

Invisible Culture

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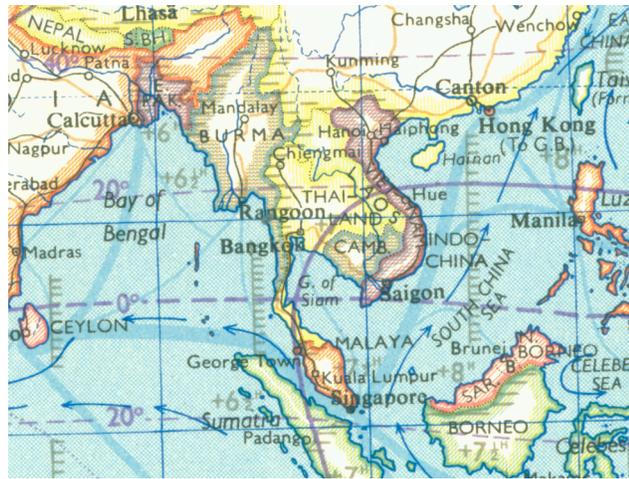
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Introduction: After Post-Colonialism?

Maia Dauner and Cynthia Foo

This issue of *Invisible Culture* addresses an enormous topic with a mix of trepidation and humility: what role do post-colonial theorizations of identity and politics play in contemporary visual culture? How are the methodologies of thinkers such as Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Edward Said, and Dipesh Chakrabarty (amongst many others) articulated today? What possibilities and limitations do various forms of theorization (post-colonial, neo-colonial, post-post-colonialism, or Cosmopolitanism) offer to a consideration of visual and cultural practice concerned with identity and place?

As guest editors, we chose this topic because it is one that we find ourselves grappling with in our own research. Maia Dauner's doctoral dissertation work addresses the tactics of artists who creatively stage racial identities in order to highlight the very unstable ground upon which these identities rest. She wonders, how is race deployed in these practices and how does it continue to be performed? Cynthia Foo's work also explores similar territory, seeking to consider the role of chaotic, amateurish, audience-involved performances that straddle the lines between art and real life. We felt that many of the factors influencing the reception and interpretation of cultural works reflect the ambiguous status of post-colonial theory today. With more and more interest—academic and otherwise—in the phenomenon of globalization, cosmopolitanism, and transnationalism, we felt the time had come to return to the field of post-colonial theory, and to some of the debates that shaped the field and laid the groundwork for subsequent discourse.

A return to post-colonial theory is not a call to refute scholarship in other fields; nor is it an attempt to place post-colonial theory as an originary source against which subsequent interpretations or investigations are to be measured. Instead, we would like to suggest that discussions of contemporary visual culture that engage theories of cosmopolitanism, globalization, and

transnationalism can be enhanced by re-considering some of the ideas generated by engaging with post-colonial theory. Some of these core ideas include the assumption that racial identities fluctuate in ways that defy categorization, that global inequalities in economic, political, and social mobility are the result of a sustained systematic guarding of privilege through colonialism and imperialism, and that relationships between previously colonized populations and the populations living in former imperial centers of power continue to be strained by historical effects of colonization. We also seek to understand nuance, and, as Benedict Anderson remarks in his interview, to consider how colonized voices, which were once lost, may continue to irritate, and to resonate, through a closer examination of colonial agency.

As we reconsider the idea of what might come after post-colonialism, it is helpful to return to Homi Bhabha's discussion of the prefix "post" in his influential text, *The Location of Culture*. Bhabha suggests that the term post-modernism, in addition to describing the limits of Western modernity, announces an awareness that these limits are also the "enunciative boundaries of a range of other dissonant, even dissident histories and voices."¹ In this description, "post" does not signify a temporal order, but a spatial and contemporaneous relationship with modernity. When we ask what might come after post-colonialism, we would like to examine the limits of post-colonial theory. Where does post-colonial theory cease to function as a mode of analysis or thinking about the world? How and why are these limits created? What lies beyond these limits and how does it influence our current understandings of identity and place? The articles included in this issue of *Invisible Culture* begin to ask how post-colonial theories share boundaries with theories of transnationalism, cosmopolitanism, and globalization. It also seeks to question what these theoretical areas of cross-over offer contemporary art and cultural practice, and how they might do so.

This issue opens with Cynthia Foo's interview with Benedict Anderson. Anderson discusses his forthcoming biography of Chinese-Indonesian Kwee Thiam Tjing, an Indonesian patriot and anti-Communist journalist, who wrote on Indonesia's tumultuous politics during the 1920s through the 40s. Anderson describes his difficulty in obtaining information about an author who uses a pseudonym and whose writing disappears from the public record after Indonesian independence. Kwee's case is all the more

¹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 6.

remarkable for his playful use of multiple languages and sharp punning. Anderson finds a book of his prose in a second-hand bookstore in Indonesia in 1962; it is a work that leads Anderson to celebrate it as “the greatest piece of prose written in the first half of the 20th century by anybody in Indonesia.” Despite Kwee’s expert prose, Anderson describes his difficulty in finding a way to adequately situate Kwee, until the former reconsiders the role of the colonial-era cosmopolitan from the perspective of the colonial subject, instead of its masters’. It is a provocative examination which Anderson labels as “cosmopolitanism from below.” Foo asks Anderson to consider the possible criticism of “cosmopolitanism from below” as a romanticization of colonialism, and to describe the import of post-colonial theory in this project and in his own work in general.

Charlotte McIvor and Mark Westmoreland’s contributions discuss attempts to imagine a national body through film. McIvor examines Ethiopian-Irish actress Ruth Negga’s performance in Neil Jordan’s 2005 film *Breakfast on Pluto*. She suggests that Negga’s performance can serve as a model for conceptions of contemporary Irish belonging that addresses the historical and present participation of non-white, non-Catholic peoples in formations of Irish nationalism. She reads Negga’s brown body as a signifier of Ireland’s recent history and current policies regarding immigration, and she asks readers to consider the colonialist and colonized histories of Ireland as equally influential to contemporary identity formation. Mark Westmoreland proposes a set of “post-orientalist aesthetics” at work in the non-linear narratives of two Lebanese films, Maroun Baghdadi’s *Hors de la vie* (1991) and Jocelyn Saab’s *Once Upon a Time, Beirut* (1994). Westmoreland discusses the films and their critical reception to suggest that the post-orientalist aesthetic presentation of narratives reflect the incomplete and impossible attempt to imagine the self in post-war Lebanon.

We invite you to read this issue with a critical eye and with a view to considering the roles of post-colonial theory and cosmopolitanism in your own experiences. We hope you enjoy this issue’s provocative offerings with the same cautious curiosity with which we have assembled what has proved to be just a few approaches to a very vast topic.

Interview with Benedict Anderson

Cynthia Foo

On October 1, 2008, Benedict Anderson presented a talk at Columbia University in which he discussed his upcoming book, a biography of the Chinese-Indonesian journalist Kwee Thiam Tjing. Having found a book of Kwee's writings in a second-hand bookshop in Indonesia in 1962, Anderson describes his surprise that no one could identify the pseudonymous author, who wrote what Anderson considers to be "the greatest piece of prose written in the first half of the 20th century by anybody in Indonesia." For years after Kwee's death, Anderson explains, details of the journalist's life and work were forgotten. It was only recently that Anderson was himself able to write about the author, in the process considering the role of cosmopolitanism in the life of the colonial subject.

Kwee wrote mainly during the period between the failed local Communist uprisings of 1926-'27 and the end of Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia. Anderson explains that Kwee's writings detail and often parody the complicated relationships among the Dutch, Indonesian, and Chinese populations. The complex cultural negotiations and facility with language demonstrated in Kwee's multi-lingual writings bely a cultural inter-mingling shared by many: it is a commonly overlooked experience which Anderson describes as "cosmopolitanism from below." Kwee's fierce patriotism for Indonesia also substantiates what Anderson points out is an often overlooked historical fact of significant Indonesian Chinese political support for the burgeoning independent nation, and a rejection of a primary political loyalty to China. Anderson spoke at length with *Invisible Culture* guest co-editor Cynthia Foo, discussing his notion of "cosmopolitanism from below," and offering some thought-provoking suggestions for reconsidering the post-colonial subject.

Cynthia Foo: The questions I had for you were along the lines of what you discussed in your talk when you mentioned the concept of "cosmopolitanism from below." Is that idea part of a larger work?

Benedict Anderson: Well, I've been working on this remarkable biography on Kwee Thiam Tjing, a journalist. But I was partly stuck for resources and what's available is very fragmentary, so I wasn't sure how to go about it. But I started talking about publishing on colonial cosmopolitanism and the more I thought about it the more I thought, "Wow, it gives me a way into some things I didn't see how I could access, but maybe I can." I'm not sure it's going to be one of the fundamental things about the book, but will certainly be a big part of it.

Kwee is one of these Chinese names which, depending on which colonial country you were in, changed. The Dutch spelled it "Kwee," but you can find it in other colonies as "Quay," "Cui," etc. It's a huge clan, one of the biggest clans in Indonesia, dating from the early 17th century.

CF: You mention that one of your interests in this individual was the fact that the entire history and record of his life had almost disappeared. I guess the question could be, given that there are so many histories that disappear, why is this one particularly interesting?

BA: Well, most of it has disappeared, but [there remains] a great piece of prose—I think actually I'd be prepared to say it's the greatest piece of prose written in the first half of the 20th century by anybody in Indonesia. It's really quite brilliant and extremely funny and extremely sad at the same time. And yet nobody seems to have done anything about it.

It was published in very peculiar circumstances in 1947, in the middle of the 1945-'49 armed anti-colonial revolution. Kwee lived for another 27 years and didn't seem to have been able or willing to do anything about republishing it. I ran across a copy in a second-hand bookshop in 1962, and found it to be something quite extraordinary. I asked people whether they'd heard of the book, but almost no one had. I asked them about the name of the author, given on the title page as "Tjamboek Berdoeri," and they'd reply, "It's just a pen name." I'd ask, "Do you know who's behind the pen name?" and the response was negative. I was banned from Indonesia from doing much about this—I was banned for 27 years. When I finally got back in 1998 after the fall of Suharto dictatorship, I said to myself, "I'm going to do my best to see if I can find out who this guy is." It took me much longer than it should have to find him. I mean, he was dead by then, but I've been thinking about this guy for 40 years.

CF: When you mentioned you were banned from Indonesia for 27

years, was this in relation to your research on the communist revolution?

BA: No, there was a failed coup d'état in 1965 and I was one of the students who wrote what became notorious as the "Cornell Paper." The Paper suggested that the government suggestion that the new, military controlled government's insistence that the Indonesian Communist Party was the mastermind of the failed coup was false; in fact the coup came from within the military itself. And this got me banned. It was only after Suharto fell that it was possible for the ban to be lifted.

CF: Do you have an idea why the ban was eventually lifted?

BA: Well, by that time many key people had died or were crippled or retired; a new generation was in the military who were young kids when [Suharto came to power]. I think there was no longer personal animosity in that sense, and I think the post-Suharto regime wanted to show everybody that a big change was really coming. One of my former students, who was fairly highly-placed in the U.S. State Department, also made it her business to help. In that atmosphere, maybe someone figured I'd been banned from Indonesia for so long that it was probably an embarrassment to continue to keep me out.

CF: I wanted to return for a while to Kwee and your biography of him. Do you have information about his background, his education, or how he came to be a journalist?

BA: Yes, it's very clear. He was born in the 1900, so by the time he finished high school, which would have been about 1917, probably 1918, there were still no colleges in Indonesia. So if one didn't have the money to go to Holland, that was as far as anybody went. The Dutch language education was probably the most modern available, but it was deliberately colonial and arrogant when dealing with non-European kids. Kwee has a very funny account of fighting in the schoolyard as a small boy, being bullied. He said, "Well, they [Dutch colonialists] talked arrogantly all the time, but the nice thing is there were rules—if you lost in a fight, all you had to do was shout 'Excuse!' and the person beating you had to stop and then help you to your feet." Then he added, "The Dutch boys were pretty good about this but us Eurasians and Chinese, if we won, we would pretend not to hear the 'Excuse!', so you could get your last licks in." This was about the only case where the colonial had the opportunity to beat up a white boy.

CF: You mentioned in your talk that he wasn't interested in the work that his Chinese parents did—what was the nature of their

employment?

BA: Kwee's mother was a housewife; his father was a sort of inspector at one of the large sugar plantations near the town of Malang.

But Kwee had funny theories about his life. A year or two before he died, and he wrote that some of his ancestors had been top collaborators with the Dutch in the 18th and 19th centuries. I mean, certainly he came from an elite family. He doesn't say much about his father, but he was very close to his mom.

I think Kwee's parents just thought, "Well, what are Chinese going to do? You can't be a bureaucrat; if you're not in business what are you going to do?" Twenty-five years later, you could go to medical school or a training institution, but Kwee's spirit was very independent, and he was quite an adventurous type, so journalism was very attractive.

CF: In terms of being adventurous, did Kwee have a chance to travel around the region, as far as you know?

BA: As far as I know, that's what's interesting about him: he almost never went anywhere. Except he had a sideline—journalism is a very unpredictable and badly-paid profession, so he had to have something else. So he worked as an agent for a quinine factory owned by some Italians. We know that he went to the southern part of Sumatra on company business, but he never talks about it. As far as I know, the furthest he ever went overseas was in 1960, when he and his wife joined their daughter and her husband, who were assigned to work in Malaysia. He only had one child, a daughter, who was very attached to him. As far as we know, Kwee was there for a decade and didn't do much except look after the grandchildren and hang out.

He returned to Indonesia in 1971 and he died in 1974, so I don't think he ever went to Bali or to Eastern Indonesia. He was quite poor, he never had a house of his own for all his life, and most of his articles were written about rich Chinese (sometimes quite nastily) as well as colonialists. In terms of colonial cosmopolitanism, I thought it was interesting because this guy was absolutely a cosmopolitan, but he almost never went anywhere—not even to China, as many of his Chinese acquaintances did. So I had to think about cosmopolitanism to talk about Kwee.

CF: And that was something that struck me quite a lot in your talk at Columbia University—this idea of being a cosmopolitan without needing to travel. This notion of the irrelevance of travel seems to

be implicit in the formulation of the idea of a cosmopolitan: a cosmopolitan, strictly speaking, as someone who's worldly, not because of world travel, but because of their exposure to other cultures. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about how this is formulated in terms of Kwee. How would you describe him as a cosmopolitan?

BA: His family had been in Indonesia for 300 years, but Dutch colonial policy had been always, as much as possible, to segregate the Chinese and not let them assimilate with the natives (a policy which was of course quietly resisted). So Kwee was very aware of the fact that he wasn't a native of the country, although he was extremely patriotic about the country. He spoke Hokkien, which nobody except the Chinese spoke, as well as Indonesian and Javanese. He started out, really, with 4 languages: he had a home or "in-the-house" language of Hokkien; he spoke Javanese, which is a street language; Dutch he got in school; and Indonesian he learned in his teens, I think, maybe early 20s, because that was the popular medium for writing in newspapers and magazines.

So you start off with a guy who at 20 is a master of 4 languages, and you've got something right there. The second thing to add was that this was a very rich colony, yet little Holland didn't have the power to say "only for us," so all kinds of people came to seek their fortunes: Indians came, Yemenese came, Europeans of different kinds—Germans, Austrians, English, Americans—and so forth. This is why the population was very mixed; there was also a huge migration of natives, mainly Javanese, from the interior where people were looking for better ways to live. The Chinese ghetto system broke down in the 1910s, so, wherever you went, you were running into all kinds of people.

The other condition that existed was that the Dutch were not able to impose everything. They could impose their taxes, and obedience, but they couldn't get your loyalty. The colonial regime was in a peculiar position. On one level they were very powerful, but on another level they had no real power: you can't command loyalty. The colonial regime was peculiar: they couldn't do nationalism, nor could they be an assimilationist colonial power. So it was possible to make popular alliances, which became much more difficult in the 1950s, after independence and when national governments were in some ways more powerful than the Dutch had been. The independent government had power because it had behind it the hurricane force of nationalism. Under those circumstances, cosmopolitanism was under heavy attack: "Why

are you still using Dutch words?”, “Using Javanese is separatist,” etc., etc. So language was disciplined after 1950 and made more monochrome.

But by this time, Kwee was old and had too much experience to accept this approach. He rejected this attitude until the day he died. It was a very peculiar situation, I mean I don't think people should be talking about colonialism and power without recognizing that, in some fundamental ways, colonialism was very weak and that's why it collapsed so rapidly all around the world.

CF: And when you said that, I couldn't help but remember that in your speech you mentioned this absolute, in a way, powerlessness, because the regional administrators from the Dutch colonial power would be replaced every four years. Regional administrators could form whatever alliances they wanted, but at the end of the four years, no matter how powerful they were, they'd be called back to the Netherlands and then replaced with somebody else. There's always an uneasy space of knowing that your power is temporal and limited. I was also reminded me of Somerset Maugham's short stories—he takes great pleasure in poking fun at the drunken colonial administrator who tries very hard to get along the natives and ultimately realizes the futility of it, and the ways in which the local residents are able to trip him up so well and foil all of his better intentions. There's a lot of comedy and, as you say, there's a lot of sadness as well; a lot of futility at the same time. But when you were talking about the influence of the colonial government from afar, I kept thinking about current discussions of transnationalism. Would you say there are any kinds of links between the processes of colonization and transnationalism, or do you see them operating very differently? How would you compare the two?

BA: If you look at the earlier history when the Dutch East India Company came to Indonesia, and you read the records of the royal courts and so forth, they couldn't figure out how the Company operated because the Governor Generals simply disappeared within several years. Added to that is the fact that the Company operated in a style completely opposite to that of the heredity and marriage-based systems, where you would have the job as long as you were alive. You might be murdered, of course. But the succession in the Dutch Company was not based on lineage or descent, so there was no possibility of marrying into the “ruling family” of the Company. All the ways in which the traditional feudal kings dealt with the external relationships simply couldn't

be successful. While the Dutch took local women, the idea of marrying a royal princess would have been impossible from them and, anyway, they were going to go home eventually. So you're talking about these fundamental contrasts between institutional forms of power.

And that's typical, actually, of most major corporations, where you could be enormously powerful back home, but with rules in the institution that said 5 years—or the age of retirement—is the limit; nobody remembers your name, you're gone, and somebody else takes your place. In fact, corporations are largely anonymous. You can give students a list of the five largest companies in the United States and ask them, "Who is the CEO?" and they never know.

The contrast of course is with people like Suharto and Sukarno, where Sukarno ruled the country for 20 years—Suharto for more than 30. If it's like royalty, then it's not a strange kind of depersonalized institutional power that corporations like the Dutch East India Company, one of the earliest trans-nationals.

CF: I'm trying to think about ways in which power is uneven. There isn't a simple equation: colonialism therefore equals more oppression, necessarily. For instance, the Dutch East India Company used Indonesia's resources to Holland's profit. This process strengthened Holland and was a direct result of its colonialization of Indonesia, but Holland is not able to exercise its power directly on Indonesia as a direct result of this relationship. A question comes to mind in terms of dealing with how to acknowledge Kwee's facility with the system, his ability to hybridize language, and to use it to pun and make really incisive jokes (insider incisive jokes that perhaps a colonial or somebody operating in a monolingual context would not be as able to be as quick on their feet, or be as able to rebut). How would you acknowledge that kind of colonized agency while answering the argument that suggesting that Kwee's facility, while a form of power, doesn't also deny the real effects and suppressions that occurred under colonial rule?

BA: First of all you have to remember, there was a tiny group of Dutch there in the 1880s—there were less than 20,000 people in the Dutch archipelago who called themselves legally Dutch, and half of those were Eurasian. So we're talking about an incredibly small group, in an age before telephones and telegraphs, before trains, before anything else. Obviously [Dutch power] was extremely limited and they *had* to work with local feudal people to get

anything done. The regime was only possible by a complex system of collaborations across racial lines, which the Chinese also participated in—a regime which was basically financed by opium. About half of the budget in the last half of the nineteenth century came from opium auctions, and it was openly sold—partly to Chinese, but mainly to poor Indonesians—and that didn't stop really until cigarettes came to take their place.

The Dutch were a small power and in a not very rich country in those days. Unlike the powerful British in Burma, they were afraid of native rebellions if the old society was messed up too much, so they passed agrarian laws which forbade foreigners—including Chinese—from owning agricultural land. There was a lot of rural dispossession and absentee landholders in other colonies, but this was absolutely not the case in Indonesia. You could also say, by the 20th century, that the practices of real colonial state- terrorism had been abandoned: the Dutch had a system where people weren't tortured and people weren't publicly executed. There was some kind of press, even if it was periodically repressed—I mean, you went to jail for nine months, but you weren't put away forever.

The punitive character of the state, by comparison to what came later, was quite mild. I'm going to say: as nobody could stay very long, the curb on instinct to get power and hold it really was quite strong compared to what came after independence. It's very curious. [The Dutch] made a lot of money out of Indonesia and the toil of the peasants, no doubt about that, and in that sense there was oppression. But the number of people in jail in 1900 to 1940 was very, very small. People can talk differently in retrospect, but during late-colonialism there meant the normality of a stable currency, a normality of a police system—I mean, it had its corrupt side—but basically you knew what the rules were and, on the whole, the judicial system followed those rules. This system completely collapsed in the late '50s/early '60s, where the law basically could be bought and people with money and power flouted the law absolutely with impunity. So normality was assumed where you minded your own business and got on with your life.

CF: I wanted to ask you about a time when Kwee was put on trial for defending [the right to independence in] Aceh in a poem, and his expression that being colonized was “tidak enak” [literally translated, “not tasty”]. I wondered if you could talk about that a little bit?

BA: It was in the early 20s, and he was just a young fellow saying, "If I had been born an Acehnese, my sword would be out of the scabbard. Blood would flow, etc." It was quite the provocation. Needless to say, it was not surprising that, to Dutch society, he was no good. But it wasn't as if he was picked up and disappeared. He was tried and, when he was sentenced, it was for eight months. It wasn't pleasant, but it wasn't horrible. And I think the expression "colonialism is 'tidak enak'" was meant to be ironical. You think of the burden of colonialism as not "enak"—it's about disagreeable food or being uncomfortable on an uncomfortably hot day. "Tidak enak" is about as funny a description of colonialism as you could imagine.

CF: How long was Kwee in prison?

BA: Until November of the same year, 10 months, something like that. When Kwee got out of prison, in Jakarta, as he described it, the Dutch knew something was coming. They were doing preventive arrests of suspected Communists. These people were being brought into the prison just as he was leaving, so he was a political prisoner, but early on. The encyclopaedia for Chinese who mattered, published in the 1930s, said that he was actually charged eleven times, was usually punished, and went to jail about three or four times, but he doesn't mention that, and I presume it was for a very short period.

CF: Are the charges and jail terms mostly for saying the wrong things or publishing the wrong things?

BA: Yes.

CF: And were they mainly allegations by the colonial government?

BA: Yes.

CF: You described how the category of Eurasian as a category which wasn't strictly defined in the colonial era. How did the official status of Chinese, or non-Indonesians, or Eurasians, or anyone who was not considered not native to the country change after independence?

BA: The Chinese were a major threat in the 1940s; in Jakarta there was a huge massacre of Chinese. But [the Dutch colonial government] had the idea that it was important to keep the Chinese and Indonesians as separate as possible, and that meant if you were registered with them as a Chinese—even if your mother wasn't Chinese—you had your own sub-section of law where you were required to live in areas designated as forts, you had to pay a special kind of tax, you had special kinds of passports to move outside the town you lived, and a system of inheritance which was

different from everybody else.

This system became very odd, because immigration wasn't very large until the 1870s or 1880s, and most of these people back then no longer spoke Mandarin. Most of the people would read Chinese, some of them kept their dialects—Hokkien, Hakka, and so forth—but the everyday language was the local language, Javanese, Sundanese, or whatever it was. The Chinese Indonesians adopted many local practices and a good number of them became Muslims and so forth. So the Dutch were always concerned about this. What happened was that around 1910, larger new immigrations came through China for plantation labour and so forth. It meant that the Dutch couldn't keep this practice of segregation up, so the laws on the movement of Chinese and the laws on ghetto residencies were abandoned. The Chinese could move around wherever they wanted, could live wherever they wanted. For criminal purposes, they were still under the law for natives, but for trade and for business—commercial purposes—they were under European law because the Europeans wanted to handle Chinese debts and bankruptcy cases by their own laws. So the Chinese were moving out of those ghettoized situations into a sort of public realm where, legally, they were treated more and more regularly like an equal. I'm sure if the Japanese hadn't come, this system would have become gradually normalizing.

But the most peculiar thing was that the Dutch settled on a term for the Chinese primarily, but also for Yemenese, and people from India, and the Japanese: they legally called them "foreign orientals." They didn't call themselves "western orientals," and the purpose of the former term is that the legal category which entered the law meant that even if your family had been in Indonesia for 20 years, you were foreign. And this sank deeply into Indonesian consciousness, which is one of the reasons why Chinese are always in a category of a mixture of intimacy and hostility: people always got it into their minds that Chinese were always foreign.

After independence, this practice was abandoned, though Chinese were faced with a choice: if you wanted to be a public citizen, what kind of a public citizen do you want to be? A citizen of China or a citizen of Indonesia? This put the Chinese into a very difficult psychic state. What was the right thing to choose? Because if you had a Chinese passport (which was available to them) then they were subjects of a government who might say, "Well, we don't want you here any more. It's time you went

home." On the other hand, if you went for Indonesian citizenship, it wasn't always easy to obtain. You had to pay money and that sort of thing and, as the states got more lawless, the advantages of Indonesian citizenship also became dubious. So there was a split in the Chinese community between those who decided to become Indonesian citizens, those who decided to be Chinese and those who didn't know what to do.

CF: Is this around the time when Kwee writes about being denounced by a rival editor for trying to be a "true native"? Where the editor crudely suggests that Kwee had been circumcised (and is therefore a Muslim)?

BA: I don't know much about the other guy, but he wasn't a native of East Java. He came from Bandung. He was sent there and he was very pro-Sun Yat-sen. He said all Chinese wanted to become real Chinese, that only real Chinese visit the home country, that one should be loyal to the home country, and so forth. And for Kwee, this was absurd; he was proud to the end of his life that he couldn't read any Chinese and didn't know any Mandarin. He really did consider himself absolutely almost in an American way, that this is a country full of all kinds of different people, that we have to get along with each other, we have to be faithful to the country where we were born, and that this is the place where we were going to die. I think Kwee was of the opposite group, the group which said, "Look, we've been born here, we were educated here, our food tastes like this, we speak like that, and we belong here." So this accusation by the other guy was a very contemptuous one, sort of suggesting Kwee was a barbarian. It came with a certain kind of arrogance about the "great Chinese civilization in the world."

Like any form of racism, Kwee had accused the Dutch of racism, and here he accused the Chinese of racism. And he didn't just have Indonesian friends, he had Dutch friends, he had Japanese friends, he was familiar with all kinds of people, so this thinking didn't attract him at all.

There hasn't been major anti-Chinese violence now for a decade. The last one was in 1998 and actually the main victors were Chinese. The problem is that the state policy was to re-educate the Chinese in many ways. Chinese were completely excluded from political power. In the whole time there was only one Chinese minister—who was a crony—and he was appointed in the last weeks of the regime. At no time were they in any bureaucratic positions; Chinese were excluded completely from

the military and the police. So what were they going to do if they didn't fill professional positions and become doctors or lawyers? They created businesses, so they became more visible as a group that couldn't do anything except business and who got rich and became arrogant, which is indeed very often what did happen.

The problem with the Chinese community in Indonesia and in fact with the overseas Chinese population generally is that this was a community which had no regrets and which had no memory. Prestige and influence depended heavily on money, something Kwee criticized all the time. Chinese were in the habit of a visible and ostentatious display of money, which they saw as perfectly reasonable. It looked terrible from the outside. And it's interesting, in many of the earlier riots, the actions aren't directed against the person who was Chinese. The most famous one was the one in 1963. In fact nobody was hurt, but hundreds of automobiles were burned. Houses were burned, not taken over. Basically it was a protest against Chinese arrogance.

At the same time, one has to say that, as pretty often happens, minorities produce courageous people precisely because they can't have political power. Far and away the most famous human rights lawyer Yap Thiam Hien, who died 8 or 9 years ago [*Yap Thiam Hien died in 1989. —ed.*] was a national hero to everybody, and wasn't in the regime. He was incredibly brave and went to prison a couple of times. By having things barred to them by a regime, perhaps part of the energy flows into this kind of heroism which native Indonesians with much different opportunities are less likely to do.

CF: Along those lines, I wanted to ask you about a cosmopolitanism that existed in the colonial era that was a lot less available once the colonialists left and Indonesia became a national state. But I was also thinking, on the converse side, of the idea of nationalism in Kwee's time, where you couldn't distinguish by race anyway, so easily. Quay's insistence, "Look, I'm a nationalist"—that idea of being a nationalist is quite different from the same idea, post-independence. Being a nationalist under colonial rule suggests solidarity against colonization and thus cuts across racial boundaries. It seems it's more fluid than nationalism post-independence, wouldn't you say?

BA: It was always quite different. The Bandung conference produced the idea of the Third World having its own world. The idea that the ex-colonial world had and ought to have transnational solidarity lasted really into the 60s and the idea that our nations

should cooperate on an international level—I think it was taken for granted by nationalists in the 30s and 40s.

I want to get the idea that the idea of nationalism just belonged to Chinese, that they weren't affected by the same conditions. The thing really is that China in the war period is a very chaotic place. The Ching dynasty is nearly infirm, there is a huge mess of warlords, youngsters like Chiang Kai-shek—China was a huge mess in the 40s. It was invaded by Japan, which conquered a huge chunk of China. There was an outpouring of overseas Chinese patriotism from other countries—people sent money and aid and support—but clearly that left Chinese in a very bad way. This changed after independence; after Indonesia's recognized independence in '49, more reforms became public. And after that, China was a very important national player, and more and more so 'til today, so that, for Chinese, for the first time in a long time, China was something one shouldn't have to pity, but was something one could identify with and [it] was quite physical in the Chinese community in the '50s. In the '50s there was much more inclination to say, "Well, you know, this country isn't treating us well," or "We have a big power over here who can help us and protect us, and they should." Chinese could be quite national and, actually, that was a problem, too. The Chinese who went to China didn't always adjust. There was a man named Kwee Hing Djiat who was very pro-China and he caused trouble with the Dutch. He was expelled from the colony and forced to live in Shanghai for ten years. And during these ten years, he writes, "It is very touching; I realized I was in a foreign country, I couldn't speak Shanghainese." There was lots of misery—drugs, prostitution, etc.—he didn't like the food, northern Chinese food, and after he comes back he completely changes into a strong Kwee-like figure. Unfortunately he died young, around 38, but was probably the most respected of the middle generation which committed itself publicly and drastically to the future of Indonesia. And there's also lots of people I know who went back to China, then had a very unpleasant experience there. They were looked down as not really Chinese: they didn't speak Chinese properly, they didn't like the food, they were thought to be arrogant and lazy. He didn't like it and he went back to Southeast Asia.

CF: Well I could keep asking you questions but I realise you have a limited amount of time. I wanted to address the issue of the topic of the publication. We're considering questions of the state of the

field of post-colonial theory, including positions on cosmopolitanism. How does cosmopolitanism affect definitions or descriptions of people? How do you categorise—or not, as the case may be—what this means? What are some impacts? And I wonder if you would share a general view of cosmopolitanism now? When you are looking at the way in which Kwee and Kwee Hing Djiat interacted with their city—not just Chinese, but other people in the community? How would you compare cosmopolitanism: the experience then, with the experience in Indonesia now?

BA: A very important change took place after Indonesia was established, and this is of a huge break in the exclusion of foreign-born people from the public field. This raises the question of nationality of Kwee, because the system of patriarchy survives, but it is in conflict with the principles of nationalism. So if a woman—let's say she's French and meets this lovely guy from Brazil and they love each other and decide to get married, and she goes to live in Brazil, but she doesn't want to give up her French citizenship, and the Brazilian government said, "Well, you are going to be living here and your children are going to be raised here. You should obey your husband. We are going to give you Brazilian citizenship." And she says, "Okay, but does that mean I have to give up my Frenchness? Sorry, it's not going to happen." It becomes increasingly an issue, particularly between Europe and South America, and what comes out of that is the first systematic form of dual citizenship, which was available only to women: women had dual passports, and it was not available to men.

Part of the reason for that was that males were still regarded as special citizens because they fought, and were subject to being conscripted to the army. That lasted really up until the Vietnam era. After that, there were really no countries that have real conscription any more. Armies were considered semi-professional, semi-mercenary organizations. Once that happened, men questioned why only women were allowed to have dual citizenships and said they should have it too. More and more countries started to accept the principle of dual citizenship. Dual citizenship would have been horrifying to people who lived in the 19th century: it was impossible. Even the United States, that doesn't allow somebody born abroad to be president: in fact from the middle 1970s you had dual citizenship. It wasn't easy to get, but it was available. So in international law, it's been accepted grudgingly. Dual nationality is a respectable possibility.

Needless to say it was abused by all kinds of crooks and people

who have as many passports as they can lay their hands on. And it has to be said that Chinese have an especially bad reputation in this respect. The idea is not to offer citizenship on the basis of loyalty and attachment, but that it is simply a racket in order to do certain kinds of business. So this is one important part of the new cosmopolitanism, that is, the possibilities for multiple citizenship either for forming attachments or for opportunistic reasons. I mean, I remember the first Indonesian I knew who took American citizenship in the 1970s: he was absolutely desperate to keep his citizenship, but no, he changed his citizenship and he was ashamed for his betrayal of the country and so forth. But now, it's taken for granted. I mean, that's one form of cosmopolitanism.

The other form which is interesting is that the kind of movement that's available to people is rather different. I mean, for, shall we say, intellectual and artistic circles, and it's especially visible in regional cinema: this is something which excludes Hollywood, but some of the most important directors are coming from Korea or Japan; there are lots from Taiwan, the Philippines, etc., with festivals which circulate this stuff. Not global cosmopolitanism, but *regional* cosmopolitanism. This reality is reflected in a much higher level of translation into different Asian languages than English, so that reading is available to people in not just English; there are translations into Japanese, Chinese, Thai, and so forth. And in literature, it's something to be proud of if you get translated into Japanese. In that sense, I think there is a tradition of conferences and spending half a year here, and half a year there. There is an experience of being overseas, but not in a position of being a prostitute or a manual labourer. There is a sense of mobility which wasn't there in the 1930s, but definitely is there now.

CF: I was wondering as well if some of the festival circuit of movies would have to do as well with a diasporic community returning to Indonesia and trying to articulate an Indonesianness that obviously includes references to whatever culture that this person was a part of? So there's a whole new generation. There are not often any explicit references, and in fact there is a real desire to reform that kind of hybrid experience as an intrinsic Malaysianness when that's not really true to the historical context.

BA: There's a Malaysian director under former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad who deliberately plays with that in a big way. He deliberately has Indians, Chinese, Arabs, etc. It's one of the great movies of our time. Everybody's jabbering away in their

own language, and it's held together politically by Mahathir. It's funny, the last thing he did was about the Communist Chinese, but everybody's in the picture. His shorts are also very good.

And of course this enraged the establishment, but people recognize themselves and they all feel bored with the earlier regime, which is probably falling apart now. And Yasmin, you know, is a transsexual, married to a Chinese which would be something absolutely impossible 30 years ago. The movie opens with a brilliant scene where a young man is practicing Indian dancing in his little shop, and does it beautifully and very funnily, and it's very touching at the same time.

And then on the other side in Singapore, there's the picture of absolute alienation from the PAP regime and from Singaporean society with all of its ghastliness. It is really quite poignant and, again, it's something that presumes Singapore, and Singapore is the frame within which it's set. It's like a prison where the people running the jail are mom and dad, essentially. And then you have Chinese-Malaysian Liang [Tsai Ming-liang]. He goes to Taiwan, but is internationally known.

So you have at least four striking figures who are very courageous and who go ahead and do their stuff and with absolutely no question that Malaysia's their home and there's no special reason for anybody not to be Malaysian. It's clearly directed against the whole structure that the British left behind. The beauty of these movies is that they aren't simply didactic: there are often sides to it which are very funny, or are desperately sad, not in any kind of ideological way. So it's not about a Chinese boy, but about what it's like to live in an endless tyranny.

Communism ended in Malaysia, at least officially, 50 years ago and you have people in their twenties now, and what they face is a stupid and corrupt government. I think that the people who go on and on and on about colonialism are elderly people, or who are people who live in America where post-colonialism is a fad. But I always thought it was a stupid category and you have to think about where you sit to have to think about it.

CF: Would you say cosmopolitanism would be a good replacement for the problems associated with post-colonialism then? What words should we use?

BA: I'm not sure that cosmopolitanism is the way out, but there is a certain sense... I mean if you look at the most famous writers, these are people from Africa, India, the Caribbean. And in French literature, all the most vital writings come from Arabs: Algeria and

Morocco. You also have the invasion of the former empire into the global cultural elite and so forth, and this is something that people have a certain kind of pride in—and in that sense you could say it's a kind of something new.

CF: May I ask you one last question? It just sparked something else. There has also been criticism of cosmopolitanism. I think Eric Lott suggested this: there's also a way that cosmopolitanism becomes a foil for a reinstatement of nationalism, so you have a culture that says, "Oh, look at us, we're so—however you want to say it—civilized, or exposed to different cultures, therefore we are such a great nation." What would you say to somebody like that? Or to that comment?

BA: The whole idea of the nation is that it survives with other nations. It's impossible to have only one nation in the world, so that the idea of only one nation is something odd. I think there are better things like sport contests, cultural exhibitions, which on the one hand, one could say, "Look what we can do," and at the same time say, "Well, we're going to show it to the world and we expect to see what the world has to say," but on the condition that it means we also accept visits. People come to Thailand, etc.; there are all those kinds of circulations which are there all the time. One of the most striking things I've heard is the ban on the Chinese New Year celebrations in the Suharto regime: fireworks and noise, but also cantankerous press, were banned. But when Suharto fell and there was a discussion of allowing celebrations as they did in the past, there were plenty of intellectuals who said, "Oh no, this will raise all kinds of tensions, we shouldn't do this, and so forth." But it turned out—and this is very entertaining—the interesting thing is that everybody loved it, and rushed out to take part in the fireworks and so forth, and the people who actually danced the lion dance, because the Chinese middle classes were too lazy, were street boys, and they thought it was a wonderful change to do something. And I'd say, "Why do you think that happened?" And they said that what happened in the 1980s were TV clips showing all these touristy kinds of programs—you can see them in Hong Kong, lion dances in Malaysia, you can see fireeaters, etc.—and these become, as it will, commercial display. They are accustomed to seeing Chinese movies, Japanese and Korean movies, even lousy historical epics, and it becomes something which is fictive and which is a form of entertainment. So, it's drained of all of its political power; it's just part of the flow of interesting and bizarre things.

And it seems to me that I probably was surprised. Everyone was perfectly happy, nobody was saying, "My god, what are the Chinese doing?" That's also a funny part of receptive cosmopolitanism: you have this distribution of images internationally. People recognize the pyramids and they know what they are; they've probably seen them in some brochure. So the world isn't as alien as it used to be.

I think the contrast between cosmopolitanism and nationalism is mistaken; it's actually conjoined. And I have to say that, even though these Olympic games are ugly in the jingoism that we see, nonetheless, it's a hell of a lot better than murdering people and going to war. If these aggressive impulses have to be expressed somehow, it's much better if they're expressed in a football stadium at a football match. I mean, you could also ask sports fans and youngsters from different countries if they're interested in the country or the sport. It's not which country you support but the second country one would support. For example if the national team is knocked out, who do you support? It's not like when their choices disappear, they stop supporting the game. They can be just as rowdy and noisy in favour of their second or third country. And it seems to me that's crucial. People who look at these football matches and say they're examples of nationalism—I mean, they are—but that's not all they are. There's a lot of stupid practices, but on the whole, it's not all bad. This, I think, is also an example of how inadequate the category of post-colonialism is. Because it doesn't recognize any new, in-the-moment experience; it's an endless recycling. To me, theorizing is like watching a drop of water: you can see the water and that's all it is, a drop of water. But the minute you actually bring a microscope in, it's completely different. Theory is really good at a sort of long-distance framing, but how people live their lives is something else, and I'm personally more interested in that than abstract theorizing.

“I’m Black an’ I’m Proud”: Ruth Negga, *Breakfast on Pluto*, and Invisible Irelands

Charlotte McIvor

This article examines Ethiopian-Irish actress Ruth Negga’s performance in Neil Jordan’s 2005 *Breakfast on Pluto* in light of recent cultural, racial, and socio-economic shifts in Irish society. How does Negga’s identity as an Irish actress of color influence possible receptions of this film in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland and contest notions of Irishness that have typically been allied only with whiteness?

Roddy Doyle famously posited a relationship between the Irish and African-Americans thus in his 1987 novel *The Commitments*:

--The Irish are the niggers of Europe, lads.

They nearly gasped: it was so true.

--An’ Dubliners are the niggers of Ireland. The culchies have fuckin’ everythin’. An’ the northside Dubliners are the niggers o’ Dublin. ----Say it loud, I’m black an’ I’m proud.

He grinned. He’d impressed himself again.

He’d won them. They couldn’t say anything.¹

Jimmy Rabbitte, band manager, uses this turn of phrase to convince his motley crowd of Dublin Irish musicians to form a soul band, although the phrase was later reimagined in the film as, “The Irish are the *blacks* of Europe” [emphasis mine].

In 1987, in the midst of the continuing Troubles in the North, long posited by some as an anti-colonial war, and ongoing poverty in the Republic, Rabbitte’s statement had a particular resonance. It captured the confused ethnic identity of the Irish throughout the 19th and 20th centuries as well as framed their contemporary underprivileged status in a metaphor that was immediately understandable to the lads and the book’s/film’s audience. “Celtic Calibans,” “Black Irish,” “Simians,” “Paddies,” “the niggers of Europe:” these slurs against the Irish recall a colonial history of violence that positioned them as an inferior race vis-à-vis the British,

¹ Roddy Doyle, *The Commitments*, in *The Barrytown Trilogy* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 13.

yet also positioned the Irish as frequent collaborators in the work of Empire in India and other outposts. Thus, the contradictions and immediate emotional appeal contained within Jimmy Rabbitte's assertion indexes an Irish history of engagement with race, ethnicity and power that is far from simple.

A contemporary engagement with African/African Irish identity and politics in Ireland, as well as with various other Third World nations and groups can be traced to the rise of the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland. From the late '60s through the present day,² the Irish Republican Army and associated parties asserted their identification with Third World anti-colonial struggles, as well as with Black Nationalist groups, through murals³ and other forms of propaganda as the Troubles erupted and transformed the landscape of Northern Ireland into a bloody struggle between various political factions composed of Catholic and Protestants over the question of whether Northern Ireland was rightfully part of the UK or the Republic of Ireland.⁴ This renewed identification with a language of anti-colonialism on the part of the I.R.A. was also accompanied by the influence of the African-American non-violent Civil Rights movement on peaceful protests organized during this period. These protests were responding to the presence of the British and high levels of unemployment and poverty in the Catholic community.

² As recently as 2007, the Irish-Cuban solidarity group erected a new mural in Derry to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Che Guevara's death. This memorial also acknowledged Guevara's Irish heritage through his grandmother through honoring him as "Che Guevara Lynch." Sinn Féin MLA Raymond McCartney said that their celebrations would look at: "the shared history of Cuba and Ireland and transition from armed struggle to political struggle. Ireland has long been a beacon for those in the wider world seeking justice and equality and struggling against colonialism and imperialism. We have also learned from other nations who have had to struggle for their freedom. During the 1981 hunger strike Fidel Castro stood up in the United Nations in defence of the men in the H Blocks and the women in Armagh and we must never forget that that" ("Derry to mark the 40th anniversary of Che Guevara death," <http://www.sinnfein.ie/news/detail/20601>).

³ Nationalist mural painting in the North did not begin in earnest until the early 80's. Bill Rolston traces this to the Republican H-Block prisoners hunger-strike campaign in 1981 and to the death of Bobby Sands in particular. Nelson Mandela, Che Guevara, Lenin, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and South West Africa People's Organization are some of the figures and groups depicted in Republican murals during this period. See Brian Rolston, *Politics and Painting: Murals and Conflict in Northern Ireland* (Salem, MA: Associated University Presses, 1991).

⁴ See Brian Dooley, *Black and Green: The Fight for Civil Rights in Northern Ireland & Black America* (London and Chicago: Pluto Press, 1998); Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, *Ireland's Others: Gender and Ethnicity in Irish Literature and Popular Culture* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press); David Lloyd, *Ireland After History* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999).

The Troubles lasted from the late 1960s up until the Belfast Agreement of 1998. During this major period, an Irish understanding of ethnicity and colonial histories was constantly being re-imagined in relation to the violence in the North. This period eventually coincided with the rise of post-colonial theory in the Western academy, a convergence that should be examined as more than conveniently coincidental. During this period, Ireland's relationship to post-coloniality was frequently framed through its contemporaneous engagement with what some would term an anti-colonial war and which others would criticize for continuing to center a violent nationalism at the root of Irish politics as well as ignoring the claims of Irish Unionists.

Neil Jordan's 2005 film *Breakfast on Pluto*, based on Patrick McCabe's 1998 novel, is set during this period in the late 1960s and early 70s in a fictional Irish town called Tyreelin. The film is the story of Patricia "Kitten" Brady, a young transgendered woman who searches for her birth mother in London. She is the daughter/son of the local village priest, Father Liam, and his former housekeeper. Set against the background of the eruption of the Troubles, Kitten's circle of friends notably includes Charlie, played by Ethiopian-Irish actress Ruth Negga.⁵ In the course of the film, Negga's character plays a central role as Kitten's best friend and the girlfriend of their mutual friend, Irwin, who becomes heavily involved with the I.R.A. After an ambiguous failed romance with the lead singer of Billy and the Hatchets, who is also an arms runner for the I.R.A., Kitten leaves Tyreelin to seek her mother in London as violence mounts at home. In London, she barely escapes strangulation while attempting to enter sex work, serves as assistant for a magician, works as a "Wobble" for a popular children's television show, and is accused of being a terrorist when her biological sex is revealed following a bombing at a British nightclub. Violence pursues Kitten even as she decries it as "too serious," but this last incident finally brings her back into contact with Father Liam who reveals her mother's name to her after tracking her down hiding out working at a peep show. Posing as a telephone survey worker, Kitten does not ultimately reveal herself to her mother who has a new family and more urgent events call her back home to Ireland. A now pregnant Charlie is devastated when Irwin is killed by the I.R.A., and Kitten returns home to take care of her and prepare for the new baby. Reconciled

⁵ Negga was trained in acting at Trinity College and named as "Ireland's Rising Star" in 2006 at the Berlin Film Festival.

with Kitten, Father Liam sets up her and Charlie in the rectory and they enjoy a brief period of happiness. Community shock at Father Liam's conduct and shelter of this unwed pregnant mother and queer friend culminate in the rectory being firebombed, and Charlie and Kitten essentially being forced out of the town. In the final shots of the film, Charlie, Kitten, and the baby are featured as a happy queer family living together in London (http://www.allmoviephoto.com/photo/2005_breakfast_on_pluto_026.html), seemingly having come to terms with the violence and anxieties which plague them throughout the rest of the film by leaving Ireland. This ending suggests that Kitten has found happiness through domesticity rather than "true love" and in finding her father, Father Liam, the village priest, rather than her mother.

Yet, as Judith Halberstam observes in *A Queer Time and Place*, London, particularly in the 1970s at the height of the Troubles, can hardly be considered a "multicultural refuge, a place where formerly colonized peoples find a home."⁶ Here, Halberstam is actually referring to the ambiguous ending of Jordan's 1993 film *The Crying Game*, which also featured a transgendered character at the center of the plot in an examination of the Northern Irish Troubles. But Halberstam's comment also holds true for *Pluto* and renders the ending of both films highly suspect. In both, a relationship between queerness, racial Otherness, and exile in London appears essential in order for the Irish characters to transcend the conflict in the North as well as the oppressive Catholic society that they leave in search of freedom. Nevertheless, while the ending of *Breakfast on Pluto* is whimsical, it is far less ambivalent than the final prison meeting between Dil, a black British transgendered woman, and Fergus, an IRA operative. Fergus still proclaims his heterosexuality despite Dil's continued advances. Neither Dil nor Kitten get to consummate any desires onscreen, but Kitten's quest to discover her family is rewarded with a family that defies her expectations and brings her happiness and narrative closure.

Unlike *The Crying Game*, where the racial identities of Dil and Jody, her former boyfriend and a British soldier, are indicated in the script, Negga's appearance in *Pluto* appears to have been an accident of casting. In McCabe's 1998 version of the novel, Charlie's physical appearance is never described. Director Jordan stated in an interview: "I didn't know much about her when she came to the casting, but the

⁶ Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 81.

moment I saw her act, I decided to change the script so that she could appear in the movie."⁷ Yet, the changes to the script that Jordan indicates do not foreground Negga's difference, but rather sublimate it in a move that recognizes the unlikelihood of an Ethiopian-Irish schoolgirl in 1970's Northern Ireland. However is it possible to reconcile this encore combination of queerness, Irishness, racial difference and exile in London with a fortuitous casting boon? How does *Pluto's* ending reprise that of *The Crying Game* from the frame of an Ireland that has been much changed? What more do the final shots of Charlie, Kitten, and their baby in London suggest using the hindsight of contemporary immigration debates? How is the fact that *Breakfast on Pluto* is set 20 years or more before *The Crying Game* further complicate this question?

Since Doyle's 1987 novel, Ireland has undergone more than a few changes that have radically transformed the resonance of his earlier assertion that "the Irish are the niggers of Europe." For instance, the Irish have been forced to suddenly deal with bodies of color in their midst rather than using racial otherness as a convenient metaphor for emphasizing their own oppression. Since the early 1990's, the Republic and the North have been experiencing an unprecedented period of prosperity termed the "Celtic Tiger"⁸ accompanied by waves of immigration from Africa, China, India, Pakistan, and Eastern Europe, as well as returning former Irish emigrants.⁹ Immigration has transformed Ireland from what was previously described as a monocultural society in terms of nationality and race, into a country reckoning with issues of diversity and multiculturalism on a mass scale, arguably for the first time within its own borders.¹⁰

⁷ Jorge Gutiérrez, "Ruth Negga: A Star Without a Label," from <http://www.cafebabel.com/EN/article.asp?T=T&Id=8984>, retrieved 21 April, 2008.

⁸ "The Celtic Tiger" is a term borrowed from the "Asian Tigers" (Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea and Hong Kong). The notion of an economic "tiger" refers to rapid and consistent growth in an economy and their levels of industrialization, etc. It should be noted here that Ireland's economy is characterized as exceptional to that of Europe through a metaphor that links it to the Global South. See Michael J. O'Sullivan, *Ireland and the Global Question* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006).

⁹ In 2008, of the new immigrants: 16.2% were (returning) Irish, 7% were from the UK, 8.6% from the EU 15, 33.7% from the EU 12, and 16.3% were from the rest of the world. See "Population and Migration Estimates: Table 2: Estimated Immigration Classified by Sex and Nationality, 2003-2008," <http://www.cso.ie/releasespublications/documents/population/current/popmig.pdf>, retrieved 1 October, 2008.

¹⁰ The perception of Ireland as a previously monocultural society is inaccurate. The most obvious omission is the history of Catholics and Protestants in the Republic and the North. Yet, the Jewish and Traveller communities are also long-established, Chinese and Italian immigrants

By viewing Ireland's recent cultural and racial shifts through the performance of Ethiopian-Irish actress Ruth Negga as she plays Charlie, a young woman deeply affected by the casualties of the early Troubles, a telescopic view of 20th and early 21st century Irish history is achieved. As subjects of and collaborators in British Empire, the Irish found themselves scattered throughout the world most notably during the 19th and 20th centuries. Through emigration, forced deportation, incarceration, missionary work, the British Army or Civil Service, the Irish traveled to India, Africa, the Caribbean, Australia, and Canada.¹¹ It has recently been emphasized by William Flanagan, former president Mary Robinson, president Mary Macaleese, Diane Negra, Luke Gibbons, and Catherine M. Eagan¹² among others that the Irish diaspora must be considered a crucial part of the "Irish people." This group, currently numbering in the tens of millions, has exerted a particularly strong pull on the mainland Irish imagination and is colluded in the formation of contemporary notions of "Irishness" as an ethnic and cultural category. My view of this history through Negga's performance in *Breakfast on Pluto* emphasizes the multiple imbrications between categories of race, class, ethnicity and gender in Irish history. I am not seeking only to expand an understanding of "whiteness" as ethnicity, as has been the previous tenor of critical race theory within Irish Studies,¹³ or alternatively to emphasize the Irish as "subaltern," but rather, to demonstrate that the history of the "global Irish" includes contact with many other cultures and populations. The terms of this contact suggest that a contemporary Irish engagement with multiculturalism should avoid comparisons of "sameness" and "difference" with immigrant populations. Rather, I seek a more

have been coming to Ireland since the 19th century, and Ireland received programme refugees from Hungary and Vietnam in the 20th century. See "European Intercultural Workplace: Republic of Ireland," http://www.eiworkplace.net/texts/National_Report_Ireland.pdf, retrieved 25 September 2008.

¹¹ See *Ireland and India: Colonies, Culture and Empire*, eds. Tadhg Foley and Maureen O'Connor (Dublin and Portland, OR: Irish Academic Press, 2006); Michael Holmes, "The Irish and India: Imperialism, National and Internationalism," in *The Irish Diaspora*, ed. Andy Bielenberg (Harlow, England: Longman, 2000).

¹² See William Flanagan, *Ireland Now: Tales of Change from the Global Island* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007); *The Irish in Us: Irishness, Performativity, and Popular Culture*, ed. Diane Negra (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Luke Gibbons, *Ireland After History* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999).

¹³ See Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, (New York: Routledge, 1995); Steve Garner, *Racism in the Irish Experience* (London: Pluto Press, 2004); Luke Gibbons, *Gaelic Gothic: Race, Colonization and Irish Culture* (Galway: Arlen House, 2004).

thorough account of the intersections which have contributed to the formation of Irish ethnicities and which have brought immigrant populations to Ireland in the shadow of global capitalism and political unrest.

This argument is not to imply that "Irishness" is continuous across the space of North and South amongst those identifying as "Irish." Elizabeth Butler Cullingford remarks in her 2001 *Ireland's Others* that while "Ireland is accustomed to being stigmatized as the feminized object of English discourse, ...in women, gays, abused children, travelers and the working class it has produced its own internal Others."¹⁴ Absolute categories of the Irish nation and state which emphasized a white, settled, Catholic subject who conformed to heteronormative expectations of gender roles guaranteed the existence of a discrete Irish culture. This rendered the Irish distinct from the British and autonomous, and was reflected in policies of economic and political isolationism that persisted through the 20th century. As Thomas Docherty observes in the context of Ireland, "...the nation-state, historically, exists primarily or is called into being as an attempt to ward off the power of globalization, to 'contain' the global as it were."¹⁵ Cullingford's analysis does not take into account the manner in which external "Others," the "New Irish," have now added to the internal stratification of Irish society in regards to gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and class, but these shifts naturally extend her critique. The ambivalent identity of the "New Irish" and their frequent marginalizations as raced, gendered, and classed subjects exposes the persistent logic of Irish cultural belonging as heteronormative, white, male, middle-class and Catholic. The history of those prejudices has not begun with the new immigrants they have only extended and transformed conventional Irish logics of exclusion. The "New Irish" call attention not only to the construction of "white Irish" as ethnicity but the manner in which normative notions of citizenship cited against incoming immigrants have to be maintained through the "Othering" of populations designated both internal and external.

Locating Irish "whiteness" within British colonial history should move beyond simply re-emphasizing the continuation of Irish oppression to demonstrate how Irish whiteness, oppression, and

¹⁴ Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, *Ireland's Others: Gender and Ethnicity in Irish Literature and Popular Culture* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 2001), 6.

¹⁵ Thomas Docherty, "The Place's Fault," in *Global Ireland: Irish Literatures for the New Millennium*, ed. Ondřej Pilný and Claire Wallace (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2005), 17.

prosperity are constructed in relation to the movement of money, peoples, cultures, and goods through a broader post-colonial map that has been more recently re-invented as a benevolent "globalization." This confrontation with colonial whiteness situates the traumas of the past while also helping the Irish recognize their own historical relationship to the post-colonial histories of people who have found their way to Irish shores. Such a perspective is necessary for an informed confrontation with the changing face of capitalism, potentially understood as a neo-imperialism driven by transnational corporations.

U.S. companies, for example, were largely responsible for Ireland's initial burst of affluence in the 90's through off-shore investments. It would be ridiculous to suggest that the Irish are the victims of neo-imperialism while many Irish citizens enjoying unprecedented prosperity react virulently to new immigrants in their midst. Yet, the urge to narrowly define the Irish experience as expressed by anxiety over immigrants is energy that would be better spent in investigating what lies behind the seeming benevolence of the "Celtic Tiger." How do the potentially shared projects of the Irish and their recent immigrants past, present, and future expose the workings of global capitalism as a neo-imperial project? How do these arrivals recall the traumas of colonial histories that brought both sides into contact with one another, and have so again? As uneven affluence persists in Irish society, and "Irishness" as a global brand has become a series of caricatures of an Irish preoccupation with historical trauma, how does an approach to Irish history that views the "global" as not merely a path for the transport of commodities or a facile celebration of "Irish culture" work against this urge? How does this historical model release the national, in order to suggest a transnational and antiracist model of inclusion that works against the logic of capital? How does Negga pull this into focus?

My approach thus locates Irish engagements with racial and cultural alterity on the terrain of Empire and beyond as crucial to the formation of Irishness.¹⁶ Negga's anachronistic presence in *Breakfast*

¹⁶ For more perspectives on this claim, see: Ronit Lentin, "At the Heart of the Hibernian Metropolis: Spatial Narratives of Ethnic Minorities and Diasporic Communities in a Changing City," in *City 6* (2002): 229-249; Declan Kiberd, "Strangers in Their Own Country," in *Multiculturalism: The View from Two Irelands*, eds. Declan Kiberd and Edna Longley (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001); Jason King, "Black Saint Patrick Revisited: Calypso's Tower of Babel and Culture Ireland as global networks," in *Performing Global Networks*, ed. Karen Fricker and Ronit Lentin (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007): 38-51.

on *Pluto* recalls this history to a contemporary audience and renders her external appearance of racialized "difference" visible and consequential to the film and its reception, even though it apparently bears no impact on the plot of the story. Negga's performance models an ideal vision of Irish belonging that does not erase the co-mingling of Irish pasts and presents with histories of other peoples. Negga forces the audience towards a contemporary engagement with a transnational Irish history that illuminates the history of a "global Irish" who have now come to the island of Ireland either as returned white Irish emigrants or as would-be citizens who share colonial and European histories with their new neighbors, despite racial and cultural differences. Negga, in an article fittingly entitled, "Ruth Negga, a star without a label," observes: "For the moment, I don't have to worry about people trying to fit me into a box. Up until now, there were no mixed-race roles in Ireland. It's not like in the UK, where these roles do exist and then you are typecast from then on."¹⁷

My tactic here is not to tokenize or constrain Negga's body in the enunciation of her "difference" from the other "white Irish" bodies in the film or to discount her assertion that she is free from being put in a box. Rather, it is important to recognize the role that she plays in Jordan's 2005 film, which looks back at Irish history from a contemporary vantage point. From this contemporary perspective, her status as an Irish actor of mixed race descent is far less remarkable than it would have been in the film's setting of the 1970s. Additionally, representations of observable "difference" that attest to peaceful co-existence among Irish subjects have been repeatedly deployed as a litmus test to demonstrate that Ireland is a nation that embraces difference. From the cover of Roddy Doyle's 2007 collection, *The Deportees and Other Stories*,¹⁸ which features an older black man and a shorter white child, to Emma Donoghue's cover *Landing*,¹⁹ a queer transatlantic love story featuring Silé Sunita O'Shaughnessy, Indian-Irish from Dublin, and Jude, Canadian, from Ireland, Ontario, exterior ethnic difference is registered as marketable trope. This second cover represents Silé and Jude's union through a white and brown hand forming the shape of a heart on the cover, the

¹⁷ Jorge Gutiérrez, "Ruth Negga, a star without a label."

¹⁸ See http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/images/0670018457/ref=dp_image_0?ie=UTF8&n=283155&s=books.

¹⁹ See <http://www.emmadonoghue.com/images/sm-novel-landing.jpg>.

visible observance of ethnic "exteriority"²⁰ always standing in for a successful resolution of "difference," broadly construed. Doyle's and Donoghue's book jacket images, as well as the marked trend towards the development of intercultural Irish theater companies in recent years²¹ certainly locates visibility and performance at the center of representations of "Ireland Now."²²

An over-emphasis on visual representation as "cultural citizenship," however, only presents the surface of the problem as its solution. A discomfort with Ireland's suddenly multicultural society is at the root of many contemporary discussions of Irish politics and culture. In fact, the visibility of Negga as a prominent Irish performer as well as the popularity of scenes of social harmony in Ireland obscure the continuing racial and socioeconomic inequalities of "Celtic Tiger" Ireland, and the many gradations of citizenship, work permit or asylum seeker status that demarcate possible levels of participation in the Irish public sphere. Jason King has criticized the decision of Irish theater companies such as Calypso to employ immigrant actors of color who are also often asylum-seekers. He writes: "...they are often called on to embody and enact as spurious agents of social and cultural diversity who gain no reciprocal right to remain in the ostensibly culturally diverse society they appear to represent."²³ He elaborates elsewhere, "As in the master-slave dialectic, they are needed by Irish society to provide visible emblems of its racial diversity while they remain in a situation of complete dependency, as figures who simultaneously embody a form of

²⁰ See Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991).

²¹ Arambe Theater Productions was founded in 2003 by Nigerian performance artist Bisi Adigun, and "officially launched" by Roddy Doyle in 2004. Their website states: "The main aim of the company is to afford members of Ireland's African communities the unique opportunity to express themselves through the art of theatre": <http://www.arambeproductions.com>, retrieved 15 May, 2008. Pan Pan Theatre Company is a company founded in 1999 by Aedin Cosgrove and Gavin Quinn. This company has an international profile, and collaborated in 2006 on a Mandarin Chinese production of *Playboy of the Western World*, staged in Beijing and Dublin: <http://www.panpantheatre.com>, retrieved 15 May, 2008. Calypso Productions, a theater company which attests to be "creating a catalyst for social change" also regularly engages in intercultural work as they write on their website: "Calypso is constantly seeking ways in which our productions can be made more accessible, inclusive and engaging for people from a wide variety of cultural, racial and socio-economic backgrounds": <http://www.calypso.ie/index.html>, 15 May, 2008. Certainly not coincidentally, all of these companies are based in Dublin.

²² I am borrowing the title of William Flangan's book *Ireland Now* here.

²³ Jason King, "Black Saint Patrick: Irish Interculturalism in Theoretical Perspective & Theatre Practice," in *Global Ireland: Irish Literatures for a New Millennium*, ed. Ondřej Pilný and Claire Wallace (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2005), 47.

cultural recognition yet suffer social and political occlusion from the Irish mainstream."²⁴ "Cultural citizenship" through representation does not resolve deeper issues in Irish society. But if these representations are not taken for granted or as unequivocally positive and inclusive, their complicated resonances as in Negga's performance can point to several layers of enmeshment in Irish history and not merely a facile celebration of "Ireland Now."

The end of the Troubles dovetailed with the rise of the "Celtic Tiger" and the political, economic, and cultural changes that it has brought to Irish society. Not insignificantly, racist attacks in the North and South have dramatically risen during this time of transition, and Unionist-affiliated individuals have been repeatedly implicated in these incidents suggesting a transfer of aggression onto the recent immigrants, although this suggestion is not meant to exempt Catholics from racial prejudice.²⁵

The scene in which a pregnant Charlie and Kitten are expelled from Father Liam's rectory by community-sanctioned arson in the 1970's matches the contemporary pattern of violence in Ireland. A great deal of the controversy over arriving immigrants focused on pregnant women giving birth in Ireland in order to gain citizenship for their families.²⁶ This anxiety followed alarm at the rising number of asylum applications throughout the 1990's.²⁷ After a 2003 Supreme Court decision and 2004 citizenship referendum, the current law no longer guarantees citizenship for the non-national parents of a child born in Ireland.²⁸ Controversial Irish musician and performer Sinéad O'Connor muses on her website:

I had a great dream a while ago which I loved, which was that An Post were using photos of pregnant African ladies to advertise themselves- and

²⁴ Jason King, "Black Saint Patrick Revisited: Calypso's 'Tower of Babel' and Culture Ireland as Global Networks," 46.

²⁵ See *Divided Society: Ethnic Minorities and Racism in Northern Ireland*, ed. Paul Hainsworth (UK: Pluto Press, 1999). Headlines include: "Loyalists blamed as racist attacks on migrants double in Ulster," (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2006/may/30/race.northernireland>) "Racist attacks on children double," (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northernireland/1796403.stm), "Ireland to fight racist attacks with new campaign," (<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/ireland-to-fight-racist-attacks-with-new-campaign-711519.html>), retrieved 6 September, 2008.

²⁶ Before the referendum, it was immaterial whether the woman had conceived in Ireland or abroad. It was the birth event which determined citizenship.

²⁷ UN Refugee Agency, "Asylum Levels and Trends in Industrialized Countries, 2007," retrieved from <http://www.uncr.org/statistics/47daae862.pdf>, 5 September, 2008.

²⁸ See Anwen Tormey, "'Anyone with eyes can see the problem': Moral Citizens and the Space of Irish Nationhood," in *International Migration* 45: 3 (August 2007), 69-100.

this became the symbol of Ireland, pregnant African women. I just loved that. And I think this whole thing has been a miracle that we should be very grateful for. It's fucking disgusting to see how against it a lot of people are, and how racist we are. I think we should be so grateful to these immigrants, for deigning to grace us with their presence.²⁹

Charlie's pregnancy and her forcible expulsion from Tyreelin in *Breakfast on Pluto* thus takes on a different tenor although, according to the film's plot, the attack is motivated by her lack of a husband, and Kitten's queerness rather than as an explicit recognition of her racial difference. The earlier scenes in the film of Charlie and Kitten being shunned by two white residents on the street signals the limits of Tyreelin's hospitality, and the physical effect of these two bodies which are queer and of color, on the local inhabitants. Speaking of the environment prior to the Citizenship Referendum of 2004, Anwen Tormey writes: "Dramas of the abuse of Irish hospitality, phantasms of excessive and instrumental fertility, and the spectre of a proliferation of immoral and unworthy character were phenomenologically animated by the bodies of black immigrant mothers."³⁰

Nevertheless, taking O'Connor's musings as a cue, the redemptive nature of Charlie's pregnancy for herself and Kitten suggests that while the people of Tyreelin think they are rejecting a curse, in fact they are foolishly refusing a blessing. This rejection reveals the limits of their own ignorance rather than the unfitness of Kitten and Charlie. The year of the film may be somewhere in the 1970s, but the film's release in 2005 nevertheless renders the lesson anew for a contemporary Irish audience. Looking forward to 2008, the diversification of Irish society today actually exposes a history of heterogeneity long obscured and attested to by Kitten and Charlie's struggles in the 1970's of the film.

Hence, Negga's location at the center of these contemporary changes and fears in Ireland in her performance in this historical film as a mixed-race Irish actress positions her in what M. Jacqui Alexander would term "palimpsestic time." This position is far from one of safety. Negga's role as Charlie highlights the violence that was experienced by bystanders throughout the Troubles as well as the violent oppressions practiced by a Irish Catholic community that would shun many kinds of outsiders or sinners insisting on a

²⁹ Sinéad O'Connor, "The Lion's Daughter": http://www.sinead-oconnor.com/home/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=178&Itemid=179, retrieved 15 May 2008.

³⁰ Tormey, 87.

normative heterosexual, white, Irish subject throughout the 20th century.³¹ Moreover, the appearance of her mixed-race body in a movie about the 1970s released in 2005 points forward to the physical and verbal racially motivated assaults that have abounded in Ireland since the early 1990s, and to the persistent fears of pregnant African and other immigrants "invading" Ireland. This series of events implicates the continuation of a post-colonial history that renders racial formations, structural inequalities, and the location of populations and national borders far from stable. In addition, it implicates the history of the Irish as collaborators in and subjects of British Empire worldwide through forced or voluntary emigration. Alexander elaborates on "palimpsestic time":

The idea of the 'new' structured through the 'old' scrambled palimpsestic character of time both jettisons the truncated distance of linear time and dislodges the impulse for incommeasurability, which the ideology of distance creates. It thus rescrambles the 'here and now' and 'then and there' to a 'here and there' and 'then and now,' and makes visible what Payal Bannerjee calls the ideological traffic between and among formations that are otherwise positioned as dissimilar.³²

Given the colonial legacy of the Irish people, it is perhaps a surprise to find that Irish history includes many examples of internal racial prejudice. Yet, this stubbornness does not only indicate a "forgetting" of Irish oppression, but rather operates through its logic. Thus, the dubious case of the Irish as post-colonial: their dual position within British Empire, proximity to Europe, history of displacement and intermixture with other cultures, etc., puts Ireland in 2008 in a crucial position as a vantage point from which to reconsider how post-colonial palimpsestic time functions in regards to race, culture and globalization today.

Negga's performance serves as a site from which to consider a new pedagogy of the palimpsest that reckons with the "blacks of Europe," Irish and otherwise by foregrounding what Vijay Prashad would term "polyculturalism," an alternative to a multiculturalism dependent on the continuation of identity politics as well as "post-nationalism". Prashad writes:

³¹ See Marjorie Howe, *Yeats's Nations: Gender, Class, and Irishness*, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); *Sex, Nation and Dissent in Irish Writing*, ed. Éibhear Walshe (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997).

³² M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory and the Sacred* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 190.

These defiant skins come under the sign of the polycultural, a provisional concept grounded in antiracism rather than in diversity. Polyculturalism, unlike multiculturalism, assumes that people live coherent lives that are made up of a host of lineages—the task of the historian is not to carve out the lineages but to make sense of how people live culturally dynamic lives. Polyculturalism is a ferocious engagement with the political world of culture, a painful embrace of the skin and all its contradictions.³³

Prashad does not suggest a capricious disengagement with the violences of these polycultural histories in favor of an unhinged and individualistic cosmopolitan account; rather, he suggests that the full extent of their violence *and* opportunities cannot be understood unless coherent lives are located in sites that index multiple histories in and through the body and lived experience. It is not only Negga and her body that are implicated here: her observable difference, her racialized exteriority, points towards the “polycultural” lives of the other actors and characters in the film hidden under their appearance of a(n) albeit unstable Irish) whiteness. By refusing to look past Negga’s exterior difference, it is therefore possible to avoid looking *only* at Negga as the sign of Ireland now, or as the guarantee of its success. The participation of the ensemble of actors that she supports with her own performance is required to truly reflect Ireland now.

Therefore, “Irish whiteness” is not just a sign which insures privilege or conceals histories of oppression; it also demonstrates how these contradictions converge and cooperate. The instability of the Irish’s location within the British Empire should not be understood as merely frustrating or suspect; instead, it powerfully exposes the weakness of imperialist logic that positioned them thus and which asked its subject to make coherent lives out of these conflicting roles. This understanding, coupled with a true reckoning of the multiple post-colonial histories now gathered in Ireland’s midst, provide a powerful platform for the forging of a new polycultural anti-racist politics that will hopefully outlast the roar of the “Celtic Tiger.”

Doyle writes in December 2006 for his introduction to his latest collection of short stories *The Deportees and Other Stories*:

Maybe it was *Riverdance*. A bootleg video did the rounds of the rooms and the shanties of Lagos and, moved to froth by the site of that long, straight

³³ Vijay Prashad, *Everybody was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), xii.

line of Irish and Irish-American legs- *tap-tap-tap, tappy-tap-* thousand of Nigerians packed the bags and came to Ireland. *Please. Teach us how to do that.*

I suspect it was more complicated. It was about jobs and the E.U., and infrastructure and wise decisions, and accident. It was about education and energy, and words like 'tax' and 'incentive,' and what happens when they are put beside each other. It was also about music and dancing and literature and football. It happened, I think, sometime in the mid-90's. I went to bed in one country and woke up in a different one.³⁴

Just as Jordan regards Ruth Negga's casting a fortuitous accident, Doyle first jokes that perhaps it was Michael Flaherty that lured the Nigerians to Ireland. Within these jokes and accidents, a deeper and more tangled history of economic duress, mutual engagement, anti-colonial solidarities, violence and xenophobia is concealed. These strands must now be unpacked in order to truly reckon with what the Celtic Tiger bears behind her/his stripes. Doyle did not simply wake up in a different country, he woke up to a country that had lured its more far-flung history home to itself. James Joyce's Stephen Bloom famously mused in *Ulysses*, "History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake." As Roddy Doyle tells us, perhaps that wake-up call has finally come in Ireland.

³⁴ Roddy Doyle, "Foreword," in *The Deportees and Other Stories* (New York: Viking, 2007), xi.

Post-Orientalist Aesthetics: Experimental Film and Video in Lebanon

Mark R. Westmoreland

In Mona Hatoum's experimental video, *Measures of Distance* (1981), she densely layers fragmented clips of audio recording, written correspondence, and intimate images in a way that accentuates the distance of exile. Nude photos of Hatoum's mother appear in close-up, rendering them initially undecipherable. A second visual layer of hand-written letters from Hatoum's mother further obscures the images on screen, the letters themselves only revealing fragmented Arabic script that prevents the viewer from reading more than a few discontinuous phrases. Meanwhile, we hear a conversation in Arabic between two women that competes with the louder voice-over translations in English. While these communiqués between Hatoum in London and her mother in Beirut are themselves markers of separation, the way the layers compete and obscure each other speaks directly to the infrastructural ruptures of phone lines and postal services during the Lebanese civil wars. Furthermore, the way the narrative reveals familial tension offers another dimension of distance inflected but not caused by Hatoum's exile. While ostensibly about family relations and the experience of exile, *Measures of Distance* demonstrates a vexed relationship between modes of communication and technologies of documentation.

In this article, I argue that Lebanese film and video consistently demonstrate an aesthetic ambivalence with mimetic modes of mediation, which poignantly engages the limitations and possibilities of post-colonial discourse around the politics of representation. In the first part of this article, I attempt to contextualize this ambivalent aesthetics vis-à-vis the Lebanese civil war(s) and the post-war aftermath. Next, I make an argument for identifying this stylistic approach as a "post-orientalist aesthetics." In the final sections, I provide a close reading of two films—Maroun Baghdadi's *Hors la vie* (1991) and Jocelyn Saab's *Once Upon a Time, Beirut* (1994)—and give particular attention to the way these films have been engaged by Lebanese visual theorists Walid Raad and Jalal Toufic. These close readings enable me to situate these films within a contested field of representation, in which the modes of remembering Lebanon's

violent past (and present) remain a defining issue in Lebanon's (post)war period.

LEBANESE VISUALITY

While scholars and critics have given much attention to contemporary video art emerging from Lebanon and the way artists like Walid Raad, Akram Zaatari, Jayce Salloum, and Lamia Joreige have disrupted the production of historical evidence, considerably less attention has been paid to the use of ambivalent aesthetics in feature films made in Lebanon. The reflexive distrust of film and video's own apparatus becomes evidenced in the work of several filmmakers who emerge during the Lebanese civil war(s), including Maroun Baghdadi, Jocelyn Saab, Borhane Alaouié, Heiny Srour, Randa Shahal Sabbag, among others. These filmmakers came of age at a time when Lebanon celebrated its "golden age." Lebanon served as the outlet for the two largest oil pipelines in the world, which resulted in Beirut becoming the banking center of the Middle East. The allure of ancient ruins, sunny beaches, and snow-capped mountains combined with cosmopolitan notions of a "Paris of the Middle East," which fostered a burgeoning leisure industry. The displacement of the Egyptian film industry during the nationalization period of Gamel Abdel Nasser meant that Lebanon had also emerged as the filmmaking capital of the Arab world during this period. The films that were made during this time tended to be melodramas in Egyptian dialect. They demonstrated increasingly liberal sensibilities, incorporating partial female nudity and hyper-sexualized plotlines.¹

The reader should bear in mind that underlying tensions emanating from the Cold War between capitalist and communist regimes, their manifestation within the Middle East, and a historical precedent of sectarian violence had already resulted in the first Lebanese civil war in 1958. These issues should temper the idealism of this golden era, which ultimately came to a close once political violence reemerged in 1975. While a mythologized nostalgia emerged about the past, the death, destruction, and depression that followed in effect superseded the myth of the golden age and replaced it with

¹ Samir al-Ghoussayni's *The Cats of Hamra Street* (1972) draws on the sexual revolution of American hippie culture.

chaos and sorrow. The critical sensibilities of contemporary Lebanese visual culture emerged during this period of social conflict and prewar nostalgia, as evidenced in Borhane Alaouié's *Beirut the Encounter/Beirut al Likaa* (1981).

Alaouié's film depicts a chance meeting between two young friends separated by the war. Shot on location during the conflict, the encounter is emblematic of the displacement and uncertainty faced when navigating inter-sectarian relationships and the obstacles of everyday political violence. Zeina and Haidar agree to meet at the airport to exchange audio letters before Zeina leaves for America, where she plans to pursue her studies. Rather than offering an air of overt violence, the backdrop of war shows instead a society paralyzed by the material signs of disjuncture (sporadic power, water, and phone connectivity, as well as roadblocks and traffic jams) or, in other words, measures of distance. Under such conditions, time is hostage. No one knows how long it will take to cross the city, or for the war to end. At the end, Zeina is stuck in traffic on the way to the airport and Haidar gives up and leaves. As a master symbol of departure and disconnection, the airport is filled with competing affective intensities of longing for the past and fantasies about the future. Alaouié's treatment marks it with the ambivalence of impossible goodbyes. As Haider leaves the airport in despair, he unspools the audiocassette out the window of the taxi. His undelivered message is reduced to its material form, fluttering across the streets of Beirut, destined to join the rubble of war.

Through various, but consistent, visual references to mediation from cassette tapes and photographs to cameras and television screens, these filmmakers deploy a reflexive critique of mediation and representation. *West Beirut* (1996), Ziad Doueri's light-hearted coming of age film, became an instant success in Lebanon, won an award at Cannes, and was released in theaters throughout North America and Europe. *West Beirut* reflects a wave of films made after the war by "returnees" still fascinated by this traumatic event.² For Ziad Doueri, who escaped the war to live in the United States and work in the film industry as a cameraman for Quentin Tarantino, his first feature film enraptured audiences with a nostalgic look at the start of the war, a hip disco soundtrack, and better production standards than most had been able to deliver during the war and

² Ibrahim al-Ariss, "An Attempt at Reading the History of Cinema in Lebanon: From Cinema Society and Vice Versa," in *Screens of Life: Critical Film Writing from the Arab World*, vol. 1, ed. Alia Arasoughly (St. Hyacinthe, Quebec: World Heritage Press, 1996): 19-39.

post-war eras. Despite its seemingly uncritical narrative, Doueri deploys reflexive devices that prevent easy dismissal. The main characters in this film are introduced and motivated by the textured presence of a super-8 camera and several key scenes are sutured to this amateur lens.

The opening scene of the movie is presented in grainy black-and-white, and cuts back and forth between the film's main characters on the playground of their school and two enemy fighter jets maneuvering against each other in the sky. The juxtaposition between the "playground" for leisure on the one hand, and the battleground for hostilities on the other, should not be lost on us here. These seemingly stable differences blur into each other as the film progresses. This foregrounding of space and the placement of the viewer looking up at the political events unfolding in the sky above contrasts with the way Hollywood often deploys an aerial optic that brings to viewer into a space in which she or he sees from an elevated position of authority.³ Furthermore, the super-8 camera is reflexively introduced as a tool for recording evidence. But the documentary integrity of the super-8 footage is constantly undermined by its duplicitous self-referentiality. In these first scenes, not only has this "silent" film recorded the motor winding, it has somehow magically recorded its own presence as the viewer sees the super-8 camera through its own lens. By seeing and hearing the camera as it records, the contradictory layering of self-referential media works to create a more phenomenologically holistic experience for the viewer as filmmaker. This creates an effect of bearing witness, the feeling that one is given the embodied sense of not merely watching, but documenting the observable world.

The playful insertion of this mimetic technology into a coming-of-age story inscribes a subtle critique of scopic regimes. The use of amateur filmmaking reveals the general lack of agency the Lebanese had in representing themselves during the war. Meanwhile, international news media have flooded the archive with images of lawless militias terrorizing the apocalyptic landscape of Beirut. Nevertheless, the proliferation of modern media may serve as a surrogate for those in exile. "[I]ntensive identification with national politics and the rhythm of life lived elsewhere is made possible through new communications technologies."⁴ However, the steady

³ Lina Khatib, *Filming in the Middle East* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006).

⁴ Michael Humphrey, "Lebanese Identities Between Cities, Nations and Trans-Nations," in *Lebanese Presence in the World* (Beirut: Lebanese American University, 2001), 5.

stream of disembodied and violent news footage may dominate one's visual relationship to a place called "home." Not only is the violence of the war mediated by the evening news, home itself is also mediated through these lenses that claim objectivity and realism. Indeed, for most of us in the west, headlines about conflict in the Middle East dominate our understanding of this region. The dominance of international news media and its presumed ubiquity over worldwide current events serves as yet another aesthetic dimension of Lebanese visual culture. Televisual imagery and newsreel footage figure strongly in Lebanese film and video as a reflexive commentary on representation.

In the experimental documentary *Introduction to the End of an Argument/Muqaddimah Li-Nihayat Jidal* (1990), a collaboration between Lebanese Canadian Jayce Salloum and Palestinian Elia Suleiman, the filmmakers present a powerful montage of dozens of clips from American news and Western popular media to create a cutting critique of the media coverage of the Middle East. These artists use video for documentary research, not in an endeavor to establish a factual record, but to situate "representation itself as a politicized practice" and to critically engage the fantastic tendencies of media and its ability to make certain "realities" believably real.⁵ While these artists endeavor to show how these representations fill a particular western imagination, they also try to re-calibrate interpretive frameworks and offer new perspectives to consider. For instance, a montage of scenes of French soldiers in *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) is edited together with news footage of Israeli soldiers storming a building. The scene cuts to another montage of news clips of Yasser Arafat, each framed by the derisive commentary of the news anchor or reporter. Ominous music accompanies these scenes and title cards frame a deconstructionist project (e.g. "Speaking for oneself" changes to "Speaking for others"). By overloading the viewer with pejorative representations from cartoons of *Ali Baba* and *I Dream of Jeannie* to *Indiana Jones* and *The Thief of Baghdad*, the resulting forty-minute video re-articulates the way western news and popular media interpret the Middle East.

Salloum's video, *(This Is Not Beirut)/There Was and There Was Not* (1994), is a similar endeavor, but with particular interest in the way Beirut has come to evoke nostalgia and horror, both in the way it was hailed as exotic and cosmopolitan during the so-called "golden era" and then violent and chaotic during the Lebanese civil wars. In

⁵ See http://www.111101.net/Artworks/index.php?Jayce_Salloum/index.php.

such conditions, the very presumption of making sense or understanding a place becomes fraught. In this video, the critique of anthropology (and its presumed ability to attain 'local knowledge' by spending a few months or years in a place) is challenged by political violence that makes factual evidence elusive: even those who have spent their entire lives in Lebanon do not understand the situation. These filmmakers reference western media sources, but also put themselves in compromising situations in order to problematize documentary methods of both procuring knowledge and producing meaning. Salloum draws on a toolkit of techniques to rupture expectations about narratives, images, subjectivities designed for the "suspension of belief," rather than the "suspension of *dis*-belief" on which Classical Hollywood cinema is based.⁶

In these films and videos, the witness of history reveals her- or himself through mediated forms of self-referentiality, thus inserting a physical referent (a media object) as a gap between history and memory, between the "real" and the "image." The physical presence of these objects and devices disallows the short circuit of representational mimesis, but it also accentuates the subjectivity of the witness as withdrawn. They tell nonlinear stories that exist always between states of being, in a process of becoming. Deterritorialized histories, personal narratives, documentary value, and media recycling engender a liminal quality to post-colonial visual representation in which the filmmaker/film-viewer/film-subject are implicated together in shared intersubjectivity. This "haptic" quality of post-orientalist aesthetics blurs boundaries between fact and fiction, art and documentary, and identity and subjectivity.

POST-ORIENTALIST AESTHETICS

Lebanese experimental film and video give expression to a distinct set of aesthetics that is at once critically conscious of Orientalist representations and acutely attentive to the traumas of war and exile that inform the Lebanese experience. As such, "post-orientalist aesthetics" provides a critical response to the representational violence of overdetermined media coverage, while also articulating

⁶ Jayce Salloum and Molly Hankwitz, "Occupied Territories: Mapping the Transgressions of Cultural Terrain," in *Framework* 43 (2002), 93.

the traumatized subjectivities engendered by political violence and displacement. Although these subjectivities emanate from a common context of contemporary Lebanese history, this framework does not suggest the commonality of a “Lebanese experience.” Indeed, the recurrent subversion of historical representation in this body of work insists on the impossibility of providing a unified national narrative, particularly regarding the experience of violence during the past several decades. Furthermore, while a variety of Lebanese films and videos gives expression to this alternative aesthetics, the post-orientalist’s perspectives are not the sole dominion of the Lebanese. My usage of post-orientalist aesthetics therefore aims to identify an alternative poetics that reflexively evokes the failure of various historical projects situated within the Middle East.

In the context of Lebanon, Lebanese cinema has been faced with the burden of representing the failure of the nation and its replacement with prolonged political violence. As such, experimental approaches emphasize the impossibilities of historical representation, as exemplified by the work of Walid Raad, Lamia Joreige, Rabih Mroue, Joana Hadjithomas, and Khalil Joreige, amongst others. Narrative, documentary, and video art in Lebanon often depict the political context through individual relationships with media. Tape recorded letters, amateur filmmaking, family photos, mnemonic objects, etc. all promote the corporeality of self-mediation. In other words, the phenomenological relationship between the filmmaking subject and the media object leaves residues of embodiment, which reflexively reveals the personal experience of everyday violence and lingering trauma. In this way, post-war mediation uncovers withdrawn subjectivities evocative of ghosts that have not been mourned and spectres that have not been tried for their crimes.

Despite the particularities of experience and location, almost all Lebanese films are dependent on western benefactors, transnational co-production, and alternative modes of dissemination for their vitality. That said, to dismiss these productions as merely catering to a universal liberal humanism—the antithesis of nationalism—would risk becoming ensnared in over-determined oppositions. On the contrary, nonlinear and non-causal narratives disrupt humanist expectations and leave room for interpretation and confusion. Under these conditions, filmmaking always entails an act of translation: representing one’s life world on film constitutes a cross-cultural exchange. This occurs through the linkages with western/non-western co-productions as well as with trans-regional cross-fertilization between Beirut and other, more localized centers of

urban cosmopolitanism, like Cairo, Damascus, and Jerusalem.

Accordingly, this paper advances the notion of “post-orientalist aesthetics” in order to loosely frame experimental film and video projects emerging from the eastern Mediterranean (a.k.a. the Levant, *al-Mashriq*, the Holy Lands, etc). These visual projects critically engage the politics of representation, both inherited from colonial relationships and historical nationalisms. These intra-regional aesthetics have a common history in relation to the ongoing violence that has reverberated around the Arab/Israeli conflicts for more than sixty years. The contours of post-orientalist aesthetics as it relates to this Levantine regional locality, trace the shared features of what film scholar Hamid Naficy calls “deterritorialized” cinemas: cinemas neither belonging to a single social location nor apprehended by a single cultural logic.⁷ Rather than privileging the notion of a national cinema, Arab cinema, or even a transnational cinema, I privilege a historic and ethnographic framework, because it gives greater context to the lived experience of these filmmakers and those depicted. Filmmakers and video artists in Beirut, Damascus, and Jerusalem (not to mention Baghdad, Cairo, and Istanbul) share similar relationships with the West and co-participate in the circuits of global festivals, art exhibitions, vocational training, higher education, media careers, and cosmopolitan citizenship. Often times the common language with these artists is English or French, rather than Arabic.

This restructuring of cinema according to the processes of post-orientalist aesthetics moves beyond national boundaries and takes advantage of intersections of exilic mobility. Sites like Beirut speak simultaneously to deterritorialization and cosmopolitanism. As a site of exilic ruination and imperial failure, Beirut has become an essential hub in the reworking of representational paradigms.⁸ While these critical aesthetics can be traced through the cinemas in Palestine, Syria, and elsewhere, I argue that post-orientalist aesthetics have taken root most noticeably in the film and video of Lebanon. Within the context of transnational cinema, I evoke a “dialectics of orientalism” in order to provide a more nuanced reading of cross-cultural representation.⁹ As a deterritorialized and yet localized site

⁷ Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁸ Catherine David, “Presentation,” in *Tamáss 1: Contemporary Arab Representations, Beirut/Lebanon* (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 2002): 10-14; Stephen Wright, “Like a Spy in a Nascent Era: On the Situation of the Artist in Beirut Today,” in *Parachute* 108 (2002): 13-31.

⁹ Stephen C. Caton, *Lawrence of Arabia: A Film's Anthropology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

of cultural production, independent transnational filmmaking in Beirut engenders new modes of post-colonial cosmopolitanism. Beirut has emerged as a premier site of experimental media and avant-garde art due in large part to the symbolic potency of its violent past and the displacement of its diaspora. Artists and filmmakers present their experiences to audiences abroad in ways that captivate while they avoid a reduction to comprehensible clichés. Their film and videos infuse Arab publics with social critique without privileging western liberalism. These polyglot exiles can move easily in and out of transnational urban publics, while also orchestrating a zone of exilic Arab sensibilities accessible to those “in the know.”

The decentering of critical discourse to the “periphery” utilizes the colonial idioms of scientism, objectivity, and documentary in order to critique imperial tropes of mastery and conquest, but this attention does not preclude criticism of other forms of over-determination. Indeed, this alternative aesthetic works to become unencumbered by patriarchal hegemony and self-indulgent humanism. For instance, Lebanese filmmakers and artists employ stylistic and thematic motifs that transcend Edward Said’s monumental critique of Orientalism as an intellectual extension of colonial politics.¹⁰ One of the critiques of Said’s argument was the lack of agency and influence by those considered the object of Orientalism. On the contrary, these filmmakers shift the conventional boundaries of orientalist discourse, not only by critiquing western representations of the Middle East, but also by critiquing the Middle East from localized positions. For instance, the work of Akram Zaatari, particularly with the Arab Image Foundation, critically examines both the fantasies of sexual desire and the discourse of Lebanese resistance movements. Whereas films like Danielle Arbid’s *In the Battlefields* (2005) demonstrate a critique of patriarchal authority, films like Ghassan Salhab’s *Beirut Phantom* (1998) and Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige’s *The Perfect Day* (2005) register the political kidnappings that occurred during the civil war.

Despite participating in western film festivals and art house cinema, Arab filmmakers and artists assert their cultural difference in ways that provide historical and political specificity, rather than advancing notions of universal humanism. This contemporary assertion of “oriental” agency parallels recent efforts to expand Said’s conceptualization of Orientalism to include a broader range of cross-cultural exchange in the context of nineteenth- and twentieth-century

¹⁰ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

visual culture.¹¹ For instance, they situate Francophone Orientalist painting as “an art of the interstices,” in which Algerian artists Etienne Dinet, Azouaou Mammeri, and Omar Racim perform a strategic mimicry in order to make space for oneself in a colonized context. While I am not situating nineteenth century Orientalist painting within a paradigm of post-orientalist aesthetics, I am emphasizing the way multi-faceted cross-cultural relationships complicate notions of unilateral representations. In other words, referencing recent work on Orientalist art is meant to decenter simplistic modern/traditional frameworks and draw attention to the simultaneity of difference and similarity that occurs through aesthetic processes of mimesis and alterity.

In this way, post-orientalist aesthetics challenges the “dogmas of Orientalism,” which Said identified as: 1) the presumption of an absolute hierarchical difference between East and West, 2) the predominance of abstraction over contextualized realities, 3) the privileging of western expertise over self-definition, and 4) the preclusion of self-rule.¹² Rather than a primordial difference between East and West, difference is situated contextually. That is to say, post-orientalist aesthetics contextualizes the hegemonic differences between East and West, deconstructs the abstracted clichés, favors situated representations, and privileges self-determination. Under such conditions, identity is authenticated by political disempowerment rather than cultural essentialism. Acknowledging the poignancy of these Arab self-critiques disrupts the Orientalist assumption that the “orient” requires imperial oversight in order to manage fiscal corruption, liberate dominated democracies, and empower passive women.

My assertion of a post-orientalist aesthetics that characterizes post-war Lebanese cinema, however, is also decidedly different from a mere outgrowth of orientalism and its auxiliary trajectories. This assertion is neither endorsing a post-modern anti-structure, nor necessarily a proclaimed “third space,” because this tertiary dimension tends to endorse a generalizable framework outside of specific contexts.¹³ Having said this, I am not necessarily trying to assert something new and fresh. Indeed, my usage of “post” should

¹¹ Jill Beaulieu and Mary Roberts (eds.), *Orientalism's Interlocutors: Painting, Architecture, Photography* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

¹² Said, 300-301.

¹³ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991).

flag it as something tired and overused. In a way, the moniker of “post-orientalist aesthetic” feigns newness, originality, and excitement, in order to accentuate a certain fatigued redundancy. In other words, at the core of such periodization is the presumption that modernism and colonialism are somehow closed systems with definable beginning and ending points. In this way, “post” does not denote a conclusion as much as a spillage.

In the context of Lebanon, *post* is most often associated with the notion of “post-war” society or a “post-war” period. This model of a discernable Lebanese historiography relies on a series of presumptions. First, it presumes that political and civil violence gave way to reconciliation. Second, it presumes that the Lebanese were able to put the war behind them and begin the process of collective healing. Third, it presumes that political violence ended and that civil antagonism would be publicly addressed. Instead, crimes are so heavily policed as to foster interpretations of sectarian conflict even where it may not be the case.¹⁴ Furthermore, prolonged occupations by both Israeli and Syrian armies, as well as earlier occupations by the PLO and MNF, have been responsible for “keeping the peace.”¹⁵ Moreover, internal power struggles are demographically dispersed by a hierarchical quota system.¹⁶

Under these parameters, post-orientalist aesthetics suggest a contentious and cynical sensibility, in which post-war means the return of the repressed rather than the end of violence. Neither have orientalist (mis)representations ended, nor has the political opportunity for reconciliation emerged. Instead, newness is created by altering the aesthetic codes typically assigned to recording, documenting, and archiving the historical record. This particular tension between stale modes of historiography and generative reframing of aesthetic codes finds poignancy in the remediation of historical artifacts and images and the accentuation of constructed reflexivity. In the context of experimental video and art, the work of

¹⁴ This dynamic has been poignantly demonstrated in by performance artist Rabih Mroue, whose 2005 performance *Who's Afraid of Representation?* was partially based on the media reaction to the shooting spree by Hassan Maamoun, who entered his office after 20 years of employment and killed eight of his co-workers.

¹⁵ MNF refers to the Multinational Force (comprised of US, French, and Italian forces) that entered Lebanon in the wake of the 1982 Israeli invasion in order to remove the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization).

¹⁶ This sectarian system of governance, commonly called confessionalism, is based on a 1932 census and an unwritten National Pact, which aimed to fix the balance of power between Lebanon's eighteen Christian and Muslim sects.

Walid Raad exemplifies this approach. For instance, his strategic reappropriation of the “western hostage crisis” in *Hostage: The Bachar Tapes* (2000) introduces Soheil Bachar, a fictive Kuwaiti embassy employee held captive with the American hostages in the 1980s. Bachar is inspired by real-life Soha Bachara, a living-martyr who spent ten years in Khiam prison after a failed assassination attempt on Antoine Lahad, the head of Israel’s proxy militia installed to police southern Lebanon. In this way, Raad pairs the narratives of the western hostages with the occupation of southern Lebanon and the captivity of its people. So instead of trying to author a narrative that stands in opposition to the dominant one, Raad inserts an alternative story within the master narrative to rupture its integrity.

Hostage begins with an informational intertitle that credits 53 video tapes to Soheil Bachar, who has donated the tapes to the Atlas Group, but only allowing tapes #17 and #31 to be screened in North America and Western Europe. We learn that Bachar was held hostage for ten years in solitary confinement “except for 27 weeks in 1985 with Americans Terry Anderson, Thomas Sutherland, Benjamin Weir, Martin Jenco, and David Jacobson.” At the beginning of *Hostage*, Bachar provides very explicit directions for how he should be dubbed over by “a neutral-toned female voice,” thus pinpointing the way dubbing and subtitles often silence or distort spoken words. At this moment, the screen turns blue for several moments before cutting to Bachar sitting in front of the camera. This amateur-looking footage has Bachar framed in the lower middle of the screen. He has affixed a muted background cloth behind him, taped to the wall, but the camera is not zoomed tight enough to obscure this aesthetic decision. As he lowers the remote control, he begins telling his story of confinement. He is dubbed over by a woman’s voice with a North American accent. These aesthetic decisions mock the veracity of the documentary confession, but also strategically insert a counter-narrative within the dominant discourse on western victimhood.

OCULARITY OF FOREIGN INTERVENTION

In his doctoral dissertation “Beirut... (à la folie): A Cultural Analysis of the Abduction of Westerners in Lebanon in the 1980s,” Walid Raad’s analysis of Maroun Baghdadi’s *Hors la vie* (1991) helps

articulate a refined and critical version of post-orientalist aesthetics.¹⁷ Raad's cultural analysis of the representation of the "western hostage crisis" in Lebanon in the 1980s forwards a critique of the way neo-orientalist representations of and narratives about these abductions delimited culpability of western foreign powers in the Lebanese "civil" wars.¹⁸ Furthermore, it provides one of the first theoretical articulations of post-orientalist aesthetics in the Lebanese context. Raad provides an aesthetic critical of the politics of representation, but it is one also belabored by a recurrent (absent) presence of violence.

First, inspired by photojournalist Roger Auque's real-life account of his abduction, captivity, and release, Maroun Baghdadi's *Hors la vie* mirrors Auque's story with the fictional protagonist Patrick Perrault. Raad is particularly concerned with the character's identity as a French photojournalist and the way the presumed mimetic objectivity of the journalist's camera erases Perrault's national biases. As Raad says, the "politically and ideologically neutral witness" enables the construction of "uncontested proof."¹⁹ Photojournalism's ability "to ideologically neutralize and ontologically naturalize" the Frenchman's relation to the war presumes and reifies the semiotic supposition of photography.²⁰ Although Baghdadi's film does not directly critique French political involvement, Raad argues that Baghdadi makes more subtle critiques of western influence and the politics of representation. First, the sequence that leads to Perrault's abduction moves from the heroics of an intrepid photojournalist, then to militiamen forcing Perrault to witness and photograph them standing proudly over a fallen corpse, and then to Perrault's intentional exposure of the roll of film to daylight, and finally to his capture and blindfolding. The symbolic importance of Perrault's blindfolding during his abduction, as Raad points out, makes a link between his camera's ability to alternately witness and be blind to images of violence. On the one hand, the war

¹⁷ Walid Raad, "Beirut... (à la folie): A Cultural Analysis of the Abduction of Westerners in Lebanon in the 1980s," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Rochester, 1996.

¹⁸ Typically rendered as a national dispute between Muslims and Christians, the conflating of Lebanon's eighteen official sectarian identities, called confessions, into a civil duality belies the role of secular militias, shifting alliances, and prolonged history of foreign intervention. For an expansive record of this war, see Robert Fisk's *Pity the Nation: Lebanon at War*, second edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), which provides an extended presentation of the shifting alliances, outside manipulations, and internal power dynamics.

¹⁹ Raad, 85.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.

photographer's *raison d'être* is to capture the violence and suffering of war on film, but his intentional over-exposure of his film roll shows an effort to recoil from this purpose into a state of intentional blindness. On the other hand, the blindfold means that he cannot directly witness his abduction, but must look peripherally through the gaps in his blindfold. The peripheral gaps in the blindfold spatially reorganizes vision "from the center to the margin."²¹ Raad points out that this shifts the "representational authority from the French photojournalist to the Lebanese filmmaker."²²

Second, Raad analyzes Baghdadi's representation of the city, which juxtaposes the cinematic devices of panning and tracking shots. The panning shots present Beirut as a city like any other with minimal traces of the war, while the tracking shots of Beirut are viewed "through the windshield of a moving vehicle as we are led through the rubble and debris of streets" and "decimated buildings."²³ The destruction evidenced in the tracking shots of Beirut "is of an unimaginable scope." The audience can only assume that this decimation extends indefinitely through a labyrinthine "no man's land."²⁴ Baghdadi's divergent aesthetics of panning and tracking shots respectively parallels Lina Khatib's juxtaposition of background/foreground in the cinematic space of Hollywood and Middle Eastern films. In Khatib's analysis, Hollywood films shot in the Middle East tend to treat space as a backdrop and thus of secondary significance to the protagonist's adventure, whereas Middle Eastern films foreground the social context of cinematic space.

Inter-cutting these disrupted tracking shots of spatial violence with Perrault in his cell "day-dreaming" cause a slippage of these "real-life" images from the factual record into "reminiscences" and "hallucinations" haunting the Frenchman.²⁵ The repetition of these scenes in his imagination can be quickly interpolated into a post-traumatic stress disorder as "a process of retroactively managing

²¹ Ibid., 118-119.

²² Raad argues that Baghdadi's production experiences in Lebanon and Europe gave him the perception of a balanced view. "Baghdadi's film projects have ranged from a series of short documentaries for the Lebanese National Movement (LMN)—a political and military coalition formed in 1969 by Kamal Jumblatt, and which grouped socialist, communists, Arab nationalists, and various other leftists and secularists—to fiction and non-fiction films for French and British TV" (92-93).

²³ Ibid., 102-103.

²⁴ Ibid., 103-104.

²⁵ Ibid., 104.

trauma,” but repetition also “acts as a link to this ‘forgotten and repressed’ occurrence, event, and history.”²⁶ Here Raad suggests that in *Hors la vie* these repeated representations of Beirut’s streets not only corresponds to the “experience of captivity,” but also works “to master retrospectively some other trauma.”²⁷ That is, the trauma of colonial occupation.

While *Hors la vie* omits any direct reference to France’s “special” historical relationship with Lebanon,²⁸ Raad makes a case that Baghdadi’s inclusion of photography as a narrative device enables him to resist “complicity in the forgetting of France’s colonial history,” and provides a crucial shift in the analyses of the “western hostage crisis.”²⁹ This shift is achieved by undermining the photojournalist’s agency to get the shot, forcing him to re-organize his vision away from a direct, forward-looking perspective. The symbolism of the blindfolded French photojournalist and the strategies of repetitive tracking shots make demands for re-reading this French-Lebanese history “not straight center, but on the periphery of this crisis, on the margins of the hitherto dominant representations of Lebanese civil war, along that temporal and spatial boundary known as the colonial periphery.”³⁰

Raad’s assertion that the aesthetics of Baghdadi’s film makes subtle critiques of France’s colonial history in Lebanon, despite featuring a Frenchman kidnapped by Shi’a militiamen, parallels Steve Caton’s reading of David Lean’s *Lawrence of Arabia*. Caton employs a “dialectical critique” of Orientalism in order to convey the contradictory complexity of the colonizing project, thus revealing the instability of colonial hegemony. He argues that it is necessary to consider the way colonial texts reveal both the traumatized colonized subject and the traumatized colonizing subject, thus registering “the ambivalences (read also horror or terror) they betray or, perhaps more rarely, by consciously engaging in a criticism of colonial

²⁶ Ibid., 106.

²⁷ Ibid., 107.

²⁸ Since the nineteenth century, the French envisioned themselves as the protectorate of the Levantine Christian populations. Following the Sykes-Picot agreement, France convinced the League of Nations to partition the rich coastal region away from greater Syria in what would become Lebanon. In 1920, the State of Greater Lebanon became established under the French Mandate. Even after independence, France has been significantly involved in Lebanese cultural and political affairs.

²⁹ Raad, 117.

³⁰ Ibid., 120.

practices and regimes."³¹ These subtleties do not refute the dominant (orientalist) representations outright; however, they insert tensions within the film that work to rupture the integrity of these discourses.

REMEDATING THE CINEMATIC ARCHIVE

Jocelyn Saab actively challenges narrative convention in her experimental re-editing of Beirut's cinematic record. *Once Upon a Time, Beirut* (1994) subverts the narrative structure to give greater dominance to an alternative poetics of representation. *Once Upon a Time, Beirut* actively seeks to understand how media representations have manipulated the identity of Beirut. Nadia Seremetakis suggests that sensory memory is a form of storage, and that assemblage of this memory is always an act of imagination.³² In this spirit, Saab strings together a cinematic memory of Lebanon that pays little attention to causality for constructing its narrative chronology. While the film reveals an explicit interest in memory, particularly traumatized memory, the insurmountable political violence depicted always remains hidden, somewhere else, and unspeakable. The troubling past becomes a plaything and violence, merely an act of representation: never acknowledged in its lived brutality.

Culling from hundreds of films, Saab revisits the cinematic fantasies that proliferated during the prewar era. From temptresses to spies to villains, Beirut is depicted as a playground in which consistently fantastic narratives took place. Saab moves the film's two female leads and the viewer through spaces that draw attention to Beirut's own cinematic construction, creating fantastic worlds within the recycling of cultural productions. The narrative of *Once Upon a Time, Beirut* moves through space and time with a liberty atypical of the classical Hollywood paradigm, to refuse the formulation of causal connections. Quoting a screenwriters' manual, David Bordwell reminds us that it was believed that the "unmotivated jumping of time is likely to rattle the audience, thereby breaking their illusion that they participate in the lives of the characters."³³ Saab either

³¹ Caton, 12-13.

³² C. Nadia Seremetakis, "The Memory of the Senses," in *Visualizing Theory: Selected Essays from V.A.R., 1990-1994*, ed. Lucien Taylor (New York: Routledge, 1994): 214-229.

³³ David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 43.

rejects this belief or is utilizing its anxious capabilities. The rattled viewer becomes aware that he or she is not participant in this imagined world, but is only an observer or witness, reflexively aware of the reconstructed cinematic space.

At the beginning of the film, we cut to a taxi driving through war-ravaged city streets, with bombed-out buildings flanking each side. Two girls sit blindfolded in the back of the taxi. Yasmine begins giving an internal commentary about it being her 20th birthday. She and Leila are going to see Mr. Farouk. They want to watch his films and to share some of theirs with him. Leila and Yasmine's journey to visit Mr. Farouk offers the semblance of a narrative structure with defined characters; however, the characters' motivation does not offer a linear structure. Instead, Yasmine and Leila guide us into an endless series of film clips, moving quickly through space and time, while remaining grounded in Beirut. The blindfold, the taxi, and the unviewed film reel left in the back of the car all serve as iconic modes of structuring visibility. Each presents a defined mode of seeing. The blindfold, as discussed in relation to *Hors la vie*, pushes vision to the edges, forcing one to look askance. The taxi chauffeurs the protagonists and the audience through the demolished streets, but the semi-private space of the vehicle structures one's experience based on movement and spatial division from the streets. The film reel presents itself as a media object. Imagined notions of its invisible contents remain sealed in a casing, while the materiality of the reel reminds the viewer of the gap between the image and the object. Meanwhile, these initial elements of visibility serve as a type of allegory for the remainder of the film, in which decontextualized clips are strung together and projected within the hidden chambers of this pre-war movie house. As we are blindfolded, chauffeured, and reminded of the materiality of representational media, this reflexive layering of visual codes serves as a key trait of post-orientalist aesthetics.

After the taxi driver delivers Yasmine and Leila to an abandoned movie theater, we are left to wander the cinematic terrain with our heroines. Mr. Farouk says that he has been hiding out there for years with his films. Now the two young women are prepared to show him a film clip of theirs. A title card announces, "1914 Leila and Yasmine play a trick on Mr. Farouk." Early documentary archival footage of people in markets rolls are accompanied by extra-diegetic music of a classical Middle Eastern variety. From this footage, we cut to a scene made to look anachronistic in its tone and texture. The camera pans to the two girls on screen as they announce, "These are

the only images that we've found of our city, Mr. Farouk. They are undoubtedly very beautiful, but, frankly, a little out of date." More archival footage with music follows, and Leila continues:

We haven't found anything else, Mr. Farouk. Yasmine tends to fib, but for once, she is telling the truth. We found nothing else, except some clichés as: Beirut, the pearl of the Middle East, hidden in the blue casket of the Mediterranean. Lebanon, the Switzerland of the Orient. A haven of peace in the heart of a tumultuous region. Beirut, a cosmopolitan city where East meets West. That's all we've managed to come up with, on our city, Mr. Farouk. A head-spinning series of clichés.

Yasmine follows:

You know, nowadays, guys don't say to us: "you've got beautiful eyes." They say: "You have machine-gun eyes." I thought that, maybe, with you, we would find a little *savoir-vivre*. We came to ask you some questions. If you could answer us. . . . It's true, we were told that you were Beirut's living memory.

As children of the war, Leila and Yasmine are tired of the old and clichéd representations of Beirut. Their desire for a "real" Beirut seeks resolution in the media landscape of Mr. Farouk's secret archive of films. Mr. Farouk agrees to show them "his" Beirut. He leads them to a huge archive of films that the women explore. Physical exploration of the archive is matched by the uncanny ability to move between the space of Mr. Farouk's theater and the diegetic space of films we presume they are watching, thus simultaneously entering the material world of the archive and the visceral world of the images. Mr. Farouk's theater becomes a darkened bunker of cinematic contraband, enabling Leila and Yasmine to move through imaginary landscapes of Beirut. Saab's creative geography creates a cinematic space, in which the viewer and the characters can enter these spaces and move between them. In this treatment, there is no difference between Saab's own footage in Farouk's theater and the scenes from Lebanese, Egyptian, French, and American films. Even if it ruptures our expectation for consistency according to classical Hollywood criteria, why should there be a clear distinction between these mediated moments? While a viewer's expectation would assume a distinction between different diegetic temporalities, in reality, all these films only exist in the present. Beirut's burden is the weight of all of these histories simultaneously and contiguously coexisting.

For instance, a French movie shows a man checking in at the airport just before he sees a plane explode at takeoff. We cut to an American film with people flying into Beirut and an airport police officer confronting the protagonist. After he leaves the airport, the American and French films are suddenly intercut to seem concurrent. A series of agents, voluptuous women, wire-tapping, and assassinations foreshadows a scene in which we are told Beirut is due to blow up in two days. Embedded within the scene, Leila and Yasmine sit at a poolside of one of Beirut's luxury hotels and comment on James Bond, bombs, and how all of this chaos started during the 1960s. "All these spies in Beirut at the same time. And nobody here seems to suspect a thing," say the girls. Cut to an evil mastermind announcing that his bomb will kill Beirut's people, leaving its vaults intact for him to clean out. Immediately following this utterance, we witness apocalyptic scenes and footage of a haunting drive through the war-torn damage of Beirut. Through this juxtaposition, we are led to believe that the destruction of Beirut was the result of an evil conspiracy, thus erasing the culpability of Lebanese and Palestinian militias and the Syrian and Israeli armies.

The lack of causality and a clear-cut ending most appropriately characterizes the impossibility of "making sense" of the war or of the forces at play that lead up to it. Saab's acute interest in revealing the artifice of the craft relates directly to her presentation of Beirut's history through cinema. And yet, if Saab goes to the effort to cull through hundreds of films to achieve this, then crisis presents a paradox in which Saab still relies on representation. Jocelyn Saab's *Once Upon a Time, Beirut/Kan ya ma Kan Bayrut* (1994) is an example of critical remediation of Beirut, which characterizes a post-orientalist aesthetics. While employing techniques that accentuate mediated constructedness, embedding a critique of (mis)representation, and focussing the narrative around a crisis of violence and exile, *Once Upon a Time, Beirut* does not exemplify the "radical closure" of memory advanced by Jalal Toufic.

In fact, Toufic's critique of the film elucidates an imperative perspective on the mediation of "post-war" (non)subjectivity.³⁴ If *Once Upon a Time, Beirut* is a film about forgetting, Toufic regrettably

³⁴ Jalal Toufic's notion of the "undead," developed around his reading of vampire cinema, corresponds to those who witnessed their own death by being "survivors" of the civil war. In other words, the undead disrupt notions of rational subjectivity, because they have witnessed the most irrational of experiences. See Toufic, *(Vampires): An Uneasy Essay on the Undead in Film* (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill, 1993).

reflects that it is “unfortunately mainly in the sense that it is an unmindful film.” Saab’s major flaw, says Toufic, is that she limited memory “to human recollection and archival images.” By bestowing the “memory of Beirut” to an elderly projectionist who lives in the bombed out ruins of Beirut in a secret archive of cinema reels, Saab constructs a “[m]emory of what has thus been withdrawn,” which Toufic dismisses as, “a betrayal of it, a false memory.” Furthermore, because Saab places the two young actresses within these archival images, she in effect “hides that the images are inaccessible.” To show the images as inaccessible would instead acknowledge the impossible referentiality that results in the wake of a disastrous ordeal: what Toufic calls a “surpassing disaster.”³⁵ This distinction about the way remediation either draws attention to nostalgic reconstructions of lost memory or to an acknowledgement of its irretrievable loss elucidates a spectrum of post-orientalist aesthetics. This aesthetic spectrum aims to critique the politics of representation, but often becomes mired in representational impossibilities (what video artist Akram Zaatari calls a “cycle of diminishing returns”).³⁶

Saab provides a pastiche of cinematic history, but what does the montage achieve? Her rigorous critique itself runs out of material and seems to retreat to a comedic farce. The final reel of film from the taxi returns: it has a clip of religious students denouncing truth as a monkey. Her ending would suggest that since there is no real understanding available, one should laugh it off. Toufic argues that in the face of a “surpassing disaster” one experiences an existential crisis, so rather than retreating into comedic escape, he argues that one must acknowledge what has been lost. Toufic’s advancement of an “undead” post-war subjectivity ushers in unimaginable potentials—becoming a non-subject, becoming latent, becoming monstrous—which enables the resurrection of imaginary memories which may or may not have occurred in the past as a way to mourn the invisible and disappeared, if only by witnessing them askance. Since the disappeared, the undead, can never be imaged directly, post-orientalist aesthetics enables an indirect mode of witnessing.

³⁵ Toufic, *Forthcoming* (Berkeley: Atelos, 2000), 68.

³⁶ Hannah Feldman and Akram Zaatari, “Mining War: Fragments from a Conversation Already Passed,” in *Art Journal* 66:2 (Summer 2007): 48-67.

CONCLUSION

Critical of nationalistic and imperialistic violence as well as fundamentalist and orientalist patriarchy, Akram Zaatari, Jalal Toufic, Borhane Alaouié, Jayce Salloum, Joana Hadjithomas, Khalil Joreige, and others embody the euphemistically “absent (Muslim) moderates”—a sensibility that western media and politicians frequently say is missing in the Middle East. Between notions of fanatic Islamic fundamentalists on the one hand and passive Muslim women on the other, exists a diverse spectrum of ideological perspectives neither passive nor fatalistic, but necessarily politicized by the ever-present violence and instability of a routine lived experience. This unstable experience disrupts the notion of coherent subjectivity. The process of thinking visually through this wreckage enables a critique with affective intensity. A careful reading of post-orientalist aesthetics in Lebanese experimental documentary provides new theoretical considerations about visual registers of difference.

FILMOGRAPHY

The Battle of Algiers (1966) Gillo Pontecorvo
Beirut the Encounter/Beirut al Likaa (1981) Borhane Alaouié
Beirut Phantom (1998) Borhane Alaouié
The Cats of Hamra Street (1972) Samir al-Ghoussayni
Hors la vie (1991) Borhane Alaouié
In the Battlefields (2005) Danielle Arbid
Introduction to the End of an Argument/Muqaddimah Li-Nihayat Jidal
 (1990) Jayce Salloum and Elia Suleiman
Lawrence of Arabia (1962) David Lean
Measures of Distance (1981) Mona Hatoum
Once Upon a Time, Beirut (1994) Jocelyn Saab
The Perfect Day (2005) Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige
(This Is Not Beirut)/There Was and There Was Not (1994) Jayce Salloum
West Beirut (1996) Ziad Doueri

Book Reviews

Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites. *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007. 419 Pages.

In Susan Sontag's final book *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), the literary critic, political activist, and controversial theorist of photography argues that, whether photographs are understood as "naïve object[s]" or "the work of an experienced artificer," their meaning and the viewer's response to them depends on how pictures are identified or misidentified—that is, on how textual discourses are constructed through the act of individual viewing. Sontag concludes that whatever excess of understanding is suggested in a given image, a caption will eventually "be needed" to help *read* the image.¹ It is to this bold claim that Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites appear to respond with their collaborative work *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy*. This book is at once a study of iconic photographs as public art in American culture, and an unabashed rebuttal of what the authors term the "hermeneutics of suspicion" around visual culture.² It provides a dynamic and much-needed contribution to debates concerning the value of visual representation and its relationship to implicit tensions within liberal democracy. The book arrives on the heels of current efforts within an expanding field of visual studies to push for a full understanding of the technological and cultural (and not strictly textual) processes through which meanings are made for images.³

¹ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 29.

² This is characterized, as the authors suggest, by "the general inattention in Anglo-American political theory to popular media" (39). Incidentally, the authors name Sontag as one of the "contemporary moralists" in order to strongly emphasize literacy in the public sphere, but no direct reference is made to the quote from *Regarding the Pain of Others* that I suggest may have inspired the title of Hariman and Lucaites's book.

³ For an overview of recent debates within the expanding field of visual studies, see Margaret Dikovitskaya, *Visual Culture: The Study of the Visual After the Cultural Turn* (Cambridge,

At its core, the study builds upon existing histories and theories of photography's emergence as a ready, duly subversive, highly mobile, and technologically superior medium, concurrent with the rise of the nation state. The authors emphasize how photography has been increasingly identified as an alternative mode of conflated artistic and documentary representation, freely disseminated to a broad, public audience. More specific to the thesis of this book, the authors isolate photojournalism as "an important technology of liberal-democratic citizenship," defined by its "intersection of liberal and democratic sensibilities" and its service to very real social and political action (18). In my estimation, this is the strongest argument of the book, and the discussion in the introductory and concluding chapters on public visual media as a repository of democratic knowledge is both compelling and at times very convincing. Such an examination reveals how photojournalism's preoccupation with personal experience can powerfully direct public reactions to large-scale and sometimes difficult-to-process historic events.

In terms of specific imagery, the authors confine their research to the American cultural context and designate the term "icon" to identify a selection of widely recognized photographs. Each of these images fit the authors' established criteria for an iconic image in that they represent historically significant events, activate a strong emotional identification or response, and have been reproduced across a wide range of media and contexts (27). The book consists of an analysis of Dorothea Lange's *Migrant Mother* (1936) and Alfred Eisenstaedt's *Times Square Kiss* (1945) in chapter three; a comparative analysis of Joe Rosenthal's *Flag Raisings at Iwo Jima* (1945) and Thomas E. Franklin's *Three Firefighters Raising the American Flag At Ground Zero* (2001) in chapter four; a discussion of John Filo's *Kent State Massacre* (1971) in chapter five; Nick Ut's *Accidental Napalm* (1972) in chapter six; Stuart Franklin's *Tiananmen Square* (1989) in chapter seven; and Sam Shere's *Explosion of the Hindenburg* (1936) considered alongside the unknown NASA photographer's *Explosion of the Challenger* (1986) in chapter eight.

The term "icon" is arguably problematic for those traditionally trained in the study of images, yet it does work remarkably well as a loaded rhetorical device when juxtaposed with those whom Hariman and Lucaites (both professors who teach in communication departments) characterize as failing to take popular media images

seriously—the “iconoclasts.” Here, the authors’ claim of iconoclasm is understood within the context of a deeply rooted Western tradition that emphasizes textual literacy and appears disdainful of popular media.⁴ In this respect, it is difficult not to admire the broader political project of *No Caption Needed*, which aims to shake up debates about visual culture and engage with photographs as dynamic sites of negotiated ideology (see <http://www.nocaptionneeded.com>, a blog related to the book and maintained by the authors to generate discussion about the role that photojournalism and public visual media play in democratic societies). Still, the study successfully mitigates its sometimes polemical tone with sound analysis and a clear grasp of the debates surrounding the “visual turn” in the humanities.

Within individual chapters, the chosen photographs are subjected to an exhaustive interpretive method worked out by the authors and carefully outlined in the second chapter. This careful approach locates public media images at the nexus of aesthetic, technological, and material concerns. In other words, the photographs are not just “read” within familiar social classifications such as race, gender, or national identity—categories that rely more heavily on themes of social control and privilege readings underscoring the manipulative or illusionary aspects of the photographic medium. Instead, the authors take into account the technological and communicative means of public media representation in its own right and demonstrate how photographs can slip between powers of social manipulation and public communication. Here, the authors include but also move beyond the familiar critical tool box to engage with five key assumptions about the appeal of public media photographs: aesthetic familiarity, civic performance, semiotic transcriptions, emotional scenarios, and contradiction/crises, all of which make up what is classified as the image’s “visual rhetoric” (28–29). To Hariman and Lucaites’s credit, they highlight the role that the viewer’s virtual embodiment in, and interaction with, visual representation plays in creating the crucial sense of shared experience that is often overlooked by scholars or, in the authors’ words, “deformed by an ideology of print” (41). To buttress this point, they strategically draw on Jürgen Habermas’s

⁴ The authors claim that the deep-rooted nature of iconoclasm in Western history, religion, and culture traces back to Plato, the “father” of the attack on mimesis. They also cite the work of Barbara Stafford on the strong influence of logocentrism in Western philosophy, defined in part as the devaluation of sensory, affective, and kinetic forms of communication (39).

theory of the public sphere, (a spatial conception of publicity where individuals constitute a social body within and against the constraints of public authority), preferring this model since “the positive content of *who* is reading *what* remains tacit” (43). Within Habermas’s methodological framework, it is therefore possible to explore how photography addresses the more abstract crisis of individual and collective representation—a crisis that often visually effaces key historical actors and events from the consciousness of fractured nations. The authors also work to unpack (dare I say, perform close “readings”) of the photographs in terms of both form and content. In my opinion, this serves as another invaluable contribution of the book to visual culture studies and lends a great deal of credibility to a project focused on the value of visual imagery. This approach also supports Hariman and Lucaites’s keen observation that “some accounts of visual culture produce social theory at the expense of what the images are actually doing” (46).

The shortcomings of this ambitious study—and there are a few—include the absence of a sustained discussion on the impact of photo-based modern and conceptual art practices on the production and reception of commercial advertisements and news photographs (case in point: the cover artwork for the book is something of an unacknowledged homage to Andy Warhol), the problematic use of the term “artistic” to describe a wide and divergent range of image-making practices, and the admission by the authors at the outset of the book that their study may already be more historical than they like, due to the impact of digital media on the circulation and reception of photographs (23). However, the book does succeed in raising the stakes around the continued dominance of textual literacy and the limitations of current critical methodologies in the close study of images—the ramifications of which include the examination of public media images as mere spectacle or easily fixed propaganda. In this sense, the strength of the book resides with exposing a clear shortsightedness in the analysis of visual imagery today, making a strong case for the study of landmark photographs in relation to public culture as a focus of concern.

Dorothy Barenscott, Trent University

Stephen Johnstone, ed. *The Everyday*. London and Cambridge, MA: Whitechapel/MIT Press, 2008. 240 pages.

Stephen Johnstone's anthology *The Everyday*—the latest in the Whitechapel/MIT series "Documents of Contemporary Art"—brings together a wide-ranging collection of texts that deal with contemporary art's encounters with the quotidian. The artists, critics, curators, and theorists presented in this anthology examine the immediate history, methodologies, and aims of the aesthetic category of the "everyday": the phenomenological *hic et nunc*,⁵ the trivial and unseen, the passive and boring, and the repetitive non-events that characterize the mundane. According to Johnstone, while the notion of "the everyday" has been considered a subdivision within historical-materialist sociology, historiography, and philosophy, it has received significantly less attention as an aesthetic category.⁶ As such, this collection seeks to formalize "the everyday," encouraging its transition from a broad theme that has inspired a profusion of exhibitions and discussions since the 1990s, into an aesthetic genre in its own right.

Like the other anthologies in this series, such as *The Gothic*, *The Artist's Joke*, and *The Archive*, this volume consists of documents that map the different ways contemporary artists have taken up a particular motif. *The Everyday* focuses on the modernist avant-garde call for the integration of theory into praxis, and acts as a vital interdisciplinary compendium of the late twentieth-century fusion of art into life. Each text discusses how the aesthetic focus on everyday life brings fundamental but "overlooked aspects of lived experience into visibility," while at the same time arguing for the socio-political importance of this visibility (12). As Johnstone puts it, "[...] running through many of these examples is the sometimes unstated but always implicit notion that a turn to the everyday will bring art and life closer together" (13). Johnstone's anthology is unique in that it thematically and structurally represents the ambiguous nature of its subject matter. Unlike the themes of other anthologies in this series, "the everyday" has no discrete boundaries. Thus, no ostensible

⁵ That is to say, the "here and now."

⁶ Johnstone includes thinkers such as Henri Lefebvre, Paul Virilio, and Ben Highmore; however, he mysteriously neglects Michel de Certeau's histories of the everyday and Norman Bryson's excellent discussion of *rhopography*, "[...] the depiction of those things which lack importance, the unassuming material base of life that 'importance' constantly overlooks" as a tradition of attending to everydayness that begins with still-life imagery (Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* [London: Reaktion, 2001], 61).

overarching concepts, structure, or *telos* is provided, other than the ongoing and differentiating structure of the everyday itself.

The 53 texts included in this volume range from philosophical considerations of the nature of the everyday (Henri Lefebvre, Maurice Blanchot, Vincent Kaufmann, Abigail Solomon-Godeau), to socio-political arguments for its re-evaluation as a fundamental category of aesthetic experience (Ben Highmore, Nikos Papastergiadis, Susan Hiller, Sally Banes), to artists' statements outlining strategies of communicating the vital meanings, values, and experiences of everyday life. Johnstone constructs and arbitrates a dialogue between these theoretical and artistic works in his introduction. He explains four basic features of the nature of "the everyday" that help connect the plurality of voices that constitute this volume. First, he claims that the everyday is what is overlooked in the world, since the ordinary is at once everywhere and nowhere in particular. Second, the everyday is authentic and democratic because it cannot be traced to a principle of becoming (such as an originating idea or cause), nor can it be restricted to an elite or hegemonic group. Third, the everyday thus located is the place where people creatively transform their world. Fourth, allusions to the everyday are about immanence, not transcendence to a rarefied aesthetic realm.

As an anthology, *The Everyday* is loosely organized around three sections. The first, "Art and the Everyday," offers varying accounts of twentieth-century art's concern with the mundane. Each text strives to explain how the objects and activities of ordinary life became the focus of artistic investigations. Not surprisingly, a selection from Henri Lefebvre's profoundly influential Marxist critique of everyday life kicks off the volume. In "Clearing the Ground," Lefebvre argues that the everyday is the realm of thought and activity marginalized from specialized knowledge, monumentalized history, and institutionalization (34). As such, the everyday is an eruptive and revolutionary force that can disarm social, political, and disciplinary confines. Lefebvre's account provides the touchstone for the rest of the first section and, indeed, for the entire book. Maurice Blanchot follows with "Everyday Speech" declaring the everyday an unperceived force that invisibly mediates subjects, objects, and processes of life because it escapes reification in any of these categories. When art takes up the everyday, it adopts the role of experience as a medium, revealing the everyday by "re-mediating" it (to use the jargon of communication theorists) with its own inflections and processes. Ultimately, Blanchot claims that art renders the elusive nature of the everyday visible by

exhibiting its own “mediality” as art. This is a fundamental point of the anthology: artists such as Yoko Ono, Sophie Calle, Andy Warhol, and Tracy Emin bring into view the hitherto unnoticed creativity that is enacted everyday without monumentalizing it. The claim is that this art demands the viewer experience its objects in the repetitive, passive, and uneventful terms of the everyday without reverting to more familiar viewing practices that tend to set the artwork off from the world. As compelling as this argument is, however, it never fully addresses why we should consider these objects as art.

The second section of the book, “The Poetics of Noticing,” delineates the modes by which the art of the everyday encourages viewers to attend to the experiences and exhibitions of everydayness. Fundamental to “noticing” is the concept of attention. Although the anthology does not reference Simone Weil, it is her definition of attention as a neutral, unpossessive openness to the other that is at stake here.⁷ Noticing is poetic because it involves selflessly attending to the ordinary reality of others, a process that enlarges vision, stretches the imagination, and elicits judgments. According to the authors in this section, there are two ways of practicing the poetics of noticing or attending: we allow art to mediate our experience of the prosaic, or we live the everyday aesthetically. The first option makes art out of everyday life, as with Tracy Emin’s installations or Andy Warhol’s films; the second makes everyday life into an art, as with the Situationist *dérive*. Within *The Everyday*, writings by Marcel Duchamp, Sally Banes, Patrick Frey, and Michael Sheringham claim the value of art is in how it selects particular features of the overlooked world and brings them to our attention, thereby revealing the everyday without qualifying it as anything but the common ground of experience that connects individuals, events, and histories. By contrast, the Lettrist International, Georges Perec, Alison and Peter Smithson, Ian Breakwell, and Francis Alÿs offer the other option, where the everyday is not re-mediated through art, but re-experienced through the spyglass of the aesthetic.

“Documentary Style and Ethnography,” the final section of the book, attempts to unify the issues presented in the first two parts. The questions raised by the essayists here pertain to value: what is achieved in documenting the detritus, the overlooked, and the marginalized? What happens when we aestheticize everyday life? In his essay “Mad For It: Philistinism, the Everyday and the New British

⁷ See Simone Weil, *The Notebooks of Simone Weil*, 2 vols., trans. Arthur Wills (New York: GP Putnam’s Sons, 1956).

Art,” John Roberts argues that the embrace of the everyday by contemporary art is marked by philistinism, but that this opens up the “popular enculturization of art [...] the incorporation of art’s production and its forms of attention” into ordinary life (211). Abigail Solomon-Godeau concludes in “Inside/Out” that the implication of art within everyday life is a fundamental post-Freudian feature of the contemporary world: there is neither an intimate truth of being that is unreachable by art or an existence of pure surface which art only mimics. She claims that art is the “third term”—the medium for communicating the everyday that re-mediate our experience, as the previous section tells us. In a similar vein, Helen Molesworth finds that the decidedly different and contradictory modes of referencing the everyday by feminist artists converge in the shared interest in “exposing the porosity of public and private spheres” (180). Art is not made into life (or vice versa); rather, art becomes a form of legitimate social discourse by which experimental ways of mediating the experience of the mundane can be tested publicly. Overall, the texts in this section argue that there is fundamental merit in the interaction between art and the everyday, yet once more they fail to fully address the aesthetic question: But why is it art?

It is important to keep in mind when reading this book, however, that Johnstone’s three categories perform a tacit philosophical categorization that the collection as a whole seeks to avoid. Not only can Johnstone’s threefold division of the collection easily be read as Truth, Beauty, and Goodness, but it is also grounded in the metaphysical concept of “becoming” as an ongoing activity of differentiation, where the mundane is what it is by continually becoming anew. When the everyday is understood to be the field of creativity or the potentiality out of which events become actualized, then it is also the transcendent principle which determines the entire aesthetic category of “the everyday”—precisely the designation that Johnstone, as evident in his introduction, wants to avoid.

Moreover, this anthology is wide-ranging, but not comprehensive. The primary conceptual apparatus for considering the everyday is Lefebvre’s Marxist socio-political critique, which leaves out an entire tradition of considerations regarding the nexus between art and everyday life: namely, American pragmatism. When John Dewey argued for *Art as Experience* (1934), he was arguing for a notion of the aesthetic that was homologous to people’s everyday lives. He reasoned that if art were brought down from the transcendental, sublime, or spiritual realm and nearer to the mundane experiences of the people, art could be better integrated

into everyday life and, ultimately, help to improve life by engaging in socio-cultural transformation. Pragmatism offers the resolute position lacking in this otherwise informative and absorbing anthology. It argues for the instrumental goal of improving everyday experience by bringing art to bear on everyday life in all the localized, contingent, and revisable ways that the various authors in Johnstone's volume promote. Johnstone's editorial embrace of the elusive structure of the everyday releases him from the responsibility of giving this collection a socio-political point. But the volume's neglect of pragmatism, the one tradition that twentieth-century American aesthetic theory offers to a study of the everyday, is problematic. It seems to me that the everyday is valuable as a site of experience that impels contemporary artists to pay attention to it; pursuing this point is one of the volume's strongest virtues. But I remain unconvinced that the everyday is the overarching category of aesthetic determination that the anthology attempts to create.

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