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Globalization, spectral aesthetics and the global soul

Tracking some ‘uncanny’ paths to trans-Pacific globalization

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Abstract The intensification of neo-liberal globalization under US hegemony has all the more activated uncanny forces and spectral forms in various trans-Pacific sites. This article contrasts Korean and US films and travelogues to elaborate uncanny paths to globalization and articulate modes of spectral critique. The seamlessness of globalization across the Pacific is thus threatened by uncanny anxieties, disrupted space–time coordinates, and everyday fears that challenge the end-of-history triumph in marketization.

Keywords global/local ● globalization ● postcolonial ● uncanny

The experience of Latin America [photographing migration sites and displaced peoples] made the sprawling cities of Asia seem strangely familiar. . . . Yet at times I would forget where I was. Cairo? Jakarta? Mexico City? (Salgado, 2000: 11)

Under the space–time compressions of globalization, time seems harried, frantic, ‘out of joint’ (see Robbins, 2001); place all but lost into a deformed hologram of flux, speed, and mixture; the self coded into a trans-local semblance of inter-connection, multiplicity, and pseudo-power. ‘Thank you for activating your Bank of Trans-America credit card. You may now use it at any one of 19 million locations worldwide’, a voice-message from God-knows-where comforted me, as I used my not-so-bottomless credit

card to purchase an electronic ticket to jet across 16 time zones from San Francisco to Hong Kong. Globalization becomes installed via a triumphalist discourse of achieved 'globality' (see Radhakrishnan, 2001), but it brings no relief: crossing Pacific vastness, we feel like Whitman (1989[1860]) haunted by *lack* at the end of *Facing West from California's Shores* – 'the circle almost circled [on the Passage to India] . . . (But where is what I started for so long ago? And why is it yet unfound?)'. These 'global souls' as Pico Iyer has called the more fortunate citizens of the 'post-imperial' and/or 'post-global order' like himself (2000: 91, 284) – in passages echoing Emerson, abolishing selfhood in a 747 cabin over the Pacific, as the Postcolonial Oversoul enters some 'duty-free zone' of transnational 'deracination' on route (for Time Inc.) to write-up Asia/Pacific (2000: 19) – such souls are not fully at home in the jetlagged speed and rhizomatic newness of global modernity. They are (like Whitman's trans-imperial Oversoul) in and out of those globalization processes, watching and wondering at them.

From Taipei and Paris to Los Angeles and Seoul, citizens of such agglomerating global-cities (becoming 'fellow in-betweeners' [Iyer, 2000: 19] of rootless places), become disoriented, restless, haunted by the uncanniness ('un-homeliness') of a world driven by the dynamism of neo-liberal values, uprooting local identity and ties of location, yet riven by irruptions of spirit presences and place-hauntings that techno-science cannot abolish nor calibrate. In the 1930s, Walter Benjamin was fond of quoting a passage from Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire* to the effect that the 'feverishly youthful pace of material production' in the mid-19th-century US was being driven by the creative-destructive dynamics of capitalist technologies like the railroad, steam engine, phototype, hydraulic mining, and telegraph (embraced as quasi-poetic achievements of US Manifest Destiny by that same past-liquidating Emerson et al.; see Stephanson, 1995: 53–65). Such forces of relentless production and waste 'had neither time nor opportunity . . . to abolish the old spirit world' (Benjamin, 1989: 52).

So the poets under high capitalism have anxiously wandered the malls, crowded sidewalks, dried-up rivers, and back alleys of the modernizing city in search of some lost aura or spirit-shining, as alienated into the commodity form, cultural sign, or material technology, and looking back to the diminished maker of global production as 'profane illumination'. This lyric 'shock' is all too fleeting ('unreal city' lamented Eliot of London) to disrupt the feeling of not-being-at-home. For Baudelaire, in a famous prose-poem on the cusp of global modernity in *Paris Spleen*, the poet had lost his vaunted aura of lyric productivity in the urban mud; for Poe, in the hurrying city crowd which treats its dwellers like fellow-ghosts; for Whitman, the poet had squandered the afflatus of high-seeing and sublime selfhood in the sea-drift and dirty muck of the Long Island Sound or displaced such personal attributes into the euphoria of Brooklyn Bridge. But we are on the other side of Hiroshima as instance of the US sublime. Post-modern thinkers of 'dissensus' like Lyotard have challenged the reign of

neo-liberalism's master-narrative, claiming to produce 'the enrichment of all humanity through the progress of capitalist technoscience' (1992: 17) by mocking the deformed spaces and mediatized genres the subject inhabits as life-world. 'We are like Gullivers in the world of technoscience: sometimes too big, sometimes too small, but never the right size', Lyotard warns in his trope of uncanny dispossession (1992: 79).

Global cities all the more register the circulation and mix of locals and non-locals; they are becoming 'translocalities' of semiotic interface more unbounded and open than the nation and its border-stalking citizenship criteria. As Ien Ang writes in *On Not Speaking Chinese*, describing discrepant versions of this rooted/routed mix of fluid 'Chineseness' via her own unsettling diaspora from Indonesia to Amsterdam to an anxiously 'Asianizing' Australia, the global city 'is one large and condensed contact zone in which borders and ethnic boundaries are blurred and where processes of hybridization are rife', and diasporas are undone (2001: 89). The very intensification of globalization flows in such spaces has often led to the felt necessity and desire to elaborate 'an intensified version of the local situation' (Wilson and Dissanayake, 1996: 5) at the global/local interface expressing 'both/and' linkage. 'Best thing about Brooklyn? All the countries of the world are here. Worst thing about Brooklyn? None of us get along', concludes an elderly black man in the Wayne Wang/Paul Auster movie *Blue in the Face* (used as an epigraph to Atlanta by Iyer, 2000: 174). At some Pacific Rim extremity of race war, uneven development and lurid catastrophe, Los Angeles nestles within such an 'ecology of fear' (see Mike Davis, 1998) a la *Blade Runner* cum *Mulholland Drive*.

The banal anguish of not fully belonging to this modern life-world, that uneasy state of being outside its space-time coordinates, takes away self-attunement to urban discipline and globalizing locality but gives the possibility of an uncanny rupture of the spirit world and its alien utterances. 'In Angst one has an "uncanny" feeling', is how Heidegger describes this famously in the modernist ontology of *Being and Time*. The fretful feeling of being thrown into forms of modernity is disrupted even more so by the 'nothing and nowhere' feeling of 'not-being-at-home' in the presence of dislocated, subliminal, or traumatized being. Such dis-attuned anxiety, in its full range of terror, trauma, and wonder, 'fetches Da-sein [Being] out of its entangled absorption in the "world"'; here, the uncanny approaches, irrupts, and dismantles the taken-for-granted security of the everyday space-time horizon' (1996: 176) and the threat of placelessness of life in the city.¹

Mike Davis has pointed out, in his *New Left Review* analysis of New York City going up in smoke and flames after 9/11, that the imaginary of global terrorism and war-from-above hitting the EuroAmerican city was long dreamt of, imagined, and luridly posited, in recent Hollywood action films and science fiction, as well as darker modes of German expressionism and Spanish surrealism from World War I. The event thus had that 'uncanny effect' of disrupted modernity (he quotes Freud, and echoes

Žižek, 2002, on the Hollywood uncanny), 'as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality' (2001: 38). Reaching some nodal point of global/local materialization in the World Trade Center's twin towers vanishing into the smoke and debris of instant ruins, the resulting 'globalization of terror' and specter of security threats has become an everyday affect of the global city, from Taipei and Paris to New York and Seoul. In more structural terms of North/South dialectics, as more people are born into poverty and made vulnerable to the effects of an interdependent economy of weaponry, spectacle, state security, identity theft and terror, 'global violence [becomes] the hard core of our existence' as Sven Lindquist outlines in the cautionary fragments and long-duree of global violence-from-above in *A History of Bombing* (2001: 186). The Bush II administration of global empire seems to take a special paranoid pleasure in the return of the security-state apparatus from cold war storage and the binary discourses of civilizational antagonism between us/them.

The uncanny all the more circulates in the global technologies of post-modernity (like cinema of the fantastic or the magical-realist novel), haunts them, gives them a new or exploratory efficacy in the aesthetic mapping of the real, however broken or incomplete the languages or frames. In *Modernity at Large*, Arjun Appadurai is pointing to such a shift in this global 'technoscape' of interactive narratives and clashing 'ideoscapes' as the imagination takes on the force of a social practice and becomes a site for figuring collective agency crucial to 'the new global order' (1996: 31) of mix and flow. Unsettling this neo-liberal regime of foreign globalization, Derrida has called this bursting-out of spectral media-effects a global *hauntology*, 'the ghost that goes on speaking' (1994: 32, 51) in our technologies and languages from the future and across borders of our nation-states. Such modes of alien 'hauntology' and threatening otherness might have a peculiar pungency and attraction in a divided country like South Korea, for example, haunted by a Marxist alter-reality and Confucian simulacrum to the North, the cold war remainder of what President Bush has recently re-demonized (like some lost Nazi kernel) as our new and abiding 'axis of evil'.² The media of representation, like photography or film, can barely keep up with or register the new global conditions of migration, urban saturation and transnational flight (see Salgado, 2000).

The 'euphoria of liberal democracy and of the market economy' (Derrida, 1994: 56) is haunted in South Korean films throughout the 1990s by 'spectral effects', as I will discuss, and images forth an alternative geopolitics of blasted trees, haunted temples, restless tombs, blind sooth-sayers, possessed beds, the returning horror of the ruined and dispossessed. Such a triumph of capitalist modernity is challenged, bereaved, threatened with catastrophe amid all the manic watching of the dot-com-dot-gone-dot con calculus of the globalizing market. As Derrida puts the claim for the politically uncanny effect and the 'strange familiarity' of unhomely spectral forces of globalization like mounting homelessness or

migrant workers ('the visibility of the invisible' [1994: 100] at home in the 1990s), 'Haunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony' (1994: 37). Belongs, I would say, even more so to a neo-liberal state like South Korea, which assumed and pushed towards some kind of enlightenment-based abolishment of the pre-modern and, as it were, oriental allure of such Buddhistic ghosts and rural paths.

The Buddhist alternative path to national enlightenment via an ascetic renunciation of urban wealth and the worldly world haunts the geopolitical cosmology of an art film like Bae Yong-Kyun's *Why Has the Bodhi-Dharma Left for the East?* (1989), for example, which uses the city to represent the allure of market accumulation, disorientation and fury, if not the blindness of the poor to such a fate (as captured by the blind mother the priestly son has abandoned). But, beautifully filmed to the point of Asiatic sublimity, the film shows only a tattered temple and a broken male-centered genealogy of succession, ash, and ascetic anguish as some kind of dead-end. An alternative path to globalization, an alternative Buddhistic cosmology for Korea, but wandering as in some anti-modern void (see Willemsen [2002] on alternative regimes of Korean space-making and subject-position in cinema).³

In a 1996 Korean horror film directed by Jacky Kang (Kang Chegye), *Ginkgo Bed*, the scientific and artistic orders of contemporary Seoul are disrupted by the uncanny entry of a spirit-laden wooden bed returning from the pre-modern order of feudal relationships which threatens the cigarette-and-laughter modern relationship of the woman doctor and her art-lecturer lover. The jealous class rivalry between a general and a court musician over the preternaturally beautiful Mi-Dan acts as an uncanny catalyst and works its way, from a 'love felt over a thousand years' in the spirit world by General Kang, into the relationship of the present-day couple, ruining their careers, their homes and offices, burning up their horizon of banal everydayness. The cash-nexus of the ordinary city is put out of joint, defamiliarized: some stunning visual effects add symbolic credibility to the cinematic spirit-conjuring, as needy ghosts flit in and out of contemporary bodies and disrupt the medical and artistic technologies for measuring the line between life and death, self and other, body and soul, reality and spirit. The uncanny seems at times luridly theatrical (hoaky spectrality of the special effects, as it were), but in its reach aims to hook into the political unconsciousness of abolished spiritual beliefs and debts adhering to the past. Released from the market of commodity exchange and returned to the fetish world of Korean spiritual-political-romantic force, the ginkgo bed becomes a kind of commodity in reverse, 'a "thing" without phenomenon, a thing in flight that surpasses the senses' in its uncanny spectrality, disturbing the homey bedroom (see Derrida [1994: 150] on the fetishized invisible exchange-value of the commodity form under capital).

The out-of-the-body experience of *Ginkgo Bed* is rendered everyday and normal via the quasi-Buddhist horizon of metempsychosis, souls of a

romantic triangle reincarnated into two ginkgo trees and a hawk. The Korean middle-class couple are finally restored to everyday modernity, but not before the comforting boundaries of modern reality and the space-time coordinates of techno-capital (which seemingly have abolished the spirit-world in its rationalized calculus of instrumentalized profit) have been luridly challenged with the blood and terror of vengeful ghosts, vampiric murders, heart captures, resurrections, spirit unions, and a large-scale exorcism symbolized in the end by the burning up of the ginkgo bed.

We have to wonder, with the innovative Korean scholar and filmmaker Kim So-Young, if these 'uncanny' effects circulating in such films of the 1990s have not surfaced to re-visit present-day Korea to remind the county of what has been lost in the furious making of the postwar modern city and capitalist nation. In an interview with Kim So-Young in *Postcolonial Studies*, Chris Berry has called attention to the recent 'resurgence of the fantastic mode in various [Korean] box office hits' such as the horror films *The Quiet Family* and *Whispering Corridors* in the anti-globalization climate of 1998, becoming popular 'just when entry to the OECD and democratic politics seemed to have secured middle class prosperity' (Kim and Berry, 2000: 54). Pushing this return of the repressed back before the Asian currency crisis of 1997 called into question Korea's bond to the neo-liberal discourse of globalization. Kim So-Young links the 'brutal sweep of the modernization project' under the regime of Pak Chun-hee to the ongoing ruse and rise of Korean cinema as 'liminal space' and uncanny irruption.

The Korean uncanny indeed has a long trajectory in postwar Korean cinema and surfaces, again and again in differing contexts, as a ghostly imagery of what we could call *fantastic critique*. Kim calls attention to the 're-emergence of the fantastic mode' (2001: 27) in such new wave late 1990s films as *Ginkgo Bed*, *Nine Tales Fox*, *Soul Guardian* and *Yongari*. Beyond this, she has deftly exposed the cold war traumas and all-too-reactionary geopolitics returning to haunt the Korean blockbuster mode of pseudo-Hollywood production in films like *Phantom Submarine* (1999), *JSA (Joint Security Agreement)* (2000), *Soul Guardians* (1999), and *Shiri* (1999). We might also recall Pak Chol-su's alluring film *301/302* (1995), where two apartment dwellers act out their symptoms of over-eating and under-eating in cleanly modern spaces haunted by traumas of childhood abuse and a claustrophobic marriage evacuating the seeming prosperity and stylized success of a well-ordered life. As Kim So-Young summarizes this generic promiscuity and trans/national imaginary of such films, 'Ghosts seem to exist not only in the horror film but in the propaganda film, historical epic, and action and espionage genre. Korean cinema is becoming the liminal space of apparitions' (2001: 304). These films pursue a 'discrepant hybridity', as Esther C.M. Yau and Kyung Hyun Kim note more broadly, and in so doing 'pursue the politics of the possible by articulating the discrepant, the non-normative, the traumatic, and the scandalous in the films' rendition of the Asia/Pacific' as an uncanny region haunted

by ghosts, ghouls, and various motley dead or ex-colonial figures who 'have yet to die' (2001: 282–4).

Chunhyang and her undying love for Mongryong is by no means a ghost story, but her force as intertextual construct and interpellative legacy in Korean patriarchal culture gives her much-filmed narrative a haunting quality as blasted allegory coming down from the premodern past of the Chosun Dynasty to call upon and constrain the globalizing nation-state present and its concert-going (or Hollywood-enchanted?) audience. From Yu Chin Hahn's Chinese-character version in 1754 to the popular tradition-trenched novel of 1955, *Chunhyangjun*, not to mention more recent joint performances of the pansori folk tale by South Korean and North Korean artistic groups performing in Pyongyang, the Chunhyang narrative stands at the core of Korean folk culture, conveying an inter-textual archive of attitudes, beliefs, pieties, mores, and modes (see H. Lee, 2000: 64–90). As Kim So-Young notes of myriad Korean melodramas fetishizing suffering women as a way of narrating 'the inscription of the new patriarchal order in a rapidly shifting society', one of the earliest Korean films, *Chunhyangchon* [The Story of Chunhyang] (1923) enlisted a renowned contemporary courtesan to play the lead role of virtuous wife and thus gave the film-commodity an early courtly aura and cross-over of traditional prestige for modern culture (2001: 304–5). Haunted by class tensions and the gender codes and sexual morality structuring a Confucian-based social order, '*Chunhyangjon* is a text apt for an ideological interpretation' by Korean film makers both in the North and the South, as Hyangjin Lee has argued, whereby globalizing Koreans can work through a heritage of colonized subjectivity and seemingly preserve residual feudal values of face-saving, ethical idealism, and the patriarchal gaze (see H. Lee, 2000: 72 and chapter two, 'Gender and Cinematic Adaptation of the Folk Tale, Ch-unhyangjon'; for a strong critique undermining such 'nativist' claims within the 'everyday' capitalist modernity of hyper-globalizing East Asian sites like Korea and Japan, see Harootunian, 2000: 37–42).

A vast intertext of cultural uses and implications surely haunts any contemporary retelling of the Chunhyang story, creating (I would hazard to guess) vast disjunctures of meaning between local, national, and international audiences. As film director Im Kwon-Taek has noted of this story, this beloved Korean folktale of a forbidden passion and sublimating romance crossing class lines had been filmed 14 times before his own version became the first Korean film to compete at the Cannes Film Festival and the first of his own to go global beyond an art-festival film venue. By way of pushing this reflection on a distinctively Korean path to trans-Pacific globalization towards a contemporary end, I want further to interrogate the global/local dynamics of this figure in Im Kwon-Taek's recent mini-blockbuster film, *Chunhyang* (2000), to call attention to the uncanny localism of this period-piece film which actually once again tracked a distinctive Korean path to globalization.

Here I am drawing upon and applying an argument I made recently in

the *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* journal (2001a), outlining a more sweeping analysis of films by Im from *Mandala* (1981) to *Sopyonje* (1993). There I called attention to and defended Im's use of 'strategic localism', so long as Korean film increasingly confronts, as a structural condition, 'the larger global/local plight of entrenched locality and nationality as such under global endangerment' (2001a: 308). Employing over 8,000 extras and 12,000 costumes and carefully researched and filmed with impeccable cinematic detail, *Chunhyang* emerges as 'Korea's largest cinematic production ever', the Dream-Suite Productions website boasts in De Mille-like terms of the spectacle-sublime.

But, more on the deformative or localist mark, Ryan Motteshead in an *indieWire* interview (4 January 2001) with *Chunhyang's* director has called attention to 'Im's stubborn Korean-ness' in his use of the pansori voice-over narrative, not just as context but as perspectival device and mise en scene. Indeed, it is fair to say that the 'caterwauling . . . barking and yowling and shouting' pansori singer, here played by Cho Sang Hyun, is what gives the movie its uncanny Korean power and defamiliarizing frame: its turn to represent (in aural and visual disjunctive modes coming in and out of narrative synch) an alternative mode of narration, linking the audience of the performative context (shrouded at first in black, and later brought into the diegesis via call-and-response towards the film's ending).

'Who knows what will happen after the story's end?', the pansori narrator taunts the aroused audience with the seemingly happy ending, suggesting that the portrayal of exploitative rulers 'fattening their pockets' and 'impoverishing the poor' may continue into the patterns of crony-capitalism and trickle-up economics haunting modern-day Seoul and its rural peripheries like the Cholla province itself where the film is set and where Im comes from. The ideology of class status uttered by the corrupt Governor Byun – 'class has a natural order and cannot be violated' – gives way to a discourse of human rights and a sacrificial vision of gender equity. Less comfortingly, the fidelity to principles of a Confucian state and the scholar-centered patriarchy ('serving two husbands is like serving two kings', Chunhyang laments to the point of self-sacrifice) are given postcolonial ratification via cinematic spectacle that borders on epic in its vistas and *Citizen-Kane* like perspectives upon power seen from afar and from below.

Pondering the uneven situation of globalization in which (to quote Im Kwan-Taek in the *indieWire* interview) 'Korean films have yet to establish their own identity for international audiences' and furthermore having faced the relative inattention of international film criticism due to what Tony Rayns (1994) sees as 'extreme specificity in references and commitment to a kind of activism deemed passe in the west' (p. 22), Korean films are beginning to forge their way into the international circuit in a distinctive and scrappy, if belated, way. As I have argued, 'Korean film at times seems torn between the quite culture-based extremities of these two transnational film genres: (a) the diasporic one [followed by Ang Lee and many

Hong Kong film makers] portraying international hybridity, global flux, and cultural impurity, versus (b) the other deftly self-orientalizing one using an ethnographic gaze backward, imagining some damaged trait as a national essence or enduring cultural trait' (2001a: 315). *Chunhyang*, in my opinion, again heads down this latter path toward globalization, portraying with ethnographic and visual mastery and sumptuous detail certain enduring Korean stories, genres, if not cultural traits.

When asked by Ryan Motteshead what he thought American audiences could take away from watching this Korean film version of *Chunhyang*, director Im replied, warily but with grim humor: 'American audiences may very well not be interested, because I am not well known in the United States. So it may be very natural for audiences not to come to see my films [laughs]. However, I am not too worried about it' (2001). Such is the power of the Korean uncanny to make its way through the circuits of globalization, laughing, seemingly oblivious to a superpower whose genres, outlets, forms and codes often define the very global in terms of its own neo-liberal particulars, though American film thankfully is by no means the only worlding-world of globalization.

Global productions increasingly send the trans-Pacific local culture offshore and world-wide, resolving the tensions of imperial history and global imbalance into mongrel fantasy, soft spectacle, and present-serving myth. Given the reach and impact of an 'increasingly globalized popular culture', we have to wonder (with Paul Gilroy) if such works are not engaged in creating 'racialized signs' of cultural difference and, with all the liberal good-will of a corporate multiculturalism gone cosmopolitical and sublime, spreading 'commodified exotica' under the myth of authenticity (Gilroy, 2000: 13–21).⁴ Solidarities evoked around blood or land, crucial to the sovereignty claims and precolonial ontology of native peoples in the Pacific, are superceded by the pop-culture community of Elvis Presley music, beach-going, and the pleasures of multicultural mixture as in Disney's pro-tourist fantasy, *Lilo and Stitch* (2002).⁵ Full of a residual animism and uncanny forces that settler colonialism has not fully displaced or marketed, the Hawaiian islands (for example) may be 'the most superstitious place in the world' (or at least the United States), as ex-local Annie Nakao has written,⁶ tracing the impact of Japanese *obake*, or ghost stories, and the uncanny hold of native Hawaiian lore (like the volcano goddess Pele) upon its residents (or driving the contradictions of a mixed-heritage novelist like John Dominis Holt in *Waimea Summer* [1975]). While economically remote or irrelevant to global production, the offshore Pacific (however alternative its vision of Oceania or place) has long served as such a testing space for global fantasy and the transnational reach of 'Americanization' stories, where nuclear weapons, imperial wars, contact phobias, cultural mutations, and (nowadays) the multicultural hyperbole of transnational community can work themselves out with romantic dreaminess, narrative immunity, and the (ridiculous) postcolonial sublimity of historical oblivion.⁷ The full force of these trans-Pacific displacements –

ecological, financial, semiotic and cultural – demand the scrutiny and resistance of de-orientalizing tactics, for the ‘uncanny’ Pacific of trans-national globalization remains haunted by historical injustice, social unevenness, and racial phobias coming back from the postcolonial future.

Looking back to John Houston’s close-to-war-propaganda film, *Across the Pacific* (1942), the Pacific was portrayed as a deceptively romantic, uncanny, and ultimately phobic space full of inscrutable oriental forces (and their subversive white allies) harboring imperial designs and an array of anti-US forces as they gather around to undermine the US hegemony over the Panama Canal just before the attack on Pearl Harbor. A huge strategizing white man is a Japanese spy and double agent (played by Sydney Greenstreet, a karate expert, reciting haiku breathlessly) who is sickened by the weak-willed and drunken white rancher in Panama, where the Japanese hide the attack planes. Even a second-generation Asian American ‘nisei’ character from California is shown to be part of the international takeover move by the Japanese axis – this all had to be decoded and stopped by the counter-espionage Humphrey Bogart character (and his hotel-owning Chinese ally), who thwarts the Japanese air attack just in time in a kind of lone-gun, stealthy, and pragmatic bit-by-bit way. Such works of cinema helped to provide the perceptual apparatus to reclaim, fantasize over, and integrate the Pacific as an American-dominated space, as Paul Virilio has written: ‘For the Americans, the abstractness of their recapture of the Pacific islands made “cinema direction” a necessity – hence the importance of the camera crews committed to the [Pacific] campaign.’⁸

‘The Pacific is the white man’s ocean’, as William Randolph Hearst proclaimed in response to the Pearl Harbor air attack (quoted in Brechin, 1999: 230), and Houston’s movie works to provide a geopolitical rationale and, even more so, ‘perceptual arsenal’ (Virilio, 1989: 9) to keep it this way. This phobic Pacific as space of peril and threat is recognizable in an array of war-era poems by Robinson Jeffers, as in ‘The Eye’, which shows an ocean full of blood, scum, and filth, and the ‘world-quarrel of westerling/ and easterling man, the bloody migrations, greed of power, clash of faiths’. Or in Robert Frost’s west-coast poem ‘Once By the Pacific’, where the ocean grows apocalyptic with yellow peril forces and God’s Jehovah-like wrath, inscribed in the trans-Pacific sky and water: ‘The clouds were low and hairy in the skies/Like locks blown forward in the gleam of eyes.’ In his white-republic diatribe, *The Land of Gold: Reality versus Fiction* (1855), Hinton Rowan Helper portrayed this *phobic* version of the trans-Pacific in 1855 as a mongrelizing site of swarming immigrants like ‘the solemn Chinamen, tattooed [Pacific] islander, and slovenly Chilean’ coming in across the ocean from alien sites of bad blood and cheap labor, thus creating a ‘copper Pacific’ as threatening politically as the chattel slavery and miscegenation of the Black Atlantic. ‘Our population was already too heterogeneous’, Helper writes of everyday life in the free-soil American state of California, ‘before the Chinese came; but now another

adventitious ingredient has been added; and I should not wonder at all, if the copper of the Pacific yet becomes as great a subject of discord and disension as the ebony of the Atlantic' (quoted in Robert G. Lee 2000: 49, 26). Exclusion acts would soon be activated to try to keep this ever-cop-pering Pacific white, and Pacific coastal states like California the exclusive domain of so-called 'native' white labor.

Globalization discourse nowadays inscribes a very different trans-Pacific, one full of motion and mixture and interconnection to Asia and the Pacific. This globalization 'discourse implies concurrence' (Glissant, 1989: 3), and would push the globe towards some utopic transnational fusion: recuperating an Asian origin of trans-Pacific synthesis dreamed of by Whitman's *Facing West from California's Shores* (1989[1860]), when 'the house of maternity' in Asia civilizations and wisdom-traditions would meet hard-headed European technologies, 'the circle almost circled', Columbus or Emerson settling down to meditate in Bombay. Globality achieved, image of wholeness and completion and fusion-culture. But we can recall how Whitman-the-post-imperial-American is haunted by lack, incompleteness, something missing in the grand global journey of translated-empire from Atlantic origins to Pacific telos – 'But where is what I started for so long ago? And why is it yet unfound?' – as the poem ends on a note of anti-Hegelian failure and the breakdown of the globalization telos. The seamlessness of US-dominated globalization across the Pacific is all the more these days threatened by a new-world order of anxieties, disrupted space-time coordinates, and everyday fears, and perhaps it is best to keep this war-era and Cold War Pacific of clashing imperialisms, civilizational divides, and racial antagonisms lurking in mind as we push to map a contemporary array of uncanny forces and emergent forms that give the lie to the end-of-history triumph in marketization.

Less critique than symptom of those neurotic globalization patterns we are living through as temporal dislocation and spatial disorientation, Pico Iyer's *The Global Soul: Jet Lag, Shopping Malls, and the Search for Home* (2000) is a highly privileged postcolonial travelogue written around a set of haunted global/local paradoxes: the more market unity we have, the less the 'global soul' feels it belongs, the more it longs for a sense of home, a psycho-geography of postmodern belonging, and bond to place (which Iyer feels, finally, at a Buddhist spirit-lantern site in Nara, Japan, his own home in Santa Barbara, California, having gone up in flames). The more unity we have on certain levels of commodity-exchange and media flow, the more tribal, fragmented, and divided we remain as civilizations and cultures. Iyer searches through the East/West and North/South hybridity-effects of various paradigmatic sites of globalization: Los Angeles Airport (LAX) as Disney-like site of multicultural mixture and border-crossing flux and fear; Toronto as global city of managed cosmopolitan interface; London as site of periphery-to-center reversals and ex-imperial transformation into Cool Britannia; Atlanta as site of Olympics brotherhood and terrorist threat. The threat of 'residual tribalism' gives way to the

mongrel mix of global commensurability.⁹ But above all for Iyer, the site of maximal globalization where the global soul feels most (temporally and spatially) disoriented, lost from place, lost into 'the global marketplace' of commodified identity and the self becoming a PIN number, credit card, and phone card, is Hong Kong.

In Hong Kong, Iyer portrays his 'global twin', a British friend (fellow student of Oxford and Eton) named Richard (now working as management consultant for an American firm 'in a global market that asks him to move as fast as it does' [2000: 84], although his ancestors had served as governor-generals in India) who lives in an expensive flat furnished with suitcases, laptops, modems, cell phones, and Delta business class toilet kits for 'people passing through' (p. 82). Life at One Pacific Place has become a space of flows and transient comforts, a 'permanent hotel' that flows into a shopping mall and an airport for leaving and returning, a place to use 12 phone cards and to live as if 'in midair', like some ex-imperial airplant. Richard's life as 'flexexecutive' lackey to high-capitalist exchange is so accelerated, so tied into the nexus of global markets, flows, and 24-hour exchanges, that at times he gets so jet-lagged he does not know who he is nor where he is. In Hong Kong, Iyer paradoxically realizes the digitalized comfort of belonging in some de-materialized way: 'You could live on the plane, I realized, or on the phone – or, best of all, on the phone on the plane' (p. 85).

Pico Iyer's postcolonial life of luxurious displacement on the Pacific Rim, like Richard's, nonetheless becomes a compound of time lag, culture mix, zone shift, 'living out of displacement' (p. 86). On the cusp of the Chinese turnover in 1997, Iyer finds not a 'uniculture' but remnants of 'generic' British colonial style that make him feel (in Hong Kong's Central District, spotting an Anglican church) not just like being in Singapore or Bombay (where his father is from), but as if 'I was in England, on a gray November morning' (p. 90). Amid the transience and mongrel flux of globalizing and postcolonializing Hong Kong with its share of boat people and migrant domestics, Iyer barely engages with via his ever-present hybridity tropes of surface mix, the space will also 'accommodate a thousand kinds of homesickness' (p. 93) and lead to gazing at those diasporic paradoxes of 'white coolie waiters from Britain and Australia who'd taken over the menial jobs in Hong Kong now that the lines of power were being redrawn' (p. 105). That Hong Kong is now filled with 'abode seekers' from mainland China only adds to the pathos of this uneasy mix of privileged nomads with less fortunate refugees and labor diasporas of the global flow (see Salgado [2000: 333–431] on labor flows into global cities of Asia).

Losing his soul into a more privileged version of the 'sweatshop sublime' (see Robbins, 2002), Iyer's self-doubling Richard ends up lost in the more digitalized or cyborg sublimity of global capitalism: he leaves Iyer with phone numbers for an office in Tokyo, home and fax numbers in Hong Kong, an 800 number for voice mail, mobile number, fax numbers and his mother's number in London, a toll-free number for calling voice

mail from Japan. 'Somehow, that left no room in my address book for his name,' Iyer ruefully concludes (p. 112). Only displaced back into a trans-Pacific Japan glutted with global products, and yet still staunchly itself as locality and culture, can Iyer claim to feel at home, as if enacting here some uncanny repetition of Thoreau at Walden Pond; but this time the transcendental market release into the illusion of autonomy takes place in Nara, Japan, with a woman who speaks little English and Iyer himself speaking less Japanese, as if in entering into semiotic immunity and de-racinated into the global oversoul: 'I read Thoreau on sunny Sunday mornings, as Baptist hymns float from across the way, and think that in our mongrel, mixed-up planet, this may be as close to the calm and clarity of Walden as one can find' (p. 296). Pico Iyer, rather obsessively, now stages the cultural fantasies and psychic needs of a latter-day American transcendentalism, but finds a home for them not at Walden Pond but in Nara and Kyoto, fronting the Pacific Rim interface of transnational encounter.¹⁰

The American transcendental imaginary of Iyer's global oversoul has been brought as spiritual cargo along with Starbucks, Costcos, American Online, and Mister Donut across the Pacific and transplanted into a Japan full of 'Western things (played out, as it were, in katakana script)' (p. 283). Iyer realizes (in this last chapter, called 'The Alien Home') that 'a sense of home or neighborhood can emerge only from within' (p. 282). Ever mobile yet longing to belong to the brave new world of techno-driven globalization, Iyer roots down in Japan amid uncanny disruptions where 'minglings are more and more the fabric of our mongrel worlds' (p. 292), writing transcendence amid the anxiety-laden space-time co-ordinates of globalization for the offshore global soul.

Iyer's uncanny path to East/West or trans-Pacific globalization is a recognizably American one, however, linking up and down to local differences while at the same time diasavowing traces of imperialism or transnational expansionism in the drive to install (translate different cultures into) a neo-liberal American version of universal liberation at LAX: 'And so half-inadvertently, not knowing whether I was facing east or west, not knowing whether it was day or night, I slipped into that peculiar state of mind – or no-mind – that belongs to the no time, no place of the airport. . . . I had entered the stateless state of jet lag' (p. 59). Or, better said, Iyer has re-entered the uncanny myth-engine of a US-centered global capitalism on its latest Passage to Cathay, where Pacific Rim expansion is recoded as self-loss and the globalization dynamic is read (translated downward) as a victory of the local culture over the regime of global time-space.¹¹

Notes

- 1 Heidegger's disturbing closeness to 'mystical raciological ideas' and quasi-fascist resolutions to the flux of global modernity are critiqued by Paul

- Gilroy (2000: 63–5). The romantic notion of organic *Lebensraum* (living space) was appropriated by German fascism into a place purified of mongrel bloods and mixed cultures (p. 39).
- 2 By Confucian simulacrum to the North, I am alluding to the hyper-culturalist argument recently put forth by Hyangjin Lee in *Contemporary Korean Cinema* (2000) that the films of North and South Korea, especially those from the 1980s, share a core of residual Confucian values that endure despite the ideological divisions of capitalism in the South and socialism to the North: 'Confucian tenets on social hierarchy and family life are widely incorporated into the films from both areas. The five adaptations of *Ch'unhyangjon*, for example, invariably stress the time-honored Confucian family ethic based on harmony, unity, and loyalty among its members' (p. 191). I will return to the *Chunhyang* film genre shortly.
 - 3 By contrast, two recent Korean films by Kim Ki-duk, *The Isle* (1997) and *Real Fiction* (2000), depict a brutalized everyday world shorn of culturally uncanny forces or redemptive alternatives and thus reduced to the raw master-slave dialectics of exploitation and kill-or-be-killed commodified need, from city to countryside. (I thank my colleague Earl Jackson for calling these brilliant and contrarian films to my attention.)
 - 4 Gilroy is addressing the 'planetary traffic in the imagery of blackness' (p. 21), which in a Pacific context often shifts into a fantasy of evoking indigenous and Asian otherness in American contact-zones of proximity, admiration, and mixture.
 - 5 On tactics of native ontology and sovereignty emerging across the contemporary Pacific, see Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999).
 - 6 See Annie Nakao (2002), who draws an ecological imperative from uncanny Hawaiian beliefs: 'But much of the island lore emanates [not just from immigrant Japanese but] from a native Hawaiian culture that respects its spiritual environment – not a bad way to live on the earth.'
 - 7 For a 'Polyn-Asian'-based updating of 'how island paradises are produced for global consumption', see Harris and Neill (2001): 'Consequently, the South Pacific has been colonized by Hollywood as a site of cultural rather than capital production, within which US commercial ambitions can be phantasmatically reimagined and replayed' (p. 76). From another angle of production, see also Najita (2001) on the fantasmatic colonial-settler history of Jane Campion's (1992) globally popular film, *The Piano*.
 - 8 See Paul Virilio (1989: 95n). On the US war movies of John Houston, Anatole Litvak, and Frank Capra made in an era when Nazi-based German cinema (via Joseph Goebbels) sought to overcome 'American super-productions' and undermine 'the American perceptual arsenal' of world cinema, see Virilio (1989: 9–10).
 - 9 Here I draw upon Lindsay Waters' critique of 'incommensurability' and the essentializing retreat towards 'residual tribalism' that marks our age of globalization and results, at times, in a neo-orientalist standoff of civilizational divides, as in the work of Alan Bloom or Samuel Huntington or even more left-leaning cultural studies work: see 'Opening the American Mind . . . Towards China' (essay forthcoming in *Dushu*, cited with permission, based on lectures at universities in China, May 2002).
 - 10 In a related cross-cultural travelogue set on the Pacific Rim, Iyer (1992) takes his essential copies of Thoreau and Emerson to Kyoto, where he searches for moments of zen intensity and romantic self-abolishment in temples and

inns. Finding a secret Japan within its globalizing corporate culture, one closer to the libidinal desires and blasted lives of Tsushima Yuko's feminist fiction (pp. 332–3), Iyer self-ironically situates himself in the lineage of writers like Pierre Loti, Lafcadio Hearn, and Kenneth Rexroth, for whom the zen mystery of Japanese otherness and aesthetic epiphany is embodied in quest of Japanese women (p. 79). Again, the book is a brilliant acting out and critique of this post-orientalist symptom and transnational romance: Iyer becomes the monk haunted and consumed by romance, here staged as ontological obsession with cultural difference.

- 11 Against Iyer's globalized vision of a Hong Kong given over to 'The Global Marketplace' (this is what he calls his chapter on Hong Kong in *Global Soul*), we would have to track Chinese national tensions, British legacies, and global/local dynamics in a more nuanced way where localism recodes, translates and deforms the global, as in the poetry of Leung Ping-Kwan in *Travelling with a Bitter Melon* (2002) and *Foodscape* (1997). As Rey Chow summarizes Leung's uncanny poetics of the Hong Kong local around the tensions of global capitalism and 1997, 'Against the oft-repeated moralistic indictment that Hong Kong is a place driven exclusively by materialism and consumerism, Leung's work, through cohesively nuanced self-reflections, forges an alternative path to the materialist and consumerist world [of globalization] that the poet, like any other person, inhabits' (foreword to *Bitter Melon*, 14). *Foodscape* poems like 'Salted Shrimp Paste' or 'Eggplants' help to provide alternative mappings of global-local dialectics, where local culture abides within and against looming forces of globalization and appropriation without being reified into timeless essence or some unchanging 'Chinese' trait. On discrepant global/local conjunctions in Taiwan, see also Hsia Yu (2001), for example, 'Salsa' (p. 39) and Wilson (2001b).

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