into 1980, New York City appears on the screen as a high rise of skyscrapers intricately connected by a network of aerial thoroughfares and bridges. In this image, one sees no base and pedestrian street level. The hero and heroine stop their little one-seater planes and hover in mid-air to rendezvous—the city around them busy
with traffic that, however quotidian, is nonetheless emphatically and literally "uplifted." Despite the fact that this rather looney film posits a repressive – if café – society, its concrete imagination reverberates as aspiration. Certainly, Just Imagine finds its primary poetic source in Fritz Lang's Metropolis (1926), whose futuristic bi-level city was inspired not only by Bauhaus architecture but also by the German director's visit to New York in 1924. Yet Just Imagine is selective in what it borrows from Lang. It does not visualize a New York whose architecture is as oppressive and negatively affective as it is also liberating and beautiful – a cityscape that, for Lang, bespoke confusion, exploitation, and "living in perpetual anxiety." Ignoring the baseness, the lowness, of Lang's subterranean vision of Metropolis, and drawing only upon that film's most affirmative modernist architecture, the buildings of Just Imagine exist in a cityscape that seems – to quote Lang in a more positive description of New York – "a vertical veil, shimmering, almost weightless . . ." (Webb 1987, 8). In sum, the New York of Just Imagine poetically reverberates with the vertical power, vast size, and ethereal delicacy of Lang's upper city.

The other three fantastic images of the city in the 1930s do not appear in SF films, although one of them is more frequently associated with the genre than are the other two. This former image is so strong as to have iconic status – indeed strong enough to have been explicitly acknowledged as the generative force of the narrative in which it so powerfully stands. Co-director Meriam C. Cooper claims that his "first idea was of the giant ape on top of a building battling a fleet of planes" (Brosnan 1978, 48). I am referring, of course, to one of the final sequences in King Kong (1933) in which the fifty-foot-tall great ape "towers over" Manhattan, momentarily triumphant and forever poetically transcendent atop what once could be called "New York's tallest phallus," the Empire State Building – officially opened on May 1, 1931, only two years before the film's release. Despite Kong's fall and death on the street below the world's then tallest building, it is this ascendent image that lingers – Kong's anarchic and primal natural presence surrealistically at ease (as well as at odds) with Western culture's most civilized and modern architectural presence by virtue of their shared transcendent scope, the imaginative monumental­ity and aspiration they so differently – but yet so similarly – embody.

Finally, toward the end of the 1930s, there are two other utopian spati­zalizations of the cityscape – both temporally coded neither to signify aspiration toward the future (as in Just Imagine) nor to celebrate transcen-
dence in the present (as in King Kong), but rather to abstractly represent the city as eternal ideal. While both of these eternal cities were visualized in aspiring architecture and explicitly located in transcendent space – that is, in the highest reaches of the Himalayas and “somewhere over the rainbow” – the temporal nature of the “eternal” was differently encoded in each. The Shangri-la of 1937 seems a mirage of aspiration shimmering in an eternal nostalgia that has nothing to do with modernity – either present or future. Aptly titled, Lost Horizon’s idealized and lofty city signifies a utopian reach always in excess of its venal grasp, an eternal ideal always already ephemeral, lost, always already relegated to the past. However, the same year that saw the opening of the microcosmic, utopian, and modern city that was the 1939 New York World’s Fair (iconographically architected in the idealist geometry of the Trylon and the Perisphere) also saw the opening of The Wizard of Oz. There on the screen, visualized as a fantasy within a fantasy, was another essential and idealized urban image: the Emerald City of Oz. Set off in the distance, framed by a foreground field of poppies (the stuff that dreams are made of), given to our sight for the first time, Oz stands as both eternal and modern city – aspiring, weightless, ethereal, atemporal, and yet evergreen and contemporary, its softened skyscrapers at once recognizable and yet giving lie to the term since they have no sharp rectilinear edges and, belonging to the sky, have no need to assault it.

What is the theme of these few fantastic film images of the city that stand apart from more contemporaneous, realist, and “grounded” visualizations of urban life in the 1930s? With the exception of Shangri-la (which in its perpetual evocation of loss seems prescient about the grim side of modernity, aspiration, and urbanism), they are architected as “modern.” All are also concretized in an architecture of “aspiration,” and what is “modern” and “aspiring” is visualized as having commerce with the “transcendent.” Emphasis in these images is on the vertical, lofty, and aerial quality of the city rather than on its pedestrian and base horizontal dimension. Thus, more than merely synonymous with “height,” since it further entails the active reach of aspiration, the “highness” of the city concretely stands as its most aesthetically significant architectural value – and metaphorically stands as its most ethically significant social value. In Topophilia, Yi-Fu Tuan (1974, 28) notes what seems quite obvious, and yet needs stating if we are to understand how our lived-experience of the city and its poetic representations have changed from the 1930s to the present:
The vertical versus the horizontal dimension? Here a common response is to see them symbolically as the antithesis between transcendence and immanence, between the ideal of disembodied consciousness (a skyward spirituality) and the ideal of earth-bound identification. Vertical elements . . . evoke a sense of striving, a defiance of gravity, while the horizontal elements call to mind acceptance and rest.

Those horizontal elements, as we shall see in the SF films of the 1970s and 1980s, can also call to mind less positive modes of being: resignation, stasis, asphyxiation, and death – and more active modes of being: expansion, dispersion, and play.

The dominant spatial mythology of America has been not only traditionally nonurban, but primarily antiurban (the paradise of the New World symbolically located in the garden, the West, the frontier, the wilderness and now – with the help of Steven Spielberg – in suburbia). Nonetheless, as we have seen in these few images from the 1930s, the fantasy of the imaginary city constitutes it in a positive image of highness and fullness, envisions it as the site of human aspiration – its vertical projection pointing toward spiritual transcendence and, perhaps, a better and fuller (that is, a more “civilized” and materially expanded) future. In an extremely popularized and “softened” way, then, the positive image of the 1930s city has its roots in the earlier urban and technological visions of Futurism and Modernism.

Given that social events in the 1940s were not conducive to continuing this utopian fantasization of the city, it is not surprising that, but for the nightmarish and labyrinthine “low” life hyperbolically figured in the urban introspections of film noir, most film images of the city during this period are neither extrapolative nor speculative. We must move into the 1950s for our next set of explicitly poetic images. It is during this decade marked by nuclear fear and Cold War tensions, by a growing dependence upon electronic technology, by the emergence of new and global information and communication systems, and by increasing consumerism and suburbanism, that the American SF film coalesces as a recognizable genre that, more often than not, poeticizes the city through what Susan Sontag (1965) has called the “imagination of disaster.” Two extremely powerful images reverberate through the 1950s – each spectacularly and concretely articulating a loss of faith in previous utopian and futurist visions of the modern city as the architectural and transcendent embodiment of aspiration. Although quite differently, both address the failure of concrete verti-
cality and “highness” to spiritually sustain and uplift modern existence. And, as aspiration and “highness” are lost or neutralized, so too is the sense of a future.

The first image is an angry, destructive one, and it appears in a great many films of the period – clearly generating its simple and repetitive narratives as a ritual context in which it serves as center. The elements of the image are all the same, although their specific articulations may change. The mise-en-scène is urban and given to our sight in long shot. As well, the city in this image is identifiable: New York; Washington, D.C.; San Francisco. Culturally symbolic and discrete architectural features like the Statue of Liberty, the Coney Island roller coaster, the Washington Monument, and the Golden Gate Bridge place and “name” the urban scene and give it a specificity that makes its immanent destruction seem an immediate, contemporaneous event. Into this scene comes a destructive force which may take any of three forms: it may be an apocalyptic natural force like a tidal wave or a comet; it may be a primal Beast or Creature; or it may be a technologically superior alien war machine. In each instance, however, the result is the same – the razing of the city and, most particularly, the bringing low of those monuments that stand as symbols of modern civilization’s aspiration and pride. In When Worlds Collide (1951), New York is inundated by a tidal wave and its buildings topple; in The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms (1953), an atomically awakened prehistoric creature stomps cars and fleeing people, smashes the New York skyline, and tangles with the Coney Island roller coaster as it mindlessly seeks its ancient breeding ground; in Earth vs. the Flying Saucers (1956), the sleek and quick alien craft of technologically superior extraterrestrials castrate the Washington Monument and bring the nation’s capitol low.

It might seem that the affective power of this image derives from the same source as that of primal Kong atop the Empire State Building swatting planes as if they were flies. Yet this is not quite the case. The fascination and poetry of destruction is not what the image of Kong is about; rather, it reverberates and touches us deeply with the visible – if brief – resolution of a monumental social and psychic desire, of both the building and Kong’s impossibly epic aspirations. The 1950s image I am describing here is not about resolution, but about dissolution. Its poetic reverberations have nothing to do with aspiration and ascendancy and everything to do with, as Sontag (1965, 44) puts it, “the fantasy of living through one’s own death and more, the death of cities, the destruction of humanity
itself." Thus, the failure of modern and urban civilization and its aspirations is poetically represented in appropriately monumental images which constitute an "aesthetics of destruction" whose peculiar beauty is found in "wreaking havoc, making a mess" (Sontag 1965, 44). The city's aspiring verticality, its lofty architecture, its positive "highness" that thrusts civilization toward transcendence and the future is — through privileged special effects — debased and brought low, and in a mise-en-scène that is bustling with contemporary activity and traffic and emphatically temporalized as "now."

The other image of the failure of the aspiring city is equally powerful, yet quite different — maintaining the city's highness, but temporalizing its value as "past." Here, the city's lofty architecture is not destroyed or brought low; rather, its originally positive and transcendent value of "highness" becomes dominated by the negative and nihilistic value of "emptiness." Highness thus remains an ideal value but one that has little to do with human being. Indeed, as Philip Strick (1984, 47) reminds us: "Science fiction writers like Simak, Bradbury, and Kuttner, with varying degrees of irony, have frequently recognized . . . the ideal city contains no citizens whatever." Again, appearing in numerous films, the basic elements of this poetic response to the ideal of highness remain the same across a variety of SF elaborations. In Five (1951), we see two characters enter New York — an empty concrete canyon whose walls are skyscrapers, whose floor is punctuated by static and forlorn automobiles distraughtly angled; nothing moves but the car in which they slowly ride, and a skeleton stares out at them from a window. In On the Beach (1959), trying to find the source of a signal from a radioactively dead America, submarine crewmen wander an empty San Francisco. And in The World, the Flesh and the Devil (1959), the image of deadly stillness and emptiness overwhelms one with a sense of irrevocable loss as a single character roams through New York, into a vacant Times Square, down an abandoned Wall Street, around an aseptic United Nations building. Cars eternally stalled on a bridge, newspaper blowing down a city street caught up in some ill-begotten draft, street lights and neon often blinking on and off in a mockery of animate existence — this is the iconography of emptiness and stillness that marks the American cinematic imagination of the post-holocaust city in the 1950s to the mid 1970s. And this imagination is nostalgic — always already fixed on an unrecoverable past rather than on a future that has not yet occurred. One of the elements of our lived-experience of the modernity
of the city is a sense of its immediate vitality: its present-tense and up-to-the-minute activity, its busyness, its people and traffic always in motion. To see the city empty of that activity, that busyness, concretely emphasizes its “highness,” but also temporally codes the value of such architectural aspiration as “past.” Marking the death of the city as a functional as well as architectural structure, skyscrapers in these films stand as monumental gravestones. Although this emptiness seems to linger on into the 1980s—in American films like Dawn of the Dead (1979) and Night of the Comet (1984)—it appears less as this nostalgic response to the city’s original loftiness and the failure of its aspiration than as a positive opportunity to dramatize the ultimate consumer fantasy of having a shopping mall all to oneself (barring a few extremist shoppers in the form of ghouls and zombies).

The destruction of the city and its symbolic architecture and the city as empty graveyard—these two powerful poetic responses to the failure of the city’s aspiration (and to the failure of “modern” civilization) mourn the outmoded value of highness, the ineffectual outcome of aspiration, but they still hold highness as a positive value and offer no alternative to its failure. Things get even worse in the 1960s and most of the 1970s. If the utopian vision of the imaginary city emphasizes its concrete highness and its spiritual fullness as positive values, then the 1950s SF imagination kept at least one of those positive values operative—even if only in a literal way. That is, in those films where the city’s concrete highness is destroyed and brought low, its literal fullness is asserted in busy activity and an emphasis on the “masses” (whether they are screaming beneath the behemoth’s scaly feet or cooperating with the “authorities”). And in those films where the city’s utopian fullness is challenged by a literal emptiness, at least its concrete highness remains. However, from the late 1960s to 1977 (the year that marks the release of Close Encounters of the Third Kind and Star Wars), the image of the SF city poeticized neither highness nor fullness as positive values. Rather, both were imagined negatively—and turned in on themselves to become lowering oppressiveness and crowdedness. Indeed, if the utopian SF city is perceived as aspiring, then the SF city during this period is clearly dystopian and perceived as asphyxiating.

Pointing to the despair of a country negatively involved in both domestic and international contestation, Joan Dean (1978, 36–37) describes the SF films of the late 1960s and early 1970s as articulating “a diminishing fear of nuclear apocalypse” and “a growing concern with domestic, terrestrial
issues — most of which are related to totalitarian government control of people’s lives or to over-population, food shortages, pollution, and ecology.” She goes on to say that the “single theme” that “dominated the science fiction imagination between 1970 and 1977 was overpopulation and its concomitant problems of food shortage and old age.” The image of the city that generates sf film narratives of this period emerges most forcefully in Soylent Green (1973). This is a New York City that no longer aspires but suffocates and expires. Visible emphasis is not on the height of buildings but their baseness. Verticality is no longer significant — and emphasis on the city’s horizontal dimension stresses its limitation, not its openness. In 2022, New York is not seen as full but as impossibly overcrowded; its population is forty million. People overflow the streets and most live and huddle in dark masses and clots on the sidewalks, alleys, and stairs of buildings that all look like tenements. Their whispering and overlapping cries and coughs and sobs are so modulated and thinned and distanced that they sound like the sighing of some desolate wind. This New York City has no monumental center, no moral center. Indeed, it is all constrained and corrupt, all inner city. The mise-en-scène is dark, claustrophobic, polluted, and dirty, and, as Robert Cumbow (1984, 41) points out, in “its crumbling buildings and rotting cars were the beginnings of . . . junkyard futurism.” But this is a futurist image that evokes no future. This New York city is literally a concentration camp, and the temporality its constraining spaces construct cannot stretch and stream forward, has nothing to do with positive temporal progression or expansion in space. All is entropy and decay. In the late 1960s to the mid 1970s, the sf city has no positive values to sustain it — and so it falls down and apart. Thus, many of the films of the period — from 1968’s Planet of the Apes to 1978’s Logan’s Run — imagine the old ideal model of cities like New York and Washington, D.C., in a fantasy of “the body in pieces,” their monuments and buildings now fragments and potshards strewn on an abandoned landscape on a radically altered planet. The aspiring city, once the center and architectural symbol of civilization, has fallen in ruins, is no longer functional, is no longer the center of human activity.

Indeed, by the 1980s, the idealized and lofty city of sf is imagined as completely decentered and marginalized. The citizens of dominant bourgeois culture are either “offworld” in outer space or in the suburbs. In 1977, with Star Wars and Close Encounters, George Lucas and Steven Spielberg provided the mainstream and nostalgic routes by which to
Escape From New York – that city in 1981 explicitly imagined as all prison. These films rally a cinematic exodus from the constraints and pollution of the failed city by all those upstanding and economically franchised folks who believe (and rightly so) that the “Force” is with them, or (wrongly so) that “when you wish upon a star, it makes no difference who you are.” What results from this mass bourgeois exodus, however, is a peculiar and hallucinatory screen liberation for those Others who are left behind. They are the dregs of bourgeois society, the riff-raff, the punks, the winos, the crazies, the gays, the druggies, the blacks, the hispanics, the new orientals, the homeless, the hipsters – everyone previously marginalized and disenfranchised in bourgeois urban culture. Let loose in a city which now has no center and no constraints, which has been “junked” rather than urbanly “renewed,” this newly dominant and diverse population energizes and reformulates the negative and nihilistic urban values of the 1960s and 1970s as sublimely positive. In a complete reversal, the imaginary SF city’s lowness, baseness, horizontality, its crowdedness, overpopulatedness, and overstuffedness are celebrated and aestheticized. That is, the old imaginary and centered SF metropolis is totally resigned to its ruination, its displacement to its own edges, its concrete transformation from city as center to city as inner, from aspiring city to city dump. But this totalized and concrete resignation to the debasement of the city results in its symbolic and positive re-signing. The junkyard, the city dump, the trashy edges of town are culturally reinscribed as an exotic urban space that eroticizes and fetishizes material culture, that is valued for its marvelously unselective acquisitive power, its expansive capacity to accumulate, consume, and contain “things,” any thing, and its existential status as irrefutable testimony to the success of material production. The omnipresence of waste serves as a sign that the unseen digestive tract of advanced capital’s body politic must still be working, indeed working “overtime” and at full capacity. The city is thus re-energized – finding both a new function and formulating a new aesthetic. It explicitly serves as the most monumental and concrete consumer, while its unselective juxtapositions and conservation of material artifacts reconstitute it as both the world’s greatest collage and the world’s greatest “pop” collector. As Fredric Jameson (1984, 76) puts it:

The exhilaration of these new surfaces is . . . paradoxical in that their essential content – the city itself – has deteriorated or disintegrated to a
degree surely still inconceivable in the early years of the 20th century. . . . How urban squalor can be a delight to the eyes, when expressed in commodification, and how an unparalleled quantum leap in the alienation of daily life in the city can now be experienced in the form of a strange new hallucinatory exhilaration – these are some of the questions that confront us. . . .

Two powerful SF city images emerge within the context of this new urban exoticism and its erotics of commodification and consumerism. And, given that the postmodernist city is experienced as having no center – being all center or decentered, dispersing its activities in every direction – it is not surprising that the site of both these images is Los Angeles. The first and most aestheticized comes, of course, from *Blade Runner* (1982). Its Los Angeles of 2019 is a crowded, aggregate, and polyglot megalopolis – one that is experienced less as base and degraded than as dense, complex, and heterogeneous with its multinational and marginal populace, additive architecture, sensuous “clutter,” and highly atmospheric pollution. This is a city that stimulates and exhausts the eyes, a city one never wants to leave because there is always – literally – more to see. (It is hardly coincidental that the eye is such a crucial element of the narrative.) The architecture of this imaginary Los Angeles is built from “layers of texture,” so that:

visual information is imparted in every square inch of screen. Details proliferate. The umbrellas carried by extras have lighted tips because the streets are so murky. The television monitors that have replaced traffic signals provide deliberately poor pictures. Skyscrapers are built on top of existing structures – and are shown . . . in their hundreds of stories . . . (Mills 1982, 45).

Despite the skyscrapers, the visual experience of this Los Angeles has little to do with verticality and loftiness. Rather, the trajectory of our attention tends to stay grounded – fascinated by the city’s transformation of its ruins, its “retrofitted utilization” (Mancini 1985, 13), its “spaces and objects whose original purpose has been lost, due not to obsolescence but rather to an overinvestment brought about by constant recycling” (Alliez and Feher 1987, 44). It is not surprising that industrial pipes and ducts figure prominently in the mise-en-scène (as they will even more explicitly in 1985’s *Brazil*). This Los Angeles is literally exhausted – generating that strange blend of hysteria and euphoria that comes with utter fatigue.

The emphasis in the second SF image of Los Angeles is less on design
than it is on random, discontinuous, and dispersive movement. It seems no accident that the company that made *Repo Man* (1984) refers to itself as Edge City Productions. Where the Los Angeles of *Blade Runner* is decentered by being all center, the Los Angeles of *Repo Man* is centered by being all margin. Where the Los Angeles of *Blade Runner* unifies its outmoded and vastly disparate material signifiers into new “retrofitted” and eroticized architectural forms, the Edge City of *Repo Man* celebrates convulsive spatial discontinuities in a constantly moving culture: its mise-en-scène is not cluttered, merely littered – with occasional newspapers, strange people, garbage, drunks, dead derelicts, and abandoned sofas punctuating otherwise empty and unwalked streets. Indeed, the city is perceived as a set of discrete and unconnected spatial rather than architectural fragments – framed by the windshield of a moving car that, in this city of repossessions, is always changing hands and drivers and points of view.

What we have here is the city in a schizophrenic representation – “reduced to an experience of pure material Signifiers, . . . of a series of pure and unrelated presents in time” (Jameson 1984, 72; emphasis added). The city does not cohere, has no causal logic to unify it. Yi-Fu Tuan (1974, 190) points out in a discussion of Los Angeles as the “automobile city”: “Driving on a freeway can be disorienting. A sign, for example, may direct one to the far, left lane for an objective that is clearly visible to the right. . . .” But repo men like Otto and Bud find sublime pleasure in these discontinuities, automotively “troping” the city’s streets and freeways – that is, rhetorically swerving from expected trajectories to create new relations of meaning, or as the film’s philosopher Miller would say, new “lattices of coincidence.” The Los Angeles of *Repo Man* is a city whose spatiality is not bound by architecture but rather by trajectories of movement which, no matter how seemingly random, will – like the freeway system – eventually intersect. Thus, no matter how they disperse themselves, repo men, vicious L.A. punks, a lobotomized nuclear physicist, a notorious pair of Hispanic car thieves, and a Chevy Malibu with a trunk full of extraterrestrial aliens keep meeting up again. Whereas the pastiche of new and old and recycled material objects, aesthetic styles, and even the narrative itself in *Blade Runner* constituted Los Angeles’s temporal mode as neither past nor future but as literal and increasingly collective present, *Repo Man*’s Edge City is temporally encoded as neither past nor future but as an eternally recurrent present.
Thus, the imaginary city of the most contemporary SF film, while not mourning the failed aspiration of its past, is not really capable of envisioning its future and, rather, is euphorically lost in the play of its material present. The imaginary Los Angeles of Blade Runner and Repo Man, the New York of Liquid Sky (1983) only hallucinate their liberation from the bourgeoisie who have gone off to live in Steven Spielberg films or gone Back to the Future — only dream their complete reversal of bourgeois utopian values. These cities, in visible fact, eroticize consumption and fetishize material culture in a scenographic paean to advanced capitalism. And, while these cities celebrate their countercultural funkyness, their heterogeneity, horizontality, and cultural leveling, their alienated terrestrials and terrestrialized aliens whose differences supposedly don’t make a difference in this dispersed and marginalized culture (1984’s Moscow on the Hudson and The Brother From Another Planet are, after all, the same movie), they function as virtual ghettos — or, wishing upon the same bourgeois star, effectively efface those differences that do make a difference who you are: that is, gender, race, class. Positing, on the one hand, a new and liberating model of the city and, on the other, buying back into its failed model by merely reversing (rather than altering) its terms and values, the imaginary and postmodernist city of the American SF film is truly a city on the edge of time, offering us a hallucinatory future we might want to visit, but a present in which — unless we just happened to be bourgeois cinemagoers and slumming — we wouldn’t want to live.

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Notes and References

1. Since there have been many debates surrounding the concept and definition of "postmodernism," for the purposes of this article, I refer the reader to Jameson (1984) and to my use of Jameson's work in relation to the American science fiction film in chapter 4 of Sobchack (1987).

2. On this issue, see also the chapter on figuration in Andrew (1984).

3. Quoted in Webb (1987, 9). Indeed, reading Lang's description of New York, one is reminded more of Blade Runner's imaginative SF cityscape than of any other -- including Lang's own Metropolis.


5. Of particular interest here (and specifically related to Steven Spielberg's oeuvre) is Yi-Fu Tuan's (1974, 236-240) discussion of suburban values and ideals.

Alliez, Eric, and Michel Feher
1987 "Notes on the Sophisticated City," Zone, 1/2:44.

Andrew, Dudley

Bachelard, Gaston

Brosnan, John

Cumbow, Robert C.

Dean, Joan F.

Jameson, Fredric
Mancini, Marc

Mills, Bart

Sobchack, Vivian

Sontag, Susan

Strick, Philip

Tuan, Yi-Fu

Webb, Michael

Zone
Future Noir: Contemporary Representations of Visionary Cities

JANET STAIGER

One of the most immediate signifiers of the genre of science fiction is the representation of a known city in which readily distinguishable sections of today's cityscape are present but other parts are rewritten. Hence an advertising supplement in The New York Times (21 June 1987) locates its commodity, the United Nations Plaza building, within a redesigned – "100 years from Today" – New York City. The proposed endurance, and consequent value of the property and its address, is reinforced through the supplement's second-page photo of the Dakota apartment building in 1881, which "remains a bastion of luxury living." Thus value exists in location and in style. Good investments require a sense of the place of the building in its relation to a present and a future urban environment, including its access to transportation lines and contingent developments. Furthermore, the architectural style will not only evince the present good taste of its occupants but anticipates directions of design. Consequently, within the commodity's value is incorporated its ability to forecast signifiers of "luxury living."

But that is not all. According to Anthony Giddens in Sociology: A Brief but Critical Introduction (1987, 101), in modern cities and within capitalist economies not only are lands and buildings situated within an exchange system but "space itself becomes commodified" (italics in the original). As urbanization spreads, all environments are transformed, becoming non-natural. City parks, pedestrian malls, a tree in a planter along the sidewalk represent city-dwellers' attempt to influence the milieux in which they live, and as New York City residents know, even sight-lines from buildings can be zoned and sold. It is not merely a rhetorical gesture of the ad to claim that one distinguishing characteristic of "the special world of 100 United Nations Plaza" is
views that go on and on, day after day, year after year. . . . In all directions dramatic and glamour-filled Manhattan vistas delight the eye. The panorama of the East River, the Rose Garden and the elegant greenery of the United Nations, the vitality of the midtown cityscapes. They all serve to give a special aura and a special value to 100 United Nations Plaza. (pp. 4–5)

This utopian vision of monopoly capitalism surely invites the desire of those capable of sharing its dream ("Residences from $330,000 to $5,000,000"). 100 United Nations Plaza, one hundred years from today, will be clean, sleek, accessible by land or air, and visionary – in both meanings of the word. It is, and will be, modern.

However, as modernism continues to respond only to the aesthetics of a select few and capitalism's benefits fail to spread evenly, the signifiers for high modernism and monopoly capitalism are potential sites for a dialogical rewriting that implies the alienating decay and deadening of that vision. If corporations assume that the designs of their buildings "communicate the company's identity to its various constituencies" (American Way, 15 November 1987, 52) and TransAmerica and Citicorp (echoing the ambulatory Prudential Rock) devise commercials highlighting the pyramid towers of their corporate headquarters as signifying their mobile or personal presence in numerous cities and landscapes, then it is scarcely much of a leap to argue that in today's popular imagination modernist architecture is associated with dominant, powerful multinationals. Additionally, it is not surprising that texts and films skeptical or critical of the effects derived from the institutions housed in a specific type of architecture will "talk back" to that institution via the appropriation, transformation, and corruption of its signifiers – here the style and design of the building. The firms' towering vision from which chief executive officers gaze at the world below can be made to imply as well their cynicism about, yet pervasive responsibility for, the failures of modern social and economic life.

This discursive procedure is not new, being a long-standing practice in the arena of science fiction, and theorists of SF have already noted that the genre is as much about the present as the future, since any envisioned tomorrow derives from premises about today. As Samuel Delany (1980, 179) notes about literary SF, "with each sentence we have to ask what in the world of the tale would have to be different from our world in order for such a sentence to be uttered – and thus, as the sentences build up, we
build up a world in specific dialogue with our present conception of the real.” Without much difficulty, such a comment applies as well to filmic representations of future cities. Consequently, the mise-en-scène of cities in SF might be understood as utopian commentaries about the hopes and failures of today or, inversely, dystopian propositions, implicit criticisms of modern urban life and the economic system that produces it.

In this essay, I want to look at three instances of such a criticism. While I shall draw in other examples of utopian or dystopian visions of cities for purposes of contrast, I find stimulating the similarities of Blade Runner, Brazil, and the television program Max Headroom. Although these three texts hardly represent the only trend in picturing the future, their appeal suggests tapping certain strands of discontent with our society. Furthermore, even if other versions of tomorrow may not include all four of the aspects of the “future noir” cities that I will discuss, they often produce permutations from this central core. These permutations are significant in that they may generate very different political expressions from the future noir texts that I am treating. In fact, I will not claim any unified “political unconscious” for these three. What the three do share in common is the strategy of quoting motifs of high modernist architecture which become ironic within terms of the context of plot developments and related mise-en-scène. Additionally, interpretations of the three texts indicate that criticisms held in common include assertions of flaws of various types in the social formation that the satirized institutions represent, abhorrence of the process of products signifying “life-styles” (late capitalist commodity fetishism), and fear of the pervasiveness of information systems that overwhelm human senses. Yet the three texts differ. While Blade Runner and Max Headroom criticize elitism and class distinctions in international and monopoly capitalism, Brazil condemns the hierarchies and bureaucracies of the social welfare state, also associated with monopoly capitalism.

Perhaps because of their common strategy of attack, the discursive sources of their imagery, or their similar criticisms, Blade Runner, Brazil, and Max Headroom do share four features in the mise-en-scène of their visions of another world. First of all, the present and future are conjoined via the device of a postmodern cityscape in which traces of modernist high rises and pyramid and glass towers intermingle with debris from revival architecture and urban sprawl – a sort of Le Corbusier’s utopian Contemporary City meets Robert Venturi’s concrete strip Las Vegas. The winner is
uncertain, but the loser seems to be us. In addition, these cities are dark, lit only indirectly and arguably from completely artificial light sources. While part of the dimness is most likely due to advantages for special effects technology, the metaphoric implication of an end to civilization or alienation from natural light pervades the atmosphere. Darkness and urban-design chaos as bricolage also permit labyrinthian and entropic cities where only overhead schematics can provide a sense of orientation among debris, decay, and abandonment. Thus, in all four features, these dystopias' uses of city architecture comment on a potential postindustrial, age of communication society. The forecast is not favorable. For the future noir city is more nightmare than vision, more anxiety than wish fulfillment.

To understand these films' pessimistic visions of the future, it is valuable to trace strands of their historical sources in earlier architecture and utopian social planning that work as subtexts for the veneers of modernist cityscapes. Importantly, moreover, earlier and contemporaneous fictional utopian and dystopian literature may have provided some imagery for modern designers. Certainly, from the perspective of a Foucaultian archaeology of knowledge, particular figures reappear in both fiction and reality with eerie frequency. Having provided a cultural, symbolic, and historical context for possible semantic ranges of meaning for particular features of these films' representations of cities, I will then explore the four features, simultaneously arguing that a cultural historian should ground interpretations of iconic representations within both the historical logic of their appearance and the specificity of their function within the individual text.

**Utopias and Dystopias**

Technically, "utopia" means "no-place" (it is perfect and imaginary), although as originally used by Thomas More in his 1516 monograph, it suggests somewhere at a *spatial* distance from the status quo (Lowe 1982, 46). Instead, "euchronia" is the appropriate word for anticipations of the future, while "dystopia" derives from a prefix implying impairment or abnormality. Indeed, dystopias seem to be fabricated as corrupted versions of some utopian (or euchronian) scheme rather than initiated outright. Robert H. Walker (1985, 132) provides another valuable distinction regarding terminology. He distinguishes between "communes," which usu-
ally "offered agricultural or village models," and utopias, which "tended to accept cities and technology and to redeploy them in ideal terms."

As historians for utopian projects report, the first attempts to envision some perfect social and political order probably requires turning further back than to More, at least to Plato's Republic. After More, visions are numerous. Early founders of the United States hoped to settle the uncorrupted American wilderness as new Edens. James Oglethorpe planned for Georgia to be an orderly asylum for debtors; William Penn wanted "a green, symmetrical, Quaker town in the woods along the Delaware"; and Cotton Mather drafted "an holy city . . . the street whereof will be Pure gold" (Walker 1985, 120).

I find it significant that these new Edens require a specific physical structure, with plans emphasizing symmetry and order in addition to specifically valuable building materials (green nature or golden lanes). Ease in personal transportation and interpersonal communication is important too. Thus, from at least the 1700s in the United States, the "new age" or the "golden era" has an implicit isomorphic relation to spatial configurations, types of architecture, and paths of communication among people. The social and political map for the utopia is doubled in the schematics for the cities and managed environments. (Washington, D.C., is a good case in point.) In fact, the schematics may be part of the therapeutic process of the utopia. As Walker (1985, 121) points out, for some "planners of ideal communities" such as Frederick Law Olmsted, Frank Lloyd Wright, the New Dealers, and Buckminster Fuller, "whatever their scope, the design of the manmade and natural setting was a crucial factor in elevating society."

It will be certain features of some utopian designs (symmetry, orderliness, clarity, value) off of which future noir dystopias will play for signification, as a sort of oppositional strategy for constructing a dialogical criticism of the social or political order the ideal community represents. Thus, in film SF, a denunciation of the utopian vision can be elaborated and interpreted not only through narrative propositions about the society but also through mise-en-scène - as impaired physical constructions, antivisions of the makers' hopes. Consequently, understanding what specific utopias might underpin particular architectural designs can be useful in reading SF films (or speculating about causes for interpretive receptions of them). I would caution, however, that as meanings shift through social and historical utterance (or reader reception), what was an original vision-
ary's "intent" is not so much at stake as a society's distinctive semantic field of meanings for a style. While I will not attempt to present the latter in this essay, at least as a starting point, sketching out several varieties of utopias in relation to their specific mise-en-scène can be pertinent in setting up some parameters for the subtexts for SF and future noir texts in particular. I shall look first in this section at literary antecedents, moving in the next one into twentieth-century architecture and a couple of earlier films before examining in the final part the central three future noir films.

As a literary genre in the United States, utopian fiction seems to have hit a cycle in the period between 1889 and 1912 when more than one hundred works appeared following the publication of Edward Bellamy's Looking Backward (1888). It is also generally considered that 1880 to 1920 marks a major transitional stage in American capitalism and society: the ending of entrepreneurial capitalism and the unveiling of monopoly capitalism. On a more local scale, mass-production needs stimulate assembly-line routines and scientific management of labor, with time and motion studies. A predominantly rural society yields to the overwhelming hegemony of urbanism as product sources shift from the farm and small town to centrally located corporations and national distribution of factory-made goods. Temporal and spatial perspectives begin to change as the telegraph, telephone, and soon cinema simultaneously shrink distances to horizons while expanding vistas. Information loads and communication channels metamorphose. Furthermore, cultural historians describe this period as including a major alteration in individuals' self-conception. As advertising promotes conspicuous consumption, we cease defining ourselves primarily through our type of work and start categorizing us by what we consume. A culture of production gives way to one of consumption.

The conjunction of utopian literature and economic and social change is hardly a coincidence according to some scholars. Even as these transformations were occurring, researchers noted that responses such as populism, progressivism, and socialism were overt political campaigns promoting specific visions to direct rapid and troubling transformation. As early as 1922, the urban sociologist Lewis Mumford argued in his Story of Utopias that "modern utopias were inseparable from the rise of technology" (cited in Walker 1985, 132n).

Bellamy's optimistic Looking Backward finds "technology and cooperation have banished the harsh inequities so oppressive to Bellamy's contem-
In opening his story, the narrator, Julian West, describes to his audience in the year 2000 the misery and squalor parts of humanity endured in 1887. By chapter three, West's miraculous awakening concludes with his first sight of the future. Refusing to believe it is some 113 years later, West is taken by his companions to the rooftop and asked, "if this is the Boston of the nineteenth century.' At my feet," Bellamy (1960, 43) writes,

lay a great city. Miles of broad streets, shaded by trees and lined with fine buildings, for the most part not in continuous blocks but set in larger or smaller enclosures stretched in every direction. Every quarter contained large open squares filled with trees, along which statues glistened and fountains flashed in the late-afternoon sun. Public buildings of a colossal size and architectural grandeur unparalleled in my day raised their stately piles on every side. Surely I had never seen this city nor one comparable to it before. Raising my eyes at last toward the horizon, I looked westward. That blue ribbon winding away to the sunset – was it not the sinuous Charles. I looked east – Boston harbor stretched before me within its headlands, not one of its green islets missing. I knew then that I had been told the truth concerning the prodigious thing which has befallen me.

As I suggested earlier, the SF effect works through the device of rewriting a known city. More importantly, Bellamy's vision is literally first of all that of a cityscape and of an architectural style. Subsequently, analogies between this physical world and an invisible but real social formation will be drawn out.

Walker (1985, 134) describes another utopian novel, Bradford Peck's *The World a Department Store* (1900), in which "Peck united producer and consumer in one great cooperative headquartered in buildings designed to produce efficiency and unquestioning respect." But perhaps the best-known – and most influential – writer of the period was Britisher H. G. Wells. Wells's writings might be considered to fall into both utopian and dystopian categories (at times for the same novel), but his 1905 book, *A Modern Utopia*, clearly suggests Wells's more confident vision. As Mark R. Hillegas (1967, 71) puts it, this utopia is the "archetypal welfare state." The city represented there, however, is alarmingly similar to a bleaker variation in Wells's earlier *When the Sleeper Awakes* (1899): "the symbol in much twentieth-century utopian fantasy of the ‘interdependence of science, technology, industrialization, mass population, and social organization’ " (Hillegas 1967, 43, citing Richard Gerber). And what con-
stitutes some of the features of this ambiguously positive and negative Wellsian “Super-City”? “[The protagonist’s] first impression was of overwhelming architecture.” The city was roofed in by glass, allowing control of climate. Surrounded by advertisements, people in the streets were treated to “babble machines” which provided constant news. Although the Sanitary Company burned books, people could watch “kineto-telephotographs.” Furthermore, despite a governmental ordering of social services, hierarchies among peoples existed, with laborers separated physically from nobility, living and working underground.

I am assuming you are already anticipating my drawing linkages between Wells’s city and films such as *Metropolis, Fahrenheit 451*, 1984, and the three movies for this essay. In fact, for example, a major similarity in plot structure between *Blade Runner* and *Brazil* has an ironic reversal in Wells’s “A Story of the Days to Come” (1897). The love story of Elizabeth and Denton is contrasted to the “oppressive tyranny of life in the supercity” (Hillegas 1967, 49–50). To escape, the couple flees beyond the edge of the city into the countryside. In Wells’s tale, however, survival becomes a problem, and the lovers choose to return. Such irony does not occur in *Blade Runner*, for any potential problems coping with the wilderness are masked by Deckard’s proposition in the narration that the length of one’s life is uncertain. Satire returns in *Brazil*, where the trip to the countryside is revealed to be the hallucinations of our protagonist, Sam Lowry. (Perhaps he had read *Nineteen Eighty-four.*) Consequently, although the motif of escape to nature circulates among the texts, functionally it serves both utopian and dystopian purposes. Semantically, the motif provides a “happy ending” in *Blade Runner*, but it also can be inverted, as in *Brazil*, to connote psychosis.

The connections between Wells and cinema obviously are not necessarily direct since much antiutopian fiction has intervened. Hillegas argues, however, the importance of Wells’s writings as predecessors for numerous motifs in modern literary sf. In particular, he locates Zamyatin’s *We* (1924), Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932), and Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949) as anti-Wellsian tracts. What all three writers objected to in Wells’s welfare utopias were the implications that in spite of the “planned, ideal, and perfected” social systems, people “are conditioned to obedience, freedom is eliminated, and individuality crushed; where the past is systematically destroyed and men are isolated from nature; where science and technology are employed, not to enrich human life, but to maintain
the state's surveillance and control of its slave citizens" (p. 3). Such propositions, I would argue, lead to specific dominant connotations for features of fictional cityscapes. Wellsian high-rise, climate-controlled, mass-mediated, and sanitized megalopolises infer benefits of welfare socialism, but they can also imply state observation and individual alienation. Yet literary SF is not the only venue for such iconic motifs. They also derive from twentieth-century urban planning and specific theories of architecture for modern cities.

Twentieth-Century Architectural Utopianism

Although literary utopias created by Bellamy, Peck, and Wells describe supercities with distinct features, architects were also susceptible to visionary speculation. Furthermore, the same economic and social forces operating to determine literary utopias functioned to foster idealist urban design. Donald M. Lowe (1982, 66-70) argues that earlier planning might consider visual aesthetics, transportation concerns, and hygienic needs, but a major transformation is marked by individuals projecting future economic, regional, and demographic developments. Blueprints began considering conditions “down-the-road,” so to speak.

Certainly the turn of the century saw the proposal of a number of utopian cities, some of which have provided the basis for actual town plans. Robert Fishman (1977, 3) looks at three people's detailed designs for ideal cities in relation to “the economic and political organization of the city, which could not be easily shown in drawings [but which] was worked out in the voluminous writings which each planner appended to his designs.” As Fishman (1977, 6) argues, “in the three ideal cities, the transformation of the physical environment is the outward sign of an inner transformation in the social structure.” These three are Ebenezer Howard’s Garden City, Frank Lloyd Wright’s Broadacres, and Le Corbusier’s Radiant City.

Howard’s 1902 vision may be less familiar to us today although his notion of small communities of limited size – thirty thousand or fewer people – surrounded by a “greenbelt” is perhaps closest to the present state of affairs in major inland cities of the United States. Branched off the hub of the central city are smaller towns joined by rail lines running into the metropolitan focal point. Howard was directly influenced by Looking Backward and constructed a city complex that might handle large num-
bers of urban dwellers while struggling to maintain older traditions of small-scale cooperation and direct democracy. As Fishman (1977, 8–10, 32–36) points out, Howard’s plan was a nostalgic attempt to retain the city/country structure of a pastoral England.

On the other hand, Frank Lloyd Wright’s Broadacres (1945) becomes the antithesis of Le Corbusier’s The Radiant City. Wright rejected any concentration of population. The notion of separating town and country was inconceivable – neither would exist as such. Hoping for no population concentration larger than a county seat, Wright planned thousands of homesteads, with everyone having a minimum of one acre of land and transportation occurring by car (rather than rail). His utopia is certainly not a city as it spreads across plains of prairie countryside. “Organic” architecture permeated not only the houses but the world as interiors and exteriors are “opened up.” As with Howard, Wright’s Broadacres was designed physically so as to promote a specific social formation: individual ownership and decentralization. But if the separated houses indicated self-reliance, they also endorsed privacy. Stephen Kern (1983, 186–187) notes that the homes’ external openings are hidden by stone parapets and porch walls. Walker (1985, 117) connects some of today’s urban planning to Wright’s work, such as James Rouse’s New Town, Columbia, Maryland (1963), but clearly strands of Howard’s Garden City influence it as well as Victor Gruen’s important impact on city planning. In the mid-1950s, Gruen advocated what is now a popular renovation procedure for downtowns: pedestrian malls in the inner areas, intercept parking lots further out, and beltline freeways circling the core area (Clay 1973, 62). Transportation and communication in and around the central, dense core has always been a feature for urban designers to handle.

If Howard’s Garden City most closely anticipates actual characteristics of today’s less than orderly urban sprawl and Wright’s Broadacres illustrates a plan almost lacking in instances of contemporary use, Le Corbusier’s Radiant City and his other proposals stand for what may be said to be the most evident properties of modernist architecture and its attending implications for social planning. Although Le Corbusier’s work differs from the most extreme high modernist skyscrapers, the extent to which his design style has symbolized an official approach in contemporary architecture is evident in Wolf Von Eckardt’s (1977, 31) pronouncement in 1977:
Modern architecture died on April 21, 1972. Few architects noticed. The public did not care. No one mourned. It was never popular. The end was not unexpected. The International Style — as the architecture conceived by Walter Gropius at the Bauhaus in Weimar and by Corbusier in his atelier in Paris, came to be known — had long been feverish, erratic and contradictory. But no one got at the basic affliction, which was that Modern architecture is an abstract art — an abstraction that failed to meet practical human needs. This affliction caused the authorities in St. Louis, that April morning five years ago, to do the only thing left to do with the modern highrise slabs of the Pruitt-Igoe public housing project. They blew them up. With dynamite. The first of the 33 identical human filing cabinets collapsed in 20 seconds flat.

Von Eckardt links the utopian sources of the international style to a twentieth-century avant-garde sensibility which was appalled by the squalor, chaos, and outright mess of the modern city. Additionally, these designers considered nineteenth-century architectural styles to be “hypocritical, bourgeois Victorian gimcrackery. They wanted ‘honest’ structures without ornament” (p. 31). If their plans included the social action of liberating people from the slums and crowded streets, their goals also demanded new styles of buildings, cityscapes, and roadways. Le Corbusier’s famous maxim, “A house is a machine to live in,” expresses this group’s pleasure in and hopes for technology. Consequently, Le Corbusier’s blueprints for his 1922 Contemporary City stress orderliness, symmetry, space, and vistas among twenty-four high rises which would house and office three million people. An elaborate transportation system becomes the nerve center of the city, but no monuments recall a dead past. “Corridor streets” are gone, as wide, open boulevards stretch toward a perceivable linear perspective horizon line. Here are the features that future noir dystopias will mock.

Furthermore, as Fishman (1977, 188–193) points out, Le Corbusier hardly envisioned an egalitarian democracy as this city’s social formation. Rather, a technocracy dominated, with hierarchies of planners and workers. Those closer into the center of the city were higher in the lineup than the laborers living further out. A sort of pyramid of living space and social caste operated in synchronization. This implied splitting of peoples into categories also shows up in sharp distinctions between city and country, as the boundaries between the two can easily be distinguished in Le Corbusier’s drawings.
Le Corbusier's (and others') International Style seems the closest visual approximation to Bellamy and Wells's literary utopias of planned societies, and Le Corbusier's own writings suggest the affinities are also conceptual (although, as I shall suggest below, their societies differ in some respects). It is also the case that the dense high rise connected by roadways quickly appears in art as visionary of the future. In photomontage Paul Citroen produces *Metropolis* in 1923, and Norman Bel Geddes shows *City of 1960* at the 1939 New York World Fair.

In cinema of the same era (1920s and 1930s), set design and story lines also respond to this version of modernism and its utopian themes. Visually, both Fritz Lang's *1926 Metropolis* and the British-produced *Things to Come* (William Cameron Menzies, 1936) duplicate the high rises and transportation systems of Wells's supercities and Le Corbusier's Contemporary City. In *Metropolis*, the city's orderliness and symmetry above ground are perhaps more visible in Erich Kettelhut's set design (Eisner 1977, 83), but balance and uniformity among parts are emphasized for the factory scenes (through camera framing) and the workers (via blocking of actors' movements). Additionally, *Metropolis*'s poster provides a strong concentration of pertinent motifs – sleek skyscrapers, critical arteries, and pyramid peaks. The linkages of *Things to Come* to this system of visualizing the future are scarcely tenuous, based as the film is on Wells's 1934 *The Shape of Things to Come*. Here the modern city of 2036, Everytown, is characterized by multistoried buildings, moving sidewalks, and a domed, glass shell protecting the climate, marking off city from exterior countryside, and diffusing light into an even glow.

Besides the occurrence in these films of visual similarities to Wells's and Le Corbusier's utopias, narrative propositions also connect to those antecedents. A major recurring postulate in both films is the necessary division and rationalization of labor. This is most pronounced in *Metropolis*, where the planners reside above ground in an Edenic natureland while the workers toil on gigantic machinery, surviving despite backbreaking labor and regimented assembly-line work. The conflict of *Metropolis* is easily solved – some believe implausibly and unsatisfactorily – through the fortuitous acceptance by the CEO of the necessity to join the head (the planners above ground) and the hands (the workers below earth) via the heart. Through such a conclusion, the hierarchy and paternalism of a social formation similar to one accepted by Le Corbusier is asserted and reinforced.
Similarities to *Metropolis*’s symbolism and plot conflict can be found not only in Le Corbusier’s work but also in Wells’s *The Time Machine* (1895). In the year 802,701 the Eloi live above ground in a kind of paradise while Morlocks exist below the surface, running the machinery necessary for the Eloi to survive. At night, though, the Morlock emerge, eating the Eloi. Such a bleak specter in the Wells story should act, however, as a caution against assuming that recurrent motifs are related to similar political positions despite narrative and visual comparisons. As I have argued earlier, in discursive formations motifs can be employed both in admiration of their antecedents as well as oppositionally, inverting (or twisting) the dominant semantics. Consequently, archaeologies of discourses might try to avoid a mere cataloging of figures, observing as well their functions within a fictional world’s rhetoric and thesis.

If *Metropolis* accepts divided labor as a prerequisite for a successful future, in *Things to Come*, the final narrative crisis ironically (through its probable unintentionality) asserts its necessity. After a devastating world war in which humanity is reduced to a regressive barbarism, the use of massive machinery and giant turbines rebuilds civilization. Yet this technological progress and its attendant social harmony are nearly halted once again when one individual incites masses of people to prevent space travel. “Halt. Stop this progress” becomes the villainous intervention. Wellsian socialism and planned economy, using technology for alleviating the poverty and misery of laborers, wins for “a whole world peace,” but to accomplish this the intellectual ruling class ignores the voices raised in opposition and pursues its dream.

The economic conservatism of Le Corbusier and *Metropolis* versus the radical visions of Wells and *Things to Come* are certainly different in their political analysis of a proper utopia. Yet in these diverse anticipations of the future, similarities occur in the features of architecture (slab-block high rises and peaked skyscrapers, breathtaking vistas from the more significant buildings, diffused lighting); symmetry and balance in the cityscapes; orderly and rational mass transportation systems; and efficient, immediate, and extensive methods of communication (both films visualize television and computer screens as signal media for mass information).

These patterns will also occur in future noir films. However, they have taken these positive images of the future as signifiers for more troubled notions of how maladjusted and distorted the visions might become. Inverting those motifs’ semantics through rewriting by context and par-
ODY, future noir films question the economic and political status quo that would generate such a future. For if the utopias of Wells and Le Corbusier, *Metropolis* and *Things to Come* are bright, optimistic views of possibilities for tomorrow, future noir dystopias seek to establish an opposing proposition.

**The Dystopian Future Noirs**

In studying the history of social reform, Walker (1985, 12) maintains that its dynamics as "directed social change" progress through a five-step sequence. These are: (1) random negative (unorganized protest); (2) structured negative (organized protest); (3) random positive (various remedies); (4) structured positive (organized movement with a constructive aim); and (5) watchdog (surveillance of institutionalized reform). Obviously, not all attempts at reform succeed; consequently, some criticisms of the social formation never move much beyond steps one or two.

I find this outline of use, however, in characterizing the political action of dystopian texts since the phrasing "random negative," or unorganized protest, strikes me as particularly apt. The advantage dystopias have is that they do not have to provide alternate visions of tomorrow; they can merely exaggerate or invert utopias, suggesting that aspects of the fantasy ideal future will eventually produce distortions or contradictions. Considered as negations of specific fantasies of the future and as unorganized protests about social tendencies, dystopian fictions criticize specific utopias and function as warning messages about the present day. This is tomorrow – if we don’t watch out.

How soon this tomorrow may occur is part of each dystopia’s alarm. For our future noirs, *Max Headroom* is probably the bleakest: it is set “twenty minutes into the future,” although *Brazil* may have already transpired since it happens at 8:49 p.m., “somewhere in the twentieth century.” *Blade Runner* takes place in Los Angeles, November 2019. Moreover, as predictions of the future, these texts are consistent in their notions of the city even if their criticisms of the implications of those cities’ social systems differ slightly. In particular, variant attacks on modern architecture as representing twentieth-century late capitalism, commodity fetishism, and a class system cross these texts, as well as an associated fear of an age of information and multinationalism. However, as I mentioned earlier, *Blade Runner* and *Max Headroom* link these problems more specifically to
multinational capitalism, while *Brazil* suggests this is symptomatic of an advanced liberal welfare state bureaucracy.

One of the most immediate experiences of *Brazil, Blade Runner,* and *Max Headroom* is their kindred presentations of the urban area. Moreover, this cityscape implies certain predictable results for monopoly capitalism, the welfare state, and the postindustrial information society which cohabit in these buildings. For those people who live in the most prestigious spaces of the contemporary city are clearly elites, at the top of pyramids in economic or political structures (or both: in this political economy they become the same thing). The sources of this representation certainly include real-life ones. Le Corbusier’s *Unité d’Habitation* (1947–1952) lead to exemplary 1960s structures such as the Alcoa Building (San Francisco) and the Chase Manhattan Bank (New York City); and Citicorp’s, Trans-America’s, and Pittsburgh Plate Glass’s peaked corporation headquarters conservatively mimic in their postmodernism Egyptian and Gothic monuments. Yet despite the grandeur of both real and fictional skyscrapers, the remaining characteristics of the future noir cities are hardly the site of order, beauty and symmetry, of light, vision, and progress. Instead, these environments are failures – both architecturally and socially. This is evident in so many ways.

Most obviously, the skyscraper and high rise do not necessarily insure either peaceful work surroundings or harmonious family habitations. The very privileged and significant inhabitants of the future noir buildings – all powerful multinational corporations as is common in contemporary reality – seem to be the sources for disruption of lives. In *Blade Runner* the most magisterial of the pyramids to which Deckard flies houses the headquarters of the Tyrell Corporation, a leading manufacturer of the androids who, unfortuitously, revolt against their makers and whom the ruling class insists that Deckard “retire.” It is Deckard’s conflict with these directives that animates both the action and the more implicit social criticism. This is a society that has so commodified human labor and animal life that it genetically engineers it, perfecting it to the point that only sophisticated devices can distinguish real from simulation. Deckard is unsure of the borderlines between humanity and mechanics, but paranoia over its accomplishments requires society keep that distinction viable. As in the case of elitist paternalism and divided labor technocracies, classes must be maintained.
In *Brazil*, the impressive and oppressive lobby to the Ministry of Information leads to absolutely uniform corridors and closet offices in which desks are shared through walls. References to *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-four* abound as Lowry works for an institution that habitually invades private homes because “suspicion breeds confidence.” Classes and hierarchies abound isomorphic with the architecture: police are stationed in the ministry’s subbasement and the CEO’s office is on the top floor. Part of the privileged class, Sam’s mother lives in an apartment in marked design contrast to that of victimized Harry Buttle. Less a criticism of capitalism and more of a postindustrial, commodified, bureaucratic information society, *Brazil* works in dialogue with its British literary utopia predecessors. Furthermore, it evokes Le Corbusier’s “machine to live in” as a literalized metaphor – although the habitations may be said to be more “alive” than the inhabitants. On the one hand, pouring behind the walls of the rooms are the intestines of the social system: breathing, pulsating tubes transport food, heat, air conditioning, waste products, information, and, if one counts the subways, people. On the other hand, surrounded by manufactured women (teeth are straightened, faces lifted, fat dissolved), Lowry fantasizes and then hallucinates escape with a dream woman to a green countryside.

For *Max Headroom*, the semantical analogies between mise-en-scène and plot are crystalized in the prominence of the opening titles locating in the skyscraper the corporate headquarters for Channel 23 – a leading competitor in the television ratings wars. In the series, protagonist Edison Carter works as a top-rated investigative reporter, often discovering that the cause of social and economic injustices is due to his own industry’s drives for profit maximization. Before the television series was cancelled because of low ratings in fall 1987 (and then revived in spring 1988), one of its fictional episodes suggested that a competitor’s ratings were being artificially increased through subliminal electronic stimulation of viewers. Another episode traced to the CEO of an officially sanctioned information monopoly the evil plot to exploit for its own profit-making computerized data which were being fed through the firm’s networks. And an early episode uncovered members of Channel 23’s board of directors as perpetrators of criminal acts that bolstered ratings. Closer to *Blade Runner* in its criticism of capitalism, *Max Headroom* echoes *Brazil’s* postindustrial, age of information theme. And as with *Brazil* and *Blade Runner*, *Max Head-
room’s architecture employs a degraded Contemporary City as its target. For all three texts, modern architecture houses corrupt institutions which are pivotal sources for the failing social formation.

Thus, the dominant thrust of these future noirs is to use the signifier of the international high rise or the nostalgic pyramid-peaked skyscraper as a method of marking out the dangers of the hierarchies and elitism that a late capitalist class system or a Weberian bureaucracy produces. Yet, additionally, the signifiers of the cityscape develop bleak semantical connotations not only through intertextuality but via their special contextual and parodic permutations in each of these texts as four aspects to this cityscape reinforce these visions of a grim future.

For one thing, if high modernist internationalism hoped to erase the vulgarity and ugliness of the nineteenth century, it has apparently failed partially as a result of what it brought with it: its own notions of class and elitism. The dialectic of the utopian sources of the style’s meaning produces its own critique. For how are categorical distinctions among individuals to be maintained if they are not visually perceivable and commercially exploited. Advertising and product differentiation in monopoly capitalism constructs “life-styles” with which individuals seek identification as they sort out their own self-image in relation to possible purchasable ones. To buy a beer requires knowing, or deciding, that you are a party animal, a tough but sensitive buddy, or a gourmet. Contemporary consumer culture requires the buyer to consider who she or he is in relation to the array of products. Thus, added to the product’s original use value is a new one: constructing self-identity. Consequently, in this consumer society, these cities become mixtures of styles and cultures, tied together by threads of advertising.

The postmodern city is the result: to high modernists, a chunky stew of architectural “monstrosities” rather than the smooth broth of sleek uniformity, Venturi’s strip rather than Le Corbusier’s boulevard. Furthermore, if the ruling class inhabit the monoliths and pyramids of modernism, the hoi polloi drift among an ahistorical potpourri of “theme” architecture ranging from colonialism and Victorian to modernism and pop. In Brazil, for instance, Lowry’s home is most reminiscent of the international style, with the exterior similar to Le Corbusier-influenced Silver Towers, home for New York University faculty and staff. Deckard also lives in such a cubical space, with a small balcony, built-in appliances, and diffused lighting sources. Mrs. Lowry’s apartment suggests late Victorian
bric-a-brac, with antique tables and chintz antimacassars sprinkled throughout the living room. The Buttles inhabit a clearly working-class domicile, a K-Mart version of Mrs. Lowry's home. J. F. Sebastian resides amidst his android toys in a nearly empty grand hotel, The Bradbury.

Frederic Jameson (1984, 80–81) argues in one of his studies of postmodernism that such a figuration of mise-en-scène is indicative of a historical shift. “I have mentioned,” he writes, “the populist aspect of the rhetorical defense of postmodernism against the elite (and Utopian) austerities of the great architectural modernisms. . . .” Indeed, a populism may inhabit advocacies of postmodernist architecture, but in these films the strategy is more of a deliberate contrast to modernist aesthetics of beauty and order as the dystopias use “ugliness” and urban bricolage to indicate the impact of capitalist commodification. Or again, as in Brazil, the criticism may be of false appearance of options in a choiceless social order, for although the guests at a fancy hotel can order various meals, they are all served three scoops of—admittedly different colored—glop, along with a picture of their “filet mignon.” In either case, commodification is attacked as fetish and alienating, and postmodernist “choice” of style is false consciousness. The satire is vicious.

This postmodern mix is not only of product styles but in a xenophobic move also of cultures. An earlier implementation of this device occurs in Stanley Kubrick’s A Clockwork Orange (1971). There, Russian and English languages mingle for the gang of mod streetwise brutes that Alex heads. Such a use of multilingualism and cultural plurality is evident in future noir texts as well but with an ominous shift of connotation. Blade Runner, for instance, describes “Cityspeak” as a combination of five languages, while advertising montages constructed from Japanese and English become ideograms spreading across Times Square billboards. Truly Eastern electronics meets Western electricity, and both produce gigantic display ads.

As with the mix of life-styles, this concoction of cultures is a result of monopoly capitalism, now that the world is an international marketplace. Furthermore, what is bought and sold seems less and less at stake. For instance, in A Clockwork Orange the range of homes Alex and his droogs visit plays out the variety of life-styles possible in an England of the early 1970s. As Robert Hughes (1971) puts it in an article neatly entitled, “The Décor of Tomorrow’s Hell,” “The impression, a very deliberate one, is of cultural objects cut loose from any power to communicate, or even to be
noticed." That this is supposedly the age of information produces a fine irony.

The pervasiveness of advertising and lack of communicative content are potent subtexts for all three of the future noirs. In *Blade Runner*, Wellsian "babble machines" float along streets dispensing not news but ads. The route from Lowry's office to the Buttles' home is a corridor (not boulevard) of billboard jammed up against the next billboard. As the camera pans upward, a bleak, nearly desert horizon with factory smokestacks fleshes out an almost vacant landscape. Carter's program is constantly monitored in the news station central for its ratings since the function of television programs is to deliver consumers to advertisers not information to viewers. Carter's texts only fill the empty air between commercials.

Postmodernism, then, in these future noir texts is not a necessary transition in history. Instead, a more political bite lies within the function of this style for these films. The criticism is of commodification of modes of living, of (sometimes approved) divisions among styles and culture, of elitism, and of surfaces emptied of meaning despite utopian hopes. The major economic and political institutions may reside in modern architectural monuments, but their offspring are postmodern urban strips nostalgically imitating design styles that only convey the content of "product."

While postmodernism is perhaps the most obvious of the characteristics of future noirs, the name of the subgenre emphasizes a second feature: dusk or darkness. Intriguingly, the role of glass and light in literary and film utopias contrasts these films from their predecessors. For glass domes protect supercities and an even light glows everywhere. But such choices also result in the loss of something else: natural climates and sunshine. As humanity controls its urban environment, something so basically natural as light becomes artificial.

Additionally, shutting in also means shutting out, although the implications of glass structures might originally relate to beauty of design and enhancement of visual pleasure. In architectural history, glass has operated contradictorily. The completion of the Eiffel Tower in 1889 produced a sort of revolution in design. "Traditional distinctions between inside and outside were useless to describe this open structure" (Kern 1983, 185). Consequently, the avant-garde's interest in "honesty" in style led not only to deletion of nonfunctional design but also to display of the infrastructures of the building. This permitted the wide, horizontal windows of the Chicago School of Architecture. It also constructed the interesting para-
dox of being an exterior display of the interior. Futurist architect Antonio Sant’Elia called in a 1914 manifesto for new materials responsive to the times: “steel, glass, cardboard, reinforced concrete, and textile fibers. . . . Elevators must no longer be hidden like tape worms in the bowels of buildings but be accessible and visible on the outside of facades” (Kern 1983, 99). Glass becomes part of the side and visual texture of buildings. Yet as Reyner Banham observes, “The sheer abundance of light in conjunction with large areas of transparent or translucent material effectively reversed all established visual habits by which buildings were seen. For the first time [as a result of glass and electricity] it was possible to conceive of buildings whose true nature could only be perceived after dark, when artificial light blazed out through their structure” (cited in Kern 1983, 186).

The paradox, however, is that if a glass structure is built in an unpicturesque part of town, its users end up looking over factories and urban sprawl – the by-products that firm’s own participation in industrialization. Apparently when Frank Lloyd Wright designed the Johnson factory complex in downtown Racine, Wisconsin, he solved such a visual nastiness by turning all windows in toward the environ’s center and by using translucent rather than transparent glass materials. Frederic Jameson (1984, 81) hypothesizes that the Bonaventura Hotel obscures entries because it “aspires to being a total space, a complete world, a kind of miniature city. . . .” Indeed, it leaves a “degraded and fallen city fabric” to its own devices.

Consequently, the darkness of the future noirs serves to draw forth visually the geometrical block designs of the brown and grey buildings, sprinkled with smaller rectangles of incandescent and neon light. But traveling through interiors of the homes and along the avenues of city streets, no natural light greets the individual. Blocks of glass permit diffused light to enter; they prevent gazes outward, but what would one see? Brazil’s urban transport system is built of blocks of translucent glass. In Blade Runner, neon tubing is pervasive, even serving as an umbrella handle.

Postmodern urban sprawl and convoluted or artificial sources of light contribute to a general semantics of decline, and they lead as well to a third aspect of these future noirs: the labyrinthian character of space. In all cases, overhead schematics supplied by “omnipotent” computers are necessary for travel. Transportation systems may merge in the center of the city, but multistoried pathways now outstrip humanity’s abilities to navigate by eye-level perspective. In a more exaggerated case, Carter
scouts his subjects via short-wave linkages to the home news center, where his “controller” has access (via a computer that somehow has access to up-to-date sensory input) to subjects’ movements. Programmed much like the source of his information, Edison receives his directions in a form that matches his eye-level perspective while he must rely on those sequenced commands to reach his destination.11 Deckard’s travels are similarly through crowded carnival streets rather than long avenues. Lowry cannot look beyond billboards or through glass walls as he travels. As I suggested in my introduction, one implication of capitalism is the commodification of space, with the attendant value placed on vistas. Yet Le Corbusier’s twenty-four skyscrapers have yielded to hundreds of structures obscuring visions beyond the next-door building. Indeed, the external skeleton of high modernism becomes a labyrinth of industrialization. If 100 United Nations Plaza promises views that go on and on, future noir films question who is able to share in that hope and how.

Seeing this labyrinthian view of space slightly differently, but in a complementary way, Jameson (1984, 82–84) notes that due to the “absolute symmetry of the [Bonaventura’s] four towers it is quite impossible to get your bearings in [its] lobby. . . .” For him, we are in a new “hyperspace” – “a disjunction” finally exists “between the body and its built environment . . . [which] can stand as the symbol and analogue of that even sharper dilemma which is the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global multinational and decentered communication network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects.” Thus, with space as either labyrinthian or “hyper,” humanity’s senses, particularly the privileged one of sight, no longer guarantee ability to negotiate space and determine perspective.

Finally, and consequently, entropy as randomness and disorder increases, and predictions for the future are not of a turnaround. The spills of waste and garbage, the graffitied walls, the breakdown of appliances are constant parts of set design for future noir movies. Rain, probably from smog and auto emissions, falls continually in the Los Angeles of the androids. Urban hoodlums trash Lowry’s car within minutes of his parking it outside the Buttles’ home. Carter often scouts around the edges of his city, near where “blanks” – those on the margins of society and without identity cards – warm themselves by barrel fires.

In “Imagination of Disaster,” Susan Sontag (1968, 213) makes a worthy observation about sf. She writes, “Science fiction films are not about sci-
ence. They are about disaster, which is one of the oldest subjects of art. . . . Thus, the science fiction film . . . is concerned with the aesthetics of destruction, with the peculiar beauties to be found in wreaking havoc, making a mess." If this is the case, dystopias surely must have the upper hand over utopian fiction, for the ways humanity can allow its own civilization to self-destruct are clearly the challenge for set designers.

As I indicated in my introduction, the four characteristics of postmodernism, indirect lighting, labyrinthian space, and an entropic civilization seem common to the mise-en-scène of future noir films, and these aspects yield part of the texts' signification of protest. The grievances are numerous and certainly not cohering around a central plan for reform. Rather they seem random shots at contemporary deficiencies in present-day life. Integral to all these dystopias is a bleak criticism of utopian versions of high modernist architecture and modern cityscapes, exterior structures which house corrupt economic and social institutions. The semiotic operation, however, is apparent: transform through context and intertextuality the signifiers of modern life so that they become the signs of a troubled society.

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Notes and References

I would like to thank the participants of the 1987 Hawaii International Film Festival and Symposium and Jeff Sconce for comments which I hope have helped me sharpen my ideas. I also thank Scott Bukatman for many earlier conversations about contemporary SF; some of this is undoubtedly influenced by his work on this subject.

1. Its grounding elitism in architectural history will be addressed below.
2. For instance, 2001: A Space Odyssey might reasonably be grouped with Metropolis and Things to Come (both of which will be discussed below) since, I will argue, they reinforce class distinctions. Furthermore, the monolith might be the ultimate modernist building: its appearance generates evolutionary levels to humanity. Similarly, the Star Wars trilogy and Dune belong to another subgenre,
one that privileges nostalgia and is a throwback in narrative structure and mise-en-scène to fairy tales and feudalism.

3. I find it significant in a period of poststructuralism that while I am not the creator of the term “future noir,” simultaneously I cannot supply its origin. One of my students, Bert Greene, used the term to describe these films, but he said he heard it from another student whose last name he didn’t know. I rather like the fact that in an essay about postmodernist SF, I can’t properly attribute my source except to say it is circulating discourse in Austin, Texas.

4. Central only for this paper, not ontologically.

5. However, Méliès’s *A Trip to the Moon* (1903) bears many similarities to Wells’s *The First Men in the Moon* (1901).


7. The obvious allegory operating here is Christ’s visit to earth to act as an intermediary between his Father in Heaven and the workers. Yet this religious symbolism only functions to reinforce a divided labor system – something that socialists such as Wells would reject.

8. This is possible since the films themselves are not of a postmodern aesthetic; that is, these future noir films may display a postmodern mise-en-scène, taking the value of spectacle associated with that style, but since that mise-en-scène is represented as the environment for the characters, the filmic effect is that of criticizing that environment. In every regard, these movies are quite traditional in their narrative form and style.

9. This is based on Anthony Burgess’s novel, where the device originates.

10. Always quick to observe a trend, *Time* magazine reported in 1968 that one feature of new architectural shapes was “Honesty. . . . Today architects like to show how buildings stand by calling attention to the structural system. . . . Another school of architects feels that a building ought to tell what is going on beneath its skin.” “To Cherish Rather than Destroy,” *Time*, 92, 5 (2 August 1968):40.

11. This becomes even more convoluted since Edison’s alter ego is Max Headroom, a now self-generating computer image compiled from Edison’s brainwaves and a sophisticated software program.
Bellamy, Edward

Clay, Grady

Delany, Samuel

Eisner, Lotte H.

Fishman, Robert

Giddens, Anthony

Hillegas, Mark R.

Hughes, Robert

Jameson, Fredric
1984 "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review*, no. 146 (July-August).

Kern, Stephen

Lowe, Donald M.

Sontag, Susan
Venturi, Robert, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour

Von Eckardt, Wolf

Walker, Robert H.
One cold, November afternoon in 1987 in Milwaukee, I received my conference packet for the Hawaii International Film Symposium and Festival; it included one glossy, brightly colored brochure that stood apart from the dull official papers and forms. My Hyatt Regency Waikiki brochure – with photos of youthful couples in “fun-filled” settings centered on Harry’s Bar and “Hyatt’s Great Hall where sun-splashed waterfalls cascade gently into a tropical pool framed with lush Island flora” – is a global, pop culture image of Hawaii, of “Hawaii 5-0,” “Magnum P.I.,” and James Michener. This emblem of free-floating tourist pleasure – now a theoretical document – promises me “a stay which is far more than just a room – a stay which is an experience.” “After a day of fun” at the beach and shopping in “70 shops with souvenir items from around the world,” “it’s an evening of excitement.” This is for me!

However, like the academic who questions while basking in this consumption, the tourist also seeks something less hedonistic – a “meaningful experience,” usually of cultural difference, which the brochure also promises: “the Hawaiian program which offers you an authentic glimpse into Hawaiian culture.” “Authentic culture” is the lure of tourism (and art), which must stage the “authentic” as public spectacle. But exactly what is this “Hawaiian program?” Will it involve my learning the hula in public? This vague word perfectly reveals the futility of tourists (a portable audience of white, middle-class heterosexuals) ever locating authentic culture – usually a commodified, singular image traded across time. As if on cue, my daughter, with her usual acuity, notes a discrepancy: the wide-lapel leisure suits, haircuts, and narrow-shouldered dresses of the fun couples resemble a Bob Newhart, 1970s rerun. The Hyatt Waikiki, like amor-
phous pleasure, is timeless, without context. But so is my knowledge of Honolulu and Eastern cultures severely limited. Given the time warp of the photos, I wonder if the hotel, or the city, has decayed and whether the brochure’s cocktail leisure is not dated.

For the postmodern critic of pop culture, this would be a site for sore eyes, which could revel in the leisure of pleasure. However, that model of the contemporary city, like the singular image of Hawaii as the Hyatt Waikiki, is a duplicitous one; while arguing pluralism and details of difference, it has paradoxically traveled into and been mapped over vastly diverse cultures – erasing differences, repressing details of place. Like the brochure, which displaces Honolulu and indeed the entire state (in fact, a group of islands) into the regime of a “program” of authentic, natural pleasure, the image hides the city, its inhabitants, and its legends; the concept of “the City,” like “the Hyatt,” both promises and conceals what tourism or 1980s cultural studies alike cannot produce – “authentic culture.”

A traveling companion for this concept of “the City” is Theory, with a capital T, which has been superimposed over East or West, rich or poor, industrial or agricultural – no small gesture of imperialism. This global venture – replicating the U.S. international exportation and market dominance of film and now television – is led by the fashionable but angst-laden theorist as nomad (a slippery act of appropriation) or traveler.

In David Lodge’s (1984) parody of upper-class academia and theory, appropriately titled _Small World_, Morris Zapp, the hip semiotician or postmodern critic, assesses the scholarly world as composed of cities strung together by airports, a topography of conference topics. Zapp:

> Zürich is Joyce. Amsterdam is Semiotics. Vienna is Narrative. Or is it Narrative in Amsterdam and Semiotics in Vienna . . . ? Anyway. Jerusalem I do know is about the Future of Criticism, because I’m one of the organizers. . . .

> Why Jerusalem?

> Why not? It’s a draw, a novelty. It’s a place people want to see, but it’s not on the regular tourist circuit. Also, the Jerusalem Hilton offers very competitive rates in the summer because it’s so goddam hot.

Funny, perhaps true, but weary.

The Arthurian narrative and structure – replete with arch, jet-setting, literary clashes between doddering humanism (and sex) and philandering theory (and sex), in mise-en-scènes of identical cities and the same speak-
ers – is Persse McGarrigle’s (from Limerick) search for the ideal woman, Angelica; it is also a parable of this young assistant professor’s quest for the holy grail of tenure and his initiation into the rites of scholarly luck and fame. Along with ideal woman as lure, the prize is an expensive UNESCO chair. There are various female academics, among them the glamorous, kinky Italian, Fulvia Morgana, but they are objects not subjects of desire. The book concludes with the young Lancelot’s reverie: “As on to a cinema screen, he projected his memory of Cheryl’s face and figure – the blonde, shoulder-length hair, the high-stepping gait, the starry, unfocused look of her blue eyes – and he wondered where in the small, narrow world he should begin to look for her” (Lodge 1984, 385). The eternal dream of woman has been an inspiration for myth and modernism; here it is the raison d’être of conferences. Crucial, of course, is the fact that the ideal woman cannot be found; if she were, desire and motive, like the story, most international cinemas, and presumably male literary scholarship, would end.

When asked why he travels so much, Philip Swallow (married but looking for Joy) says (Lodge 1984, 75–76): “Happiness? One knows that doesn’t last. Distraction, perhaps.... Intensity of experience is what we’re looking for, I think. We know we won’t find it at home any more, but there’s always the hope that we’ll find it abroad. I found it in America in ’69.”

“With Désirée?”

“Not just Désirée, though she was an important part of it. It was the excitement, the richness of the whole experience.”

I wonder. Is this the same “experience” as the fun-filled one promised by the Hyatt Waikiki? Is male desire interchangeable with the object of desire, Désirée? Is this not redundant? What of the female traveler, the female academic? If told from her point of view, an actual rather than dream woman, in a claim for women’s historical subjectivity and existence, the story and the theory would necessarily be different.

Italo Calvino tells a parable of the dream girl, quoted by de Lauretis; this is a dream of history, of founding the city of Zobeide: “men of various nations had an identical dream. They saw a woman running at night through an unknown city; she was seen from behind, with long hair, and she was naked.” (Is she Darryl Hannah, Steve Martin’s fantasy in Roxanne, a remake of Cyrano de Bergerac?) They dreamed of pursuing her, and then constructed a city built on the memory of her. “At the spot where
she had vanished, there would remain no avenue of escape. Those who had arrived first could understand what drew these people to Zobeide, this ugly city, this trap.” “The City” functions as a “delusion and dream” “to keep women captive” – and it is ugly. Zobeide is a Greek maze, with the minotaur or woman at the center, with no escape. As Teresa de Lauretis (1983, 21–22) writes: “It does not come as a surprise, to us cinema people, that in that primal city built by men there are no women; or that in Calvino’s seductive parable . . . woman is absent as historical subject.”

Another detour beckons me. “High-stepping gait” has led me to a byway or blind alley – to Freud and Delusion and Dream; Small World is the comic remake. Like the mediocre novel that inspired him, Gradiva: A Pompeian Fancy by Wilhelm Jensen (translated in 1917), Freud analyzes the male scholar’s search for the classical woman. However, taking his cue from Jensen, Freud knows that “the City,” in this case Pompeii, is an excuse, a symptom; the dream girl has nothing to do with cities, science, or research but everything to do with desirous men. Norbert Hanhold is an archeologist; “his interest is fixed upon a bas-relief which represents a girl walking in an unusual manner . . . he spins a web of fantasies about her . . . transports the person created by him to Pompeii . . . he intensifies the fantasy . . . of the girl named Gradiva [the girl splendid in walking] into a delusion which comes to influence his acts” (Freud 1956, 33).

Norbert travels to Rome, Naples, grumbling about encountering so many married couples, and pursues his delusion through the ruins of Pompeii. Norbert has confused the real, a girl from his childhood, with the imaginary, her image. He is not a well man.

“There is no better reason for repression . . . than the burial which was the fate of Pompeii and from which the city was able to rise again . . . in his imagination, the young archeologist had to transport to Pompeii the prototype of the relief which reminded him of the forgotten beloved of his youth” (Freud 1956, 61). Along with the importance of the city and childhood memory to repression (and the unconscious; Rome was another of Freud’s metaphors), what intrigues me is Freud’s analysis of Norbert’s problem: “A psychiatrist would perhaps assign Norbert Hanhold’s delusion to the large group of paranoia and designate it as a ‘fetishistic erotomania;’ because falling in love with a bas-relief . . . the interest in the feet . . . of women must seem suspiciously like fetishism.” But Freud dismisses “erotomania” as “awkward and useless.” He goes on to hypothesize that “An old-school psychiatrist would, moreover, stamp our hero as a degen-
erate . . . and would investigate the heredity which has inexorably driven him to such a fate.”

Freud’s third and preferred analysis is the literary interpretation of Jensen, the author, who was “engrossed in the individual psychic state which can give rise to such a delusion. . . . In one important point Norbert Hanhold acts quite differently from ordinary human beings. He has no interest in living women; science, which he serves, has taken this interest from him and transferred it to women of stone or bronze. Let us not consider this an unimportant peculiarity” (Freud 1956, 66–67). Indeed, let us not. Unfortunately, modernists paid scant heed to Freud. Scholastic delusions have continued to “have no interest in living women.” The delusion might be more telling than the cover-up journey or scholarship – a (bas-relief) fetish. Freud’s prognosis for Norbert might serve as a cure for theories of modernism and postmodernism; otherwise, the future is bleak: “The condition of continued avoidance of women results in the personal qualification . . . for the formation of a delusion; the development of psychic disturbance . . .” (Freud 1956, 68). A real woman, Zoe, is the end of the delusion, the end of the story, and Norbert’s cure.

However commercially banal the brochure, or tongue-in-cheek popular the novel, Small World, or mediocre Jensen’s Gradiva, they share common premises with the great writers of modernism – that is the myth of the city as a woman. As Michel de Certeau argues in The Practice of Everyday Life, when encapsuled as myth, “the City” works to contain specificity and repress all differences or pollution; it is a myth which creates “a universal and anonymous subject” coterminous with “the city” itself (De Certeau 1984, 94); the subject is male and the myth totalizing (albeit more poetic than the concept generated by city planners) and functions to “eliminate and reject” waste products which, like poverty, homelessness, and presumably women, can be reintroduced outside the myth, for example, in welfare discourses. De Certeau’s acute assessment of this “concept-city” points to “its forgetting of space, the condition of any city’s possibility.” “The City” is neither place nor space but a universal figure of history, “the machinery and hero of modernity” (De Certeau 1984, 95). To this critique, I must add contours: as this figure comes into focus, it is a shapely female image.

Before arriving at the movie theater, I want to stroll through Reflections with Walter Benjamin. “A Berlin Chronicle” sketches a topography of childhood memory (setting off desire or delusion?) – a provocative map
of his youth drawn from the streets of Berlin and Paris. “Now let me call back those who introduced me to the city” (Benjamin 1986a, 3). Like medieval chronicles, this vivid, spatial map of “moments and discontinuities” (unlike the temporal sequence of autobiography which “has to do with time . . . and the continuous flow of life” [p. 28]) begins with a nursemaid, a trip to the zoo, mother and shopping, wanders through adolescent encounters, fancies sex and love, is guided by poets, essayists (particularly Baudelaire), and friendship, meanders to finances, father, and hated school discipline, and concludes with a paternal tale of death and an ominous warning, “syphilis.” As enchanted as I am by Benjamin, I will focus on two recurring, interrelated figures, representative of the city, which are superimposed over his oedipal walk: the labyrinth and the prostitute.

Childhood is a “period of impotence before the city” due to “a poor sense of direction” (p. 4) blamed on his mother; adolescence is “a crossing of frontiers not only social but topographical – a voluptuous hovering on the brink in the sense that whole networks of streets were opened up under the auspices of prostitution” (p. 11). His political awareness of what the city hides, the poor, and his social awakening, are equated with sexual awakening: “crossing the threshold of one’s class for the first time had a part in the almost unequaled fascination of publicly accosting a whore in the street” (p. 11). Behind the facades of the city architecture, its public image, hidden in the center was a prostitute or Ariadne – eroticism initially curtailed by his nursemaid or his censoring mother. No matter. “Nor is it to be denied that I penetrated to its innermost place, the Minotaur’s chamber, with the only difference being that this mythological monster had three heads: those of the occupants of the same brothel. . . . Paris thus answered my most uneasy expectations” (p. 9). (On his quest, Theseus had an earlier encounter with Medea who, after her separation from Jason, had become the wife of Aegeus, the father of Theseus. She convinced her husband to try to poison Theseus, whose sword identified him to his father. Bullfinch [1959, 125] writes: “Medea, detected in her arts, fled once more . . . and arrived in Asia, where the country afterwards, called Media, received its name from her.” The shift from Medea to Media, from woman to country, intrigues me. In Benjamin’s account, Medea is the figure on a ring purchased with friends and destined for his fiancée – “you only entered its secret by taking it off and contemplating the head against the light” [Benjamin 1986a, 33]).
Benjamin sees Berlin through the streets of Paris and the eyes of Baudelaire: “What is unique in Baudelaire’s poetry is that the images of women and death are permeated by a third, that of Paris” (Benjamin 1986b, 157). In the city, the oldest technology, sex, combines with the newest technology – mass culture, celebrated as mass transit, skyscrapers, or decried as commodity fetishism. In his wonderful portrait of arcades and shopping, “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century,” Benjamin writes: “Such an image is presented by the pure commodity: as fetish. Such an image are the arcades, which are both house and stars. Such an image is the prostitute, who is saleswoman and wares in one” (p. 157).

She, like the city, was fascinating and frightening, representing, as she did, sex and death; like mass culture, she was available and dangerous. The city existed paradoxically as the exemplar of art and creativity and as the symptom of commodity culture – resolutely linked to the figure of woman. As Patrice Petro (1987, 69) so decisively argues in “Joyless Streets,” “Berlin also served as the decisive metaphor for modernity, and modernity was almost invariably represented as a woman.” That Berlin was the center for mass culture is critical to her thesis. Some critics were not as subtle as Benjamin. Petro (1987, 72) quotes Carl Zuckmayer’s description of Berlin: “Some saw her as hefty, full-breasted, in lace underwear . . . her very capacity for cruelty made them all the more aggressive. All wanted to have her. . . . To conquer Berlin was to conquer the world.”

In “Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism’s Other,” Andreas Huyssen (1986, 189) argues that modernism’s fascination with imaginary femininity “goes hand in hand with the exclusion of real women from the literary enterprise and with the misogyny of bourgeois patriarchy itself.” Mass culture, site of the contemptible, is equated with women; real, authentic culture “remains the prerogative of men” (Huyssen 1986, 191). The city is the turf of both, although in mythology, one serves the other. Thus, the commodity fetish of Marx coincides with Freud’s fetish – which as we know is female.

The modernist art and commodity, cinema, picked up this division of the fetish woman. And, if Benjamin is right that “Only film commands optical approaches to the essence of the city . . . like conducting the motorist into the new center” (Benjamin 1986a, 8), then cinema, like modernism’s city, is also built on a boyhood dream of woman, a dream arrested in adolescence, endlessly repeated. Benjamin’s chronicle of modernity is also an old story, a bildungsroman in which the young boy
conquers the city, and woman via desire, on his way to manhood and mastery; in the end, he casts his lot with his father in a shared secret, syphilis. This old story and the need to retell it might explain why the image of "the city" is such a totalizing figure. If Oedipus is our repeated narrative, then the modern city is its site. However, as Petro says, modernism is not the same as modernity, just as women and their experiences of modernity can never be captured in accounts of male modernists.

Benjamin's remembrance of things past in Berlin and Paris turns to dystopia in the post-World War II emigration to the United States of German Expressionism; modernism's equation of women with the city and sex is all that's left in the migration; it becomes the repressed of Hollywood cinema. In *It's a Wonderful Life*, the adventure of the bildungsroman - journeying to far-off lands for fame and fortune represented by George Bailey's travel brochures and graduation suitcase - is denied and undercut in favor of staying at home, in a small town, Bedford Falls defining the United States as rural/suburban; anti-European means anticity. The real Christmas threat to the film and masculinity is the city (as well as the lack of recognition for George Bailey, which sets off a crazed identity crisis) - that transformation of Bedford Falls by jazz, black musicians, neon, booze, and prostitutes into a nightmare of male identity - a nightmare because no one recognizes or can name the hero, George Bailey. In this nightmare city, women are either prostitutes or asexual and old; perky Mary becomes a dull librarian who timidly looks down, Mom runs a boarding house, and both are bleakly lighted by German Expressionist lighting. The value of home, the nobility of building row, suburban, individually mortgaged by savings and loan rather than investment banker homes, is upheld - along with U.S. culture and strong fathers.¹

Ten years later, after an intense period of film noir, the city of *Touch of Evil*, although supposedly only a border town, is equally menacing; it is a fragmented, noisy, and anonymous place of race, sex, drugs, leather-jacketed gangs, and separated couples, traversed by automobiles (that city emblem repeated from *The Magnificent Ambersons* as the symbol of modernity and decline) and represented by motels, an ugly and dangerous extension of the car and modernity to return, with a final vengeance, in *Psycho*; jazz, linked to bars and motels, also means danger, sex. Remember Susan's attack by the Grandes in the motel. When Vargas returns to the bar to beat up the Grande boys (meanwhile, missing his wife, once again), he concludes the brawl by smashing a head against a jukebox,
stopping the film’s jazz/rock. After this, order is restored. The film’s action, including the moving nostalgia of Tanya’s room and player-piano refrain, is set against the dystopia of modernism – tall oil derricks and darkness, the detritus of industrialism and modernity. The nostalgic past – Marlene Dietrich as Tanya – is that dream woman of modernism, here returning as the good ole days. (The dream of Dietrich refuses to die; Maximilian Schell tried to recapture her image but failed, left with her voice and clips as she evaded his project while seemingly complicit with it.)

Like other modern artists, Alfred Hitchcock built his cinema from an impossible dream of woman – a dream that was not ugly until perversely “psychoanalyzed” or viciously caricatured by Spoto without Freud’s understanding. In many ways, Hitchcock is the most sophisticated theorist of tourism. In his films, travel is not always what it is cracked up to be; tourism can be dangerous, particularly at Mount Rushmore (North by Northwest) or at a Spanish mission in northern California. Vertigo is Hitchcock’s most direct dream of woman, almost a travelogue; the upper-class, fashionable Madeleine “wanders” through the streets of San Francisco and out to various tourist attractions along the Pacific Coast Highway; she is the seductive lure, the city woman who incites Scotty Ferguson to obsessively chase her image, only to have this imaginary dream vanish, like Zobeide, by presumably plunging to its death from the special effects mission bell tower. That Scotty is a detective and motorist, following Madeleine in his car, suggests that he is a protagonist of modernism; caught in his delusion like Norbert Hanhold, he experiences a “psychic disturbance” in the middle of the film and is hospitalized, shot from a high angle, unable to speak or look.

The red-haired Judy is the shop girl, on foot, the working girl of the streets of modernity; she and Scotty stroll together. Even after her fashion transformation into the ideal, blond, quieter, more refined image of woman, she is still fictively real – or excessive, which her make-over via a hair style and a tailored, grey suit cannot contain. Thus, she must die. Real women have little to do with the edifices of modernism, including male desire (and Hitchcock’s alteration of tourist attractions via special effects matte shots). She can never be found because she cannot exist, her nonexistence demanding her continual recreation in cinema. The chase and her destruction are what counts; Hitchcock leads us on a merry narrative tour of the United States (and earlier Britain), with cities as scenes of
his various crimes. (Hitchcock’s films were precursors of the American Express ad campaign warning us of the threat of travel – particularly North by Northwest and the 1957 The Man Who Knew Too Much.) Thus, he is the theorist as tourist or a nomad trying to perfect “otherness” as precisely sexual difference. However she is punished and contained, Hitchcock was fascinated by modern woman.

That the image of the central city of modernism is built from male desire analogous with “woman” is not, of course, new or surprising. That this myth has persisted in postmodernist claims for decentralization, pluralism, and the vernacular, however, is rather surprising. A desirous cartography of Berlin and Paris of the 1920s, along with the visage of the male modernist author, hovers over London, Chicago, New York, and indeed cultural studies everywhere in the 1980s. While the specificity of war, recession, and industrialism have vanished, the eternal, naked woman has been transported around the world and back. What is missing from most accounts is that historical women comprised a significant part of the crowds of modernity; they went to the cities, to work, and to the movies. What is missing from postmodernism is women’s voices – their work of the past twenty years in criticism and art alike. While the modernists didn’t bother to look beyond their own consuming desire and passions, postmodern male critics have not bothered to read women’s writing. While feminism, like the naked woman for modernism, is invoked as central to any manifestation of postmodernism, the actual work remains uncited, buried in the revival of another male, heroic pantheon, a litany of great male thinkers bewildered by women’s silence in the debates; modernists failed to notice women’s presence; postmodernists are baffled by women’s lack of speech – a contemporary displacement of old and weary repressions, a tactic that is nonsense.

But there is a difference between then and now. What was historical reminiscence marked by subjectivity in Benjamin’s post-World War I accounts has become vapid flanerie in 1980s renderings; without the inscriptions of authors and signs of production, the commodity and its purchase are what counts; what looked back with detached wisdom and intimate detail has soured to a frantic celebration of the present – one was predicated on the desire for change; the recent return to the anonymous streets settles for stasis, the repetition of the same products – “new and improved” – as difference. Writers of cultural studies are no longer historical inhabitants of the streets that they praise; neither they nor the streets
nor their subjects have any history or idiosyncrasy. Today's critic is an itinerant, just passing through town. “The City” is anywhere and everywhere, but it is “uninhabitable,” without stories, but particularly without memories. It is a clever place to visit, but no one lives there – like the Hyatt. Unlike Benjamin, critics have been lured and seduced by the reception of commodities, turning their ephemeral writing into hot properties. The new academic careerist hammers out fast thought, aware that for fads, like hamburgers, timing (and a macgimmick rather than a maguffin) is everything. Like a local chamber of commerce, they generate an easy, singular, saleable, accessible image while not realizing, as Meaghan Morris so cleverly said, “The boom is over. Snooze, snooze.” Like the real women banished from the streets of modernism, referents are vanishing from cultural studies – a clever tactic. As Morris so acutely assesses, theories of subjectivity can no longer tell us who we are or where we live. Perhaps contemporary theory is not sure what its theoretical object is; one objective has become the silencing of women’s position from which to speak, a place in enunciation that the women’s movement has arduously claimed only to recently learn, to our amazement, that we didn’t write anything about contemporary issues, after all. This is a classic instance of postmodern male avowal (the new and improved disavowal), the fetishist’s costly, inverse gambit; woman’s “lack” of the phallus (which she never envied in the first place) triggering disavowal has been transformed into women’s “lack” of research, writing, and speaking, which she has accomplished aplenty. While seeing was not believing in the Freudian scenario, hearing has joined the realm of disbelief. Women then turn, in men’s minds, into shrews and braggarts, continually re-citing their own writing, like the housewife who points out her daily labor when the husband arrives home, knowing that he will not notice the waxed floors unless reminded, again and again; after all, women’s work is just not as important as men’s, as academia replays the domestic regime of erasure.

If told from the point of view of the naked woman of Zobeide, the story might be different. She must have been very frightened and cold. Was she from Zobeide? Or a visitor? Why was she naked? What had happened to her clothes? Why was she running away? Where had she been? Where were her friends? Did she make it home? Or was she murdered in a dark alley? Why didn’t anyone help her? What was her name? Or, perhaps she was more clever than imagined. Rather than guiding Theseus through the labyrinth, did this Ariadne take him on a wild goose chase? She has led
modernist and postmodernist alike astray, down ever narrowing argumentative paths of their own repetitive making. Everything, for them, now, is simulation or vague and constant pleasure; all the streets look alike, all their names sound alike. Her lovers are trapped in an ugly city, transformed into so many Minotaurs, bumping into one another; like a video game arcade, the maze has become crowded with loud repetition while she has gone home, to work, to think. She can no longer be bothered (or frightened) by his desire. Unfortunately, the Marco Polo school of critics, believing they have abandoned Ariadne while she was sleeping, are now casting their wandering, fickle eyes on other cultures, specifically Eastern and Third World, depositing the same myths of mysterious otherness applied to women in foreign terrain, seeking answers but not really caring if anyone lives there.

To return to Paris, specifically Jean-Luc Godard and the situationists, with Japan on the horizon via Nagisa Oshima, and, along with Andy Warhol and William Burroughs in the United States, the 1960s beginnings of postmodernism. Both filmmakers occupied the streets and populated them with youth, drugs, transients, bars, rock and roll, pop culture, and philosophy – celebrating the vernacular, sometimes the inarticulate, emphasizing the sexual. Godard’s central characters are women, discontent with home and marriage. However, his metaphor for capitalism is prostitution, played out over women’s bodies and lives. For me, this is yet another, albeit “working (or not) class” and gritty, everyday, manifestation of modernism – the banal and bored rather than glamorized dream whore.

Oshima’s metaphor for imperialism and cultural struggle is rape. Although inscribed within a complex of avant-garde performance, a layering of the levels of representation, a revelation and interrogation of the cinematic apparatus’s complicity and complexity (not unlike Godard’s project), a rewriting of narrative conventions and enunciation, along with an almost parodistic inquisition of the intellectual’s or artist’s connivance or role in dissecting capitalist exploitation, the sexual metaphor and enactment is again on woman’s body. In both cases, with cultural specificity and difference in mind, woman and her victimization is the central myth. For me, neither prostitution nor rape nor the preponderant obsession with difference as singularly sexual will do in 1988. While these “liberated” or “radical” constructions posit woman as victim, she is still an object of pursuit, without subjectivity of her own.
There is a strange similarity among the concerns of Godard and Oshima then and the writers of cultural studies now, a similarity suggested to me by a passage in an unpublished essay by Morris, "At Henry Parkes Motel" (Morris n.d.). Remember the conversation scenes in various Godard films where great male poets or philosophers either appear, are directly quoted, or whose words are embedded in dialogue. Oshima also quotes great, sometimes scandalous, male modernists, his films, like *Diary of a Shinjuku Thief*, peppered with meaningful, enigmatic citations, primarily from literature but also, like Godard, from pop culture and trash references. Citation and quotation are favored tactics for both. In a critique of Iain Chambers's *Popular Culture: The Metropolitan Experiences* (as exemplifying a current take on culture), Morris writes the following assessment, which could serve as a critique of Godard: She argues that "populism" today "predicates its pedagogy on the radical dissociation of person and persona." "Populism" assumes that "anywhere and everywhere the problem of ‘theory’ is the same." "Not the least of the little imperialisms performed . . . is to place the ‘modern world’ under the sway of an intellectual Prophet who sounds for all the world like an elderly Humanities professor in a venerable but declining European university" (Morris n.d., 31).

Then the sentence that first caught my eye: "as an account primarily (and avowedly) based on the emblematic street experience of un- or underemployed males in European or American cities (or what then become its echoes elsewhere), it restricts the scope of enquiry to . . . one of the ‘growth’ areas of that economy. . . . Perhaps this is one reason why women, in post-subcultural accounts, still appear in apologetic parentheses or as ‘catching up’ on the streets when they’re not left looking out the window. The ways that economic and technological changes in the 1980s . . . have been transforming women’s lives simply cannot be considered — leaving them not so much neglected in cultural studies as anachronistically mis-placed” (Morris n.d., 32). Are 1987 cultural studies the sublation of early 1960s politics, with Marx dropped out and postmodernism plugged in? Are we hearing an echo or inversion of Godard’s dilemma of the artist-intellectual in the free-spirited pop studies’ professor? This time the question is not the intellectual’s relationship to the revolution and the proletariat, but the hip, slick ’n’ cool academic’s relation to television and white, middle-class college students — a love-it populism takes on a loathe-it elitism: the new left as right politics. If the 1960s have returned, vanquishing
the gains of the women’s movement and feminism by jumping over them, regression as forgetting, this might explain the anachronism. If I am right, the appropriation is depleted and apolitical, divorced from Godard and Oshima’s political concern with the means of production. In the end, I prefer the modernist image of woman out front, leading a merry and dangerous chase, rather than pathetically tagging along behind.

But, unlike the celebratory take by critics who like mass culture, albeit without discrimination, or the negative view of the city as a dingy museum of copies and forgeries, the city as a tourist trap invaded and contaminated by mass culture, the view of Baudrillard, there are other ways of thinking cities – that of Marguerite Duras’s script for *Hiroshima Mon Amour* and Michel de Certeau’s metaphor of the pedestrian, a guide highly recommended by Morris due to his fine style. To a degree, de Certeau’s “Walking in the City” is a revival or postmodern rendering of Benjamin (read through Foucault and linguistics), who will again be my guide through this spatial terrain. Later on in “A Berlin Chronicle,” the labyrinth is imagined in another way; rather than what is installed “in the chamber at its enigmatic center,” he is concerned with “the many entrances leading into the interior – primal relationships, so many entrances to the maze, with men drawn on the right and women on the left” (Benjamin 1986a, 31). This maze of stories, of books, of wandering through the city as a place of unpredicted events, while rigidly gendered, is entrancing to Benjamin and to me. The outline of the labyrinth has shifted – from the Greek model with its central chamber in which “terror is born” (according to Umberto Eco in *Postscript*) to the mannerist model, “a structure of many blind alleys . . . a model of the trial and error process,” and perhaps on to the “rhizome” of Deleuze and Guattari, a labyrinth with no exit because it is potentially infinite (Eco 1983, 57).

Benjamin calls this way of thinking the city “the art of straying.” “Not to find one’s way in a city may well be uninteresting and banal. It requires ignorance – nothing more. But to lose oneself in a city – as one loses oneself in a forest – that calls for quite a different schooling. Then, signboards and street names, passers-by, roofs, kiosks, or bars must speak to the wanderer like a cracking twig under his feet in the forest . . .” (Benjamin 1986a, 9). The wanderer, the strayer from the path, listens, gathers clues, pays attention to the details of the city, without mastery or a map yet with knowledge. The wanderer does not have a grand theory, or central image, but learns (rather than proves) along the way; the adventure
does not have a predetermined destination. For me, this is the inventive, scholarly path of discovery.

(In the spirit of Benjamin, I will stray, distracted: I just received the latest issue of *Time* [23 November 1987]; on the bright cover is a declaration, “Bringing the City Back to Life,” with a cute, cartoon painting of two decaying, black row, townhouses juxtaposed with two Victorian, re-vamped, high-style versions. The inside cover story is titled “Spiffing up the Urban Heritage,” under the statement that “After years of neglect, Americans lavish love and sweat on old downtowns” – the return, from suburbia, to the downtown as small town. “How did Americans manage to forget for so many years that downtowns are invigorating and old cities grand . . . the nation has had a great change of heart” [p. 72]. Not economics [or politics] and perhaps displacement of the poor but “a change of heart,” the city as a site of upwardly mobile romance dependent on a literal erasure of poverty and race. Rather than dealing with the homeless [and racism, the left-over of the 1950s emigration from cities to the suburbs], we will redecorate the homes and reclaim the territory, without compensation, like our methods with native Americans. The politics of renovation/redecoration as a fashionable coverup, with restoration paradoxically preserving history, the turn-of-the-century style, the original, usually Victorian, while eradicating “modern” history, is more than troublesome.)

The “art of straying” is the way of the lovers in *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, wandering through the cafe streets of Hiroshima and the paths of their mutual desires. The French woman is the traveler, making a peace film; the Japanese man is an inhabitant of Hiroshima; trying to find each other/avoid each other, they speak of history, of person, of otherness. In the famous opening scene, their bodies form a topography of desire, of glinting catastrophe. “Who are you? You destroy me. How could I have known that this city was made to the size of love? How could I have known that you were made to the size of my body?” (Duras 1961, 25). Newsreels of the atomic bomb’s victims, tourist monuments, Peace Square, and a busload of Japanese tourists are intercut; place and history are personal and impersonal. She has seen the tourists’ view of Hiroshima and catastrophe; he insists that she has seen nothing, that she knows nothing. “No, you don’t have a memory” (p. 23). Knowledge is inextricable from memory, from lived experience, as is history. The film then precipitates the memory of her history, France’s cultural history, women’s his-
tory – her humiliation, her victimization for desire, loving a German soldier, in Nevers. It concludes with these remarks in the screenplay. “He looks at her, she at him, as she would look at the city. . . .” “Hi-ro-shi-ma . . . that’s your name.” He: “That’s my name. Yes. Your name is Nevers. Ne-vers in France” (p. 83). Cities, proper names and sites of enunciation, are lived places of memory, spaces for history, love, and desire – for women travelers as well as men.

In an uncannily direct way, the film documents de Certeau’s claim that “The concept-city is decaying. . . . The ministers of knowledge have always assumed that the whole universe was threatened by the very changes that affected their . . . positions. They transmute the misfortune of their theories into theories of misfortune . . . they transform their bewilderment into ‘catastrophes’ . . . they seek to enclose the people in the ‘panic’ of their discourses” (De Certeau 1984, 96). De Certeau suggests a way out of catastrophe; his Diogenes is Michel Foucault: “one can analyze the microbe-like, singular and plural practices which an urbanistic system was supposed to administer or suppress . . . follow[ing] the swarming activity of . . . everyday regulations and surreptitious creativities that are merely concealed by the . . . discourses of . . . organization” (De Certeau 1984, 96). For him, in the footsteps of Foucault, who was looking for a “theory of everyday practices, of lived space,” and like Benjamin strolling and remembering history in the present, the scholarly and creative act is that of passing by, the operation of walking, wandering – the art of the strayer and consummate stylist.

(A parenthetical detour leads me wildly astray – perhaps flying off to another country or essay. I question de Certeau’s tinge of nostalgia, as well as a politics of space which doesn’t include the twentieth-century determinant of time. Some of us might be driving rapidly in cities, on crowded freeways, or flying from airport to airport, vague and similar networks without borders or difference [a distillation of cultural differences into the mass, institutional international airport style of bland sameness depicted in Small World].

(Time dominates and narrates airports via the act of waiting and meeting, punctuated by checking out the “times” which are electronically and manually posted everywhere, now on banks of black-and-white TV monitors like a costly, precious video installation piece at the Whitney Museum of Art; the iconography is simple math, strings of disparate cities, repetitively arranged in two categories which divide up the world with little rec-
ognition or logic of space or specificity and which are difficult for the onlooker to discern: arrivals and departures. Airports, like corridors, are modern spaces of hasty passage [now adorned with high-tech neon or other mural “art” to distract our nonmovement on the flat escalators on which we do move forward but appear to be walking in place; we are being moved and wonder whether we should move, too, held in a simulation between active and passive], determined by regularity and forced delay, the disruption of scheduled time by mechanical error [for which the passengers are compensated] or the vagaries of the weather, nature [whose foibles and cost we must bear, financially]. Time’s extension and collapse into international, standardized time zones traverses night and day marked only by food – if it’s breakfast, it must be morning and time to chat. Passengers dash to distanced terminals, burdened by luggage and resentful of the long walks in architecture which has ignored the crowd, the pedestrian on the ground; the plane is the destination, the port a place of impermanence, of passage with microwave food stands of high-priced junk food, pockets of idle chatter but no conversation, the confusion of direction, the scrambling of destination. We are unable to tell arrivees from departees, beginnings from endings; the vectors are rhomboid, going off in all directions, like the airline maps in on-flight magazines; corporate terrain is not clear, not determined any longer by place [American used to be just that; Pan American flew to South America; Trans World did just what its name implied – there was a territory, a spatial plan; now there are cat’s cradle graphs which all overlap]; there is no narrative other than coming or going, either here or there, no public identity [and hence little privilege or class, with the exception of first-class and executive lounges], no nationality, only the mission, goal, and life-and-death desire of being “on time” but feeling timeless, contextless, unmoored but safe in this anonymity of suspended time; how many days have you “lost” by traveling, a true waste of time.

(Thus the commandeering of tourists by terrorists, the taking of travelers from their unseen anonymity into context and history, struggle and cultural difference – turning the national into the international which airports already are – randomly transforms passengers into bystanders, partisans, characters in a political drama, witnesses of confrontation and negotiation. Hostages embody the nightmare of waiting or being trapped in airports and airplanes, our fears of death in flight, as well as the risk of live theater. Yet unlike the touristic threat portrayed again and again by
Hitchcock, these are dramas of time more than space, hence suitable to TV special event coverage rather than cinema, which is quintessentially [but not solely] a medium of space. The horror is being trapped, together, for days rather than hours in the enclosed, claustropic plane [an inside, confined terror which on TV we can only imagine, but on film would become the scene which would be boring, like waiting for a plane is anxious boredom], or meeting someone at a plane which is delayed or does not arrive. Hostage dramas thus represent not the complexity of the political issues, but images of waiting and entrapment – the very experience or paradox of flight and temporality. The random move from bored obscurity to dangerous celebrity is a surrealist one: there is no reason for the selection of hostages, determined only by destination and chance. The terror is the missing cause-effect logic including names which television, a medium also obsessed with time rather than space, tries but inevitably fails to supply. Temporal disorientation amidst signs of efficient regularity and normality [sealed by tailored uniforms of employees who rarely freak out and who are not in a hurry – for them, the airport and the place are workplaces, a job, a very different experiential temporality] is the experience of time travel – jet lag reminds us of the real effects; the suspension of time becomes the substance of hostage coverage. Like passengers and their families, TV waits, counting time against death threats.

(Yet, commercial TV – so in chronotopic sync with airports – flowing forth from little sets mounted on individual chairs, with slots for quarters of time, is anomalous in those spaces; perhaps “watching” TV is too active for, or repetitive of, this enforced passivity of waiting [one of the best places, along with libraries, to watch people read is at the airport]; or airport time misregisters with TV time, one obsession cancelling out or magnifying the other. However, while commercial TV seems out of place, either old-fashioned or too complexly fragmented or too embarrassing to watch in public unlike legit reading no matter how pulpy, at the airport, TV is everywhere, monitoring time, surveying our bodies, x-raying our lingerie and birth-control devices, and recording our automobile license plates outside the parking structure. We literally watch time on banks of television monitors while discreetly mounted surveillance cameras monitor our view and every move, “security” measures which will protect us from terrorist acts; we might feel safe in the crowd of imagined obscurity, but we have appeared and been recorded on television, like all the other hostages yet not broadcast on the nightly news.)
In *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, the lovers walk away and toward each other, their wandering the enunciation of desire. De Certeau might assess that the museum, Peace Square, the newsreel footage, and the guided tourists have the status of the “proper meaning” of grammar — it is a produced fiction. Theirs (urbanists and architects) is the image of a “coherent and totalizing space.” Against this official rendering is the space and memory of the lovers: “the pedestrian walker” tells a “story jerry built . . . from common sayings, an allusive and fragmentary story whose gaps mesh with the social practices it symbolizes.” The fit of this chapter to the film is almost too perfect. As if analyzing the film, he writes: “To walk is to lack a place.” As if writing an epigram for the film: “Memory is a sort of anti-museum; it is not localizable” (De Certeau 1984, 100, 102–103, 105).

For de Certeau, like the woman from Nevers and perhaps Norbert Hanhold, travel “produce[s] ‘an exploration of the deserted places of my memory,’ the return to nearby exoticism by way of a detour through distant places and the ‘discovery’ of relics and legends. . . . Haunted places are the only ones people can live in.” Like Benjamin, travel involves a return to childhood — “to be other and to move toward the other” (De Certeau 1984, 106–108, 110). Unfortunately, for both writers, “walking” is moving away from the mother, a game of Fort da! De Certeau’s conclusion (the royal road named Lacan), like Benjamin’s “syphilis” and jabbing denigrations of his mother, was unexpected, a letdown. While women travelers have come at least some distance — just before the end, de Certeau (1984, 109) says that this experience will be different for “the female foetus . . . introduced into another relationship to space” — Barthes might be right: to write, for men, involves the body of “the Mother.” If one can live through this separation (Barthes could not), then one comes out siding with the father, like Benjamin. In de Certeau’s account, women are still unborn.

I want to step up the pace and fast forward into 1987 in which the dream woman of modernism’s city returns as a feminist monster — Norman Bates’s knife-wielding mother incarnate. In *Fatal Attraction*, Psyche or the sexual woman of the city, the working, successful, glamorous woman living in her dark loft-lair above hellish red fires in Soho, guarded by street-people Charons, is fatal. Set against this demon is the soft-focus wife-mother, a compliant, quiet woman of the countrified suburbs of New York.

Replaying the city/sex/country/family dichotomy (for working wom-
en, an ominous containment) *Baby Boom* (predicated on an unabashed biological "maternal instinct") takes the successful executive working woman out of the city of high-tec condo dec into the country and motherhood of overstuffed chintz and early American farm home, proving that Tammy or Loretta or Dolly is right: you can’t take the country out of the girl. While motherhood appears to be the issue, fatherhood is the real trajectory of the film; the little girl is literally handed over to the country vet, Sam Shephard, the city writer of transient motels, in the film to prove the old adage that women want to be royally screwed but don’t know it. The country becomes the place of free laissez-faire capitalism and all-night rather than twenty-second sex. Like *Fatal Attraction*, the country is reserved for nuclear families, the proper place to raise adorable little girls – taken away from the goals and possibilities of cities and jobs at an early age.

Women’s success and accomplishments in the proverbial city provoke gross, hysterical fear – witness the comic overkill of the ending of *Fatal Attraction*. The films could be read as economic signposts – of recession, a declining job market; covered over by fear of AIDS arguments and images of the “successful” female executive, both films are reminiscent of post-World War II. The massive ego involved in *Fatal Attraction*’s premise that this city woman would obsessively desire this boring man is, to me, unimaginable. The real boom is in the rediscovery of sweet mothers and little daughters; this scenario is replayed in *Slam Dancing*; one night of sex with a seductive blonde, like *Fatal Attraction*, has necessitated a nightmare of male masochism; after the cartoonist’s grueling ordeal, the family is restored. (The truly interesting story buried in this film is the surrounding sex scandal and the lesbian relationship of Bobbie Nye and the blonde.)

But there is a happier ending to my meanderings – memories of films that escape the mastery of the city and the romanticism of the country. In Chantal Akerman’s *Jeanne Dielman*, the protagonist, the mature, motherly but glamorous prostitute of modernism’s dreams, remains within the dailiness of her home, quietly servicing her clients and performing routine chores – a feminist tour de force of formalism. This is a story seen from the point of view of Zobeide’s imaginary woman. This film is about her existence in the city and her vengeance on her entrapment. While the film’s style is modernist, its conclusion is a shocker; she refuses to be passive victim and murders a client. Women’s rage is very real.

In Sally Potter’s *The Gold Diggers*, Celeste and Ruby, chased through
the labyrinthian streets by an anonymous gang of business-suited men, or Keystone terrorists/accountants, conquer the streets and outwit their pursuers, rescued by women, and join together in the end. Potter has picked up where Ariadne left off: “The identificatory thread – I think of Ariadne and the Labyrinth – is not along the lines of the human being providing a model... but rather an identification with... arguments and ideas... an intellectual identification” (Cook 1984, 20). Like Delphine Seyrig in Jeanne Dielman, Julie Christie has played the idealized woman as the repository of male desire. Here, like Seyrig, she turns the tables. Her Ariadne is a black woman who has no interest whatever in various incarnations of Theseus.

Yvonne Rainer’s The Man Who Envied Women, a great subtitle which summarizes this argument, is punctuated by energetic scenes grabbed from New York streets. After telescopic, kaleidoscopic shots of crowds, the images focus on women walking and talking. These women are not being pursued, nor are they trailing behind. They are walking confidently, with assertiveness and style, together. Closer shots center on various pairs of women; we hear their words, the sound, like the image, coming into clear and comic focus. As they stride with sure awareness, they drop one-liners, make puns. They are telling jokes, sometimes about men, and they are laughing. This film is not a dream. This film is my experience.

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Notes and References

1. The tears and relief at the film’s conclusion celebrate the restitution of the patriarch, George Bailey, to his central role in the family and the town. Stewart towers over the other characters and is given center-frame and intercut close-ups; citizens, all very much shorter, observed from Stewart’s point of view, like suppliants, pay tribute to him. It is the hero’s obsessive need for acclaim and verbal recognition that marks so many of Capra’s male-identity-crisis films.

2. Barthes’s “meditation” on mother culminates in Camera Lucida.

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Attitudes Toward Tokyo On Film

DONALD RICHIE

The metropolis of Tokyo was like an ocean. There were a limitless number of villages. These villages and their people all appear identical. So no matter how far you walk you seem to remain where you started, going nowhere at all. And wherever you are in Tokyo you lose your way.

KOBO ABE (Shinda musume ga utatta, 1954)

The city on film has a long history, as do changing attitudes toward it. This is as true for Tokyo on film as it is for New York, London, or Paris. At the same time, however, national attitudes are usually different from each other. Hence, this paper will consider Japanese attitudes in comparison with those of the West.

Originally, of course, in all countries, it was the city which was the primary subject of the infant cinema. The Lumière views of Paris and those of anonymous movie cameramen of Tokyo’s Shimbashi are identical. The city is the spectacle and consequently the cityscape is shown rather than the countryside.

And shown, initially, only to city dwellers. The earliest theaters were in the city, and it was only later that towns and villages got theirs. People went to the little theater next to the big train station to see a short film about a train pulling into the station.

The theme of the city was so taken for granted in this very early cinema that no attitude at all toward the subject is to be discerned. The city was there to be photographed and looked at – like a forest fire or a naval battle.

Once movies started being shown in the provincial capitals, and then in smaller towns and villages, however, an attitude evolved. The city became visible as a theme.

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In the West, the earliest reading of the city as theme saw it as a place of promise, where one went to make one’s fortune. In early story-films, predominantly in the United States but in Europe as well, the city was seen as home of wealth and consequently culture. The manners of the country were seen as provincial, and loutishness became a favorite comic theme. At the conclusions of such pictures it was common to see the bucolic young couple setting off for the city all smiles at the prospect. Often indeed they set off walking, since this made a better pictorial effect.

Though Japanese cinema early imitated the American, this reading of the city as promise had no place in the early Japanese story-films. The city was often enough shown, but a division between city and country was not indicated – though it later would be.

The reason, perhaps, was that Japan already had an attitude so persuasive that such dichotomies between city and country, and the attaching of qualities to both, were understandably late in beginning. This was (and is) the Japanese insistence upon the primacy of the *urusato*, the hometown.

In Japan a mystique is given this location which is much stronger and more persuasive than anything an American or German or Italian might feel about the town in which he happened to have been born. In the West such regard (and such resultant films) are usually dismissed as sentimental.

Not in Japan. The early cinema was filled with celebrations of life in the *urusato* and a consequent anguish experienced when separated from it. This was the initial reading of the city theme in Japanese cinema and was so for a time to remain. One might mention two films by Kenji Mizoguchi actually named *Furusato*. The latter (1929) was a talkie, starred the tenor Yoshie Fujiwara, and featured a song about these singular small-town virtues.

This theme continues even now. Certainly one of the reasons for the success of Yoji Yamada’s *Tora-san* series is that the lovable hick after all sorts of big-city adventures always returns to his hometown, little Shiba-mata. This is pictured as a place that may have had some existence in the 1960s when the series began but that is in the late 1980s pure film set. Always romantic, the *Tora-san* series has now become historical fiction.

Nonetheless, many Japanese still subscribe to the myth of hometown where everything was good, where people were nice, where things were, somehow, much better than elsewhere.

Elsewhere was early defined in Japan. It was the city. Originally it was
not that the city was bad, it was simply that it was urban and consequently small-town virtues could not exist in it. That these films were made during a time when the millions were first beginning to pour from the furusato into the metropolis indicates nothing—except, of course, that this hometown longing is something that the Japanese exhibit more often and more readily than do other peoples.

The idyllic qualities of small-town life are seen in the West mainly as reflections of their lack in the big cities. After the initial view of the city as promise came the opposite, though complementary, view of the city as place of betrayal. The happy couple had walked into a scene of menace.

In many films the city was regarded with the most grave suspicions. Lang's Metropolis (1926), Murnau's Sunrise (1927), and Vidor's The Crowd (1928), among many other films, looked askance at the big city. It was in popular cinema the home of the gold digger and the city slicker. Innocent folks from the country (no longer seen as laughable bumpkins) were here fleeced and sent back to where they came from sadder but wiser.

Just as Japan had no reason to glamorize the city (since it was glamorizing the furusato), it had no reason for denigrating the city. Nonetheless, damnation makes for better drama than celebration and—following the American example—the city was shortly being seen as a place of trauma.

After 1929 Mizoguchi dropped the furusato theme and was making films about the disappointing city. Both Tokyo March (Tokyō koshinkyoku) and Metropolitan Symphony (Tokai kokyogaku) were about the lives of proletarian families of rural origin unable to make a living in the heartless capital. By the following year such films as Kiyohiko Ushihara's The Great Metropolis: Chapter on Labor (Daitokai rōdōhen) had deepened and widened accusations of coldness and lack of fellow feeling.

Later, in the tradition of Bowery-based or Limehouse-set Western films, Japanese were even discovering “dangerous” sections in Tokyo itself, always the safest of cities. One such was the later but typical Lights of Asakusa (Asakusa no hi), directed by Yasujiro Shimazu in 1937. Here the old section of Tokyo is seen as home of the “criminal.”

In the same year, Tomu Uchida made The Naked Town (Hadaka no machi), in which the city conspires to beat down a good man. He acts as guarantor to a bad friend, then must go to the moneylender, and from then on tumbles to the depths. At one point, even his cat (city bred, no doubt) refuses the milk he went to some lengths to obtain.

In the better Japanese films about cities the theme is not so much what
the city is as what it isn’t. In Ozu’s The Only Son (Hitori musuko), a 1936 picture, the mother works hard so that her child can go to Tokyo and make something of himself. She is later invited to visit. The stay is not a happy occasion. Both he and his wife make only just enough money—they are cut off from communal life. This is not claimed as the fault of the city, but there is nevertheless the implication that the city is less caring, indeed less human than the town from which he came. It is not the fault of the city, but nonetheless the city is seen as no proper place to live.

This attitude is one often seen in the films of Ozu. Its major statement is in the 1953 Tokyo Story (Tokyō monogatari), where the city is contrasted with the town (Onomichi, a port on the Inland Sea) and found wanting. There is the suggestion that the children’s selfishness might have something to do with their living in a metropolis. After all, the story of the consequences of this coldness is called Tokyo Story.

In Ozu’s later statement on big-city life, the 1956 Early Spring (Sōshun), the young couple is seen at the end going off to live in the country (he has been transferred), and this constitutes an indication that their marriage may now be saved, since it will no longer be subjected to urban stresses.

Just what these consist of is seen in the opening sequence of the film, which shows people moving from the distant suburbs to their work in the city. At first there are only one or two persons catching their trains at rural stations. Soon, however, these numbers grow, the various trains grow crowded, then packed. When the passengers are disgorged at Tokyo Station they are anonymous, faceless—an impression that Ozu intensifies by shooting the final scenes of this opening sequence from high up, reducing the workbound people to the size—and status—of insects.

The people, it will be noted, were human enough when they left the suburbs. This is because in Tokyo—as in London and New York—these are viewed as a kind of buffer zone between the hometown and the city. Ozu seems to have found them this—he lived his adult life in the suburbs of Kamakura. And even now a majority of Tokyo workers are happy to commute enormous distances daily so that they can have a bit of the country, a sort of furusato.

Heinosuke Gosho’s 1931 The Neighbor’s Wife and Mine (Madamu to nyōbu), Japan’s first talkie, is about the suburbs. A philandering husband contemplates adventures with the vamp next door, something that would not have been allowed in the hometown and would have been thought much too dangerous in the big city. In Ozu’s 1932 I Was Born, But...
(Umareta wa mita keredo) the trouble in the office worker’s new home in the suburbs is caused by conditions in his office in Tokyo. In its 1958 “remake,” Good Morning (Ohayō), we are again in the safe suburbs, and the problem is that big-city presence, TV.

Later films about the suburbs, however, seem to have indicated that (on film at any rate) the city infects as it grows. The 1957 Candle in the Wind (Fūzen no tomoshibi) of Keisuke Kinoshita shows the suburbs as home of avarice and violence. In Susumu Hani’s 1963 She and He (Kanojo to kare) the suburbs are seen as mere anteroom to the city, a place almost as cold and impersonal as the metropolis itself is thought to be.

Still, Japan has never had a genre of suburban films as devastatingly detailed as those of the American Peyton Place variety. Perhaps one of the reasons for this was that city-as-villain was never as strong a theme as it was in the United States – ending there with the full horror of Soylent Green, Escape from New York, and Blade Runner.

In Japan it was not city-as-villain so much as it was life-as-villain, and life can be awful just anywhere, even in the furusato. And it is indicative that Japan almost alone has a rehabilitating city-film genre, one that attempts to find hometown-like qualities in the heart of the city itself.

Kurosawa’s 1947 One Wonderful Sunday (Subarashiki nichiyōbi), for example, is about a poor young couple in Tokyo who one Sunday construct an urban furusato for themselves. Gosho’s 1953 From Where Chimneys Are Seen (Entotsu o mieru basho), is about a real furusato right in the heart of the city, as is, in a way, Kurosawa’s Drunken Angel (Yoidore tenshi). This 1948 film even has its small-town figures: the doctor, the young gangster, the tubercular schoolgirl, and so on.

One of the reasons that such a genre is possible is that Tokyo is actually in its construction more a collection of small towns, or neighborhoods, than it is big, hard-core city. It is not centralized, there is no good and bad side of the tracks, no zoning, no real slums. Rather, it is a series of villages, each with its identical parts – supermarket, beauty parlor, sushi shop, and so forth. Consequently Tokyo is, indeed, not a cold or heartless city at all, at least by comparison with, let us say, Paris. Yet, big-cityitis threatens.

Hence a theme often seen in Japan’s city films is the change from warm, accepting city unit into cold, aloof big city proper. In Kurosawa’s 1952 Ikiru it is the city government itself which is the villain. The dying Kanji Watanabe wants to make a warm, living, small-townlike children’s park, a
furusato for the neighborhood children, and eventually he succeeds in doing so.

In Yasuki Chiba’s 1957 Downtown (Shitamachi) the poor widow finds a warm hometown-like friend in the truck driver, but it is the cruel city that kills him. In Mikio Naruse’s 1960 Flowing (Nagareru), the little town of the geisha in the middle of modern Tokyo is going to be destroyed after the film is over – yet one more living unity rendered lifeless.

It is not so much that the city is bad. Rather, the danger is always that the little-towns of which the city is made will be crushed to death, exterminated by this tremendous accumulation of people.

In the West, of course, the city is bad because it really is. Most American cities and many in Europe are truly dangerous. A film like The French Connection is only showing it as it happens to be. Thus when cities in the West get destroyed it is usually because they deserve it.

Tokyo has been destroyed on film any number of times, but never, I believe, because it deserved to be. Usually, Tokyo seems chosen for earthquake or fire or monster-attack simply because this is a place where the most people can be gratifyingly gotten rid of. This highly pragmatic attitude does have, however, further dimensions.

From Godzilla (Gojira, 1954) on, the attacker is, whatever else, uniquely Japanese. Though this particular monster was awakened by the 1953 U.S. atom bomb tests at Bikini, he is nonetheless Japanese in that he was sleeping in his own furusato in Tokyo Bay (to where he in true Japanese fashion returns at the end of the picture). Though he may destroy other cities – Osaka and Fukuoka in later films – he has never touched Kyoto, Japan’s official furusato. And in his latest (1984) appearance it is no longer the historical downtown of Tokyo that he pulverizes, but the new skyscrapers in Shinjuku. Godzilla has become conservative, which is very Japanese of him.

Even so, the civic destruction wrought by monsters, by alien invasions, by mysterious clouds, by earthquakes, and by conflagrations (all of them disasters to which Tokyo on film has been treated) are never occasioned by anything specific about Tokyo itself. Rather, in a country that is always being shaken by earth tremors and visited by typhoons, full disaster seems a part of the climate and is not used – as it is in the West – to make moral observations.

It is interesting that when Westerners use Tokyo in their films they bring along their moral conceptions. Samuel Fuller in his 1955 House of Bamboo
found Tokyo's innocent Asakusa to be a home of oriental evil. Chris Marker, on the other hand, in films such as *Le Mystère Koumiko* and *Sans Soleil*, finds Tokyo filled with a charm and a beauty that are purely Parisian. Also, Tokyo's size, relentless modernity, and resolute artificially made it the model for the Los Angeles of the future in *Blade Runner*. However, Ridley Scott made all of this malign — his own contribution. Actually, modern Tokyo is as benign as the Disneyland it has now come to resemble.

One further singularity about Tokyo on film might be noted in this brief listing of attitudes. This is that, unlike all other major cities, Tokyo is itself very rarely seen in the films, that is, location-work in Tokyo is very rare. If one sees a crew on the street, one may be fairly certain they are making something for TV.

Among the reasons might be that Tokyo itself, as many have noticed, looks just like a film set. The Tokyo street photographed in a film looks somewhat unreal. More real looking were those sections of Tokyo — “the Ginza,” “a Shinjuku alley,” “an apartment house” — that one used to find in the open sets of the major motion picture studios.

Indeed, the few times that Tokyo has actually been used as setting, Summu Hani's *The Inferno of First Love* (*Hatsukoi jigokuhen*, 1968) and Nagisa Oshima's *The Man Who Left His Will On Film* (*Tokyo sensō senso hiwa*, 1970) as well as portions of his *Diary of a Shinjuku Thief* (*Shinjuku dorobō Nikki*, 1969), the theme has been the artificiality of modern life and the anonymity of Tokyo itself.

Another reason for Tokyo itself so rarely appearing in films about Tokyo is that reality (at least in Japan) is so much better contrived and controlled on the sound stage. Kurosawa's wonderfully detailed and mercilessly hot Tokyo in *A Record of a Living Being* (*Ikimono no kiroku*, 1955) is all studio set. So are the ruins of Tokyo in *The Bad Sleep Well* (*Warui yatsu bodo yoku nemuru*, 1960).

All of Ozu's beautiful little Tokyo streets, all of the intimate bars, all of the offices and sitting rooms and kitchens — these are movie sets. Actually Tokyo is sometimes to be seen between them, however. When Noriko takes the old couple on a tour of Tokyo in *Tokyo Story*, it is the real Tokyo we see; when father and daughter take the suburban train in *Late Spring* (*Banshun*, 1949) from Kamakura to Tokyo, it is the actual progression of that journey which we see in the picture.

Attitudes toward Tokyo on film remain constant, but as the city prolif-
erates, as land grows daily more expensive, as the suburbs press further out, there are new numbers of films that continue to question urban life—films such as Shinji Somai’s *Luminous Woman* (*Hikari onna*, 1987), which has a noble savage from Hokkaido coming to rescue the Tokyo-stranded heroine. At the end he carries her back to an idyllic *furusato* where the rabbits and the foxes play happily in the grassy lawns of the couple’s house in the country. And, of course, Tora-san continues to be as popular as he ever was.

The attitude toward Tokyo as seen in the film is one much more benign than are the various attitudes shown by other countries toward other world capitals, but at the same time, the evidence is that of disapproval. Though there is no reason for a reading of city-as-hell, there also exists no reading of Tokyo as city-as-heaven, which is odd when one considers that it is the *furusato* for millions.

Donald Richie, former curator of film at The Museum of Modern Art in New York, is widely known for his works on the Japanese film. He also writes of many other facets of the country, however. His most recent work is *Different People: Pictures of Some Japanese* (Kodansha International).
Chinese Urban Cinema:
Hyper-realism Versus Absurdism

CHRIS BERRY

Until recent years, the cinema of the People's Republic of China was marked by an amazing uniformity of style equal to that of the classic Hollywood cinema in history and ubiquity. With the emergence of two younger, post "cultural revolution" generations of filmmakers, all that has changed. Distinctive styles have become associated with individual directors, cameramen, and genres. In the case of urban subject matter, two directors have marked themselves out. One is Zhang Liang, from Pearl River Film Studio. His enormously successful films have tended to what, in the Chinese context, might be termed a sort of hyper-realism. The other is Huang Jianxin, from China's most innovative studio, Xi'an. Huang's expressionistic films have been spoken of as "absurdist" in China. Although somewhat less successful at the box office than Zhang Liang's films, their influence in the film industry itself has been enormous and many urban films now bear their mark.

The traditional cinematic style against which Zhang Liang, Huang Jianxin, and the majority of young and middle-aged Chinese directors are trying to distinguish their works is the Chinese variant of socialist realism. It is a didactic fusion of classic Hollywood filmmaking and Soviet Stalinist style. I have already analyzed some of the cinematic characteristics of this style (Berry 1985). Editing codes are similar to Hollywood's, but their relation to the representational level is different. Two shots are dominant, with harmony and consensus signified by maintaining groups of characters or couples within the same frame. Shot reverse-shot tends to signify the collapse of harmony.

This cinematic system meshes well with narrative structures in which harmony and disharmony are expressed as separation and reunion. This is the dominant narrative pattern in classic mainland Chinese cinema,
whether the order of the day has been class struggle or “unity and stability” as now.¹

On the representational level, the “realism” of the classic Chinese cinema aims for typicality rather than naturalism. As an interpretation of the didactic demands of the Yan’an Forum cultural policy that insists art is in the service of politics, characters tend to minimal internal contradiction.² It is clear whom the audience should learn from and who is the enemy. Other characteristics follow Hollywood. Interiors and many exteriors are studio sets. Lighting is full, with speaking characters centered in the frame and positioned so that their faces are clearly visible to the audience. Costumes and sets themselves are usually a cleaned-up, in-style version of what members of the audience might like to recognize as their own lives.

The realism of Zhang Liang’s *Yamaha Fish Stall*, made for Pearl River Studio in 1984, and *Juvenile Delinquents*, made for Shenzhen Film Corporation in 1985, are strikingly different from traditional socialist realism.

As the first of the two films, *Yamaha Fish Stall* had a particularly strong impact. The plot traces the efforts of a young Cantonese man to establish a privately run fish stall with the help of two friends. The name derives from the Yamaha motorcycle he uses to transport live fish back from the docks. Just to get the business going, the three young friends have to pay off petty officials and people with connections. These bad experiences encourage them to move beyond fair competition whenever they run into difficulties. Eventually this gets them into trouble. For example, when they are unable to sell their stock one day, they decide to turn the dead fish into fish balls. However, to stretch them out further, they make the fish balls with enormous quantities of flour. In no time at all, they are surrounded by a mob of angry customers. However, through these experiences they come to understand that cooperation with other private businessmen and honesty help best to cushion against the insecurity of an independent life outside the state system.

The three main characters of *Yamaha Fish Stall* are very far indeed from traditional Chinese socialist realism. Private peddlers are hardly typical “cultural revolution” heroes, nor are they even the modern-day equivalent of the politically upright brigade leaders and barefoot doctors who populated these films. (This role has fallen to efficiency- and profit-minded state enterprise managers in the “reform” genre.) In fact, private businessmen have a rather unsavory reputation in China today, and the antics of the characters in the movie further confirm an ambiguity of characteriza-
tion that marks this realism out as something different. The naturalistic effect of these characters is enhanced further by the casting of people who were unknowns or even amateurs at the time in the main roles.

At least as important as the characterization and casting are the settings. Probably 70 or 80 percent of the film takes place in the open air: in the markets, on the streets, at the docks, and even on a floating restaurant. Many of the interiors are commercial rather than domestic. These include teahouses, coffee shops, dance halls, and even a barber shop. The masses of people milling around in the background of all these scenes and the dense traffic in the street scenes help to signify not only location shooting but also settings that are unorganized, unrehearsed, and thus somehow more “real” than the studio sets of socialist realism. Even the clutter and dilapidation of the domestic interiors add to this effect. Zhang Liang is careful to avoid “impossible” camera positions in these scenes, and so it becomes unclear whether these are carefully naturalized studio sets or locations.

Additional techniques add to and even draw attention to the “realism” of these settings. The techniques signify “realism” by virtue of their difference from traditional socialist realist techniques, as does the use of cluttered locations as opposed to organized studio sets itself. Artificial lighting, if used, is low-key and motivated. Main characters are often partly in shadow. For example, when the rival woman stallholder speaks the first dialogue in the film, she is centered and facing the camera, but she is in the shade of the stall itself while the backs of the people between her and the camera are brightly lit, at least apparently by sunlight.

The scenes in large public places also contain cutaway shots that are totally unmotivated by the plot. For example, in the teahouse, when the would-be young stallholders are treating a local big-wig to dim sum in an attempt to get a trading license, there are shots of old men eating their snacks and reading their newspapers, apparently unaware that they are being observed by the camera. When the hero makes his first fish-buying trip to the docks, again there are cutaways to trading and unloading scenes on the docks. Apart from building “atmosphere,” these shots function to draw attention to the realism of the film. It is for these attention-seeking qualities that I would like to refer to Zhang Liang’s comparatively naturalistic realism as a sort of hyper-realistim.

*Juvenile Delinquents* continues many of the tendencies of *Yamaha Fish Stall*. As the title suggests, it examines the world of young criminals. A
middle-aged woman reporter decides to make an extended visit to a reform school to research an article she intends to write. The longer she stays at the school, the more involved she becomes with certain cases, working with warders in their efforts to reform the young criminals. As time goes by, she neglects her own son and comes home only to find the police hauling him off.

I cannot claim that *Juvenile Delinquents* uses its settings to signify realism in the same way as *Yamaha Fish Stall* does. Most of the action takes place in a reformatory. This is an interior location not much different from those used in traditional films. It lacks the power to signify a different realism in the way the crowded streets of Guangzhou do. Furthermore, not many of us are familiar enough with such a place to judge the mimetic qualities of the institution and studio sets used in the film.

Characterization is the mainstay of realism in this film. Underage law-breakers are even further from the traditional socialist realist hero than private peddlers. The journalist’s character seems a cipher at first and then an embodiment of maternal virtues in her growing concern for the inmates. However, even she is made highly ambiguous by the final arrest of her son, which throws into question her responsibility as a parent. This is further underlined by the fact that the delinquency of various inmates has been traced back to poor upbringing in the course of the film.

The attention-grabbing, hyper-real aspect of *Juvenile Delinquents* lies not in the text itself, but in the casting. As advance publicity made sure every filmgoer in China knew, all the inmates in the movie were played by real juvenile delinquents. These lucky individuals were wheeled out for every premiere of the film and given early parole or reduced sentences in reward for good behavior during the shooting. When they were later successively reported to have been arrested for committing crimes, this must have only added further sensationalistic evidence of the new “realism” of this film. These weren’t “typical” juvenile delinquents; they were real juvenile delinquents.

Zhang Liang’s hyper-realism is one of a number of new realist directions in Chinese cinema that have defined themselves by their difference from traditional socialist realism. It is as part of this broad tendency that his films must be understood. To give a precise account of the different critical debates and films that have informed and composed this tendency would probably take a book-length study. However, I would like to point to one or two elements here.
First, why were new forms of realism necessary at all? The reasons for this lie in the fall of the "Gang of Four" and the end of the "cultural revolution" period in 1976. With this event, all the films associated with the period 1966 to 1976 immediately fell into disrepute. However, the Yanan policy on culture continued to be applauded. Other policies and slogans that had been espoused during the "cultural revolution" continued to be cited with approval until at least 1979. For example, a volume detailing the crimes of the "Gang of Four" in the film industry still speaks approvingly of "the direction of art serving the workers, peasants and soldiers" in 1978 (Zheng and Ding 1978). (This triumvirate has since become a joke in the recent film Ormosia Inn, where it is revealed that the old name of the inn was "Worker-Peasant-Soldier Inn," to the guffaws of all the Chinese audiences I have seen it with.) Other slogans and policies current during the "cultural revolution" still continue to this day. The date of Mao's "Talks at the Yan'an Forum" is commemorated every year, and a popular film award called The Hundred Flowers Award, after the cultural policy of the same name, is awarded almost every year. "Realism" is still upheld regularly in critical articles everywhere.

This situation has presented the Chinese film world with an interesting problem. On the one hand, they are to repudiate "cultural revolution" films totally. On the other hand, they must uphold the policies and slogans such as the Yan'an Forum, the Hundred Flowers policy, and "realism," in the name of which these very films and indeed all other films produced since 1949 were made. Perhaps not surprisingly, most of the pronouncements about the "cultural revolution" period made immediately after 1976 detailed plenty of malpractices and crimes, but spent little time analyzing what was actually wrong with the films themselves. However, what little space was devoted to the films themselves attacked them for a lack of authenticity (Zheng and Ding 1978). A cultural policy particularly associated with the "Gang of Four" led this attack to be concentrated on characterization. This was the "Theory of the Three Prominences," which required that greatest prominence in a work of art be given to the purest, most typical, and most heroic characters. At the same time as this policy was being singled out for attack, famous films from the early 1960s which featured more ambiguous "middle characters," such as Early Spring in February, were being rereleased. Articles also appeared regularly in the professional press discussing the problem of remaining "gangness" in characterization and how to make characters more complex, credible, and "realistic."
However, a batch of urban films made by teachers at the Beijing Film Academy and released in 1980 and 1981 suggests that the return to middle characters alone did not prove enough to establish a realism profoundly different from that of the "cultural revolution." The revival of films from the early 1960s indicates that because these films were condemned in the "cultural revolution" it was thought that they had to be very different from those of the "cultural revolution." Yet I would suggest that different though they might be, the two sets of movies are variations on the same dominant socialist realist tradition. The basic characteristics described at the beginning of this article can be found in both groups. However, my interpretation here of the drive necessitating the emergence of further new realist directions after 1980 must remain unsupported, if for no other reason because political considerations preclude anyone in the People's Republic agreeing to it for attribution.

The urban films that appeared in 1980 and 1981 were The Drive to Win and Neighbors. The former was made by the woman film theorist and director Zhang Nuanxin. The latter was directed by the current head of the Beijing Film Academy Directing Department, Zheng Dongtian, and Xu Guanrong. Neighbors was followed up by a very similar film called Sunset Street, directed by Wang Haowei.

All three films make moves in the same naturalistic directions that Zhang Liang's films take up later. The Drive to Win follows the ups and downs of a female basketball player's career and personal life. Set in crowded apartment blocks and at sports events, it features understated lighting and occasional use of a hand-held camera. Unlike the carefully organized drama of traditional socialist realist films, The Drive to Win is designed to appear more spontaneous. Characters move in and out of frame while they talk, and their dialogue sometimes overlaps. Both Neighbors and Sunset Street are slice-of-life movies. One is set in a city apartment block. The other is set in a small alley. Both accommodations are due for demolition, and the inhabitants' everyday dramas are further complicated by the prospect of the move. They feature crowded locations and multiple plots with complex characters who are far from the typical heroes of the past.

These films were the last major burst of realist innovation before Zhang Liang's films first appeared. What remains to be explained is why both Zhang Liang's films and these earlier films are urban in setting. Why have cities been particularly associated with realist innovation over the last decade? I think the key to understanding this lies in realizing that these new
realist directions are distinguished by their difference from traditional socialist realism. Only shooting on city streets provides the crowds, the play of shadow and light, and the speeding traffic in the background that could never even be approximated in the studio settings of the past.

In fact, more and more rural films have also been shot on location over the past ten years. However, the countryside simply doesn’t provide scenes that are so radically different from what can be simulated in a studio, and so these films cannot signify their difference so well as urban ones do. Peasants sitting around and talking in their houses can look much the same as actors sitting around in a studio set. The slower pace of life doesn’t make overlapping dialogue and bustling movement so likely, either. Only in one area have rural films been marked out for realist innovations of their own. This is in the use of synch-sound as opposed to post-dubbing, a practice first introduced in a major way in the award-winning countryside film *In the Wild Mountains* in 1985. However, the countryside was a more suitable location for this innovation precisely because it lacked the complex and difficult hubbub of the city. Even though over 90 percent of *In the Wild Mountains* was filmed with synch-sound on location, because the background noise was limited and the dialogue measured, the results are difficult to distinguish from a more traditional, post-dubbed studio effort. Similarly, many rural films feature more complex, naturalistic characterization than the typical heroes of the past. The main character in Wu Tianming’s film *Life*, made in 1984, is a good example. He pulls strings and dumps his girlfriend, but all for reasons anyone could sympathize with. However, without the other new realist elements made possible by the urban settings in Zhang Liang’s films, *Life* and other rural films do not stand out as a new realism in the same way as Zhang Liang’s urban hyper-realism.

Huang Jianxin’s urban films make an even more radical break from traditional socialist realist filmmaking than Zhang Liang’s, and they move in completely the opposite direction. Where *Yamaha Fish Stall* and *Juvenile Delinquents* move toward a more naturalistic realism, *Black Cannon Incident* and *Dislocation*, made in 1985 and 1986, respectively, move away from realism altogether. In China, they have been spoken of as “absurdist” because of their plots, but the overall style of the films could also be said to be “expressionistic.”

*Black Cannon Incident* gets its name from a Chinese chess piece called a “black cannon.” Engineer Zhao Shuxin loses his black cannon on a busi-
ness trip. When he cables back in an effort to retrieve it, the farcical or "absurd" plot line begins. A telegram operator suspects a secret code. Contacted by the police, the elderly woman Party vice-secretary at his company begins to suspect him of engaging in industrial espionage with a German engineer who had come to China to help install some imported equipment. When the German returns, Zhao is given various excuses and not allowed to work with him again. The German is furious because his new translator lacks technical vocabulary. Various misunderstandings ensue. By the time Zhao is cleared, the German has already left. Due to a translation error made during Zhao's absence, an industrial breakdown costing the company a large sum of money occurs.

The farcical or absurd character of this plot, where the logic of a small misunderstanding is allowed to snowball to a devastating conclusion, is clear enough. But what was even more remarkable than this already revealing comedy was the expressionism of the film. Noticeably, however, the expressionistic elements do not include characterization. Precisely because of this, Black Cannon Incident can be said to be almost a reversal of the Chinese socialist realist filmmaking tradition. The latter aimed at some level of mimesis in settings, costumes, and so forth, but veered furthest away from this in its use of "typical" characters which lacked the contradictions perceived to exist in real-life people, especially during the "cultural revolution" period. In Black Cannon Incident, on the other hand, the settings, costumes, and use of color are very evidently not mimetically motivated, but the characters are. They are all too full of contradiction. No one appears as a pure expression of a certain moral line, or as a perfect hero, or as a villain. Even lovable Zhao Shuxin, the engineer who loses the chess piece, is clearly a fool not to stand up for himself or even realize he is under investigation. As for the Party vice-secretary, instinctively xenophobic as she is, her behavior is clearly the product of her past training. It is made clear that she is acting out of a concern for what she believes Zhao's best interests to be when she keeps him away from the German; she doesn't want him to get into any more trouble than he is in already.

The expressionistic elements in Black Cannon Incident combine to give the film a decisively modern look. This look is modern in a way completely new to Chinese film. The urban setting does not simply help signify modernity. It is part and parcel of the qualities that compose the modernity signified in the film. Black Cannon Incident is set in an unspecified
city that does not correspond to any specific city outside the movie itself. For the first time ever in a Chinese film, we get a city with no views of old alleyways or old buildings. The only exception to this is a scene when Zhao Shuxin visits a Christian church. Since his parents were Christians, we can interpret this as a return to his past, a moment of review, reflection, and escape from the modern world. Significantly, this is also the only moment in the film in which any significant stretch of green appears: a park outside the church. Apart from this scene, the city appears as a new town composed of modern hotels, high-tech factories, model housing estates, a new airport, and so forth. This is a city of the present, a city without a history.

However, the modern urban world of *Black Cannon Incident* is not the paradise of modernity predicted in traditional socialist realist films from the boy meets tractor dramas of the 1950s to today’s “getting rich is glorious” celebrations of rural prosperity. Certainly there is gleaming machinery everywhere. But these machines are usually massive, noisy pieces of equipment that dwarf human beings and drown out their conversations. For example, there is the earthmover that roars past the Party vice-secretary and the plant manager when they are discussing Zhao Shuxin’s case and envelops them in a cloud of dust.

The use of colors, settings, and camera work add to the overwhelming aspect of modernity. Outside neutral earth tones and so forth, the predominant colors are red, white, and black. Gleaming red Japanese taxis transport people in white shirts and black business suits around town. On the whole, I do not think that specific, symbolic meaning is consistently attached to these colors. Red does sometimes figure with conflict and anger. The coffee bar where Zhao Shuxin and his German counterpart have a major fight is decorated totally in bright red plastic. Even the wall behind the stands at the football match which degenerates into a punch-up is being painted red when the scene opens. But for the most part, these colors simply signify an aggressive starkness that like the machines overwhelms the individuals set against them. This is most vividly illustrated in the repeated Party committee meeting scenes. Men and women dressed in black and white file in and sit around a long white table in a white room with white curtains. Dominating the entire scene is an enormous wall clock in a modern design. Placed above the head of the table, its hands and numerals are made of large chunks of black plastic. As decision after decision cannot be made, time ticks visibly by. The camera maintains a
relentlessly fixed confrontational position through much of these meet­
ings, recording the scene from a point perpendicular to the clock and the
head of the table. This confrontational positioning and lack of movement
are often found throughout the film and are as expressive as the colors and
the settings themselves. Part of this modernity, then, is an anomie similar
to that expressed in so much Western modern art produced in the indus­
trialized and urbanized societies of this century.

As the camera maintains a fixed position and the figures don’t move
much in the committee meeting scenes, it is not surprising that these styl­
ized, almost-tableau shots take on the qualities of modern art. And indeed
modern art, with its connotations of sophistication and advancement, is
also one of the qualities of the modern sensibility produced in Black Can­
non Incident. The film is punctuated by montages of very abstract images
with no direct plot motivation, such as composites of an orange sun set­
ting in a red sky over a black silhouette of an industrial plant. These pro­
vide a space calling on the viewer to reflect on the rest of the film. It seems
to me their interpolative qualities are similar to those of much modern
abstract art. This reflection required of the audience is very different from
the didactic mode of traditional films. It is both a part of the total break
with the past that Black Cannon Incident makes and a part of the inte­
grated complex of urban life, modernity, anomie, expressionism, and
abstraction that makes the break possible.

Dislocation continues where Black Cannon Incident leaves off, in terms
of both plot and style. Zhao Shuxin has now become a bureau head in a
large high-tech concern. However, he faces a problem that besets all Chi­
nese people of position. There are so many meetings he must attend that
he can’t get on with his research. To solve the problem, he builds a robot
indistinguishable from himself to attend the meetings in his place. As the
robot develops into a sort of id-on-the-loose, the plot develops along farci­
cal lines again, until Zhao Shuxin eventually has to destroy it.

Dislocation takes the modern look of Black Cannon Incident to new
heights. If industrial is the adjective that sums up the first film, high-tech
would be the word for Dislocation. Chrome, steel, and plastic in red,
black, and white are the order of the day again. Zhao Shuxin rarely goes
out of doors, and when he does it is usually in the black of night, where
restricted vision gives the world a stripped-down, abstract quality. Again,
abstraction and modernity are integrated with and expressed through the
urban environment constructed by the film.
Dislocation is not the only film to show the influence of Black Cannon Incident. Zhang Liang’s films are the latest in a series of realist innovations, and therefore it would be difficult to trace any similar moves directly to his films. But Black Cannon Incident was unique at the time of its release, and so the same is not true. Its connotations of sophistication have proved remarkably appealing. Quite a number of films bearing its stamp have appeared in the last year or two. Although they are very various, it is important to note that they all feature contemporary, modern, urban settings. This confirms my thinking that the urban is an integral and necessary part of the new style Huang Jianxin’s films have carved out.

Sometimes, the influence of Black Cannon Incident can appear in rather superficial ways. For example, there is the Changchun Film Studio production, Strange Circle. A disappointingly regressive film, it starts with the interesting premise of five unmarried women who set up an alternative household together, cutting themselves off from the world of men. However, it rapidly proceeds to demonstrate that each of these women really needs a man. The women all wear black. One of them gets involved with an artist. They appear repeatedly in a shot that could have been lifted directly out of Black Cannon Incident. The camera is fixed perpendicular to a corrugated, bright red wall. A modern Japanese car is parked in front of the wall. Dressed all in black, the women appear, get into the car, and drive out of frame.

A more thoroughgoing instance is Questions For the Living, Huang Jianzhong’s outrageous and still-to-be释放的 new film. The plot is certainly “absurd.” A man is killed on a public bus. He comes back to life and, accompanied by his girlfriend, goes to visit all the people who were on the bus and asks them why they did nothing to help him. The hero is a nebbish little man not unlike Zhao Shuxin of Black Cannon Incident. The film is adapted from a modern stage play, and modernity in the Chinese arts in the broadest possible sense is referenced throughout the film. The hero paints modern art. Massive abstract paintings hang all over his walls. He and his girlfriend act in a modern drama troupe. The film cuts away to sections of modern drama and the primitive rituals that the Chinese modern movement, like its Western forerunner, draws upon. These punctuate the film like the montages in Black Cannon Incident and also provide the viewer with space to reflect on the film. The film is even the first in the People’s Republic to feature what many Chinese feel is the most modern of the modern in modern art, nudity.
In conclusion, what I hope I have demonstrated in both the cases of Zhang Liang's and Huang Jianxin's films is that in the cinema of the People's Republic today, cities are not just something to be represented. Rather their settings, the style of life in them, and the activities associated with them from the economic to the cultural, have been necessary and integral to the development of new cinematic tendencies. The combinations of signification constituting different ideas of the urban are part of the means by which Zhang Liang's hyper-realism and Huang Jianxin's modern absurdism are distinguished from the socialist realist tradition.

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Notes and References

1. This is discussed in further detail in Berry (1988).
2. Probably the most useful translation of Mao Zedong's "Yan'an Talks" is McDougall (1980).

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The Rural Base of an Urban Phenomenon

CHIDANANDA DAS GUPTA

WHEN Mahatma Gandhi went to London to the Round Table Conference in 1931 to discuss India’s future with the British government, he caused a sensation by coming down from the ship wearing little more than a loincloth. He had dressed in what the vast majority of the people he represented could afford to wear. Later, asked if he hadn’t been underdressed for an audience with the king, Gandhi replied: “He had enough on for both of us.”

It is curious how well this image sat upon a man who had been educated in London as a barrister and came from a well-to-do merchant background. When he lived in a city, as he often did, he chose his dwelling among the poor in the slums and from there carried on his dialogue with the high and the mighty. There was no urban-rural divide in him. The fact that his background was that of a city-dweller or that he dressed like a villager but spoke English perfectly, did not visit temples, and preached against the caste system did not alienate him from either the rural population or the urban. His doings in the city were seen by the villagers as the labors of a leader of the country as a whole.

By and large, this was true of all the national leaders of the period before India’s independence in 1947 and at least for a decade thereafter. The city was not evil; it was, in fact, the place where the future of India was being made. In Satyajit Ray’s Apu trilogy, the son of an impoverished Brahmin family in a village moves first to the ancient city of Varanasi in search of better times and then to the modern city of Calcutta to get himself educated. In Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadya’s novel on which the trilogy is based, Apu leaves his little son with relatives and goes off to Tahiti – a long way from the village in which he had been born. The progression is from the village to the city to the world – with hope. Satyajit Ray changed
THE RURAL BASE OF AN URBAN PHENOMENON

the ending; but Apu’s evolution from the traditional village to the modern world is deeply etched. The city supplies leadership toward liberation. In *The Goddess (Devi)*, the rich rural landlord with his traditional education is wedded to outdated beliefs. It is his son, who is studying in a Calcutta college under the radical reformist Henry Derozio, who represents reason and tries to prevent the tragedy that overcomes his wife because of his father’s religious superstitions. Thus the city is the source of light and of liberation from servitude. The British had to leave because of the able leadership of the Western-educated Indian, and the whole country knew it. The massive mutiny of the previous century had failed because it did not know the sources of its enemy’s power.

In a highly successful film of 1937, Shantaram’s *The World Does Not Understand (Duniya na Maane)*, a young girl is married off, against her wishes, to a decrepit old man who has a daughter her age. The young girl, however, is very spirited and refuses to consummate the marriage. In this resistance who should help her but her stepdaughter, who is a leading social reformer of the area. The two become such close friends that they sing Longfellow’s *Psalm of Life* together, in English, and hold out against the old man until he gives up his designs and begs his wife’s forgiveness. On his deathbed, he asks her to remarry – an inconceivable idea for the traditional Hindu widow.

In another film of the same year, a crazy comedy called *The Celibate (Brahmachari)*, an educated modern woman chases the man she loves, weans him away from his religious vows, and makes him marry her.

Neither film could be made today – at least within the ambit of the popular cinema. The city has become evil in the decades since independence. But in order to explain something of this transformation, it is necessary to cite certain historical and social factors.

Given the size of India’s population, the 25 percent that lives in the urban areas still forms a large audience for the cinema. Except for some touring cinemas located in the south, the cinema theaters are overwhelmingly urban. The rural element of the audience comes from the urban periphery. Villagers who come to town to buy and sell will often see a show before going back home by bus or train, or on foot. Fairs and festivals and places of pilgrimage, to which both men and women come with their children, provide another important point of contact with the cinema. In some villages, sets owned by rich peasants and landlords plus some community sets placed there by government provide a certain
amount of cinematic fare through television. The radio, which is ubiquitous, constantly blares forth film songs, without which the popular cinema would not be what it is. Most villagers, of course, have relatives in towns whom they visit and who in turn visit them, making a conduit for the transmission of vicarious experience of films. Nevertheless, the cinema remains a basically urban phenomenon. It requires the supply of electricity and infrastructural facilities that limit its spread to rural areas, where such facilities are at best inadequate, even though over 60 percent of India’s 570,000 villages do have some electricity and are connected by bus routes.

Until independence, even this peripheral audience was minute in size. Cinema theaters were concentrated in the cities. Inevitably, the films made at the time primarily addressed themselves to the middle class, which had considerably expanded during the consolidation of British administration and the infrastructure created in its service. The main concerns of the films were social reform, the glorification of Indian history, and the revivification of its mythology through the magical properties of film technique.

Independence set in motion a process of rapid industrialization and urbanization, which in turn resulted in large-scale migration to the cities and the growth of an urban working class. The uneducated began to dominate the cinema audience because the expansion of the working class, as well as of the unemployed seeking work in the cities, altered the cultural composition and the money map of the urban areas. The working class made rapid progress in terms of money; but the ranks of the unemployed also swelled and made urban destitution much more fearful than rural poverty. The emphasis on industrial expansion without corresponding investments in educational opportunities and standards led to a rapid lumpenization at the urban grass roots. As a result, films were now made primarily for the uneducated. The enthusiasm for social reform slowly evaporated out of the films. The middle-class audience was largely subsumed into the film culture of the urban lumpen, which had lost much of its rural moorings in tradition and yet failed to acquire an urban character. The slums of the cities – now about 30 percent of the metropolitan population – acquired far greater influence on the standards of filmmaking because the producers constantly sought the lowest common level of acceptance of their products. They tried to find commonality amongst an extremely varied population in the superfluous of modernism rather than in the depths of regional tradition. The slowly expanding rural cinema audi-
ence was subjected more and more to the urban lumpen standards that the cinema had begun to adopt. At the same time, the Gandhian-Nehruvian identity with the rural masses had declined, and the cultural divide between the rural and the urban had widened.

By the 1960s, the middle-class oriented films and their effort to hold all audiences together in the work of Raj Kapoor, Guru Dutt, and Bimal Roy had died out. Bimal Roy himself made *An Acre of Land (Do Bigha Zamin)*, about a debt-ridden peasant who comes to the city to make money as a rickshaw-puller. The film was hailed by the educated audience and is considered by many as a precursor of Satyajit Ray's early neorealism. But like the Apu films, *An Acre of Land* was rarely seen by the lower sections of the urban audience and its rural periphery.

A New Cinema now came into being with Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, and Mrinal Sen, and a firm divide sprang up between the cinema of the elite and that of the common man. In a sense, the divide was also between the urban and the rural because the new films acquired a markedly urban outlook. It was the point of view of the urban educated that went into these films. The so-called commercial cinema continued to design its appeal to the sector of the urban population that had arrived from the villages not so long ago and suffered from a sense of alienation. Few among the migrants to the city did not have strong links with the villages they had left behind. Most of them were there as men without women, having left their families in the village home. For them, as also the producers who made films for them, the village came to represent tradition and goodness and the city, the modern and the evil. The village girl was good, the city girl bad; you had your fun with the city vamp but married the village belle. This equation quickly expanded to take in the Indian as opposed to the Western. In *Evening in Paris*, Sharmila Tagore played two sisters, one modern and the other traditional, leaving you in no doubt about which one was better. In *Two Roads (Do Raaste)*, and *East and West (Purab aur Pachhim)*, similar judgments were made. Of course, the dichotomy often represented an inner conflict between two selves resting within the same soul, as Otto Rank says in *The Double*. It was also an indicator of the social dilemmas of choice. But in no time, the bikini-clad woman, the vamp, the nightclub singer, the photographer's model became the embodiment of the evil city; the mother emerged as the icon of the family, the symbol, although not an active agent, of an unchanged tradition enshrined in the archetypal village.
Once upon a time, the family was an agricultural concept of kinship bound by the common ownership of land and the labor upon it, untrammeled by geographical mobility or by the seductions of new professions and occupations springing up. That image of the village now ceased to be real in the life of the migrant and turned into a dream. The village lived more and more in the country of the mind and continued to supply an increasingly unrealistic model. Families in the city splintered, becoming increasingly nuclear; land holdings in the village grew smaller and smaller under the pressures of nuclearization of the family. The extended family became impossible to sustain in the competitive, combative atmosphere of the city. These dangers to the family became embodied in the villain who harmed it and therefore had to be revenged upon. The Mother and the Family and the protection of their honor became the formula of the 1970s. The presiding deity of this worldview was Amitabh Bachchan, India’s biggest box-office phenomenon ever, who acted in a series of amazing blockbusters. Until recently, he was an elected member of Parliament but has continued to act in films, with uncertain results. The guardian of rural values has defected to the city and is no longer welcome. The charges of corruption laid at his door have placed him in the very center of the city’s evil heart. The urban villager can no longer identify with him.

To go back to the 1970s, the frequent disappearance of the father in the films of this period resulted in the dominance of the mother. This could well reflect the situation of the rural family whose migrant father leaves the children in the care of the mother exposed to multiple dangers. Toward the end of these films, father, mother, and sons would of course be reunited, perhaps in the fulfillment of a dream. *Amar, Akbar Anthony*, a hugely successful film, is a notable case in point. In this blockbuster, the father is removed early from the scene, the children lose touch with mother, and the orphans are brought up by surrogate fathers of different religions. They hover physically close to each other and to mother without knowing. At the end of the film, all identities are rediscovered. Father too is unearthed from somewhere and brought back into the fold. The three religions merge into one. They are all Hindus, the dominant religious community. The modern pressures that had splintered the family are miraculously overcome by mother’s binding power and all are reunited.

The city divides, the village unites. The village is the fountainhead of security and identity in the psyche of the uprooted. The migrant cannot strike new roots in the urban psychological ground composed of totally
different patterns of interdependence determined by institutions rather than individuals. The preindustrial dream haunts the soul imprisoned in the unfamiliar, impersonal situation created by the divisive nature of production itself and by the alienating anonymity imposed by the bewildering variety and the sheer massiveness of urban human conglomerations. The migrant is a lonely man, forever regarding himself as a temporary resident, harboring a dream of return which he consciously knows to be impossible. He is caught in an inexorable, irreversible change that he cannot fully accept. The major part of the urban cinema audience is thus rural at heart.

In a country that has lived for thousands of years as a honeycomb of self-contained group identities at its grass roots, the sudden breakdown of dividing walls in an industrial world with its rapid communications and its changing configurations, its high social and geographical mobility, poses a serious threat. A secret fear of homogenization haunts the mind.

Will my son eat beef when he goes to the city? Will he marry some girl of his own choice who will be unacceptable to the mother? Thus the rural population, the urban working class, the unemployed migrant, the petty trader, the slum-dweller remain a community set apart from those who have accepted the values of the city and continue to see it as a center of growth, the point of take-off into a great future. In Anand Patwardhan’s film on Bombay, Sohrab Godrej, the industrialist, standing on the roof garden of his penthouse flat, says: “Why don’t those people [the slum-dwellers] go back to where they came from? After all, they came from somewhere.” The urban sophisticate rejects rural man as unfit to live in the city.

Once we see this, it becomes clear why the advanced middle class needs its own separate cinema. It continues to see itself as the determinant of the country’s destiny – despite the divide that has descended between the elite and the masses with the loss of the power of persuasive communication of the Gandhi-Nehru era, compounded by the frustration over the inequity of distribution of the fruits of development. In spite of its own criticism of the evils of the city, the post-Ray generation sees itself as the cutting edge of social reform, redress of economic and political wrongs, as well as aesthetic development – the very areas vacated by the popular cinema. Thus there is no pastoralism in the New Cinema but a strong social critique of rural conditions, both economic and cultural. The New Cinema has a sense of certain new goals denied to the common man. It stands for a con-
tinuing, evolving synthesis of tradition and modernity, East and West, pre-industrial and industrial values calculated to ensure the unity and the material and spiritual development of the country. In this it has the unifying instrument of a national language of the elite — which is English. Without it, the North could not converse with the South, men and women of different linguistic areas could not marry or form friendships or even travel. Hindi is the official lingua franca of the country but is far from being accepted as such by society. Gautam Ghosh from Calcutta and Ketan Mehta from Gujerat can discuss social problems or world cinema, but the common man from those two areas would have to use sign language to communicate. Thus the elite and the masses form two separate worlds. These new filmmakers form an inexorable part of the English-speaking elite even though they make films about the masses in Indian languages and not in English.

Naturally the films of the New Cinema are not seen by the people about whom they are made. This is especially true in the field of the all-India Hindi film. Regional cinemas have a somewhat better time but are not free from the problem. In Bengal, for instance, Satyajit Ray’s films are widely seen, often achieving commercial success. But that too is due to the presence of a large, expanding, politically aware middle class. The situation is still better in Kerala in the southwest, where literacy is high and the urban-rural divide is weaker, almost all of coastal Kerala being one semiurban continuum. Taken all in all, however, the audience divide in the country is so real that the explorations of the New Cinema are at best exercises in self-discovery and search for identity with the people on the part of an alienated elite. At worst, they constitute a pursuit of new aesthetic sensations within certain modish formulae of social awareness. Thus a film like Gautam Ghosh’s *Paar* projects a moving portrayal of a migrant peasant couple in the city with the certain knowledge that the film would not be seen by the people whose fate it depicts. Arousing the middle-class conscience seems to be the sole social satisfaction such films can hope to derive — at least within the present privately owned, profit-seeking setup of distribution and exhibition, even for films financed mostly by the state and sometimes by individuals for the social good and for the sake of artistic achievement.

Ironically, the New Cinema, beginning with Satyajit Ray, has a slow rhythm derived from the traditional pace of the country’s life. Apu’s journey through life is unhurried, attuned to a preindustrial society that
ignores models set by the islands of modernity in which the films themselves are made. Nirad Mahapatra’s *Maya Miriga*, an exquisite study of the breakup of a joint family, is Ozu-like in its stillness and belongs to the rhythm of life of its region. Even Ray’s *Big City*, that is, Calcutta, is set to the rhythm that would be natural to a genteel middle-class woman orienting herself to a working life. The rhythm is a part of the realism of the films and their effort to get to the essence of a way of life.

It is in the commercial cinema designed for the semiurban and the rural that we come across a frenzied pace. If Kehtan Mehta’s *Spices (Mirch Masala)* were to be remade by the movie moghuls, it would be speeded up a hundred percent. In the average blockbuster, the major part of the two-and-a-half hours is taken up by the songs and the dances; experiments in exporting them without these numbers have resulted in unsaleably short features. Being spectacles, these films move incredibly fast in order to prevent their audiences from having any chance to think. The songs and dances, especially the dances, are cut with amazing speed and finesse, using a very large number of minute cuts where the New Cinema would use much longer, contemplative takes. This rapid-fire style of cutting in the commercial film derives clearly from the West, in direct contradiction to the pace of the life of both its subject and its audience. Sometimes the rhythm is aptly used, as in the opening sequence of *Shaan*, in which Mazhar Khan, playing a maimed beggar in the employ of a gang of bandits, rolls his wooden platform along the streets of Bombay with skyscrapers zooming above him in low-angle shots as he speeds his way to inform the gang chief of his latest findings. The opening sequence of *Sholay*, India’s best-made and most famous curry western, is a smartly executed race across the top of a speeding train that could have come from a western.

In other words, the commercial cinema uses a city-slick pace regardless of the pace of life of the people it portrays or the place in which its story occurs. The New Cinema adopts the rhythm of its subject. In Satyajit Ray’s *The Middleman* (1975), the pace is much faster than in *Big City* (1963). The camera moves restlessly as it follows the brisk pace at which the novice is walking with the seasoned businessman along the streets of Calcutta to learn the tricks of the trade. The pacing also has to do with the attitude to the city. The Calcutta of the *Big City* was benign; in *The Middleman*, the city has become evil. The industrial city brutalizes the youth in transition from a preindustrial state of mind. In Saeed Mirza’s *Why
Does Albert Pinto Get Angry? a sizzling quarrel takes place between boy and girlfriend on a motor bike slicing through peak traffic in Bombay, fully reflecting the pace of the city and the state of mind of the characters. Thus the attitude to the city affects the formal elements of filmmaking as much as its content. Broadly speaking, this is true of the sick jazziness of the commercial cinema as well. It now regards our times as Kaliyuga, the evil aeon, the last in the Hindu concept of the cycle of creation, composed of 4,320,000 years, divided into four parts, the last of which is now drawing to a close. In other words, the end of the world is approaching, and in this evil age, the city is the center of destruction.

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LONG AGO Adam Smith and Voltaire foresaw with hope that cities could not only make urban life blossom with music and art, but could enrich rural life as well. Cities, they believed, could encourage virtue and beauty.

But the typhoon of the industrial revolution swept this romantic image of the city away. Mass production and specialization turned human beings into cogs of a great machine. Poets began to see the city as vice and to sing nostalgically of country life.

Nowadays, cities remind us of a host of problems: poverty, slums, crime, violence, prostitution, isolation, heavy traffic, pollution. But curiously, even though the city has become a den of vice, people still flock to it, leaving their friendly neighbors, their mountains and streams. Has the city the face of an angel or a devil?

Seoul, Korea's capital and biggest city, has been a subject of Korean cinema since its beginnings. Seoul was the city where the first Korean film was produced and shown in 1909. The film was a thousand-foot-long feature inserted in a stage play, which showed scenes of Western civilization in Seoul: the railroad, a street car, an automobile, and so on.

During the silent film era, about eighty films were produced, and many used Seoul as a simple background. With the beginning of talkies in 1935, more types of films were made, but the city was still not a subject that attracted filmmakers, who were more interested in patriotic inspiration against the Japanese occupation or in mere entertainment.

_Tuition_ (1940) by Choi In-Kyu (Ch’oe In-kyu) may be the first Korean film that treated city life in earnest. A poor family has difficulties paying the son’s tuition; the sick mother goes downtown to sell some small articles, and the boy worries about the problems he causes his parents. The
hard life of urban Koreans at that time was portrayed with keen realism and pathos. With the success of *Tuition*, Choi turned to a broader subject, from the individual family to society as a whole. *Homeless Angel* (1941) used the difficult life of orphans in Seoul as an image of Korean society: Seoul is the orphanage in which the fatherless Korean people are imprisoned during the long Japanese occupation.

As Korea regained its independence in 1945, Seoul came alive with joy and hope. But modernization and industrialization were interrupted by the civil war of 1950. After three years of fighting, people began the reconstruction of a city that was nothing but a ruin. By the late 1950s, Seoul began to look like a modern city. Today it is a major modern metropolis. Through this period, Seoul became increasingly an important subject for Korean films.

*Madame Liberty* (1956), directed by Han Hyung-Mo (Han Hyöng-mo), was one of the first films to treat the conflict between traditional Korean culture and the process of Westernization. A common housewife hears of the city’s fun and excitement and is tempted to go downtown. In her traditional Korean dress, the hanbok, she happens to enter a cabaret where a jazz band is in full swing. In the course of the film, she turns into the Madame Liberty of the title, who seeks her satisfaction in the pleasure haunts of Seoul. The film struck a strong responsive chord in Korean housewives, who made it a great commercial success. The social questions raised by the film were hotly debated throughout Korea.

In Kim So-Dong's *Money* (1958), Seoul began to play the role of the villain. A farmer sells his cattle to pay for his daughter's wedding. He is soon cheated out of the money by swindlers in Seoul, and his whole family collapses. Since the late 1950s, there has been a saying: "If you close your eyes in Seoul, you'll lose your nose."

In 1961, two important films appeared that used Seoul as a vital influence on character. In *A Horse-Cart Driver*, directed by Kang Dae-Jin (Kang Tae-jin), a poor family depends on the very occasional work the father can find for his horse-cart in modern Seoul. Now jostled by cars and trucks, he misses the Seoul of the old days, crossed by streams and shaded by trees. The protagonist represents the old generation adapting itself with difficulty to the changing life-style of the city.

The sentimental realism of *A Horse-Cart Driver* is replaced by dry psychology in *Aimless Bullet*, directed by Yoo Hyun-Mok (Yu Hyön-mok). The petit bourgeois protagonist, depressed and enervated, frequently
mutterts to himself, "I want to go. I want to go." The film never says where. He only wishes to escape the city with its deep wound of civil war and its social and political confusion. He is like an unaimed, stray bullet – a misfire – who has lost his identity in the modern city. The public showing of the film was banned by the government on the grounds that its theme was too antisocial.

The government economic policies since the 1960s have resulted in the heavy concentration of industry in Seoul. This has led to a large-scale migration of rural dwellers to the city in search of jobs and a better life, the same process that transformed London during the nineteenth century. But they found they had exchanged their traditional homes in their towns and villages for illegal squatters' shacks and labor at the lowest end of the economic spectrum.

Many films of the 1960s explored the lives of these laborers of the lowest class: Mr. Park, Blood Line, A Burden Bearer, Ephemeral Life, among others. A particularly interesting film of this period is Kim Su-Yong's Dried Fish (Kulbi), which resembles Ozu's Tokyo Story. An old country couple comes to Seoul to visit their married sons and daughters, bringing with them some dried fish as gifts. But the children are much too busy with their city living to spend much time with them and shuffle them off to the next sibling as quickly as possible. The traditional extended family of Korea is disintegrating under the pressures of city life.

Lee Man-Hee (Yi Man-hüii), one of the most capable filmmakers of the 1960s, was deeply interested in the theme of the city, as seen in his two films of 1965, Black Wheat and Market. The former explores the dark side of Seoul, swarming with hookers, bums, and hoodlums. The hero, a slum hoodlum nicknamed Eagle, falls in love with a pure girl, who gives him some hope for a brighter life. Eagle tries but fails to escape the evil of the city; the vice of Seoul is too deeply rooted in the hero to be uprooted by the heroine's virtue.

Market shows how the original Seoul-born market people have been displaced, first by refugees from the North and then by country people drawn to the economic opportunities of the city. They meet in the marketplace to compete fiercely and if possible survive, a microcosm of the life of Seoul itself.

One of the biggest social problems of the 1970s was the increasing rural exodus, especially of the young, which created a crisis in farm labor, a major industry in Korea. Unlike the previous generation, these young peo-
ple were seeking a better cultural rather than just economic life. They wanted to enjoy city life, watch tv, go to the theater, dance in discos, and drink beer in bars. Many of these new migrants were young women and even girls. They had to replace their vague dreams with low-level labor in factories, housework in private homes, waitressing in clubs, or being prostitutes in slums. Many of the films of the 1970s dealt with these young women, notably *Home of the Stars* (1974) by Lee Jang-Ho (Yi Chang-ho), *The Heyday of Yǒng-ja* (1975) by Kim Ho-Sun (Kim Ho-sŏn), and Kim Su-Yong’s *Girls Who Went to the City* (1979).

The very popular *Home of the Stars* shows how a pure girl ruins her life in the cold-hearted city. She meets four men – a clergyman, a businessman, a painter, and a bum – who use her ill and discard her. In the end, the abandoned heroine commits suicide on the snow-covered banks of the Han River, a traditional symbol of Seoul. True love is lost in the egoism of city life.

Despite its happy ending, *The Heyday of Yǒng-ja* is an even deeper and more direct look at the life of the poor in Seoul. Yǒng-ja (a typical name of a country girl) comes to Seoul with no definite purpose in mind. She works first as a housemaid and then as a bus conductor, only to lose her arm in a traffic accident. Soon she is a tough hooker in a downtown slum area. But Yǒng-ja’s humanity, which has been stolen from her by the city, is restored to her by the pure love of a young man who works in a lowly capacity in the city baths, scrubbing the city grime off the patrons’ backs.

Kim Su-Yong’s *Girls Who Went to the City* shows how the human rights of poor workers are disregarded by a system based on materialism. The heroines, three young women bus conductors, are searched after each working day to see whether they have stolen a few coins. Finally, one of them goes up to the rooftop of a high building and shouts out over the city, “We are people!”

Curiously, the union of female bus conductors demonstrated successfully against the public showing of the film, claiming it showed only the negative side of conductors’ jobs. Except for this film, however, most of the socially conscious films of this period were commercially successful because they appealed to the many young women who had experienced similar problems when they came to Seoul from the country.

*Wangsimni* (1979), directed by Im Kwon Taek (Im Kwŏn-t’aek), developed a new theme. Now wholly absorbed into Seoul, Wangsimni was only a short time ago a charming, even pastoral suburb, with a ferry, streams,
and famous vegetable gardens. The protagonist returns to his former home in Wangsimni only to find it strangely changed. The ferry where he once played with his friends has been replaced by a huge concrete bridge. On the wide gardens where his father worked stand ten-story buildings. He searches but cannot find a single familiar or friendly face. The once peaceful and neighborly life of Seoul has been lost forever.

In the 1980s, Seoul achieved the status of an international capital. With its population of nearly ten million people living in one of the highest population densities in the world, Seoul suffers from severe social problems: unemployment, squatters, crime, alienation, and the growing gulf between rich and poor.

Lee Jang-Ho's *A Good Windy Day* (1980) (the first film on which I collaborated as scriptwriter and assistant director) portrayed the transformation of suburbs into urban centers in their own right, “new towns.” Lee’s *Home of the Stars* had shown the problems of young women in the city. His new film showed three young men moving to Seoul in different ways and for different reasons and taking a succession of typical jobs, ending up as a delivery boy for a Chinese restaurant, a hairwasher in a barber shop, and a motel bellhop. The three meet by chance in one of the new towns in a suburb of Seoul. They share with each other their friendship, news of their love affairs, their grief, frustrations, and hopes. They try to adjust to their bad circumstances – their poverty, lack of opportunity, and discriminatory treatment – but what they find hardest to endure is the general social indifference of the world around them. In the epilogue, the delivery boy, who aspires to be a boxer, says to the audience, “I was beaten by Seoul. But Seoul is just a place where people live. I think I can make it here.” For the three young men, Seoul is always a windy city, but they make an effort to help each other and to be of good cheer.

In 1981, Lee Jang-Ho turned to the growing prostitution problem in Seoul with *Children of Darkness*, set in the red-light district (I worked on this film in the same capacities). Kasu (which means “singer”), a beautiful and famous prostitute, has a sad past. She ran away from home with the dream of becoming a famous singer. She applies to a music school in Seoul, and for a kickback the dishonest teacher fools her into joining a low-class traveling troupe. After several years touring the countryside, she returns to Seoul with the sad memory of the death of her illegitimate son. Having been sold by others, she decides to sell herself and becomes a member of the red-light district. She tries to overcome these sad experi-
ences by gradually coming to her own way of life, which includes offering love to someone whom all others find unlovable.

A special characteristic of this film is its exploration of the role of media in Kasu's tragedy. The heroine remembers how as a child she would watch every night the luxurious life of singing stars on television and dream of becoming a singer herself, a dream that led her to ruin. Television has spread throughout the Korean countryside, bringing to the rural poor its traditionally tempting images of the city life of the rich.

I want now to describe my own works on life in Seoul. I was the youngest director of the early 1980s when I made my first film, *People in a Slum* (1982), based on real-life stories. In a squatter village on the outskirts of Seoul, where people survive by working at whatever they can find, the heroine nicknamed Black Glove lives with her lover and her son from an earlier marriage. Throughout the story, the many problems the squatters face are described: unemployment, crime, housing, lack of educational opportunities, and so on. But the richness of the human heart – seen in the warm relations between the troubled heroine and her neighbors and in all their efforts to preserve friendship and hope – is a genuine triumph over their sad conditions.

Since industrialization, Seoul has been treated as a center of vice, but people continue to move there in the hope of a better material life. In my own view, however, the real joy of our lives comes from our good relations with people, not from material goods. Since I believe that film as an art form should deal with people's souls, I decided to make a film about how the human soul can be sickened by city life.

*Tropical Flower* (1983) depicts alienation and lack of communication in the modern city. "I," the unnamed protagonist, lives isolated in an expensive apartment and feels like a drifter on an uninhabited island. One day in early summer "I" sees out his window a woman moving into an apartment in the building facing his. She is the type of beauty "I" has long been craving. Under the name of Mr. M, "I" tries to approach her and win her soul, but is outraged when he discovers that she is the pathetic mistress of a pleasure-seeking middle-aged businessman. "I" immediately decides to save her. He also learns by talking with her on the phone as Mr. M that she is constantly searching for true love, but is always falling victim to men's desires. "I" decides to wreak vengeance in her behalf on the men who have abused her. On a rainy day, Mr. M meets the heroine for the first time. At first friendly, he begins to berate her for her past life, gradu-
ally becoming so frenzied that she realizes he is insane. Trying to break out of his isolation, “I” has destroyed the relation he wanted to establish. Wanting to communicate with the woman he loves, he has conveyed to her the magnitude of his mental and emotional problem. In the first scene of the movie, the enormous concrete apartment complex symbolizes the isolated living of individuals in Seoul. A voice is heard over the image, saying, “I don’t like this city. This city is full of evil desires. I am a stranger trying to find a true love in this city.” The film ends by showing the same complex with the voice of the protagonist, saying, “I am a prisoner who is guilty of not loving people. I will be imprisoned in this apartment forever.”

In my two films, I showed two kinds of people. People in a Slum shows the healthy soul in conditions of poverty; Tropical Flower, in the sick world of luxury. What is more important in our own lives?

My Deep Blue Night (1985) is not set in Seoul, but it does show an aspect of Korean urban living today. More than three hundred thousand Koreans live in the major American city, Los Angeles. Many of them immigrated for a better economic and cultural life, greater educational opportunities for their children, and a more stable political and social atmosphere than Seoul.

Under American immigration law, a foreigner who marries a U.S. citizen is eligible for a “green card,” a residence and work permit. Deep Blue Night is the story of Hobin Beck, an illegal Korean immigrant, who has come to America to realize his dreams of wealth, and Jane, the former wife of a GI stationed in Korea, who is now a legal resident, but leading a lonely and frustrated life in her new country. Jane works in a bar, but her main source of income comes from allowing herself to become a wife in contract marriages that enable illegals to obtain the green card. These short, mock marriages have earned her enough to live a luxurious life in a fashionable home in the Hollywood hills. In fact, she is sick and tired of her life and unconsciously misses a genuine relationship. When a “matchmaker” puts Mr. Beck in contact with her, she begins to feel a certain hope that she might be able to settle down. But Beck, who has adopted the catchy name Gregory Peck, already has a yōbo (sweetheart) in Korea, and she is pregnant. So after obtaining his green card, Beck asks Jane for his divorce. She will not consent. Beck’s yōbo keeps sending him cassette tapes pleading with him to send for her. Jane begs him to start their own relationship again, this time with love rather than a contract. The tension between these two appeals drives Beck to the film’s tragic ending.
In the film, Los Angeles provides examples of problems different from those of Seoul—like illegal immigrants, armed robbery, and a harassing legal system—but the real problems still lie deeper: in the minds of the characters, who use good things, like marriage, for selfish ends.

At one point, Beck says, "Los Angeles— that means the place of the angels." Jane answers, "Shit! It's a desert." For lonely and isolated Jane, Los Angeles is a wasteland where emotional comfort and fulfillment are hard to find.

After making eight films, I wanted to make a small, beautiful love story in a city setting. Our Sweet Days of Youth (1987) is based partly on my college experience of desperate and unrequited love. I intended to shoot most of the film in New York as the representative modern city. But when, after finishing about thirty percent of the shooting, I went to New York to scout locations, I couldn't find any that added something special to this particular film that couldn't be found in Seoul. Seoul has become so modern itself! So in the final script, Central Park was replaced by Tōksu Palace Park, a pizzeria by a Korean pastry shop, and Greenwich Village by the busy streets of Myōng-dong.

In a mere thirty years, Seoul has experienced the development that the West had two hundred years to absorb. Korean films have dealt with many of the problems that have been faced. If Seoul becomes, as expected, another Tokyo or New York, it will face new problems that are even more serious and difficult than the old ones. Cinema has shown itself perhaps overeager to portray this evil face of city life.

In my opinion, filmmakers should also portray the good. A city is a place where people gather to live together. In any such living, there cannot be only negative aspects, there must be some happiness and pleasure. If filmmakers can explore positive aspects of our modern life, city dwellers can learn from them some ways of achieving a more humane life-style, one based on mutual help and warm support, in whatever circumstances they find themselves.

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FIRST THE very long shot. Two countries: Brazil and the United States. Two vast New World lands similar in both historical formation and ethnic composition. Both began as European colonies, one of Portugal, the other of Great Britain. In both countries, colonization was followed by the conquest of vast territories that involved the near-genocidal subjugation of the indigenous peoples. In the United States, the conquerors were called pioneers; in Brazil, they were called bandeirantes. Both countries massively imported blacks from Africa to form the two largest slave societies of modern times, up until slavery was abolished, with the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 in the United States and the “Golden Law” of 1888 in Brazil. Both countries received successive waves of immigration, indeed often the same waves of immigration, from all over the world, ultimately forming pluri-ethnic societies with substantial Indian, black, Italian, German, Japanese, Slavic, Arab, and Jewish communities.

Now a somewhat closer view, of two cities of roughly equivalent population: New York and São Paulo. From the air, a similar spread of tall buildings and urban development, but the Brazilian city is not traversed by so many mighty rivers or blessed with so many beautiful parks. Although it might seem a sacrilege to compare what many regard as the preeminent metropolis of the world to a Third World city that few First Worlders have even the slightest notion about, the fact remains that significant parallels link the two cities. In both cities, indigenous populations preceded the European arrival, and in both cases the indigenous presence left traces in place-names: Manhattan, Ipiranga, Montauk, Pacaembu. São Paulo was founded on the site of an Indian village in 1554; its founder, Padre José de Anchieta, was versed in the local Indian idioms and even
ROBERT STAM wrote a grammar and a dictionary for the Tupi language. New York was purchased from its Indian inhabitants for $24 worth of trinkets in 1626, some seventy-four years later. Although it is not well known, the historical destinies of New York and Brazil were linked from the beginning. Historian Warren Dean (1987) points out that in the seventeenth century, Dutch settlers brought Afro-Brazilian slaves with them from Brazil to what was then called New Amsterdam, and even granted them a measure of freedom in order to make them allies in the fight against the British. The first Jews to arrive in New York were Sephardim who came from Recife, Brazil, in 1636 and founded the synagogue that still stands on West 70th Street in Manhattan. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, New York and São Paulo received some of the same waves of immigrants from the same countries: Germans, Italians, Jews from Poland and Russia, Arabs from Lebanon and Syria, Chinese, Japanese, and so forth. Both received as well “internal immigrants” such as blacks from the South, in the case of New York, and blacks from Bahia and Minas, in the case of São Paulo. Both cities have their Italian neighborhoods – Little Italy in New York, Bras and Bexiga in São Paulo, their turn-of-the-century Jewish communities – the lower east side in New York, Bom Retiro in São Paulo, and their Asiatic communities – Chinatown in New York and the Japanese district called “Liberdade” in São Paulo. Indeed, many Brazilians have North American relatives who trace their origins back to the same villages in Poland or Italy or Lebanon or Japan.

I do not intend to develop an elaborate comparison between New York and São Paulo (and obviously the differences are as important as the similarities). I simply wish to stress one aspect of both cities: their “polyphonic” ethnic and cultural nature as reflected in films generally and in two specific films: Woody Allen’s Zelig and Joaquim Pedro de Andrade’s Macunaima. At the historical origins of the cultural diversity of both countries we find the same triad of white European, native indigenous peoples, and blacks brought from Africa, although the degree of mixing among the three groups was obviously much more intense and widespread in Brazil. The basic triad was subsequently augmented, in both countries, by a wide diversity of immigrant strains, all part of an ongoing history in which diverse new arrivals impact complexly on a preexisting population, flowing into a broader nonfinalized polyphony of cultures.

We see the end result of this ongoing process in present-day New York, a city where public schools teach in at least eight languages, where the
mass is celebrated in more than a score, and where prospective drivers can take the driving exam in Russian or Spanish. Present-day New York is a black, Latin, Asian, and European cosmopolis, one that has Koreans running its twenty-four-hour markets, Indians running the newsstands, Arabs running neighborhood groceries, and Senegalese and Nigerians working as street vendors, not to mention two hundred thousand Russian Jews, Israelis, Poles, Italians, Greeks, Cubans, Haitians, Jamaicans, and other Caribbeans.

Ever since its earliest days as a Dutch-managed polyglot trading port, New York has served as a kind of conduit for ethnic forces and populations. Jim Sleeper (1987) compares it to a "great human heart which draws into itself immigrant bloodstreams, and after working its strange alchemy, pumps them back out again across America." New York has become a "minority-majority" city, a city without any clear or overwhelming ethnic majority, where each apparently unified community itself breaks down into numerous subcultures traversed by class, generation, and the nuances of ethnicity. The very language of New York streets is syncretic, hybrid, consisting of Yiddishized English, anglicized Spanish, and so forth. When Rupert Pupkin (Robert de Niro), in Scorsese's *The King of Comedy*, calls Masha (Sandra Bernhard) "el schmucko supremo," he is offering nothing more than a typical example of the hybridized language of the city.

In the cases of both New York and São Paulo, the cinema has "translated," reflected, refracted, or sublimated this ethnic diversity into filmic images. Much of the potential force and audacity of both Brazilian and North American cinema derives from the capacity to stage the cultural conflicts and complementarities intrinsic to a heteroglot culture, and cities such as New York and São Paulo obviously form privileged sites for this kind of ethnic interplay. Many São Paulo films focus on specific ethnic communities. Lauro Escorel's short film *Os Libertarios* (*The Libertarians*, 1973) treats the largely Italian anarchist movement of the 1920s, a South American version of the same political movement that animated such figures as Sacco and Vanzetti in the United States in the same period. Sergio Person's *São Paulo, Sociedade Anomina* (*São Paulo, Inc.*, 1966) deals with the Italian community in São Paulo at a later point in its historical trajectory, at a time when many were working in the burgeoning automobile industry of the city. *Compasso de Espera* (*Marking Time*, 1973) focuses on the travails of Jorge, a black São Paulo poet and advertising agent, as a pretext for an inventory of the racist features of Brazilian society. (Many
of the film’s political discussions, for example, those between integrationists and separatists, could have as easily been set in New York as in São Paulo.) Tizuka Yamasaki's *Gaijin* highlights the Japanese immigration at the turn of the century. In many other films, such as Babenco's *Pixote* (1982), Sergio Toledo's *Vera* (1986), and Wilson de Barros's *Anjos da Noite* (*Angels of the Night*, 1987), connections of friendship or sexuality are made easily across lines of race and ethnicity.

Countless films set in New York, similarly, from *Levi and Cohen: The Irish Comedians* (1903) through *West Side Story* to *Cotton Club* have centrally featured interaction between the diverse ethnic communities. Many New York-based films pivot on some sort of ethnic interplay as a key structuring strategy: black/white in *Brother from Another Planet*, Anglo/Latino in *Crossover Dreams*, Jewish/black/Puerto Rican in *The Pawnbroker*, and bohemian-polyphonic in *Next Stop Greenwich Village* and *Hair*. In films such as Alan Parker's *Fame* and Mazursky's *Moscow on the Hudson*, a New York setting helps generate a rich weave of ethnic voices. In *Fame*, youthful representatives of diverse communities – black, Puerto Rican, Jewish – collaborate within a kind of utopia of artistic expression. In *Moscow on the Hudson*, the Robin Williams character enters into dialogic interaction with a diverse gallery of synecdochic ethnic figures – black, Italian, Puerto Rican, Jewish – and each dialogue becomes influenced by the specific accents and intonations of a culturally defined interlocutor.

It is only recently, I should point out, that both Brazilian and North American cinema have even approached cultural polyphony. Brazilian cinema went from a virtually lily-white cinema, in the silent period, to one that progressively embraced more and more of Brazil's ethnic communities in the seventies and eighties. The history of racism as reflected in American cinema, meanwhile, has already been delineated by Donald Bogle, with respect to blacks, by Ralph and Natasha Friar, with respect to native Americans, and by Alan Woll and Arthur Petit in relation to Hispanics, so there is no need for me to review their conclusions here. As late as the fifties, in both countries, we find at best timidity and at worst racism concerning questions of ethnicity. In Brazil in the fifties, the Hollywood-style Vera Cruz production company made films set in São Paulo that consistently elided the black presence, except as maids, in that city, in films where the physiognomies of the actors, the decor, the costumes, and even the music were calculated to evoke a European or North American ambi-
ence. The films set in New York in this period, meanwhile, tended to downplay the ethnic diversity of the city. The Jewish presence was often euphemistic at best, featuring what Lester Friedman calls "safe Jews" who looked, spoke, and acted far more like their gentile neighbors than their immigrant parents or grandparents, while the black presence was often elided completely to become a kind of "structuring absence." Despite the emergence of black stars such as Sidney Poitier, as late as 1957 a film such as Alfred Hitchcock's supposedly documentary-like *The Wrong Man* could show the streets and subways and the prisons of New York City as totally devoid of blacks.

The sixties, seventies, and eighties, as is well known, brought a kind of resurgence of ethnicity in the cinema. I would now like to focus on two films, one from the late sixties and the other from the early eighties, one deeply rooted in São Paulo and the other in New York, as examples of this resurgence. Both treat the theme of the city as privileged locus of ethnic and cultural interaction, at times in strikingly similar ways. The first film is Joaquim Pedro de Andrade's *Macunaima* (1969), based on the famous 1928 Brazilian modernist novel of the same title by São Paulo writer Mario de Andrade. The story of both film and novel concerns the improbable adventures of a Brazilian antihero who goes from the Amazon region to São Paulo and undergoes diverse transformations on the way. The second is *Zelig* (1983), the Woody Allen film about a bizarre chameleon man who has an uncanny talent for taking on the accent and ethnicity of his interlocutors. *Zelig* is obviously deeply rooted in the cultural life of New York City, for the film constantly foregrounds the city's standard iconography and urban landmarks — Fifth Avenue, Times Square, Washington Square, Union Square; its ethnic neighborhoods — the lower east side, Chinatown; its institutions — Manhattan Hospital, The *New York Daily Mirror*; and its intellectuals — Susan Sontag, Irving Howe, Morton Blum.

The most striking feature of the two films, for our purposes, is that they both revolve around multiethnic protagonists who "condense," as it were, the ambient ethnic polyphony. Both characters, furthermore, undergo racial metamorphoses. Zelig is born white and Jewish but subsequently becomes Indian, black, Irish, Italian, Mexican, and Chinese. Macunaima is born Indian and black but subsequently transforms himself into a white Portuguese prince and even into a French divorcée. (These metamorphoses are diversely handled in cinematic terms, of course: *Macunaima* basically relies on the use of two actors and "magical" editing substitu-
tions, while *Zelig* deploys a rich panoply of cinematic and extracinematic devices such as makeup, manipulated photographs, ironic "anchorage," and trick cinematography.) The theme, in any case, is the same. Both Macunaima and *Zelig* are oxymoronic protagonists, larger-than-life composite characters who epitomize ethnic interaction and hybridization. Macunaima, the "hero without any character," as the novel’s subtitle has it, lacks character not only in the conventional moral sense but also in that he is ethnically plural and identityless. *Zelig* too might be called a "hero without any character," again both in the characterological and in the ethnic sense. Both protagonists personify the cultural "heteroglossia" or "many-languagedness" of the cities from which they emerge. They resemble their cities, which are like them the sites of constant metamorphosis, disintegration, assimilation, and renewal.

In the case of the novel *Macunaima*, polyethnicity lies at the very kernel of its theme and even in its process of creation. As a mulatto, Mario de Andrade quite literally embodied the ethnic diversity of what Gilberto Freyre called a "mestizo" nation. An anthropologist and musicologist as well as poet and novelist, Mario de Andrade compiled Amerindian, Luso-Brazilian, and African legends to create the novel *Macunaima*, calling his text a "rhapsody" in the musical sense of a "free fantasy on an epic, heroic or national theme." Even the language of the novel is syncretic, constituting what de Andrade himself called a "veritable esperanto" which taps the multiethnic linguistic genius of Brazilian Portuguese, fusing its Indianisms and its Africanisms, its legends and songs and slang into a panfolkloric saga. The fascination with ethnic plurality, in the novel, was motivated not only by the author's status as a mulatto but also by the polyglot culture of São Paulo. In a 1929 letter, Mario de Andrade describes what he calls one of the "most human aspects of São Paulo:" the sight of its diverse ethnic groups mingling in the street on a Saturday night. "I feel happy," he tells us, "among all the Hungarians, the Czechs, the Bulgarians, the Syrians, the Austrians and the northeasterners who go out to have a good time." It is a significant coincidence, perhaps, that both Mario de Andrade and the Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin were both elaborating theories of artistic "polyphony" in the twenties. Polyphony, for Bakhtin, refers to the coexistence, in any textual or extratextual situation, of a plurality of voices that do not fuse into a single consciousness but rather generate dialogical dynamism among themselves. 1 De Andrade (1944) defined polyphony as the "simultaneous artistic union of two or more melodies
whose temporary effects of sonorous conflict collaborate to create a total final effect," a definition in some ways not terribly distant from Bahktin’s. And although neither author was thinking specifically of a polyphony of ethnic voices per se, an ethnic interpretation is in no way excluded by the term.

Both the novel and the film version of *Macunaima* are peopled by the ethnic types that predominate in Brazilian life. In the first sequence, we see an improbably old white woman (actually a man in drag) stand and grunt until she/he deposits a wailing fifty-year-old black “baby” on the ground. The names of the family members – Macunaima, Jigue, Manaape – are Indian, but the family is at once black, Indian, and European. Apart from this constant syncretism of the three major ethnic sources of Brazilian culture, the film also features other, more specific ethnic types. The industrial magnate named Pietro Pietra, for example, was modeled in the novel on nouveaux riches Italian immigrants, such as the members of the Matarazzo family, who become very wealthy in São Paulo in the twenties. In the film, the character is updated to represent Brazil’s dependent national bourgeoisie with its second-hand American technology, and his “Italian-ness” is reduced to his name and his Italian accent in Portuguese.

But let us look with closer attention at the magical ethnic transformations that occur in both *Zelig* and *Macunaima*. There are two points in the film *Macunaima* when the protagonist, born black, turns white. (He is played by two actors, the black actor Grande Otelo and the white actor Paulo Jose.) In the first, a woman named Sofara gives the child Macunaima a magic cigarette, which turns him into a handsome Portuguese prince. The transformation, in this case, is an allegorical one, for the woman is dressed in a sack on which we read: “Alliance for Progress: Donated by the People of the United States;” The magic cigarette, then, is the American aid that contributed to the short-lived Brazilian “economic miracle” of the late sixties and seventies, which later gave way to the economic disaster of runaway inflation and unbearable foreign debt.

In the second of these transformations, the black Macunaima enters a magic fountain which turns him white. This sequence, occasionally misread as racist by North Americans, is in fact a sardonic comment on Brazil’s putative “racial democracy” and on what is called in Brazil the “ideology of whitening.” Although the author of the novel was proud of his black ancestry and deeply involved in revalorizing the African cultural heritage of Brazil, the characters in the film seem to idealize whiteness as
having special value. Macunaima is delighted with his newfound white beauty, and his black brother Jigue is disappointed that there is not enough water to make him white as well. Black Brazilians, the film seems to be saying, are the victims of the “ideology of whitening.” They have absorbed the values of the white elite that oppresses them. Turning white immediately changes the power situation for Macunaima as well. Upon turning white, he immediately walks off with his black brother’s girlfriend as if there were never any question about his right to do so. The apparent white-is-beautiful message is ironically undercut, however, by the sound track. We hear an old romantic song entitled “Sob Uma Cascata” (By a Waterfall), the Brazilian version of a song used by Lloyd Bacon in the 1933 film Footlight Parade, a film whose musical numbers were choreographed by Busby Berkeley. The choice seems especially apt when we remember that the original diegetic inspiration for the “By a Waterfall” number was black children playing with the water spurting from a hydrant in Harlem, a sight that suggests to the James Cagney character the spectacular possibilities of waterfalls splashing on white bodies. The allusion suggests, then, a complex play of black and white in both Brazil and the United States, as well as the relation between the American musical comedy and Brazil’s carnivalized imitations of those comedies, the so-called chanchadas or “filmes carnavalescos,” the genre in which Grande Otelo, the black actor who plays Macunaima, was the most famous star.

Both Macunaima and Zelig treat the issue of racial and ethnic prejudice, and both treat it in a comic and satirical vein. At one point in Macunaima, the white brother Manaape explains to the black brother Jigue why the black brother was arrested rather than himself, citing the popular rhymed maxim: “Branco quando corre é campeão; preto quando corre é ladrão” (A white man running is a champion; a black man running is a thief). When the white Macunaima makes a disparaging remark about a mulatto, Jigue responds: “Oh, so now that you’re white you’ve become a racist!” Zelig, meanwhile, makes comic and satiric references to anti-Semitism. In street fights with antissemites, Zelig complains, his parents always sided with the antissemites. In France, we are told, Zelig’s convincing transformation into a rabbi led some Frenchmen to want to send him to Devil’s Island. And as a black, Indian, and a Jew, the Ku Klux Klan sees Zelig as a “triple threat.”

Both Macunaima and Zelig can be read as ironic odysseys of assimilation. Black/Indian Macunaima goes from the Amazon to São Paulo, car-
rying with him the folkways associated with his origins; even in the city, he sleeps in a hammock suspended over his bed. His turning white certainly facilitates his access to the elite and to power, but when he and his urban-guerrilla wife have a child, that child is the same black Macunaima whom we saw at the beginning of the film. Zelig, meanwhile, goes from the lower east side to the centers of social power. In his flight from ghet­toization, in his personal “ordeal of civility,” he demonstrates a weakness for upward mobility. The psychopathology of assimilation even leads him, at one point, to extremes of self-degradation, imaged by his ephem­eral transformation into a Nazi. Zelig gains mobility and even wins access to the Vatican and the Third Reich, but his mimicry is always incomplete, always producing what Homi Babha calls “its slippage, its excess, its dif­ference.” As a result, Zelig is ejected from the Papal Balcony and from the Third Reich rostrum.

In Zelig, each of the protagonist’s ethnic transformations carries its spec­ific weight of historical association. Zelig’s recurrent chameleonizing to blackness, for example, is deeply rooted not only in the experience of anti­semitism in Europe but also in black/Jewish affinities in the United States. The image of the “black Jew” was common in end-of-the-century Euro­pean antisemitic tracts. Hermann Wegener called Jews “white negroes,” and Julius Streicher, one of the most notorious antisemites of both the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich, argued for a quasi-identity between Jew and black. In the United States, meanwhile, New York-based Jewish entertainers took over the preexisting tradition of blackface, endow­ing it with their own accent and intonation. Al Jolson made blackface recital the foundation of his success, while Sophie Tucker was billed as the “World-Renowned-Coon-Shouter,” and Eddie Cantor played Salome in blackface and in drag. The Jewish fondness for blackface, Irving Howe (1976, 553) suggests, involves not only shrewd opportunities but also an intuition of deeper affinities: “Black became a mask for Jewish expressiveness, with one woe speaking through the voice of another.” Blackface, Howe suggests, paradoxically enabled Jewish performers to reach “a spontaneity and assertiveness in the declaration of their Jewish selves.” Cultural syncretism, in such a situation, was almost inevitable. Thus Irving Berlin mingled Yiddishisms with black musical conventions, Isaac Goldberg found musical affinities between black “blue notes” and the “blue note” of Hassidic chant, and Gershwin blended Yiddish folktunes with black melodies, and all as part of a general syncretism both at the mar-
gins and between the margins and a constantly changing mainstream. (It was this kind of creative intermingling of cultures that led commentators such as Randolph Bourne, in the twenties, to speak of the possibility of New York City, with its infusions of diverse cultures, generating a "novel international nation, the first the world has ever seen.")

While critics have emphasized the bizarre and improbable nature of Zelig's ethnic transformations, they have generally ignored the deeper social, cultural, and historical logic that structures them and the ways in which these transformations are rooted in the cultural diversity of New York City. Under hypnosis, for example, Zelig admits to dialogically chameleonizing with another group of "hyphenated Americans." Entering a bar on Saint Patrick's Day, he relates: "I told them I was Irish. My hair turned red. My nose turned up. I spoke about the great potato famine." In *The Ordeal of Civility*, John Murray Cuddihy (1974) explores the analogies between the Irish and the Jewish immigrant communities as "latecomers to modernity." While the Irish were the product of the famines of the 1840s, which killed a million Irish and drove them into the world of Anglo-American Protestantism, the Jews were the product of the Russian pogroms, which killed thousands of East European Jews and drove them too into the cultural universe of the New World goyim. Both groups had a precarious grasp on political power, and both had a nostalgia for the Old World convivium. Irving Howe (1976, 387) describes the relation between the two groups within New York's political establishment as "generally amiable, seldom close, and far more complicated than either side realized." All of Zelig's transformations, then, have their particular rationale and specific resonances. It makes perfect sense, for example, that Zelig would chameleonize, more or less "horizontally," not only to his Irish fellow-swimmers in the melting pot, but also to other, more obviously oppressed minorities - Indian, black, Chinese, Mexican. Zelig's repeated transformation into the native American "Indian" - to take just one of these examples - forges a symbolic link between what Todorov has called Europe's "external other" - the Indian, the African, the Asian - and its perennial internal "other" - the Jews.

Zelig's father, we are told by the voice-over, worked as an actor in a Brooklyn theater, playing the role of Puck in the orthodox Yiddish version of *Midsummer Night's Dream*. The Yiddish theater that "fathered" Zelig was a theater full of wild transformations and boisterous polyglossia, fond of oxymoronic protagonists such as the schlemiel-saint and the luft-
mensch-visionary. The immigrant experience in New York familiarized Jewish actors and entertainers with a wide variety of ethnic accents and intonations. Indeed, Zelig exemplifies the ironic “universe changing” and the sometimes caricatural ethnic switchabouts typical of Yiddish-derived theatricality, of Fanny Brice performing “I’m an Indian,” or Al Jolson in blackface singing “Mammy,” or even, to anticipate, of Mel Brooks’s Yiddish-speaking Indian in Blazing Saddles.²

The inhabitants of cities such as New York and São Paulo pass their lives within a complex web of ethnic interaction. The streets of these cities, with their intense and vibrant life, become a kind of medium in which the diverse ethnicities meet, clash, and interact. Both Macunaima and Zelig, through their ethnic transformations and hybridizations, underline the necessarily syncretic nature of the self within the context of the multiethnic metropolis. As walking polyphonies of cultural personalities, both Macunaima and Zelig mimic the appearance and impersonate the voices of those with whom they come into contact. Their metamorphoses render visible and palpable what usually remains invisible – the constant process of syncretization that occurs when ethnicities brush against and rub off on one another. Macunaima renders this syncretism visible not only through its Indian/white and black protagonist but also through its diversified music track, its syncretic decor, and multiethnic allusions. Zelig renders syncretism visible by offering us a figure who is at once recognizably Woody Allen, and therefore white and Jewish, and black, Indian, Chinese, and Irish. Woody Allen does not become Chinese, it is important to note; he becomes a Chinese Woody Allen. The dialogical encounter, according to Bakhtin, is never a complete merging, but rather a reciprocal hybridization taking place within what Bakhtin calls the in-between of two interlocutors. One cannot finally become the other, both Zelig and Macunaima indirectly suggest, but one can at least meet the other part-way, and this process of interlocution, favored by the multiethnic city, inevitably leaves all the interlocutors subtly changed.

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Notes and References

1. For more on the Bakhtinian conception of "polyphony," see Bakhtin (1984).
2. For more on Zelig and ethnicity, see Stam and Shohat (1987).

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Bakhtin, Mikhail

Cuddihy, John Murray

De Andrade, Mario

Dean, Warren

Howe, Irving

Sleeper, Jim

Stam, Robert, and Ella Shohat
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Fuzen no tomoshibi (Candle in the Wind), 1957, Keisuke Kinoshita

Gojira (Godzilla), 1954, Motoyoshi Oda/Ichiro Honda

The Gold Diggers, 1984, Sally Potter

Hadaka no machi (The Naked Town), 1954, Tomu Uchida

Hatsukoi jigokuhēn (The Inferno of First Love), 1968, Susumu Hani

Hikari onna (Luminous Woman), 1987, Shinji Somai

Hiroshima Mon Amour, 1959, Alain Resnais

Hiroshima–Nagasaki: August, 1945, 1970, Paul Ronder

Hitori musuko (The Only Son), 1936, Yasujiro Ozu

House of Bamboo, 1955, Samuel Fuller

Hüngmaek (Black Wheat), 1965, Yi Man-huí

Ikimono no kiroku (Record of a Living Being / I Live in Fear), 1955, Akira Kurosawa

Ikiru, 1952, Akira Kurosawa

In Paris Parks, 1954, Shirley Clarke

In the Street, 1952, Helen Levitt

It's a Wonderful Life, 1946, Frank Capra

Jana Aranya (The Middleman), 1975, Satyajit Ray

Jeanne Dielman, 1975, Chantal Ackerman

Jinsei gekijo (Theater of Life), 1937, Tomu Uchida

Le Joli Mai, 1962, Chris Marker

Just Imagine, 1930, David Butler

Kanojo to kare (She and He), 1963, Susumu Hani

King Kong, 1933, Merian C. Cooper and Ernest Schoedsack

Kino-Glaz (Kino-Eye), 1924, Dziga Vertov

Kip’ko p’urûn pam (Deep Blue Night), 1985, Pae Ch’ang-ho

Kipp’un uri chölmûn nal (Our Sweet Days of Youth), 1987, Pae Ch’ang-ho

Kkobang tongne saramdûl (People in a Slum), 1982, Pae Ch’ang-ho

Kulbi (Dried Fish), 1963, Kim Su-yong

Ladri di Biciclette (Bicycle Thieves), 1949, Vittorio de Sica

Os Libertarios (The Libertarians), 1973, Lauro Escorel

The Life of a Peking Policeman, 1950, Shih Hui
A SELECTIVE FILMOGRAPHY

Liquid Sky, 1983, Slava Tsukerman
Logan's Run, 1976, Michael Anderson
Lost Horizon, 1937, Frank Capra
Mabu (A Horsecart Driver), 1961, Kang Tae-jin
Macunaima, 1969, Joaquim Pedro de Andrade
Madamu to nyobō (The Neighbor's Wife and Mine), 1931, Heinsosuke Gosho
Manhatta, 1931, Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand
Maya Miriga (The Mirage), 1984, Nirad Mahapatra
Menschen am Sontag (People on Sunday), 1928, Robert Siomak
Metropolis, 1926, Fritz Lang
Nagareru (Flowing), 1960, Mikio Naruse
The Naked City, 1948, Jules Dassin
Necrology, 1970, Standish Lawder
Night and the City, 1950, Jules Dassin
Night of the Comet, 1984, Thom Eberhardt
Nihonbashi, 1929, Kenji Mizoguchi
1984, 1955, Michael Anderson
Nora inu (Stray Dog), 1948, Akira Kurosawa
Notes on the Port of St. Francis, 1953, Frank Stauffacher
La Nuit Électrique, 1930, Eugene Deslaw
N.Y., N.Y., 1957, Francis Thompson
Obalt'an (Aimless Bullet), 1961, Yu Hyön-mok
Ohayō (Good Morning), 1958, Yasujiro Ozu
Oktyabr (October), 1927, Sergei Eisenstein
On the Beach, 1959, Stanley Kramer
On the Town, 1949, Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen
Ótum ūi chasiktūl (Children of Darkness), 1981, Yi Chang-ho
Paar (Crossing), 1984, Gautam Ghosh
Parampurō choūn nal (A Fine Windy Day), 1980, Yi Chang-ho
Paris, 1900, 1947, Nicole Vedres
Paris Qui Dort, 1923, René Clair
Planet of the Apes, 1968, Franklin Schaffner
Pyōltūl ūi kohyang (Home of the Stars), 1974, Yi Chang-ho
Repo Man, 1984, Alex Cox
Rien que les Heures, 1926, Alberto Cavalcanti
Roma, Città Aperta (Rome, Open City), 1945, Roberto Rossellini
Sans Soleil, 1985, Chris Marker
São Paulo, Sociedade Anomina (São Paulo, Inc.), 1966, Sergio Person
Shagai, Soviet (Stride, Soviet, USSR), 1926, Dziga Vertov
Shinjuku dorobō nikki (Diary of a Shinjuku Thief), 1969, Nagisa Oshima
Shitamachi (Downtown), 1957, Yasuki Chiba
Sijang (The Market), 1965, Yi Man-hūi
Skyscraper, 1959, Shirley Clarke
Sōshun (Early Spring), 1956, Yasujiro Ozu
Sous les Toits de Paris (Under the Roofs of Paris), 1930, René Clair
Soylent Green, 1973, Richard Fleischer
Subarashiki nichiyōbi (One Wonderful Sunday), 1947, Akira Kurosawa
Sunday in Peking, 1955, Chris Marker
Sunrise, 1927, F. W. Murnau
Suŏpyo (Tuition), 1940, Ch’oe In-gyu
Things to Come, 1936, William Cameron Menzies
Tokai kokyogaku (Metropolitan Symphony), 1929, Kenji Mizoguchi
Tokyō koshinkyoku (Tokyo March), 1929, Kenji Mizoguchi
Tokyō monogatari (Tokyo Story), 1953, Yasujiro Ozu
Tokyō no gasshō (Chorus of Tokyo), 1931, Yasujiro Ozu
Tokyō sensō sen'gō hiwa (The Man Who Left His Will on Film), 1970, Nagisa Oshima
Ton (Money), 1958, Kim So-dong
Tosiro kan ch’ŏnyŏ (Girls Who Went to the City), 1979, Kim Sa-yong
Touch of Evil, 1958, Orson Welles
Umareta wa mita keredo (I Was Born, But . . . ), 1932, Yasujiro Ozu
Wangsimni, 1979, Im Kwŏn-t’aek
Warui yatsu bodo yoku nemu (The Bad Sleep Well), 1960, Akira Kurosawa
When Worlds Collide, 1951, Rudolph Maté
The Wonder Ring, 1955, Stan Brakhage
The World, the Flesh and the Devil, 1959, Ranald MacDougall
The Wrong Man, 1957, Alfred Hitchcock
Yoidore tenshi (Drunken Angel), 1948, Akira Kurosawa
Yŏngja āi chŏnsŏng sidae (The Heyday of Yŏng-ja), 1975, Kim Ho-sŏn
Zelig, 1984, Woody Allen
La Zone, 1929, Georges Lacombe

Compiled by Donald Richie

As the rising tide of Chinese cinema on the international film scene becomes ever more impossible to ignore, so does the woeful lack of English-language studies on this important national cinema. In these circumstances, one cannot but understand and applaud the motivation behind this compilation of essays and interviews. In the best of circumstances, such a collection of materials would intersect productively. However, in this case the end result is somewhat less than the sum of its parts, and although one essay is excellent, a minefield of factual and typographical errors seriously undermines the rest of the book.

To start with the good news, the Chinese scholar Ma Ning, now studying in Australia, has contributed an analysis of new trends over the last ten years, modestly titled "Notes on the New Filmmakers." This is quite simply one of the best pieces of writing on contemporary Chinese cinema available anywhere in the world and should be required reading for all wishing to acquaint themselves with the subject. Bringing together his thorough knowledge of the methods and theories of Western film analysis with a careful and pertinent awareness of his own culture, Ma constructs his argument for the relevance of humanism and its resurgence in China to an understanding of the new cinema through a series of careful and close readings of important texts. His analyses of the films of Yang Yanjin in the light of the epistemological crisis of the late seventies is particularly masterful.

Also useful is Patricia Wilson's oral history account of the early days of Communist China's cinema in the Northeast. It provides detailed memories of a period about which little concrete information has hitherto been available. However, the period was also very disordered, and the addition of maps and biographies of the numerous people mentioned would help the less informed reader to make sense of the narrative. Indeed, without biographical notes, the reader cannot be expected to know that the woman mentioned as Tian Fang's wife on page 29, "Yu Lin," is the same person as the "Yu Lan" mentioned on page 33, and that the name should in fact be "Yu Lan" throughout.

This is only one of the many typographical errors that vitiate whatever reference value the book might have
completely. Neither Semsel nor Praeger Publishers seems to be aware that the apostrophe is an integral part of the Pinyin romanization system. Yan’an is printed “Yanan” throughout, and Xi’an appears throughout as “Xian.” Even Chen Bo’er’s name is printed as “Chen Boer” – whatever else she was, Chen Bo’er was not a South African. Misspellings are also common. “Hanzhou” should be Hangzhou (p. 3), “Ye Jian-yin” should be Ye Jianying (p. 15), “Long Zifeng” should be Ling Zifeng (p. 26), “Su Yu” should be Su Yun (p. 27), and so on. Things reach their worst when Madame Mao’s name (Jiang Qing) is rendered as “Qing Jiang” (p. 7).

Factual errors abound, too. In the biographical notes, editor Semsel is described as having worked for “China Film Corporation, the state enterprise responsible for all matters of film business within the country.” Presumably he supplied this information himself. However, China Film Corporation is only responsible for distribution and exhibition, and all other aspects of film business, in particular production and coproduction, are in the hands of other organizations. When the editor of the book does not know the basics about his employer for a whole year, one has to wonder about his grasp of the rest of his information. And indeed, when he can blandly state in his introduction that “In the 1950s and 1960s the film industry ran quite smoothly,” apparently in complete ignorance of the upheavals of the anti-Rightist campaign, the “cultural revolution,” and other movements, one knows one is not necessarily in good hands.

Apart from the materials he himself originated, looking at the article alleged to be on film theory by Xia Hong, it becomes evident that Semsel also decided to be an editor with a light touch, despite the fact that parts of this article are translated so appallingly that they make no sense at all. Words not found in any English dictionary, even the sort of Chinese-English dictionary produced in Taiwan, such as “conceptualism” and “labelism” are thrown about, and the reader is even presented with the sentence “Filmmaking challenges theory filmmaking” (p. 36). This article certainly challenged me!

Finally, the interviews that make up about half the book are enormously disappointing. Apart from the highly variable standard of translation, and the factual errors about personal histories that one doubts the subjects could have really made, the results are vague, uninformed and dull, largely confined to confused reminiscence, hesitant opinion, and lists of favorite Hollywood movies. Is it that all the subjects were vague, uninformed, and dull, or was there a problem with the questions that were asked? Since the questions are not printed, we will never know.

All this compels me to address a more serious issue. I cannot understand how so compromised a book was ever published. How did Semsel, who all too apparently speaks no Chinese and knows little about China, Praeger sociology editor Alison Podel (is this a sociology book?), and foreword writer Professor Robert Wagner, maybe a communications expert but hardly famous for his intimate knowledge of the Chinese cinema, get the nerve to think they were qualified to produce this
book? What sort of racism and cultural presumption makes it possible for a book like this on Chinese cinema to be published, when I sincerely hope I am right in thinking a similar manuscript on the French or German cinema would never have seen the light of day?

All in all, apart from Ma's article, one would need to be an expert in the Chinese cinema already to be able to pick through this book and extract whatever there might be of value in it. I had high hopes of this volume, and I know George Semsel developed a deep love of the Chinese cinema during his stay in China. I am sure he produced this book with the best of intentions, but I am dismayed that he could not even secure the help and expertise to ensure that names were spelled right. In his foreword, Professor Wagner remarks that the book "is a volume which, in addition to the light it sheds on the new Chinese cinema, is a reminder that we are all still the primitives in this medium." How sadly and ironically accurate he has proved to be!

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