1Asian Films and the Potential of Cinematic Space

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The foregrounding of space as the subject of inquiry in film studies is, in itself, not new. Indeed, the variety of scholarly work that focus on space in cinema is as wide-ranging as the ways in which space may be defined; from discussions on landscape, geography and cartography in films to how space is constructed in particular genres (such as science fiction) and cinematic representations of urban space and particular cities, as well as within the boundaries of specific cinemas (such as European, notably Italian, cinemas).[1]

This book is concerned, on the one hand, with how cinematic space can be used to study, understand and reveal new perspectives on Asian cinemas, and on the other, to reciprocally employ these cinematic spaces as a means to understand the construction and production of physical spaces within a national milieu. Given its cultural diversity and immense geographical coverage, we acknowledge that "Asia" is a conceptually problematic term and use it here as a broad label to bring together a limited range of cinematic practices. Our intention is not to develop an Asian-based theory for exploring Asian cinema through space or to propose an Asian conception of space. Nor do we assume that Asian cinemas use space differently from other cinemas. Instead, this book forwards the proposition that a dedicated study of how space is used in a range of Asian films could potentially allow us to learn more about cinema in Asia in ways that are either new or relatively unexplored. The aim is to respect the cultural diversity of "Asia" as a series of relatable but independent entities through chapters that seek to represent this plurality while also recognizing the possible commonalities and overlaps between different cinematic practices. Mindful of the global and transnational flows of capital, labor, culture and commodity impacting these cinemas, this book also argues that a productive understanding of transnational mobility can be achieved when viewed in tension with specific national ambitions. As such, the inquiry is couched within the remits of a range of Asian cinemas and foregrounds cinematic space as the site of inquiry in films from different genres across various cinemas in Southeast, South and East Asia. The chapters focus on the negotiations that occur within these cinemas and takes into account the specificity of geopolitical contexts, different articulations of nation and nationhood and how these issues are enacted in cinematic performances and representations of space.

In this volume, space is projected as a conceptual tool that allows access, consciously or unconsciously, to the latent political, social and cultural ideologies underpinning a geopolitical region. We are interested in the role of space in film, that is, when such ideologies find material expression in spaces portrayed through filmic media. What we propose here follows on from Frederic Jameson's argument that "the political content of daily life, with the political logic which is already inherent in the raw material with which the filmmaker must work"[2] finds its unembellished form in a series of spaces and locales, which when read closely suggest that they are more than just mise-en-scène. The essays here propose that space becomes the prime motivator of filmic plot, narrative and style. More importantly, such cinematic space ultimately reveals the "emergence of profound contradictions"[3] that

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mark the material or absolute spaces to which the films refer. In particular for this volume, such contradictions revolve around the persistent dialectic of the national and the transnational, with their attendant sites and spaces, as these ideologies and identities are played out in the cinematic spaces of Asian films.

Taking its cue from the multidimensional potentials of space as a conceptual tool to unpick Asian films, this book engages the relationships, outcomes and discourse which ensue between space and film by exploring the performance of space in Asian films in two ways: how cinematic space (re)produces or (re)imagines the material space to which it refers, and the implications that such negotiations reveal about national cinematic practice(s) in an increasingly transnational field.

Transnationalism and National Cinema

Current research on Asian cinemas tends to involve what Mette Hjort calls "the 'transnational turn' in film studies."[4] Indeed, the currency of transnationalism seems to have elevated critical conceptions of Asian cinemas from the boundaries of area studies. As Hjort puts it:

> The assumption, much of the time, seems to be that 'transnationalism' is the new virtue of film studies, a term that picks out processes and features that necessarily warrant affirmation as signs, amongst other things, of a welcome demise of ideologically suspect nation-states and the cinematic arrangements to which they give rise.[5]

Defined by Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden as "the global forces that link people or institutions across nations," transnationalism emphasizes the globalization, networks and flows that underpin film production, distribution and exhibition.[6] Based on the assumption that cinema is international, transnationalism complicates and questions the adequacy of viewing films within the seemingly outmoded rubric of national cinema. As Kathleen Newman observes, "changes in film industries and in film style are now understood not merely to be a response to national conditions and pressures, but also to have, most always, multiple international determinants."[7] As such, "[b]orders are seen to have always been permeable, societies always hybrid, and international film history to have been key to the process of globalization."[8]

Although transnationalism has played a key role in integrating Asian cinemas, particularly those of less developed countries, within a globalized community and network of cinematic production and consumption, it is, nonetheless, also a problematic concept that urgently needs critical definition or risk exhausting its value as a "virtue" in film studies. As Hjort points out: "Oftentimes the term functions as shorthand for a series of assumptions about [contemporary] networked and globalized realities … and it is these assumptions, rather than explicit definitions, that lend semantic content to 'transnational'."[9] Moreover, as she notes:

> There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that a number of film scholars are tiring of the endless incantation of 'transnational' and are beginning to ask themselves whether the very cinematic phenomena currently being described in 2009 as transnational would not, just some ten years previously, have been discussed in terms of a now allegedly outdated national cinemas paradigm.[10]

Transnationalism, as the trendy, relatively new buzzword in film studies is, in short, in danger of burning out if its critical possibilities are not properly arrested, developed and advanced. To that end, Hjort calls for "a far more polemical and less unitary discourse about cinematic transnationalism" and

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clarifies her own view that:

> the more valuable forms of cinematic transnationalism feature at least two qualities: a resistance to globalization as cultural homogenization; and a commitment to ensuring that certain economic realities associated with filmmaking do not eclipse the pursuit of aesthetic, artistic, social and political values.[11]

This collection of essays follows Hjort's valuation of transnationalism. Here, the conception of transnationalism is less about "transcending" national boundaries or the taken-for-granted-ness of what Newman sees as the "geopolitical decentering of the discipline,"[12] but takes on an inter-national perspective, where the emphasis is on the prefix "inter-." Unlike its implication in the term "international," which Nataša uroviová sees as "predicated on political systems in a latent relationship of parity,"[13] the prefix is used here to highlight the inter-relation and inter-action of cinematic connections that acknowledges the mobility of cinema and the uneven relationship between cinemas. This is consistent with what uroviová views of the "transnational" as an "intermediate and open term" receptive to the "modalities of geopolitical forms, social relations and especially the variant *scale* [sic] on which relations in film history have occurred that this key term its dynamic force, and its utility as a frame for hypotheses about emergent forms."[14] According to Ezra and Rowden, "the transnational at once transcends the national and pre-supposes it."[15] As such, far from signaling its demise, integral to this conception of transnationalism is a (paradoxically) renewed focus on national cinema as a simultaneous point of access and departure. The national is no longer viewed in isolation but within the context of the global, underscoring the role and theorizing of the national in an age of permeable boundaries where, according to Jürgen Habermas:

> we must distinguish between two different things: on the one hand, the cognitive dissonances that lead to a hardening of national identities as different cultural forms of life come into collision; on the other, the hybrid differentiations that soften native cultures and comparatively homogeneous forms of life in the wake of assimilation into a single material world culture.[16]

Habermas' "two different things" inform not only current cinematic practices but also the study of it as critical trajectories move beyond conventional perspectives of national cinema towards a consideration of the transnational, requiring a reframing of how we think about the interaction between cinema and the nation. According to Chris Berry, "[w]ithin this framework, the national is no longer confined to the form of the territorial nation-state but multiple, proliferating, contested and overlapping."[17]

This framing of the national is important if we are to understand cinemas, particularly the lesser known and/or those of less developed nations, as not just connected to and imbricated in a global network, participating in and producing an international film history, but also as functioning within the scope and scale of particular cultural, social and political movements and transformations within nations and nation states. As Dudley Andrew observes, "[q]uite distinct strains of national and regional styles and genres surely tell several histories of East Asian film, each harbouring its particular idea of cinema."[18] It is, therefore, the aim of this volume to find, through a focused perspective on cinematic space as a methodological tool, these "distinct strains" in South, East and Southeast Asian films and discover their particular idea(s) of cinema.

Cinematic Space

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Cinematic space is represented or produced space, and if, as Henri Lefebvre argues, "space is produced, then the 'object' of interest must … shift from *things in space* to the actual *production of space*."[19] Lefebvre's theorizing of space is the starting point for Yingjing Zhang's recent *Cinema, Space, and Polylocality in a Globalizing China*, one of the few published works that focus on space in general, and Asian cinema in particular. However, whereas Zhang emphasizes how spaces of production and reception affect our encounters with films from mainland China, this volume interrogates instead the (re)production of space(s) in Asian cinemas, and provides a critical context for understanding Asian film via space; and vice versa for negotiating meanings and constructions of nation and the space(s) implicated in such constructions via film.

Since its inception, theoretical discussions on film as art have focused primarily on the medium's ontological relationship with reality; between the realist position that film records reality and the formalist view that film renders reality. These schools of thought seem so fundamentally opposed as to never be reconciled. However, according to Irving Singer, the formalist–realist divide could be less divergent than previously realized. He argues that formalists like Sergei Eisenstein, Rudolf Arnheim and Béla Belázs "are aware that film 'captures' reality, in one sense or another,"[20] whereas realists like Siegfried Kracauer and André Bazin "also understand that films are not just reproductions."[21] As such, he states that whereas "reality may be revealed through photographic images … the use of these images shows the extent to which reality has been transformed."[22] Nataša uroviová goes further and characterizes the medium as "indebted at once to photographic capture of space and to movement, mobility, displacement,"[23] built "on the paired desires to bring the distant closer and to make the proximate strange enough to be worth seeing."[24] If this is so, then the experience of watching a film involves a kind of "double vision" that she describes as akin to irony in literary terms, or the same "consciousness of doubleness" that Richard Bauman ascribes as central to performance.[25] Marvin Carlson singles out Bauman's articulation that

> all performance involves consciousness of doubleness, according to which the actual execution of an action is placed in mental comparison with a potential, an ideal, or a remembered original model of that action.[26]

Hence, the difference between "performing" and "doing" is that the former "introduces a consciousness" to normative actions ("doing"), enabling a critical reappraisal of such actions, which may otherwise remain opaque, perfunctory or mundane.[27] For film, this difference is translated into the consciousness of the medium's doubling of reality. This consciousness can take two forms: on the part of the person/thing performing (i.e. the deliberate process of filmmaking and/or a film's emphasis on verisimilitude) and the people watching the performance (i.e. the audience is conscious of the constructedness of what they are watching).

How a film performs, how it uses photographic images, is determined by the formal configurations of that film's style. This is especially evident when applied to space because the setting in a film is perhaps the most tangible visual reference that a film makes to the reality it refers. The choice of setting gives us important information about, and affects our understanding of, characters and the world they inhabit. It can refer to a real space or locale, giving audiences a frame of reference for the film's diegesis and so also its narrative. However, the design of the setting can also create particular views of that space that may differ from, or reinforce prior, knowledge or impressions of that space to which it refers. The composition of a shot and the space of a frame can determine what we see, and affect how we see what we see. Editing techniques can articulate specific relationships among spaces whereas sound effects like music can also affect how spaces register with audiences. Therefore, although a film may refer to, or even contain, photographic images of real space(s) in a recognized

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world, how it chooses to use, depict and articulate that space transforms it and produces a particular realization, version or performance that can interrogate, impact and inform the 'reality' to which it refers or (re)produces. As such, although setting as a function of mise-en-scène locates narrative and gives it context, the narrative in turn also dislocates and recontextualizes the deployment of space as performative.

How cinematic space performs, therefore, is the central focus of this collection of essays. Here, space is foregrounded as a conceptual tool. Some qualifying remarks are necessary to establish what we mean by this. Although cinematic space may be understood as one possible representation of space—a condition 'out there' which has been conceptualized, aestheticized, and expressed as a reflection of such an entity—there are prevailing arguments that space should not be seen as embedding only one modality at any one time.[28] Instead, the interpretation and internalization of space (and here we refer specifically to cinematic space) as well as the ideologies such a space implicitly holds, relies on the imagination of that space as triadic or trilectical, that is, space should be understood *simultaneously* as what is represented (aestheticized or otherwise), what is actual (because it draws upon the "raw material" out there) and what is ultimately experienced (because the images that circulate around us tend to influence how and what we perceive).

What this means is that cinematic space is emblematic of a larger conception of space within the ideological tendencies associated with national or transnational movements or peoples. Consequently, the study of cinematic space has wider repercussions on the actualized politics of space as a symptom of nation building, or as embedding the seeds of a more complex, and fluid, transnational idiom. Through an understanding of this representation of space via cinema, one traverses complex and multiply coded identitarian questions dealing with issues of location and displacement such as belonging, spatial justice, rights or access to the city and its modes of expression, the rural and the dispossessed, loss, estrangement, migration, diaspora, self-exile, alienation and naturalization.

The triadic notion of space as inseparably actual, represented and experienced is delineated in geographer David Harvey's *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom*.[29] Harvey frames space, which he sees as coterminous with time, in two parallel, and comparable, dimensions. The first dimension describes space (and time) as absolute, relative or relational; the second dimension (following Henri Lefebvre's definition) sees spaces as materially sensed, conceptualized or lived.[30] Harvey argues that the two schemas share some common points, and when combined, give us a multidimensional perception of space and time.

Absolute space refers to space perceived through measurement and calculation. It is a "space of cadastral mapping."[31] This space corresponds to Lefebvre's materially sensed space, which is perceived through our direct sensorial engagement and primary experience with a physical environment. The next two definitions of space—relative and relational; or conceptualized and lived—are much more entwined in their relationships with each other. On this other level, space may be understood as relative to where others are located. Thus, space is defined through its specific surrounding contexts and communities of people, objects, events, practices, and locales, which are in turn, subject to movement and time. Conceptualized space or "representations of space" describes the abstracted representations of space deployed to depict how we perceive a space. Conceptualized space may be manifested through texts, diagrams, pictures, graphs, geometry, and mathematics. This is primarily the space that appears in the drawings of architects and planners, the space that circulates on the internet, as well as the space which materializes in film, art, poetry and literature. Harvey cautions that the fit between materially sensed space and what is represented is often open-ended as "concepts, codes, and abstractions" are used to depict our primary experiences, and these modes of deciphering are often subject to the specific cultural contexts or milieu in which we operate.[32] Such abstract

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representations are further related to a third category which Lefebvre awkwardly calls “spaces of representation” or what Harvey prefers to refer to as “space as lived.” Lived space is how our appreciation (affinity, fear or indifference) towards space is cultivated through our physical and emotional experiences as well as our cumulative worldview.

Harvey’s combination of the two schemas underscores the importance of understanding representations of space—of which cinematic space is a subset—as simultaneously reflecting *and* producing what is “out there.” It then makes sense to think of space in film as one part of a trilectical tool that underpins larger questions related to location, locality, and place, and as a consequence of this, leading on to issues of belonging, rootedness, and mobility, whether elected or forced. Thus, the study of space in film is not an end unto itself, but a means to engage entanglements of politics, culture, social life and the individual within a geopolitical region like Asia where the ambitions of state, nation and its peoples have often been too easily conflated or otherwise purposefully repressed.

Nation, Nationalism, Nation Space

The definition of nation, according to Benedict Anderson, is “an imagined political community,” which hinges on the imagination or the invention of a comradeship amongst peoples who will “never know most of their fellow-members, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”[33] Anderson’s understanding of nation is premised on a collective imagination, or a shared image of what “a people” may be. This imagination is often enacted within a network of spaces and events, or sites and practices that facilitate the placement and movement of such peoples. Rather than hypothesize “nation” as a static entity, Anderson’s definition may be interpreted as performative—nationhood is consequently constituted through a reflective action that reworks an existing image or idea of community. Nations, as Michael J. Shapiro reminds us, “should be regarded as dynamic and contentious domains of practice… . At a symbolic level, they are imaginaries (abstract domains of collective coherence and attachment), which persists through a complex set of institutionalized modes of inclusion and exclusion.”[34]

At the same time, there is strong support against nationalism which can be perceived as masochistic, divisive, and as Anthony Giddens argues, downright “belligerent.”[35] Yet, nationalism still matters because it is a shared concept which “helps locate an experience of belonging” in a world inundated by global flows; “underwrites the struggle against the fantastically unequal and exploitative terms on which global integration is achieved,” and more importantly because it offers “a deeply influential and compelling account of identities and structures in the world.”[36] Inasmuch as nationalism is criticized as anti-democratic, the nation is also a structure of integration—it consolidates solidarity and enables international cooperation.[37]

Consequently, nationalism is an “ambiguous and contradictory construction” manifested through a complex ordering principle involving politics, culture, and society, whose intertwined roles are played out in time and space.[38] Nationalism may also be associated with the state, hence, the portmanteau term “nation-state,” although nationalism can be a sentiment belonging to individuals and groups not connected to the state’s larger agenda. In *Seeing Like a State*, James C. Scott describes how state attempts to make society legible have entailed officials taking “exceptionally complex, illegible, and local social practices, such as land tenure customs or naming customs, and [creating] a standard grid whereby it could be centrally recorded and monitored.”[39] As Scott points out, what is fascinating is not the standard legible grid but instead what escapes or cannot be accommodated by this grid. Thus,

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although there are obvious architectural edifices which exemplify the political will of a state such as key civic buildings (parliament houses, courts of justice, presidential palaces), monuments and public plazas, the essays in this book explore the way national preoccupations and imaginations are taken up by nonstate actors in spaces not specifically constructed for state purposes.[40] These spaces differ in types, occupancy and scales: from dwellings to landscapes, construction sites to rooms, urban to rural, actualized to projected. In comparison to state edifices, these spaces are consequentially more nuanced in their encoding of meanings arising from national or nationwide preoccupations.

All space is political. Space is "fundamental in any exercise of power."[41] Its political dimension comes from its "ability to link the social, symbolic and experiential," and the "transformative politics" of space arises from how these different dimensions are manipulated.[42] For Margaret Kohn, spatial configurations can either naturalize or transform fluid social relations so that these appear "immutable" or empowering:

> The physical environment is political mythology realized, embodied, materialized. It inculcates a set of enduring dispositions that incline agents to act and react in regular ways even in the absence of any explicit rules or constraints.[43]

Following Kohn's argument, the essays in this volume explore the ways in which space is implicated in the conscious or unconscious articulation of national (or transnational) identities and politics. The affinities between national cinema and space seem significant although this relationship has not been exhaustively explored, save for a few examples.[44] As David B. Clarke notes, rather than analytically dissected, the visual representation of space, vis à vis the city in film, has been largely disregarded as "specialist," "tangential" or "maverick."[45] This volume aims to fill this gap by advancing the primacy of space. It does so by exploring how Asian film may be critically understood through the spatial networks it reflects, projects, and ultimately produces.

This book is structured around the performative potential and implications of space in Asian films. By this we are interested in how space is called upon to construct and reconstruct particular forms of identities, meanings and situations, which in this case, will be specifically studied in the context of particular national cinemas and cinematic practices. For our purposes, the representation of spaces in film is taken as a discursive text, not as a mirror of reality, nor a binary relationship featuring fiction versus fact. We suggest that film in its various formats—feature, shorts, propaganda, documentary, experimental, and amateur—may offer a series of "texts" or ideas, which reveal how spaces are reflected, constructed, and how they may be performative, transformed or transgressed. This concept exposes the constructed nature of space, reinforcing the argument that space, whether real or imagined, cannot be essentialized. It is neither reified nor static, but evolves according to the dynamics of experience (use and occupation) and interpretation (translation and reproduction). This would begin to suggest that space as imagined, constructed and/or transformed within the contexts of specific cinematic practices, through narrative, genre, or the work of particular filmmakers, enacts and exposes how Asian films perform, engage and relate to the national—complicated by micropolitics, myriad subcultures, as well as transnational, and global interventions and interests.

The essays in this volume foreground the use of space in Asian films as sites of inquiry that open up new perspectives to the study of Asian cinema. These examples are by no means exhaustive. Indeed, the objective of this book is not to close the argument but to introduce new ways of seeing and discussing Asian cinemas.

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Space in Asian Cinemas

Forwarding the book's overarching interest in cultivating new perspectives on cinemas in Asia through space and vice versa, for understanding Asian space through films, Ackbar Abbas' chapter, "Between the Visible and the Intelligible in Asian Cinema," directly addresses the complex and rapidly changing relationship between space and cinema in a globalized world of intricate information networks and mediatization. He argues that whereas space is both socially produced and produces the social, space itself has also become so complex and enigmatic that it cannot be directly described. Urban spaces in particular are like black holes: we perceive them only in the effects they produce; effects that we call "architecture," "cinema," "new media" and so on. All these cultural forms can be thought of as different ways of performing space. Film, he notes, can be taken to be the paradigmatic case. By focusing on disconnections, including the disconnection between the visible and the intelligible, *film*—specifically the films he discusses as examples—allows us to glimpse a problematic space that looks recognizable enough but whose internal ordering principles have changed. Cinema enables us, therefore, to trace a spatial history that would otherwise remain hidden.

Following on from Abbas' chapter, the subsequent chapters in this book are structured around three spatial themes that deal with the struggles for identity, belonging, autonomy, and mobility within different national and transnational contexts across Asia. The themes of *ephemerality, imagination* and *contestation* delineate how spaces are negotiated by nonstate actors to engage with nationwide preoccupations, whether such engagements result in co-option, resistance or active transformation of the status quo. The essays use space as a discursive tool in two ways. On the one hand, they attempt to negotiate the agendas and subtexts in Asian cinema through the study of spaces in the films. On the other hand, they engage these cinematic spaces in order to understand the construction and constitution of physical spaces that are reproduced in these films.

In *The City of Collective Memory*, M. Christine Boyer discusses two diverging views of space by Maurice Halbwachs and Walter Benjamin respectively. Both Halbwachs and Benjamin converged on the point that "collective memory always is embedded in a spatial framework."[46] For Halbwachs, city spaces remained enduring and unchanging even in the face of calamity:

> It is to space—the space we occupy, traverse, have continual access to, or can at any time reconstruct in thought and imagination—that we must turn our attention to. Our thought must focus on it if this or that category of remembrances is to reappear.[47]

In contrast, Benjamin argued that the spatial structures which aided memory were continuously under threat, and would ultimately be destroyed by the forces of progress. Such gradual decay was abetted by the advent of the photographic image, which simultaneously recorded each detail to precision but also relegated the past to "a pile of rubble" waiting to be "appropriated and recorded."[48] The essays under *Ephemeral Space* suggest that cinematic space may straddle the divide between Halbwach's and Benjamin's polarized worlds. This relies on cinematic space's capacity to depict the rich narrative and temporal qualities of these transitory spatial frameworks, caught as they were, in the midst of change. The contributors reevaluate disappearing and fragile spaces and structures, posing these as productive new modes for approaching identitarian issues entangled with memory, tradition and loss.

Examining Trâ'n Anh Hùng's *Vertical Ray of the Sun*, Christophe Robert asks whether there is an emerging genre of Vietnamese self-expression which strategically transforms the nation's violent wartime past into an introspective survey of nostalgic spaces linked to longing, anxiety and loss.

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Although Hùng's film raises issues such as extreme poverty and abjection, which have been, until recently, censored and repressed by the state, there is also ambiguity as to whether such nostalgic spaces and their stock narratives can effectively reclaim new sites for understanding loss as a regenerative process.

In comparison to Hùng's ambivalence towards a repressed past, Chinese director Jia Zhangke's cinematic cities depict, as Esther M. K. Cheung argues, a nation in drift. Focusing on Jia's *Still Life* and *24 City*, Cheung sees the assembling and dismantling of cities through the picturesque ruins and grimy construction sites as both realistic and allegorical—simultaneously documenting what is ongoing in real time but also creating an open-ended critique on the kind of loss and destruction which accompanies capitalism and modernization. Jia's perspective of space also resembles the Situationist *détournement*, a tactic of journeying and movement which juxtaposes normative space with aspects of the extraordinary, surprising and shocking.

The leitmotif of transience is carried into Lilian Chee's chapter on Singapore filmmaker Tan Pin Pin's work. It focuses on Tan's underlying spatial narratives of Singapore's capitalistic urbanism, and the filmmaker's bid to create a topographical montage of the city-state's peripheral spaces, shaped as it were from below—through occupancy, everyday use, personal history, and habit. Examining Tan's postmodern and posthuman spatial perspectives in six films, including *Moving House* , *Singapore GaGa* , *The Impossibility of Knowing* , *Snow City* and *Yangtze Scribbler*, Chee argues for a latent network of affective spaces which arise from Tan's preoccupation with, and ambivalence towards, entangled issues of nationalism, individualism, tradition and modernity in contemporary Singapore.

Contrasting Singapore's sociopolitical stability, Adam Knee demonstrates the volatile and oppositional conceptions of Thai identity as these are played out between two cities—the capital Bangkok and the northern city of Chiang Mai. Examining representations of, and discourses about Chiang Mai in recent Thai cinema, focusing in particular on *The Letter* (*Jod mai rak*), *Ladda Land*, and *Home: Love, Happiness, Memories* (*Home: kwamrak, kwamsuk, kwam songjam*), Knee makes the case that Chiang Mai is distinctively associated with values of home, family, tradition and culture, which are antithetical to Bangkok's drive towards modernity and globalization.

Imagined Space resonates with Anderson's definition of a nation as an imagined community of peoples who share a sense of belonging even though they may never know their fellow citizens. However, it also extends this definition by suggesting that cinematic space has historically offered "a new urban imagination, (and) a new structure of visibility" which framed specific modes of seeing.[49] James Donald argues that cinema has educated its audiences on "ways of seeing and imagining" the city "whether or not they live in one."[50] Consequently, our perceptions of physical space are so influenced by cinematic space that the former is at once real but also equally fictional, conjured up through associations and alliances, which are charged with excess imagery and meaning: "the imagined landscape of the city has become inescapably, a cinematic landscape… . film represents urban space as itself representational, as simultaneously sensory *and* symbolic."[51] The essays in this section explore such spatial imaginations.

Deborah Shamoon discusses the implications of a highly fictional but incredibly influential space found in Japanese animation. Evocatively called "superflat", a description which befits its character, Japanese animators have tended to emphasize sideways two-dimensional motion and a dynamic iconography rather than mimetically reproduce three-dimensional spaces and movement in depth. One recent intriguing example of the superflat style is *Puella Magi Madoka Magica* (directed by Shinbo Akiyuki). *Madoka* contrasts modernist, spare architectural settings in the "real" world with a baroque

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"magical" world composed of superflat montages. As the teenage characters negotiate transitioning from school life to the larger world, personal struggles of love, friendship and sexual maturation take on literally earth-shattering dimensions.

Lai Chee Kien's chapter casts a fresh critical perspective on Hong Kong director Wong Kar-wai's films by situating these within a Southeast Asian diasporic milieu particular to Hong Kong in the 1960s. Examining the parallel spaces featured in Wong's trilogy—*Days of Being Wild*, *In the Mood for Love*, and *2046*—Lai identifies the emergence of Manila, Singapore, and Phnom Penh/Angkor as corollaries to Hong Kong, the latter acting as an important edge between China and the overseas Chinese communities. He argues that Wong's films reimagine the lost connections between Hong Kong and Southeast Asia, expressed particularly through the popular media of film, literature and art.

The notion of "tableau" is introduced as a means to understand how the oft-neglected background space in film, constituted by "extras" with limited narrative roles and their attendant scenes, may destabilize the film's obvious spatiotemporal rhythm and narrative structure. Drawing attention to the 1959 Hong Kong film *Air Hostess*, Charles Leary suggests that its cinematic space collapses the mundane with the primitive, the grotesque, and the absurd. Reading as it were, in between these spaces, Leary argues for a more deconstructed and ambivalent sense of self-presentation in these films, often typecast as monodimensional and without self-critical content.

The concern with consistency among elements of mise-en-scène has not always been as important in other national cinemas as it has been in Hollywood cinema. A lack of consistency among realistic and unrealistic parts of mise-en-scène in Singapore's Malay-language films persisted into the 1950s and 1960s. In his chapter, Timothy R. White examines this lack of verisimilitude, with special attention on the spaces depicted. White offers explanations for this lack and suggests reasons for the change in the perception towards this lack. He argues that the conception of realism was replaced by another, essentially Western, idea of verisimilitude.

"Space is," as Rosalyn Deutsche contends, "political, inseparable from the conflictual and uneven social relations that structure specific societies at specific historical moments."[52] Through feminist theories on the politics of images, Deutsche argues that visual images (and by extension, films) of the city actively represent and construct the social relations and "identities for viewing subjects."[53] Therefore, often unremarked "vantage points" may purposefully subordinate, obscure, or render invisible other subject positions. The final section, *Contested Space*, interrogates such vantage points and their corollaries. The essays revisit questions of agency, voice, and struggle for autonomy within the fractured, multiple and contradictory conditions and identities present in an Asian geopolitical context. Perhaps, unsurprisingly, the contributors posit their arguments via feminist, postcolonial and gendered theories of spatial contestation as a means to recover agency, thus, concurring with Deutsche's opinion that visual representation, or in this case, film, and its contemporary spatial theories, are complicit in spatial production.[54]

Intan Paramaditha and Ugoran Prasad discuss the films of Indonesian filmmaker Garin Nugroho, which illustrate the mismatch between a state-sponsored version of national culture and the rich cacophony of local traditions found across the nation. Focusing on Nugroho's *Opera Jawa*, which advocates a hybrid aesthetics reflective of this cultural melting pot, Paramaditha and Prasad argue that the spaces in this film enact the idea of nationhood by opposing the essentialized concept of "tradition", yet remains paradoxically bound to the expectations of a transnational, Westernized audience in its insistent exoticization of Indonesian culture. The paper highlights a catch-22 situation in which the struggle for an autonomous, ground–up version of culture, free from national dictates, is ultimately dependent on its perceived audience.

The Korean black-and-white historical fiction *Jiseul* (directed by O Meul) attempts to cinematically

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enact the trauma of 'Jeju 4.3'—referring to the massacre of Jeju islanders in the anti-communist campaigns begun in 1948 by Korean troops of the then U.S.-backed regime. By closely analyzing selected scenes from the film, Sohl Lee discusses how this cinematic space of homage incorporates the performative elements of the shamanistic ritual (*kut*) to connect the present with the past through the experience of "documentary consciousness." O's poetic depiction of history ultimately moves away from conventionally didactic forms of narrative.

Extrapolating Judith Butler's theories on the performativity of gender, Edna Lim looks at how contemporary Singapore cinema functions as a national cinema. Taking in particular Kelvin Tong and Jasmine Ng's *Eating Air* and Royston Tan's *15*, she considers the performance of the "heartland" in these films—the public housing estates that cluster the island and form a significant part of not only the nation's landscape but also its performance of success. Lim argues that the heartland and other spaces in these films operate as sites of performance, consistent with the way films after the 1990s constitute a national cinema that counterperforms (an)other Singapore.

In the final chapter, Anoma Pieris examines the pivotal role of women in Sri Lanka's Black Cinema through the classical trope of Antigone, a figure opposed to violence, war and patriarchal order. Pieris's gendered reading of this figure is set within the context of Sri Lanka's civilian women who have been forcibly co-opted into the nation's conflicts because of their loyalties towards country and overwhelming need to protect their families from harm. Pieris proposes that Black Cinema may be interpreted through the conflicted roles of these women, to understand how their opposing loyalties are painfully negotiated through the cinematic (and real) spaces across the nation.

The contributors to this volume come from different disciplinary backgrounds including, architecture, film and cinema studies, media studies, cultural studies, comparative literature, literature, cultural anthropology, and art history. Although every chapter deals with the use of space in Asian film, each contributor approaches space with different disciplinary concerns. Hence, the perspectives offered here are radically diverse, perhaps even contestable, in their readings of the chosen cinematic texts. We see such diversity as a strength because it expands the interpretive repertoire of the films, as well as enlivening current filmic discourse.

Finally, the variety offered here is deliberate. In an age of permeable boundaries and transnational flows, the writings aim to reveal the performative potential of cinematic space across genres and cinemas. The interdisciplinary perspectives further highlight discursive opportunities arising from new ways of seeing and understanding Asian cinematic connections, practices and responses. These relationships, we argue, are simultaneously particular, multiple and varied, and thus, challenge us to see Asian cinemas and their use of space anew.

Notes

1. For discussions on landscape, see, for example, Martin Lefebvre, *Landscape and Film* (New York: Routledge, 2006). On geography, see, for example, Graeme Harper and Jonathan Rayner, *Cinema and Landscape Film, Nation and Cultural Geography* (Bristol: Intellect, 2010); Catherine Fowler and Gillian Helfield (eds.), *Representing the Rural: Space, Place and Identity in Films about the Land* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2006). On cartography in films, see, for example, Tom Conley, *Cartographic Cinema*, (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2007). On space in particular genres, see, for example, William H. Katerberg, *Future West: Utopia and Apocalypse in Frontier Science Fiction* (Kansas: Kansas University Press, 2008). On cinematic representations of urban space and the city, see, for example,

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Stephen Barber, *Projected Cities: Cinema and Urban Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) and Richard Koeck and Les Roberts, *The City and the Moving Image: Urban Projections*, (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). On space and specific cinemas, see, for example, Tiziana Ferrero-Regis, *Recent Italian Cinema: Spaces, Contexts, Experiences* (Leicester: Troubador, 2009).

2. Frederic Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 38.
3. Ibid.
4. Mette Hjort, "On the plurality of cinematic transnationalism," in *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives*, eds., Nataša uroviová and Kathleen Newman (New York: Routledge, 2010), 13.
5. Ibid., 14.
6. Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden, "General Introduction: What Is Transnational Cinema," in *Transnational Cinema: The Film Reader*, eds. Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden (London: Routledge, 2006), 1.
7. Kathleen Newman, "Notes on Transnational Film Theory: Decentered Subjectivity, Decentered Capitalism," in *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives*, 4.
8. Ibid.
9. Hjort, "On the plurality of cinematic transnationalism," 13.
10. Ibid.,12.
11. Ibid.,15.
12. Newman, "Notes on Transnational Film Theory," 4.
13. Nataša uroviová, "Preface," in *World Cinemas, Transnational Perspectives*, eds. Nataša Durovicová and Kathleen E. Newman (New York: Routledge, 2009), x.
14. Ibid.
15. Ezra and Rowden, "General Introduction," 4.
16. Jürgen Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays*, trans. and ed. Max Pensky (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 72–3.
17. Chris Berry, "From National Cinema to Cinema and the National: Chinese-Language Cinema and Hou Hsiao-hsien's 'Taiwan Trilogy,' " in *Theorizing National Cinema*, Valentina Vitali and Paul Willemen, eds. (London: British Film Institute, 2006), 149.
18. Dudley Andrew, "Time Zones and Jet Lag: The Flows and Phases of World Cinema," in *World Cinemas*, 62.
19. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 37.
20. Irving Singer, *Reality Transformed: Film as Meaning and Technique* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1998), 4.
21. Ibid., 7.
22. Ibid.
23. Nataša uroviová, "Vector, Flow, Zone: Towards a History of Cinematic *Translation*," in *World Cinemas*, 92.
24. Ibid., 90.

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25. Ibid., 92.

26. Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1996), 5.

27. Ibid., 72.

28. See Yingjin Zhang, *Cinema, Space, and Polylocality in a Globalizing China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010), 1–4.

29. David Harvey, *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 133–65.

30. Ibid., 134. See also Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 38–46.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid., 142.

33. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2000), 6.

34. Michael J. Shapiro, "Nation States," in *A Companion to Political Geography*, John Agnew, Katharyne Mitchell, and Gerard Toal, eds. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 272.

35. Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 129, cited in Ulf Hedetoft and Mette Hjort, "Introduction," in *The Postnational Self: Belonging and Identity*, Ulf Hedetoft and Mette Hjort, eds. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), viii.

36. Craig Calhoun, *Nations Matter: Culture, History, and the Cosmopolitan Dream* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 1, 8.

37. Ibid., 147.

38. Hedetoft and Hjort, "Introduction." x.

39. James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How certain schemes to improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 2.

40. For discussions on political will and state-sponsored architecture in the context of capital city designs, see Lawrence J. Vale, *Architecture, Power, and National Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

41. Michel Foucault, "Questions on Geography," in *Power/Knowledge*, ed. C. Gordon (London: Harvester, 1980), cited by Harvey, *Cosmopolitanism*, 161.

42. Margaret Kohn, *Radical Space: Building the House of the People* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 8, cited by Harvey, *Cosmopolitanism*, 158.

43. Ibid.

44. See, for example, Yingjin Zhang, *Cinema, Space, and Polylocality in a Globalizing China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2010); Myrto Konstantarakos, *Spaces in European Cinema* (Intellect, 2000) and Tiziana Ferrero-Regis, *Recent Italian Cinema: Spaces, Contexts, Experiences* (Troubador, 2009).

45. David B. Clarke, "Introduction: Previewing the Cinematic City," in *The Cinematic City*, ed. David B. Clarke (London: Routledge, 1997), 2.

46. M. Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996), 137.

47. Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1980), 140, cited by

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Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory*, 137–8.

48. Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory*, 138.

49. James Donald, *Imagining the Modern City* (London: The Athlone Press, 1999), 92.

50. Ibid., 68.

51. Ibid.

52. Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996), xiv.

53. Ibid., xix.

54. Ibid., xxi.

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